

Flock: The Autobiography of a Multiple Personality Study Guide

Flock: The Autobiography of a Multiple Personality by Joan Frances Casey

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Plot Summary

Joan Casey was in her twenties, a student at the University of Chicago and dealing with the breakup of a marriage when she sought out a therapist she could talk to about the escalating stress in her life. The therapist, recommended by the university, was Lynn Wilson. Over the course of only a couple of sessions, Lynn recognized what she believed to be Multiple Personality Disorder. Over the coming months, Lynn met twenty-four distinct personalities. The most prominent of those were Renee, Jo, Joan Frances, Isis and Missy. Each had distinct characteristics, mannerisms and memories. Some of them harbored memories of childhood abuse at the hands of both her parents. Abusive situations and the need to get along prompted the creation of most of the personalities. Renee, who had arrived when Joan was raped by a teacher, was able to see the majority of what happened with all members of the Flock and became dominant in most situations.

Though hampered by the personalities, there were advantages as well. Many of the personalities did specific duties. Some were very intellectual while others were able to cook or clean. One - a male named Doug - learned to play golf when that became an expected skill. As the therapy progressed, Renee made certain that the body made it to each session with the idea that she was healthy and was only trying to make life comfortable for the Flock as a whole. Both Renee and Jo initially refuse the idea of integration, though that's more or less what eventually happened.

Renee, encouraged by her boyfriend, applied for graduate school at Harvard and was accepted. There, she found added stress in the coursework but divided up the classes so that those who excelled at particular aspects of learning could take those classes. She found acceptance among two close friends who quickly accepted her personalities, just as Lynn and Gordon had done.

The final stress on the system was prompted by Joan Frances, who couldn't seem to accept the abuse at the hands of her father and wanted only to fulfill her mother's prophecy that she was psychotic. Near suicide and with no help at hand, the Flock created a mediator personality called "Unity" that resulted in a log of internal conversations aimed at helping hold things together. Reassured of Lynn and Gordon's continued love and support, Joan Frances bought a puzzle in the shape of an egg and Renee glued it together - a symbol of her own personality. Though the new fused personalities - which called herself Joan - said it wasn't exactly like being integrated, she became a unified being displaying aspects of all the personalities that had previously split her life.

Book I

Book I Summary and Analysis

As the story opened, the personality called Renee was thinking about her life. She had been married to a man named Keith but he had recently asked for a divorce. She said that she initially believed that he'd only wanted her to "shape up" because she sometimes forgot to please him. She then realized that she was at a window and had been considering jumping during her thoughts about her life. She didn't remember getting up from her desk or going to the window. She said that she didn't want to commit suicide but thought about it "a lot." She blamed drugs taken during high school.

She worked at the University of Chicago and had spent most of her life "walking a tightrope," so that she felt she was good at it. Still, at this moment she felt out of control and decided to see a counselor - something she'd done for a "quick fix" in the past. She said that she often forgot things or slipped "inside-out", only to wake and find herself in a strange situation. She called a nurse practitioner at the university who suggested that Renee see a social worker named Lynn Wilson.

In chapter two, Renee called the Mental Health Clinic. She practiced what to say, finding what she believed to be indicative of need without sounding suicidal. With a little prodding, the receptionist worked her in later that day - a Friday. Lynn Wilson called Renee into her office. Renee said she preferred to be called "Jo", though she privately thought that she never wanted to be called Jo. Under Lynn's questioning, Renee began an "unrehearsed monologue" and said she hadn't heard this before. The words, actually coming from another of the personalities, told the story of Joan's father, Ray, dying of cancer and calling for Joan to be at his bedside for the death. Lynn responded that it was "quite a story", and Renee was immediately defensive, but wasn't sure herself whether the story was true. Renee stood to leave, realizing that the pressure was already abating and that she felt better.

In chapter three, Renee told Lynn during her appointment the following week that she desperately wanted to reconcile with her husband. Lynn witnessed a personality switch, though she didn't recognize it for what it was. Lynn, worried when Renee left without making another appointment, had her receptionist contact Renee, who agreed to return. During that interview, Lynn noted many contradictions. Renee was later aware of them but was too drowsy to do any better.

