



Julie Lawson Timmer

AUTHOR



Invite Julie
to your
book club!

**“If you’re inclined to gently strong-arm your book club,
Timmer’s is a poignant page-turner worth going to the mat for.”**

—Elisabeth Egan, author of *A Window Opens*

BOOK CLUB KIT

Discover additional material from Julie inside this kit to help make your
book club a success!

Letter from Julie

Dear Book Clubs,

I am inspired by complex moral dilemmas that have no easy answer. So many of us (including me) are so quick to make firm declarations about how we would act in a given situation: “I would never do x, y or z! Not in a million years!” My goal in writing is to gently remind us not to condemn the decisions of others so fast, but to consider instead the other side of the story.

My newest book, *Untethered* (Putnam, June 2016), tells the story of Char Hawthorn, the stepmother to a fifteen-year-old, Allie. Before the book begins, Char’s husband dies, leaving open the question of who Allie should live with: Char, her devoted stepmom, who has raised her full-time for the past five years but has no legal rights to her, or Allie’s self-involved biological mother, who lives across the country and has never been interested in parenting, yet who now has sole legal rights to the teenager. While this situation plays out, Char and Allie get swept up in the life of a ten-year-old girl, Morgan, who was adopted out of foster care but is subsequently “rehomed” by her adoptive parents (i.e., given away to new parents, without any oversight or court approval) after they decide they cannot risk having her in close proximity to their biological son.

Five Days Left (Putnam, September 2014) combines the stories of two main characters, Mara and Scott, who are friends on an anonymous, online parenting forum. Mara is a Type A lawyer who lives in Texas with her husband and her adopted daughter, Lakshmi. Mara has Huntington’s disease, and as the book opens, she is planning to take her life in five days, to spare herself and her family from the dreadful end stages of the disease. Scott is a middle school teacher and basketball coach in Michigan who has, along with his wife, been looking after an eight-year-old boy, Curtis, while Curtis’s mother serves a jail sentence. Curtis’s mother is out of jail, and the boy is scheduled to return to her in five days. Scott’s wife is expecting their own baby, and tensions erupt when it becomes clear that Scott is more devastated about losing Curtis than he is excited about meeting his own child. The book follows Mara and Scott in their lives in Texas and Michigan, and also follows their interactions on the Internet forum.

Please get in touch if you think your book club is interested in reading *Untethered* or *Five Days Left*, and if you would like to include me in your discussion. One of the best things about writing is connecting with readers, and I would be honored to connect with you!

Thanks,



Praise for Julie Lawson Timmer

UNTETHERED

“[A] thoughtfully written and ultimately uplifting celebration of families that are not bound by blood or by law but by love... [*Untethered*] leave[s] readers with much to discuss about parental responsibility.”

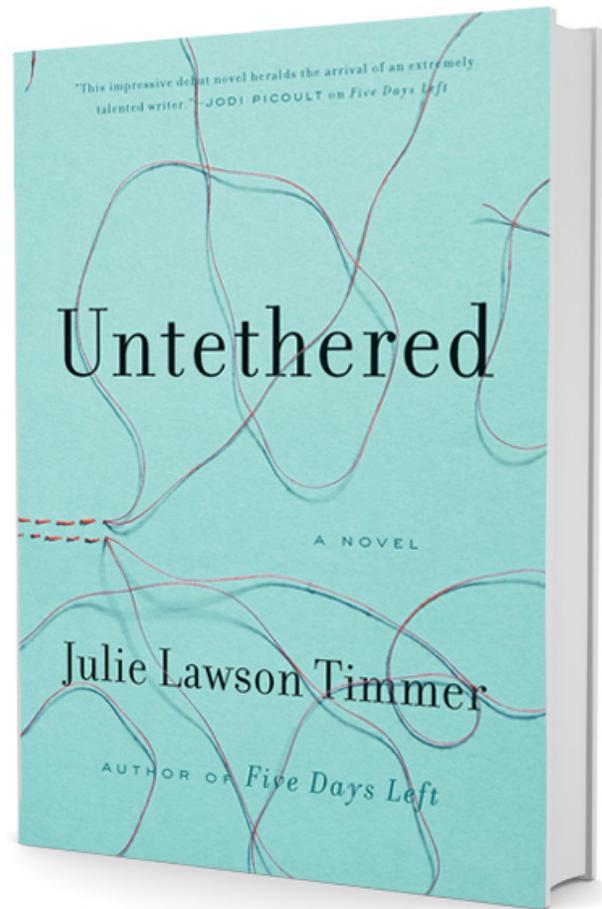
– *Kirkus Reviews*

“Harper Lee famously wrote that you can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family. In *Untethered*, Julie Lawson Timmer makes mincemeat of this old chestnut, proving that a modern family can indeed consist of people who find their own way to each other, however circuitously. The pulse of the story is in the journey, and the triumph is in the unexpectedness of the destination. If you’re inclined to gently strong-arm your book club, Timmer’s is a poignant page-turner worth going to the mat for.”

– Elizabeth Egan, author of *A Window Opens*

“Timmer handles the sensitive, emotionally charged nature of her plot with reverence and openness, avoiding harsh judgments. *Untethered* is a beautiful mosaic of love’s many fragments, no matter how shattered.”

– *Shelf Awareness*, starred review



Praise for Julie Lawson Timmer

FIVE DAYS LEFT

“A beautifully drawn study of what is at risk when you lose control of your own life. Unique, gripping, and viscerally moving - this impressive debut novel heralds the arrival of an extremely talented writer.”

- Jodi Picoult, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Storyteller*

“Timmer’s emotional debut should come with a box of tissues...The characters are so affecting it’s tough to make it to Day 5. An authentic and powerful story.”

