

Broken Promise Discussion Questions

by Linwood Barclay

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & Linwood Barclay website)

Linwood Barclay started his journalism career in 1977 where he has been a reporter, assistant city editor, news editor, chief copy editor and Life section editor. He is now a staff columnist for that section, writing three times a week.



He lives in Burlington, Ontario, with his wife, Neetha. They have two grown children.

Characters:

- **David Harwood** – (41) Former reporter. Living with his parents and son, Ethan (9) in Promise Falls. Widowed; Wife Jan died a few years before. Newspaper he worked for shut down. His parents are Don and Arlene.
- **Barry Duckworth** – Detective in charge of the Rosemary Gaynor case. Wife – Maureen. Adult son - Trevor.
- **Marla Pickens** – David's cousin. Lost a baby girl during birth. Has Prosopagnosia (face blindness) so she cannot identify faces. David finds 10 month old Matthew with her.
- **Natalie Bondurant** – Lawyer hired to defend Marla.
- **Angus Carlson** – Police officer who likes to crack jokes.
- **Carol** – Agnes' assistant. Having an affair with Gill.
- **Derek Cutter** – Father of Marla's baby. Student at Thackeray. Father owns a landscaping business. Mason Helt was his friend.
- **Trevor Duckworth** – Detective's grown son. Works as a driver for Finley Springs.
- **Clive Duncomb** – Thackeray College Chief of Security. Working on a few attempted rape cases at the college.
- **Gloria Fenwick** – General Manager of the Five Mountains Themepark which is being decommissioned.
- **Randy Finley** – Former mayor of Promise Falls. Owns a bottled water company. Has a wife, Jane, and an assistant Lindsay.
- **Walden Fisher** – In the town Engineering department. Wife, Beth, deceased. Daughter, Olivia, stabbed to death 3 years prior.
- **Bill Gaynor** – In insurance. Wife Rosemary murdered. Son is Matthew.
- **Sarita Gomez** – Illegal from Mexico. Gaynor's nanny and aide. Also works at a nursing home. Boyfriend – Marshall Kemper.

- **Mason Helt** – Student at Thackeray. Was an amateur actor. Boy attacking girls on campus. Shot by Duncomb.
- **Marshall Kemper** – Sarita’s boyfriend. Custodian at the nursing home. Budding blackmailer.
- **Agnes Pickens** – Marla’s mother and David’s aunt. Hospital administrator. Married to Gill.
- **Victor Rooney** – Olivia Fisher’s former fiancé. Former fireman. Current town drunk.
- **Jack Sturgess** – Doctor at the hospital. GP in charge of both Marla and the Gaynor’s. Has gambling debts with a loan shark.
- **Wanda Therrieult** – Medical Examiner
- **Cal Weaver** – Insurance investigator.
- **Samantha “Sam” Worthington** – Son Carl has an incident with Ethan Harwood in school. Ex-husband is in jail.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. This book is written with alternating chapter depicting different character viewpoints. Was it well done? Was it effective? Did you like this style of writing? Why or why not?
3. Did you like the pacing of this book? “Broken Promise” has many very short chapters. Do you think that short chapters aid in keep the pacing of the book fast and interesting?
4. Who was your favorite character? Who was your least favorite? Why?
5. Did you know who committed the Gaynor (baby) crimes depicted in the book before it was revealed? What gave it away?
6. Did you, at any point, think that Marla took the baby? Why or why not?
7. Who is ultimately responsible for what happened to Marla and Matthew?
8. Dr. Sturgess says he helps people and everything he has ever done is to help. Do you think he really believes that or was he just making excuses?
9. Do you think Sturgess killed Rosemary?
10. David wonders if Agnes’ final act was an act of courage or cowardice. (p 373). What do you think?
11. Detective Duckworth takes the case of the dead squirrels just as seriously as the attempted rapes and the murder. Why did he feel it was important to continue investigating the incident? Do you think that a real police officer would give it the gravitas Duckworth did?
12. David Harwood gets a job offer from ex-mayor Randy Finley. Should he take it or turn it down? Why?
13. What do you think the significance of the 23 is?

14. One reviewer said, “The characters in this book could be your neighbors, your friends even. It raises the question, just how well do you really know these people; your friends, your family, your acquaintances? What are they keeping hidden from you? Do you really know them, or do you only know the façade they present?” What do you think? How well do you know your family, friends, and neighbors?
15. There were multiple seemingly unrelated crimes committed in this book. Did you like or dislike the parallel plotlines? Why or why not?
16. This book ends on a cliffhanger. Did that annoy you or were you okay with it because this is the first book of a series?
17. The title of this book is “Broken Promise.” Why do you think that was chosen as the title? Who or what do you think the title refers to?
18. “Broken Promise” (2015) was billed as the first book of the Promise Falls series, but “Never Look Away” was written earlier (2010) introducing Harwood and his wife, Jan and “Too Close to Home” deals with Derek Cutter and the murder of his neighbors. Is “Broken Promise” really the first book of the series or is it farther down the list? Who do you think makes those decisions and why?
19. Barclay has written 21+ books. Will you read any of the other books?

References:

- Linwood Barclay - <https://www.linwoodbarclay.com/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/b/linwood-barclay/>
- Goodreads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23398840-broken-promise>
- Novelist – <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=6c42c471-394c-4858-8d65-906256128144%40sessionmgr104&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10430922&db=neh>

Linwood Barclay’s Books

Zack Walker

1. Bad Move (2004)
2. Bad Guys (2005)
3. Lone Wolf (2006) aka Bad Luck
4. Stone Rain (2007) aka Bad News

Promise Falls

1. Broken Promise (2015)
- 1.5. Final Assignment (2015)
2. Far From True (2016)
3. The Twenty-Three (2016)
4. Parting Shot (2017)

Chase

1. Chase (2017)
2. Escape (2018)

Stand-Alone Novels

- Mike Harris Made Me Eat My Dog (1998)
- No Time for Goodbye (2007)
- Too Close to Home (2008)
- Fear the Worst (2009)
- Never Look Away (2010) – Promise Falls Prequel
- The Accident (2011)
- Never Saw it Coming (2012)
- Trust Your Eyes (2012)
- A Tap on the Window (2013)
- No Safe House (2014)
- A Noise Downstairs (2018)

If you liked **Broken Promise**, try...

- [A Small Death in the Great Glen](#) – A.D. Scott
- [Chasing the Dead](#) – Tim Weaver
- [A Killing in the Hills](#) – Julia Keller
- [The Pale Blue Eye](#) – Louis Bayard
- [Tabula Rasa](#) – Shelly Reuben