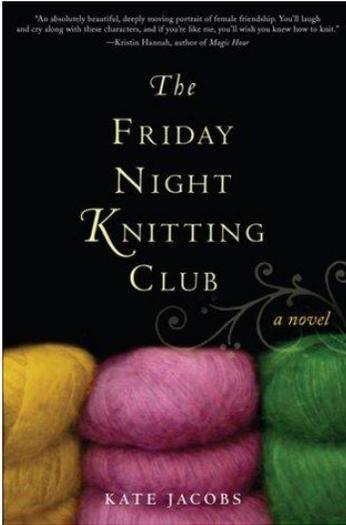


# Friday Night Knitting Club

By Kate Jacobs



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## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Georgia Walker is a single mom and successful New York City entrepreneur whose yarn shop, Walker and Daughter, has become something of a mecca for knitters of all skill levels and dispositions. What begins as a disorganized Friday night gathering of her most loyal customers turns into a regular meeting of minds and hearts, as each woman discovers there's much more to be found at Walker and Daughter than tips on knitting technique.

Just when business is really looking up, the father of Georgia's daughter and a long-forgotten nemesis suddenly resurface and Georgia's orderly world falls to pieces. Soon enough, she learns that she isn't the only Friday Night Knitting Club member who sees it as the only constant in life, and a saving grace at that. *Taken from the publisher.*

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does Georgia reject her parents' offer to house her and Dakota?
2. The role of friendships among women is a central theme of *The Friday Night Knitting Club*. Some friendships develop easily, like K.C. and Georgia's, while others begin on unsure footing, like Darwin and Lucie's. Cat's insecurities create conflicted feelings about drawing Georgia closer. Discuss the emotional baggage and issues of class that challenge trust between various women in the knitting club.
3. Georgia has a history of being burned by the people closest to her. Cat's decision to attend Dartmouth meant breaking a pact of friendship, and James abandoned her for another woman. Leading up to forgiveness, do you think there are moments when her defenses against intimacy and protectiveness of Dakota are excessive?

4. What does Anita see in Georgia that gives her the confidence to invest? Why does Georgia trust Anita, given her past relationships that went awry?
5. Lucie's decision to become pregnant without telling the man she conceives with is a choice that flies in the face of social convention and her mother's expectations, to say nothing of her Catholic upbringing. What factors led to her choice? How does the whole of Georgia's experience as a single mother support or undermine her decision?
6. Entrepreneurs, single moms, and a seventy-something undergoing a sexual reawakening—the women of the knitting club are hardly traditional, although a highly traditional woman's craft is what brings them together each Friday. Eventually Darwin decides to write her thesis about the positive impact of knitting in the lives of modern women rather than criticizing it as a "throwback" that prevents women from focusing their energy on professional success. In your opinion, which is the more feminist interpretation?
7. Georgia gets defensive when James asserts that he has things to teach Dakota about race that Georgia could never teach her. Is her indignation totally justified in light of James's delinquency as a father, or is there some truth to his claim?
8. How does Dakota's major act of rebellion (her attempt to go to Baltimore) alter Georgia and James's playing field? Do you agree with Georgia's decision on an initial trip to Scotland over a trip to Baltimore?
9. Before Georgia gives James a second chance, she claims to harbor "hatred lite" toward him, reasoning that she'd always heard the opposite of love is hate. When Cat's lawyer informs her that Adam wants to settle and be done with her, she's unexpectedly hurt because he's letting her walk away without a fight. Given Cat's reaction, how does indifference factor into the love/hate equation?
10. When Cat responds to Georgia's sincere questions about her college experience at Dartmouth by saying, "It wasn't like you think," what does she mean?
11. Things get interesting in Scotland when Georgia's Gran offers her loving but firm analysis of the women's lives. She points out that Cat is capable of handling stress but hasn't tried, and that Georgia's spent too much time ruminating on the past. Her advice: mistakes are made; the important thing is to decide how to react to what people offer, because you can't make them change. How do the women accept this advice in each of their lives?
12. If Georgia had opened the letters she received from James in a timely fashion, how might things have been different?
13. While James and Dakota are in Baltimore visiting his parents, Georgia decides to tell the club that she has cancer. Why does she share her news with the knitting club before she tells her immediate family?
14. When Georgia gets diagnosed, she worries that a show of weakness will be unacceptable to Dakota, James, and others who know and love her as a pillar of strength. How do her loved ones prove her wrong?