In chapter four, the sessions became twice-weekly and Renee liked that Lynn didn't call her a liar when she contradicted herself and didn't laugh at her when the Jo personality admitted that she didn't remember what clothes she had on that day. Renee quickly felt secure with Lynn and began doing what she'd never done - allowing the other personalities time. She said that she felt somewhat guilty at not maintaining better control, but Lynn began to see the various personalities. Lynn's case notes dated March



30, 1981, indicate that she believed Renee was suffering Multiple Personality Disorder. She shared this with Lynn, who dismissed it as impossible.

In chapter five, on April 9, Renee told Lynn that Keith had a right to be angry because "she" messed up. Under more questioning, Lynn learned that the speaker was Renee and that "she" who had messed up the relationship was Jo. Renee then said that she was feeling better and told Lynn that it was all a game, but Lynn refused to believe that. Lynn questioned more and Renee told her about Jo, the serious young woman who didn't want to be married to Keith; Missy, the five-year-old girl who liked to be hugged and was afraid to talk; Joan Frances who always stood up for her mother. Renee said that she watches while the other personalities come to the forefront but that she was sometimes too bored to stay and only came back when something warned her that there was some danger.

When Renee arrived for the next appointment, Lynn asked to speak to the Jo personality. She explained to Jo that the personalities were a creative way to deal with the stresses of life and that when those personalities took over, she lost blocks of time. To prove it to the skeptical Jo, Lynn asked what she'd been doing just before the appointment. Jo looked blank and then closed her eyes and Joan Frances stepped in. Lynn wasn't fooled and immediately recognized Joan Frances. Renee said that she "gave Joan Frances' anger a wide berth as I struggled back out." Renee had watched the scene and admitted to being impressed. Renee agreed to continue therapy but predicted Joan Frances would tell her mother, Nancy, and that Nancy's predictable objection would make Joan Frances want to stop the therapy. That's exactly what happened.

In Lynn's case notes for May 1, she indicated that she'd gotten a great deal of information from Missy, including that her parents had wanted a boy. Lynn called Renee to check on her during Lynn's vacation and Renee said it was dangerous to let the others believe there was someone to depend on.

In chapter six, Lynn began a diary on May 7 in order to record more of her personal thoughts than in the clinical notes. She said that her supervisor and her colleagues were skeptical of the diagnosis and the treatment. She also noted that she was faced with the ethical dilemma of how much of what one personality's talks could be related to another without violating patient confidentiality. She expected to eventually discover that Jo was sexually abused as a child. Renee couldn't believe that Lynn was still interested and Jo hated to hear references to other personalities. Missy revealed that she'd been forced to use her right hand over her dominant left. Jo worried that Lynn would reject her if Jo became too dependent and Joan Frances worried that her mother would be angry if she continued therapy. Jo said that her father was "wise, gentle and loving", though he'd wanted her to be a son, but Joan Frances called him a "cold, insensitive bastard who made life hell for my mother." Lynn came to believe that both parents were abusive at least to some degree though both apparently had some positive parenting qualities.

In chapter seven, Missy spent more time with Lynn, who soon revealed that "the other girls came" beginning at a time before Missy was a year old. Lynn learned that



Raymond Casey - father of Joan - was from a large Catholic family and married Nancy Fitzgerald, who was pleased to be his wife. They married and Ray went to war, returning when their daughter Carol was three. Nancy miscarried several times before giving birth to Joan, who she was certain was a boy. Ray apparently bonded with Joan while she was struggling to survive a difficult birth, but Nancy alternately felt jealousy and nothing for the child. When Joan was very young, Nancy grew frustrated in her attempt to make the child crawl and smashed the baby's hand with the heel of her shoe. Three young personalities vied for dominance but "Missy won. She pushed the two new personalities into safe mental pockets."

In chapter eight, Renee said that she continued to be sure the body showed up for therapy so that the "other parts" were able to work through some issues. Renee said that she was learning about the lives of the others prior to her arrival. Renee continued to expect that Lynn would eventually find a reason to end their sessions.

