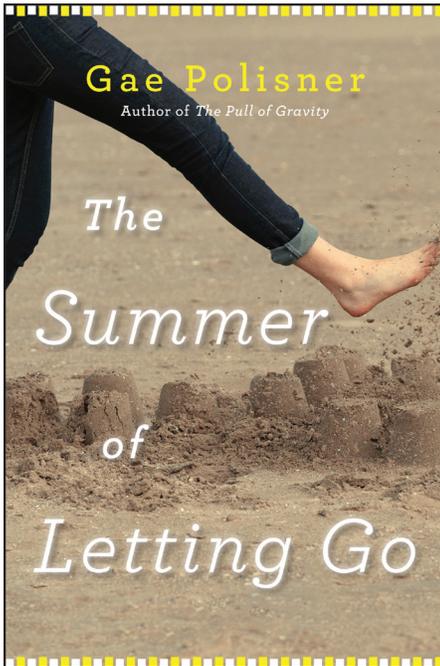


The SUMMER of LETTING GO

by Gae Polisner



MARCH
YOUNG ADULT FICTION
 Ages 12 and up, Grades 7 and up
 320 pages, 5½" x 8¼"
 ISBN: 978-1-61620-256-9
 \$17.95 Hardcover
 E-Book ISBN: 978-1-61620-402-2

BOOK TALK

Four years ago, eleven-year-old Francesca Schnell watched helplessly as her little brother, Simon, drowned while on a family trip to the beach . . . and her guilt has kept her stuck in place ever since. The summer before she turns sixteen, Francesca meets a young boy named Frankie at the pool. He's four, has blond curls like Simon, and even shares Simon's passion for frogs. As time goes on, more and more connections surface between Frankie's birth and Simon's death . . . connections so strange and numerous they are impossible to ignore. Is it possible that Frankie is Simon's reincarnation? Francesca has to know. Because if it's true—and a little bit of Simon's soul lives on in Frankie—then maybe, just maybe, Francesca can begin to forgive herself, grow up, and even fall in love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gae Polisner is the award-winning author of *The Pull of Gravity*. She is a family law mediator by trade but a writer by calling. She lives on Long Island with her husband and two sons. When she's not writing, she can be found in a pool or, in warmer weather, in her wet suit in the open waters of Long Island Sound. *The Summer of Letting Go* is her second novel for teen readers.



PRAISE FOR THE SUMMER OF LETTING GO

"*The Summer of Letting Go* is haunting, heart-lifting, and impossible to put down . . . Francesca Schnell is one of the most authentic young adult characters I've read in a long time."

—A.S. King, author of *Reality Boy*, *Ask the Passengers*, and *Please Ignore Vera Dietz*

"A beautiful story of heartbreak and hope."

—Daisy Whitney, author of *The Mockingbirds* and *Starry Nights*

"Polisner has a keen understanding of the suffering, maturing teen psyche; Frankie's fragility and self-doubt are heartbreaking in their realism . . . First-rate realistic fiction with plenty of heart."

—*School Library Journal*

"The prose is gentle but evocative, and Frankie Sky's childlike exuberance and occasional misconceptions add heart and humor . . . [*The Summer of Letting Go* is] both hopeful and careful—like Francesca herself."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

The SUMMER of LETTING GO

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Since the day her brother drowned four years ago, Francesca has felt that her only identity is “the girl who let her baby brother die” (page 234). Is that how you saw her throughout the novel? Have you ever felt like one event defined you?
2. Francesca seems to be connected to a boy named Bradley in ways her best friend, Lisette—Bradley’s girlfriend—is not. What are some of the connections Francesca and Bradley share? Have you ever had romantic feelings for someone that you felt you shouldn’t have? Should Francesca have told Lisette early on how she felt about Bradley? Would you have? Why or why not?
3. Francesca becomes determined to find out the truth about her father’s possible affair with their neighbor, Mrs. Merrill, and jumps on the case like a detective. The author drops clues about the truth of this relationship but doesn’t tell the whole story at once. Do you like the suspense this literary technique creates? Did it tempt you to flip to the end of the book for the answer? Does Francesca ever learn the whole truth about her father and Mrs. Merrill?
4. Francesca’s mother is mourning her son’s death in her own way. What is Mrs. Schnell doing to try to move on with her life? In what specific ways is she not moving on with her life? How does her grief affect Francesca and Mr. Schnell?
5. One of the most emotionally wrenching scenes in the book takes place when Francesca’s mother finds Francesca going through Simon’s room on page 178. Why is this scene so powerful?
6. In an online author essay, Gae Polisner writes, “In my head, the book became my ‘swimming book,’ the book where water would both take away and restore.” How is water a restorative force in this novel? How does water imagery relate to Francesca’s musings about transmigration of the soul and reincarnation?
7. On page 313, Francesca asserts, “I know in my heart that Simon’s soul is living in Frankie Sky.” Does she mean what she says literally? Do you think such a thing might be possible? If Francesca is not speaking literally, then how does Francesca mean Simon lives on through Frankie Sky?
8. Curious coincidences abound in this story—not only the overlap between Simon’s death and Frankie’s birth, but also Bradley’s gift of the sand dollar and Frankie’s mother’s experience with Saint Florian, the patron saint of drowning. On page 227, Francesca starts to think these events can’t really be coincidences, “but something bigger and magical at work.” Do you think our lives are random, or do you agree with Frankie? Have you ever experienced strange events that seemed like more than coincidence, or that made you wonder if fate was at work and your life was part of a bigger plan?
9. Part of Francesca wants it to be true that her father is having an affair with Mrs. Merrill. On page 251, she says, “Because if Dad could make such a huge, horrible mistake and still be a good person, then that would mean, technically, I could be, too. I could still be worthy of loving, even if I let my brother drown.” Why is forgiving—and being forgiven—important to Francesca? Are there ever situations in which forgiveness is impossible? Why or why not?
10. The massive, real-life migration of Christmas Island crabs becomes a touchstone for Bradley and Francesca in their budding romance. On page 266, Francesca quotes the nature-channel narrator: “It appears for these small creatures, at least, an innate sense of purpose, a higher calling, if you will, overrides logic or good sense.” How does the story of the Christmas Island crabs tie in with the novel’s themes? (Take a few minutes to view an online video of the Christmas Island crabs! As Francesca says, “It’s freaky, but mesmerizing.”)
11. The novel is called *The Summer of Letting Go*. Besides Frankie, what other characters are letting go of something . . . and what are they letting go of?

Reader’s Guide by Karin Snelson

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