15. In your opinion what is the main lesson of *The Friday Night Knitting Club*?

*Taken from the publisher.*



## Interview with author Kate Jacobs

Get to know the author of *The Friday Night Knitting Club*, our June Book Club pick.

By Dayna Boyer  
*Canadian Living*

Our June Book Club pick is *The Friday Night Knitting Club* by Kate Jacobs. ([Click here to read an excerpt from the book.](#)) Not only will you fall in love with this character-driven story, but it may also motivate you to pick up the knitting needles. We chatted with the author about girlfriends, British Columbia and (of course) knitting.

### **Canadian Living: What pushed you to move from magazine-writing to novel-writing?**

**Kate Jacobs:** Well, fiction came first. I always wrote stories when I was young and growing up in Hope, B.C.; I remember, when I was eight, outlining 300 characters for a novel I planned to write. Of course, that project never went very far because I was too busy naming all the people who were going to be in it! Fast-forward a few years later and journalism seemed a good approach: I could make my living as a writer and learn some useful skills. So I focused in that direction and went to Carleton University in Ottawa. It was there that I became interested in the magazine industry and, after graduation, moved to Manhattan to attend NYU. New York was so different from Canada! It was a demanding transition and I worked very hard to get my foot in the door of the publishing world. Internship by internship, I did so. Then I was a magazine editor and writer for several years, and I continue to freelance today. But always my private intention was that I was making my way to novels. And isn't it amazing how things can come full circle? For example, I was recently at my parents' home and I found part of a story I wrote when I was about 12; the main character was named Georgia!

### **CL: How different was the writing process?**

**KJ:** The most significant difference is really one of scope - it is daunting to contemplate going from working on magazine pieces that are a couple of thousand words to writing one long work that runs almost 120,000 words! It takes a lot of focus and a lot of writing. Some days the pages aren't as good as you'd like them to be, but the trick is to just keep at it. And it's through the writing process that I discovered the characters, really got to know them and learn new things about them, and in that manner developed the story. That's how it all comes together.

**CL: You didn't job-shadow or attend a stitch 'n' bitch as research. Why did you want to keep your subjects completely imaginary?**

**KJ:** As a journalist, you're trained to interview and listen and then report. You're a reporter. When you write fiction, your goal is to create, to invent, to imagine, to build the story. So I didn't want to job-shadow a yarn shop owner in case that experience would curb some of that creative process. Similarly, writing dialogue was so amazing -%u2013 I didn't have any notes to check or tapes to play to ensure accurate quotes. I simply listened to my imagination and to the personalities of the characters, who feel very real to the writer, I can assure you. That said, I did take a research trip to Scotland -%u2013 fun fun fun! -%u2013 and I very diligently and very seriously researched the medical issues in the novel.

**CL: You've said before that people have a tendency to assume first novels are semi-autobiographical. Tell me about the process you went through to develop your main characters.**