In chapter nine, three months into therapy, Jo continued to refuse to entertain the notion that she'd been abused. Renee's boyfriend, Steve, argued against the MPD diagnosis. Lynn decided to call Cornelia Wilbur, who had been the doctor for the famous MPD case, Sybil. There was a month's pause in treatment while Renee went to a seminar and Lynn went on vacation. Wilbur gave Lynn some facts, including that therapy would be three years or more, that there were more personalities and that Missy's existence indicated sexual abuse.

In chapter ten, Lynn and Renee met again for a session on July 23. Lynn knew immediately that this was a different personality. She was dressed differently than either Renee or Jo and was "polished." She introduced herself as "Isis." Renee said that as she and Jo were struggling to decide what to wear to the session, Isis appeared for the first time in years and took over, saying she wanted to meet Lynn. She told Lynn that she has "existed in a spiritual sense forever" but came into the group when Joan was thirteen. Lynn said that Isis joining at thirteen and Renee at fifteen was interesting and asked what had happened to Joan just prior to that time. Renee admitted to listening closely because she wanted to know the answer. Isis said that it was "that boy," and Lynn learned that Missy's friend Rusty was another of the personalities rather than a real boy as she'd initially thought. Isis said that she hated all men but accused Renee of being promiscuous, though Renee said the same of Isis with regard to lesbian relationships.

In chapter eleven, Lynn asked Renee for the total number of personalities but Renee admitted to being unsure. At one point, Renee sought out medical records to prove or disprove Lynn's suspicions of abuse, but her mother worked at the medical practice where her childhood records were and claimed the records had been lost in the mail.

In chapter twelve, Lynn's case notes indicated that there was structure among the Flock. Renee was a high school teacher and Jo was attending class toward her master's degree. Another took over when it was time to cook and another when it was time to be a mate to the boyfriend, Steve. At Christmas, Renee presented Lynn with a small tree decorated with tiny hand-crafted snowflakes. Isis had decided on the number



of snowflakes and Lynn quickly realized that there were twenty-four, probably one for each of the personalities.

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In her case notes in chapter two, Lynn said that she'd noted a marked change in the behavior of her patient, seeing her as outgoing and direct at the beginning but subdued and "limp" during the interview, reverting back to the former at the end of the session. It was later apparent that Lynn had seen a personality change, from Renee who took the initiative to make the appointment and took the Flock to the office, to another personality - probably Jo - and back to Renee.

It was Isis who described the first sign of sexual abuse. She said that Rusty had been created because Ray wanted a son. One day Rusty was sitting in his father's lap, driving the car, when his father got an erection. Rusty had been "confused" and "I was there."

Lynn said that her goals for the Flock were to keep them functional while focusing on treatment for each individual member of the group. Renee initially wanted only to gain more control over the body but came to realize that might not be possible. From the beginning, she and most of the others fought vehemently against the idea of integration.



Book II

Book II Summary and Analysis

Lynn said in chapter thirteen's case notes, dated January 14, 1982, that several of the personalities were worried about being lost in the process of integration. Renee split the personalities into three categories - the autonomous personalities who were well-defined and were limited to Jo, Isis, Joan Frances, Missy and Renee - the single-motive personalities who were charged with specific tasks such as cooking, and the past-keepers who concealed harmful information from the autonomous personalities so that they didn't have to deal with it. Two of the past-keepers were Robin and Reagan, though they weren't linked to a trauma but served the purpose of providing a "memory trace." Little Joe, a two-year-old personality, was interested in little other than playing and seeking nurturing. He was one of the personalities created in response to Ray and Nancy's desire that Joan be a boy. Another personality was Dear, who was happy to "perform" and do whatever Nancy asked. Joan Frances wanted to be a nun because Nancy "extolled the virtues" of the church.

The Karen personality emerged to meet Nancy's criticism that Joan be more like her cousin, Karen. She was organized and was used by the Flock for that purpose. Tracy arrived when Nancy demanded that Joan stay nearby but remain quiet. At two, Nancy had slammed Joan into the wall. The Jo personality woke in the hospital but a new personality, Josie, was created. Whenever Josie was in control, she wanted only to hurt herself into unconsciousness. Sissy arrived when Joan was three in response to Nancy's cruel insistence that she use her right hand for drawing. When Joan retreated into herself, Nancy dashed cold water on her and Sissy arrived, constantly seeking a way to make others see her pain.