- *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

“Timmer’s debut novel packs a powerful punch. Absorbing, deeply affecting, and ultimately uplifting, it heralds the arrival of an author to watch.”

- *Library Journal*, starred review

“A heart-wrenching drama about a world in which there are no easy answers. With an unflinching gaze, Julie Lawson Timmer explores what makes a family, what happens when bonds (familial and otherwise) are tested, and the relationships we forge that change our lives. This novel feels as true as life.”

- Christina Baker Kline, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Orphan Train*



Suggested Discussion Questions

UNTETHERED

SPOILER ALERT! Some of these questions may give away certain plot elements.

1. Ignoring the issue of who has legal rights to Allie and who does not, who do you think Allie should live with: her stepmother, Char, or her biological mother, Lindy? Why?
2. Should Char shoulder some of the blame for Allie's behavior throughout the book? Why or why not?
3. Allie and Char are both grieving the loss of Bradley. How are they able to help one another throughout this time? How are their mourning processes different?
4. Legally, Char has no parental rights to Allie once Bradley dies. Do you agree with this law? Should step-parents have certain rights to their step-children in the event of a spouse's death?
5. Allie and Morgan have a special bond. Why do you think this is? What do they provide for one another to make their relationship so special?
6. Dave Crew ultimately prioritizes his biological son over his adopted daughter. Is this understandable or is it reprehensible?
7. "Rehoming" is a difficult, but very real, event that occurs in adoptive families. Do you agree with the Crews' decision to "rehome" Morgan? Was Morgan's violent behavior enough of a reason to do so?
8. One of the issues the Crews face is an inability to afford post-adoption mental health services for Morgan. Do you believe there was more they could have done? Should the state and federal governments improve the availability of these services?
9. Should Char have reported the Crews to the Michigan authorities? Why or why not?
10. We get a glimpse of how things turned out for Char, Allie and Morgan. How do you think things turned out for the Crews?
11. There are several different mother-daughter relationships explored throughout the book: Allie and Char; Allie and Lindy; Morgan and Sarah. How are these relationships different? How are they similar? Did you relate to one relationship more than the others?

Suggested Discussion Questions

FIVE DAYS LEFT

SPOILER ALERT! Some of these questions may give away certain plot elements.

1. Before we meet Mara, she has already decided to be tested for Huntington's disease. We learn from Tom (and this is true in real life) that many people at risk choose not to take the test. They would rather live with a 50/50 chance that they don't have the disease than know with 100 percent certainty they have it. Why did Mara choose certainty over chance? What would you choose, and why?
2. Mara believes it would be better for Laks and Tom to be without her than to be "dragged down" by her. Is it easier for a child with a severely ill or disabled parent if that parent dies early rather than lives for a long time? What about for the person's spouse? From what you know of Tom, will he feel relieved by or furious with Mara's decision?
3. Scott feels that Curtis would have a better future if he stayed with him and his wife instead of going back to live with his mother, LaDania, even if she cleans herself up. But unless there's been extreme neglect or abuse, the law holds, it's in a child's best interest to be with his own mother. What do you think? Are the Coffmans the best choice for adoptive parents for Curtis, or should the social worker look for a same-race family? Is race an important consideration in foster care or adoption?
4. The online forum is an important source of friendship and support to Scott and Mara. Why do they each rely so much on people they've never met? Do you have online friends you've never met? Have you relied on them for friendship, support, or advice? Would you rely on them? What is it about online relationships that allows people to share intimate facts about their lives with others who are essentially strangers?
5. Bray is prepared to give up his basketball scholarship and college education to look after Curtis, until friends tell him it's the wrong thing to do, both for him and for Curtis. If living with the Coffmans isn't an option, do you agree it's better for Bray to put Curtis into foster care rather than try to raise him?
6. If you were a friend of Mara's and learned of her plan, would you let Tom know, or would you keep your friend's secret? Do you think Tom should tell Laks how her mother died? Why or why not?
7. Early in their marriage, Scott and Laurie made plans to have children of their own. Later, Scott realized this plan wasn't important to him anymore. Why do you think that is? Should Laurie be expected to go along with her husband's new outlook, or should Scott be expected to stick with their original plan? In the end, Laurie sacrifices the family she's always dreamed of in order to help Curtis and Bray. Why does she make that choice?
8. Mara hides her condition from her friends on the online forum. Does this make her interactions with them less authentic? Have you ever used the anonymity offered by the Internet to present yourself as someone different from who you really are? Can online relationships ever be as authentic as in-person ones?
9. Mara is unable to accept the loss of her legal career and her dependence. Were you sympathetic to her about this, or upset with her? Is her reaction understandable, given her Type A personality, or should she have tried harder to accept her new reality for the sake of her family? Do you believe the motivation behind Mara's ultimate decision was Tom and Laks, or did she make a choice based on her own feelings and then justify it to herself by saying it was better for her husband and daughter? Is Mara self-sacrificing and brave, or is she selfish and cowardly?
10. If you were in either Mara's or Scott's position, what would you do?

Julie Lawson Timmer

AUTHOR



Julie Lawson Timmer grew up in Stratford, Ontario, Canada. She earned a Bachelor's degree from McMaster University and a law degree from Southern Methodist University. She serves as in-house legal counsel to an automotive supplier near her home in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where she lives with her husband, two children, two stepchildren, and two badly-behaved rescued dogs, one of whom features prominently in her social media posts. In her spare time, she is a reluctant cook, a lover of books, and a devotee of Pilates, barre and spinning. She is also the author of *Five Days Left*.

Julie Lawson Timmer would love to join your book club! Invite Julie at:

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