**KJ:** Don't we all read a book and then wonder where the writer is talking about him or herself? In fact, readers I've met at signings have asked me if I had dreams of opening a yarn shop, or if I'm Georgia. (No one asks me if I'm Anita, though, which I think is because she's older than I am.) And the truth is that I am all of the characters and none of the characters. A writer doesn't exist in a vacuum and so aspects of myself, my personality, or of people in my life do appear in FNKC. Sometimes it is intentional and other times it was unconscious; my friends particularly like to tease me about occasional bits of life philosophy in the book. They call these the "Kate-isms" because they are things I've said before in my real life. Sure, I tucked in some of my ideas on certain issues. ("Be your own safety and security" is what Dakota and Georgia tell Cat, and what my own brother told me when I was leaving for university.) For my part, when I go back and re-read, I have moments when I'm shocked that I've revealed so much about myself! It makes me feel quite vulnerable. So yes, I poured little bits and pieces of myself into the characters, but that doesn't make the story semi-autobiographical. The characters are fully their own people. And that's because, even as much as I had an idea of the characters when I began writing, I truly discovered them -- really got to know them -- through the actual, physical act of writing. Sometimes their back story changed, sometimes their personalities changed. Writing is where the story happens, in those long hours alone at the computer. But, because I'm often asked about it, I'll point out some of the links to me. Darwin, for example, is near and dear to me because when I was a teenager, I had a tremendous suspicion of domesticity and what it implied for feminism. It took me a long time to understand that rejecting traditional skills doesn't translate into modern empowerment. Also, I was lucky to have a grandmother called Nanny who was a great knitter and with whom we would sit and play cards at the kitchen table and talk. She lived to be 99 and she had much to say about everything; just a great lady. So I could draw on this wonderful personal relationship in my own life to explore Georgia's rich relationship with her granny. My sister-in-law is a devoted single mom in New York, and yet she's quite different from Georgia. That said, admiring her helped inform how I developed Georgia's story. There's more, and yet my personal story still isn't a direct parallel to any of the characters in the FNKC. Mine is a story I have yet to fully write.

**CL: Where did you get your parenting cues from to develop Georgia and Dakota's relationship?**

**KJ:** Well, I'm not a mom. I have a beloved springer spaniel, Baxter, but no kids. Maybe someday. However, I do take the role of Auntie Kate quite seriously. I love to spend time with my nieces and nephews: I'm happy to go to kid movies, play imaginary games, get manicures with my almost-a-teenager niece. Just be around. And I have one niece in New York who is near Dakota's age -- she was a little younger when I was writing -- but she and I spent a lot of time simply hanging out and that gave

me a tremendous insight into the tweenage world. Even though the character of Dakota is very different from my niece; my older sister and another close family friend have pointed out to me how similar Dakota is to how I was at that age. (For someone devoted to avoiding domesticity, I baked a lot. My mother encouraged independence by having us make our own cookies and brownies and she wouldn't buy goodies from the store!) Also a factor is that I am a youngest child – and Georgia and Dakota's relationship has a certain type of sibling camaraderie to it. It made sense to me that a young mom would feel the push-pull of sisterliness as well as the joys and challenges of being the parent.

**CL: Why was it important that Dakota be biracial?**

**KJ:** What I tried to do was reflect some of the real New York in the novel. It's an amazing, energetic city that draws people from all parts of the U.S., from all parts of the world. And that meant it wouldn't make sense to me if every character was the same – I didn't want everyone to be like me, for example, a married white woman in her 30s – and so there are characters of different ethnicities, different religions, different races, different ages, and different socioeconomic groups. Dakota being biracial is part of that: Her mother, Georgia, is white, and her father, James, is African-American. Occasionally a reader will ask if their relationship mirrors my own, but that's not the case.

**CL: As a British Columbia native, do you feel this book reflects Canada?**

**KJ:** What a great question -- I'm more interested in your take on that! Being raised in Canada had a tremendous influence on me, and I feel a strong sense of identity about my background. It has defined me. But there are no Canadian characters in the book, which is something intentional. I do have some Canadian characters in my head that may appear in another book. That said, I think there are some influences in FNKC, some of which have more to do with the impact of Canada on me rather than me trying to put Canada into the book. One is what we've already discussed: the importance of creating a multiracial story. That's a very Canadian sensibility. I think the issues about searching for personal identity, or of changing identity. And I think I have a very Canadian sense of humour. Plus there is an aspect in FNKC about Georgia and Cat coming from a smaller place to the big city, and I keenly felt different when I first arrived in Manhattan. I remember walking into a seminar in grad school and the prof and my classmates were discussing "Kate's quaint accent." I was mortified; they thought it was cute. (Let me tell you, a person can recite "Let's go out and about" only so many times in a day.)