In chapter fourteen, Lynn learned that the Jo personality was completely unaware of her surroundings when she went "inside." Jo wasn't particularly supportive of the activities of some of the others, including Little Joe's playtime, Missy's coloring time and Renee's teaching. Jo had been told that she was impressionable and believed it to be true. Lynn wanted Jo to listen to tape recordings of the therapy sessions but Jo refused. In Lynn's case notes of March 8, she said that she had met seventeen personalities but that some were extremely fragmented. Missy had revealed that she was molested by her father and Lynn had "relayed" Missy's story of abuse to the other personalities, though Jo continued to refuse to believe it.

Lynn convinced Jo to read the book, "Sybil." Lynn told Jo that she had developed relationships with several of the personalities and believed the best treatment was to have each focus on becoming healthier rather than looking for a way to integrate them. Lynn said that she soon realized that Jo was not only comparing herself to Sybil but was also comparing Lynn to Sybil's therapist. Jo took the difference as a failure on her own



part and decided to slash her wrists at her father's grave during an upcoming visit to her mother in Richmond. When Lynn unexpectedly issued an invitation for Jo to visit, Jo forgot her plans of suicide. Renee and the others allowed Jo the time in Lynn's home on her own. Later, Renee told Lynn of Jo's planned suicide and said the trip to Richmond was easier because Lynn interrupted that plan.

In chapter fifteen, Lynn tried hypnosis, but Jo woke terrified at the image of the beach scene Lynn described and Josie began trying to slam her body into the wall. During the scene, Joe cried out for "Larry" but said she didn't know what a former teacher could have to do with her fear of water. In chapter sixteen, Renee promised to help Lynn recreate Joan's life. Jo recalled attending classes at East Junior High School. Her parents had separated and she lost a section of time, waking next at John F. Kennedy High School. Jo spent time with a psychology teacher named Larry Dunlap, who had made himself seem a friend willing to listen to her problems and Isis was spending time with a lesbian teacher named Miss Maloney though it hadn't come to a sexual encounter. There were, however, encounters with drugs.

In chapter seventeen, Lynn said that Jo's story of "waking" to find that she'd moved from junior high to high school meant that an observant doctor might have made the MPD diagnosis then. An illness led to a hospitalization and Ray, citing the fact that Joan apparently needed him at home, moved back in. After not seeing Larry Dunlap for awhile, Nancy told Joan that he'd been fired from school, hinting that she'd revealed information about his past as the reason and that he shouldn't be around young girls. Jo refused to believe it and called him. He invited her to his apartment and she went, hiding it from her mother. He hypnotized and raped her, though she came to during the sexual act. Renee stepped in and took over, saying that this was her first consciousness. Nancy liked how Renee acted and praised her.

Renee revealed to Lynn that Kendra had been created for "self-protection" after being used by a black boy out to prove he could get a date with a white girl; Cassandra and Doug were created to deal with the stress of working in the legislature; and Charlene and Honey were created to be what Keith expected in a wife. Renee said that, even though she and some of the other autonomous personalities were becoming more capable within themselves, she felt that Jo was "a twit" and refused to consider the possibility that they might someday merge.

In chapter eighteen, Lynn pointed out in her September 1 case notes that the Flock worked together as a system to create a high-functioning person. One of the personalities might excel in math, meaning that personality came out during times that skill was being taught or was needed. The same was true of life situations, such as the personality Doug who "learned to play golf" when Joan was working in the legislature and needed that skill.

In her personal life, Renee was having trouble. Steve didn't believe in the diagnosis initially but came to recognize the personality switches, though he couldn't identify the personalities. In 1982, Steve bought a house for them to share, an important move because they'd been living in the house Steve's wife had occupied before her death. Jo



wanted to attend graduate school at Harvard and Renee believed it to be important because it would bring therapy to a natural conclusion before there was any chance of integration. However, Jo suddenly realized that she was dependent on Lynn and feared leaving. Jo's frustration upset the entire system and Jo II was created in an effort to give Lynn the clinical answers she seemed to want to hear without Jo being forced to deal with the situations. Lynn was caught off-guard but made it clear that she didn't intend to "accept" a personality created for that purpose.