**CL: What sparked your interest in building an alternate reality website like WalkerandDaughter.com?**

**KJ:** It seemed like a fun idea, quite frankly. My husband was a real help throughout this process and he has a great mind for marketing. And the impetus behind the [www.walkeranddaughter.com](http://www.walkeranddaughter.com) site is to create a reader community -- simply a place where readers from all over can connect with each other and talk about the book, talk about knitting, talk about New York, whatever they want to discuss. Because FNKC is a story about women's friendships and the power of community and so why not make it real? But I'll always remember, having already written that Georgia's employee Peri was taking website classes, when I made an offhand comment to my husband that Peri should build the shop's website. And he said, "Why doesn't she?" And then we were off and running, asking ourselves what her skill level would be, and how much time and money they would have to spend on images and those kinds of details. I knitted the background -- so it's not as good as if Georgia had really done so -- and

wrote the content; my husband architected the site and my good friend Dani did the beautiful graphic design and logo.

**CL: What kind of a response have you received from the site?**

**KJ:** A lot of enthusiasm — we have many members of the message boards — and a little bit of confusion from a handful of folks. I do still get e-mails from people asking how to get to the store or what types of yarn I carry. And we've even put up a bit more info explaining that it's not a real store. Either people “get” [www.walkeranddaughter.com](http://www.walkeranddaughter.com) and they find it fun, or it's simply not their cup of tea. And that's fine. For that reason, we made sure that [www.fridaynightknittingclub.com](http://www.fridaynightknittingclub.com) is a straightforward, informational site with basic navigation. It has a sample chapter, a reading group guide, reviews, and a link to my book tour blog.

**CL: How important is female friendship in your life?**

**KJ:** My friends are a major part of my life and always have been. Don't get the idea that I'm a social butterfly; I'm a bit too reserved for that. It takes me time to relax and open up with people. I'm always happy to hold up a wall at a party! But when I make a friend, I keep a friend. And FNKC is really a novel about friendship — the power and importance of having a support network in our lives. There are individual friendships within the story but it's very much looking at a group dynamic. On a personal note, I have some very special individual friends but I also have two groups of friends who have played important roles in my life. When I started my first job at Redbook magazine in New York, I met a super group of young women. We're so much closer now, in fact, even though we don't see each other as much as we used to. But we make a point to get together, as a group, on a regular basis. There's something very special when you have this kind of emotional shorthand with people: You can get right to the heart of things. And I'm still close with my “gang” from elementary school in Hope. Each one of those women are so very important to me. Some have just turned 34 — I have a few months to go before that birthday, I'd like to point out — and it's amazing to me that we've managed to keep together. We're a long way from the days of Bionic Woman lunchboxes. It hasn't always been good times; one of my dear friends and I had quite a fight in Grade 6 and didn't talk to each other for over a year. It's funny to look back on it now because we can barely remember the cause! But, oh, the drama...

Seriously, like all of us, I go through periods of feeling closer or more distant to some people. What I don't do is close the door. I have a strong belief that communication may ebb and flow but that the connection is always strong. So there have been times when it has seemed as though a friendship has run its course and then it has been renewed. Or it will be renewed. If someone has been a close friend, even if there is now distance, I sincerely believe we will be close again. For example, I communicate infrequently with one of my closest friends from high school, but it feels very natural when we are in touch. I am always beyond thrilled to hear from her. My personal experience helped me to explore Georgia's emotions about her formerly close friendship with Cat, even though this friend of mine is all the wonderful things Cat has yet to become! (Like all the characters, Cat is not modelled on any real person.) It all comes down to a guiding principle of my life: True friendship, when you find it, is something worth cherishing. There is much to be said for loyalty. And I have a great example in my mother, who gets together every few years with her friends from high school in Thunder Bay.

**CL: And how did that influence your portrayal of the women in the story?**

**KJ:** I'm lucky -- I have a lot of smart, funny, gutsy women in my life, who inspire me, support me, annoy me, push me, and love me whether I succeed or fail. That's good stuff. It's also a fertile ground from which to think about characters.

**CL: Why was it important that Georgia suffer through heartbreak in order to become successful?**

**KJ:** Hmm...that's an intriguing question. I'm not sure Georgia's heartbreak was necessary for her success. However, it pushed her to self-reliance. It made her sharper, stronger. And it pushed her into an entirely different career direction, in that she had a child to care for and couldn't raise a baby on her publishing assistant salary. But obviously her broken heart had a negative impact as well. One of the Georgia's challenges, in my opinion, is that she took her life experiences -- the betrayals -- and used them to justify pushing people away. It was a reasonable defence mechanism but it impacted the quality of her life. The character of Georgia is courageous and generous and warm-hearted but she's not perfect; she's judgmental and she's stubborn, for example. Still, she is devoted to her daughter above all else and she builds a business to support her child while, almost unknowingly, building a community that ends up emotionally supporting many people. And yet by always holding herself at arm's length, she is one of the last people to fully open herself up to this wonderful group of women.

**CL: Even with knitting becoming more mainstream do you think people still shy away from domestic arts?**

**KJ:** Not in my world -- all of my friends are turning into domestic geniuses. How did that happen? If you could have read a crystal ball when I was in university and told me that one day my phone calls with my pals would often include the question, "What are you making for dinner tonight" and then involve a long chat about recipes and ingredients, I would have rolled my eyes and laughed. As for knitting, many of my friends were knitting before I did and some are now doing fairly complicated stitches and patterns. (I am always about big needles and chunky yarn, fast and easy.) Sometimes people hesitate to try knitting or another skill because it seems intimidating. But believe me, if I can make a stitch -- and I'm tremendously uncoordinated -- then anyone can do so. What's so amazing to me about the resurgence of domestic arts is that we're finally at a point where women are developing a more complete range of choices, where wanting to have a high-powered career and also wanting to knit a scarf or decoupage a hat box aren't seen as incompatible.

**CL: What would you want people to discuss in a book club meeting of your book?**

**KJ:** I love how a reader brings her own ideas and interpretations to a book. So my first response would be that people should talk about the emotions they feel after reading the book. Knitting is a metaphor for life in FNKC, because when you make a mistake in knitting, you can go back and rip it out and start again. It's never too late to try and set something right in life, I think. Or at least to come to terms with what has happened, which is another form of setting something right. My goal with FNKC was to write an engaging story. A good yarn -- pun intended. But there isn't only one thing to take away from the book. In fact, readers can contact me directly at [kate@katejacobsbooks.com](mailto:kate@katejacobsbooks.com) and ask me to call in to their book club, which I've just started doing and it's very fun. And these are some of the things we discuss: What does friendship mean in their lives? What is the role of personal responsibility? Is there

potential for second chances? What they would have done if they had been in Georgia's shoes, in Anita's, in Lucie's, in Cat's? How did they react to the story? And why?

**CL: What's your next knitting project? And your next writing project?**

**KJ:** I'm knitting a baby blanket -- on size 19 needles -- for a friend's baby. I thought the baby was due in the fall but it's actually coming in August so I need to get going or he'll be in kindergarten before I finish! What's special about this project is that it's for my friend who often gives me knitting advice, and who helped me to develop Dakota's muffin recipe. But I have a competing project: a novel due at the end of the summer. I'm very excited about what I'm writing and look forward to exploring the relationships and complications in the lives of these new characters. Stay tuned!