In chapter nineteen, some of the personalities became more secure and demanding. For example, Jo refused to clean up messes left by some other personality. About this time, Jo confessed that she couldn't see herself in a mirror or in a picture and recalled a time when Nancy forced Jo to look at herself in the mirror and told her that she was retarded. Steve went away for a period for a teaching job and Lynn said the Flock progressed well in his absence. Renee said it was because she was truly "off duty" when she was at home and could let the personalities do what they wanted. Jo faltered, certain she was insane, and Lynn realized that Sissy and Josie only appeared in times of severe stress and that both continued to relive the horror of the episode that had created them.

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In first grade, Joan was given IQ tests and realized that working too quickly and accurately brought her to the attention of the adults. She purposefully made some mistakes and paced herself with other children. This would be repeated later, when Renee was in college and had come to an uneasy alliance with several of the personalities so that it was possible for two of them to take notes at the same time - one with the right hand and the other with the left. Renee realized then that she was again attracted unwanted attention and solved the problem by bringing only one pen to class so that the two personalities were forced to share.

It's interesting that Renee enjoyed the sexual experience with Larry Dunlap, though Jo retreated in horror. However, Lynn asked Renee what she would do if she found out a fellow teacher had sex with a student. Renee responded that she'd be angry because it wasn't right. Lynn pointed out that that's exactly what had happened to Jo and Renee seemed to feel sorry for Jo. Renee was in fact, trying to do everything she could to make sure that the Flock as a whole remained safe. She pointed out several times that she took the body to the therapy appointments but felt that therapy had little to do with her personally. Renee continued to think that she was the best or most autonomous, though there were several personalities created after she came into being.



Book III

Book III Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty, Josie arrived during a session and broke two of Lynn's ribs as Lynn was trying to restrain her. Lynn enlisted the help of her husband, a teacher named Gordon, to be with her during sessions to help if things got violent. Renee, who had met Gordon at a housewarming she and Steve held, was angry because she felt Gordon liked her as the in-control hostess and would ridicule her when he saw the actions of some of the other personalities. Gordon soon became more involved, joining in the therapy sessions. He met Jo, and it was while he was talking to her about the possibility of multiple personalities that he compared the group to a flock of birds, each with an individual thought process that sometimes made it appear that there was only chaos before turning together as one flock. Lynn liked the analogy but said she wished to be "lead bird."

Through this process, Renee was able to see what happened to the other personalities and sometimes related that information to Lynn and Gordon. She told them that Jo had once read a book that made her sad and had joined her father in his bedroom as he was watching television. She fell asleep there and woke as she was being raped. During the act, Josie imagined throwing herself against the wall, creating a pain that would end the pain she was enduring. Renee noted that she could no longer say that the problems of Joan's childhood had impacted the other members of the Flock without impacting her, but that she didn't yet know her role. In chapter twenty-one, Renee was impatient that Jo won't accept that she was abused but Lynn understood that Jo was holding to the image of a father she cherished.

Lynn noted in her diary that the situation had changed with Gordon's involvement and that she and Gordon were now acting like parents. She still worried about what she would do if progress halted for some reason. In chapter twenty-two, Lynn has an encounter with Rusty, the first since she'd challenged him initially with the fact that he was in a girl's body. Renee said that Rusty continued to wish for male companionship and emerged in April of 1983 in search of Ray. Rusty believed himself retarded like a boy he'd seen at the docks with Ray. Though he continued to appear periodically, he stopped talking until Gordon provided an opportunity for Rusty to help install a radio and antennae on his car.

Lynn learned that Missy had often accompanied her father into the woods and that he'd masturbated, though telling her he had to urinate. When he called for Missy to come closer, it was Rusty who responded, refusing to come closer but claiming to also have a penis.

In chapter twenty-three, Lynn admitted that she dreaded confrontations with Josie but Gordon said he believed Josie had something important to contribute to the overall good health of the Flock. Renee said that some of the other personalities, Kendra and



Isis especially, took up time during shopping trips with Lynn, Missy demanded playtime and Rusty insisted on time to work on things. About this time, Renee starts spending more time with Lynn and Gordon. She said that any personality in crisis took precedence but that she deserved to have time with them also. The summer arrived and Lynn and Gordon invited the Flock to spend time with them at their cabin in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

In chapter twenty-four, Lynn said that the decision to spend time with the Flock over the summer was possible only because she and Gordon knew it would end with the fall when the Flock went away to Harvard to school. Steve returned home and their first sexual encounter was a disaster with Josie popping in and trying to throw herself into a wall followed by Missy who curled up with a stuffed animal. Renee said that "each" of the personalities tried to get to know Steve but that it was disarming for Steve, who says outright that he prefers Renee. Rusty sailed periodically with Gordon and Lynn used that as an example that the "group mind" or overall entity would help ensure that the Flock had what it needed, though Renee found it frightening to consider trusting that.

In chapter twenty-five, Lynn noted that Jo and Renee became much more interested in making things "comfortable" for all the personalities. Renee felt bad and several of the personalities were constantly calling on Lynn and Gordon but pointed out that they were managing to work through many situations on their own. She remained confident that Lynn would eventually reject their pleas for help. Lynn sees, in the actions of the personalities toward each other, a marked relationship to the actions she'd heard described about Nancy and Ray.

In chapter twenty-six, the Flock had been in therapy for two and a half years. Lynn said that she could usually see what the other personalities saw, but didn't always understand what they knew. Lynn suggests that Renee and some of the other personalities form an alliance. Lynn said she didn't want to unite with Jo because they were two different. Lynn also said that she couldn't communicate directly with Jo. However, Kendra, Isis and Renee do just that, forming an alliance of sorts that allows any combination of the three to be conscious at any given time though it remains Renee who is typically talking. Renee said that the union meant each of them could react more quickly to emerging situations and was actually a very good decision for them individually and for the Flock. As the summer drew to a close, Lynn wrote that Jo still didn't want to go - mainly because she felt she didn't get to decide whether to apply - but that Missy and Rusty, secure in the parental love of Gordon and Lynn, are happy.

One day Jo said that she typically "woke" to find that the previous personality was apparently in the middle of some task that Jo was expected to complete. Gordon asked what would happen if she did something else and she said she'd never tried it. Renee said that she began staying in the background, allowing Jo more time, until Jo realized that no one else was going to rush out to answer the phone and that Jo could take that kind of initiative on her own. Renee's fear of integration seemed to make this kind of



experiment dangerous for her but it seemed that by this point she had come to realize that the healthier each of the personalities became, the easier it was to manage life.

One day Lynn suggested that she and Renee go to town together when Gordon and Rusty finished working on a project; then laughed, realizing what she'd suggested. This was an example of how Lynn had come to know each of the personalities and to accept them individually rather than as part of a whole. Later, the Flock went for a walk and Jo left a note to that effect. Renee, in an apparent attempt at humor, said, "we'll stay in a group."

Book IV

Book IV Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty-seven, Steve drove the Flock to Cambridge for her to start school at Harvard. Though they were still living together, their relationship had changed and they were more like father-daughter. Renee and other members of the Flock were upset at leaving Lynn and Gordon, but she knew that Steve couldn't and wouldn't understand that even if she tried to tell him. Renee hoped, on one level, that the others of the group who had demanding time and attention from Lynn and Gordon would be less interested in time at the forefront once they were away from Lynn and Gordon. But she also feared this because she wasn't the "intellectual" of the group and felt she needed help to pass the classes.

Renee had two days alone in her suite of dorm rooms before her roommate, Bethany, arrived. Joan Frances immediately came out, rushing to do everything possible to make Bethany like her. Renee realized she couldn't guarantee that she could maintain control and decided that she needed to establish a safety net. She knew that if Josie came out and made a scene, she might find herself locked up in an psychiatric ward. Lynn agreed and set her up with a psychiatrist named Dr. Timothy Matthews who had treated multiples and agreed to see the Flock in an emergency.

Renee looked over her class load and arranged for Jo to take specific classes while the "alliance" of Renee, Kendra and Isis took care of the other classes. Jo wasn't happy with the situation and was angry when she woke to find herself seated in a lecture hall but did what was expected anyway. The Flock went to Richmond for a wedding and Nancy's disregard for her daughter's success made the situation unstable again. In her diary, Lynn wrote that the Flock had become pushy about their relationship with Lynn because of the poor relationship with Nancy. Lynn was afraid that the Flock might drop out over the holiday break on two counts - one for their continued education but also because she wasn't sure she could continue to commit the energy into helping on a fulltime basis.

Back at school, Renee decided to share her secret with Bethany, who accepted the MPD and soon realized which personality was out front at any given time. At one point, Bethany asked Renee how Jo had done on an exam. Renee marveled that Bethany accepted so easily. Renee also made friends with a woman named Lillian, and when Lillian began to talk about a class she had with Jo, Renee told her as well. Lillian also accepted. The Flock got all A's on midterms and Renee felt they were going to make it. In a particular class, Kendra was making notes in the margin of a book with her left hand while Renee took notes on a tablet with her right. When Renee realized that students were staring, she stopped and resolved the situation by taking only one pen to class after that so that she and Kendra had to share.



In chapter twenty-eight, the Flock kept a calendar so that each could track what was happening on specific dates. Over Christmas vacation, they visit with Gordon and Lynn and were again reassured of the bond. At one point the previous year, Rusty had "absorbed" Little Joe. Around Christmas, Renee and Lynn realize that Jo had absorbed Jo II. In Lynn's diary of January 2, 1984, she noted that Reagan and Robin were the first to merge and that they did so soon after sharing the stories they'd been created to carry. Lynn was concerned, however, that Renee and Jo were growing less tolerant of Nancy, which would make Joan Frances more defensive. Back at school, the Flock became ill and was checked for stomach problems. A doctor suggested that she see a psychiatrist, but Joan Frances rebelled. During another visit to Richmond, Renee wanted to confront her mother with the abuse but gave in to the fear of conflict and left the time to be filled by any of the other personalities that felt up to the challenge of dealing with Nancy.

In chapter twenty-nine, Joan Frances became suicidal and set up an appointment with a psychiatrist named Dr. Tate. Renee asked Lynn to call and fill him in on her condition ahead of time. Lynn worried about Dr. Tate's reaction but did as Renee asked and found him understanding. But Joan Frances argued to Dr. Tate that Lynn was wrong in her diagnosis and that all she needed was to figure out how to please her mother. Renee stepped in, identified herself and explained that Joan Frances just needed someone to help her through this crisis. Dr. Tate asked her to return in two weeks, which was a long time for Joan Frances to continue to deal with her depression. At the next appointment, Dr. Tate was uninterested in Joan Frances but set up another appointment for two weeks later. A few nights later, Renee woke to find Joan Frances with a razor blade. She called Dr. Tate who told her to wait until her appointment. Renee finally went to the emergency room and found that Dr. Tate was on call. He was incredibly angry and accused the Flock - with Joan Frances out front - of manipulative behavior. He threatened to lock her in the psychiatric ward but a phone call to Lynn finally solved the crisis so that the Flock was allowed to leave the hospital.

In chapter thirty, Steve came to pick up Renee after the semester ended. They'd decided that after Renee's next year of school, which would conclude the coursework, they would marry. They returned home for the summer to find that Lynn was ill with a cold. The various personalities were upset at the delay in seeing her. One day Rusty made the comment that he wished he was able to pay Gordon for the sailing lessons. Lynn snapped that she'd done a lot for the Flock as well and asked Rusty if her time had been worth anything. Lynn apologized, saying she was feeling under-appreciated at work. One day Renee mentioned babysitting Lynn's grandchildren. Gordon pointed out that if Josie were to appear, she'd have no idea how to handle children. Suddenly Josie was out front and hurled herself through a patio door. Jo woke and apologized for the blood. A medical doctor came to Lynn's house and bandaged the wound to eliminate the need for a trip to the hospital, which the Flock feared would end them in a psychiatric ward. Lynn said that the event made her realize that the Flock was acting like an adolescent and was acting like the mother of an adolescent. Meanwhile, Renee admitted that she had come to like Jo and the other members of the Flock, and that she saw them all as worthwhile people so that she no longer wanted to have sole possession and control of the body.



In chapter thirty-one, the Flock returned to Harvard and Renee said that they began to work more effectively. They needed little sleep and so were able to use their time meeting the needs of the individuals. Renee took on a teaching job so that they could afford an apartment in order to be alone more. Despite the fact that things were apparently going well, Renee felt the need to have someone to talk to. Dr. Matthews, who treated multiples and had been contacted by Lynn, recommended a therapist who turned out to be Dr. Tate's partner. That didn't work out, but neither did an attempt by Renee to see Dr. Matthews. The Flock "compensated" for the lack of outside help by looking for inner strengths. Renee woke one October morning to discover "transcripts" of a conversation between members of the Flock. These conversations continued as they struggled over coming days and were moderated by a new entity called Unity.

Renee was embarrassed to tell Lynn but Lynn was amazed at the creative response to the situation. She said that there had been a change in the personalities of Jo and Renee, who had both declared that they would never be willing to integrate. Though both still claimed this to be true, they were no longer suspicious and jealous of other personalities but were seeking the best things for the good of the whole.

In chapter thirty-two, the Flock returned for Thanksgiving break. Gordon and Rusty were at the boat dock when Gordon urged Rusty to wait for him near a specific sign. Rusty, ever fearful of words, was very upset and slid back inside, leaving Josie to cope. This time Josie simply related the story of when Rusty was with Ray. Ray had scratched some words in the sand and asked Rusty to come look at them. Over the course of the conversation, Ray had seen Rusty, Misty and Jo, and had been angered into beating his daughter's genital area with the stick. Back to the present and inside the Flock, Rusty stopped near Renee, "ran a finger down my cheek" and "strolled back and back." Just before he disappeared, he whispered, "I love you" to Renee. Renee said that Rusty had learned that "he was one of us."

In chapter thirty-three, Steve said he didn't want to be married to a person with multiple personalities, though he continued to be caring and supportive in public. In chapter thirty-four, Renee began losing pieces of time and found she could not always account for where the Flock had been. She often had a headache, indicating that Josie had thrown the body into walls. She talked to Dr. Matthews but warned that Josie might appear and from his negative reaction realized that she shouldn't see him for fear she might be locked up if she became violent. Lynn believed that Renee caught Dr. Matthews off guard. Lynn told him that unless he was a small man he could likely handle any violent outbursts from the Flock, but he didn't call on Renee after their talk.

There was an escalating situation within the Flock and Missy revealed to Lynn that Joan Frances had decided to live up to her mother's expectations that she was crazy. Renee realized that this explained her own emotional state as well. Renee managed to complete the coursework and her teaching duties and go home but was near the breaking point when she arrived.

In chapter thirty-five, Lynn noted that Joan Frances had to come to some acceptance of her father's abuse in order to deal with her mother's judgmental attitude. Meanwhile,



Steve announced that he was seeing a therapist in order to learn to live with a person with MPD. The disorganization within the Flock was so prominent that Renee had little control, nor did any of the other personalities. In addition, the alliance made up of Kendra, Isis and Renee had completely evaporated. One day, Joan Frances asked that Lynn take her to the store. Lynn, initially fearing that Josie might appear and throw herself from the car, refused but others joined Joan Frances's plea and Lynn agreed. In town, Joan Frances bought a puzzle in the shape of an egg then bought some glue. Renee said that it was apparent that she was supposed to glue the puzzle together so that it could never again fall apart. Suddenly, Renee realized that she was in control, that the various personalities were still intact but were somehow part of a "cohesive being."

In chapter thirty-six, Lynn said that it made sense that the Flock needed the assurance that Lynn and Gordon would remain steady despite Joan Frances's psychotic break and that the assurance was enough to make them whole. Steve and Renee, who now called herself Joan, hit an impasse as she suddenly realized that there were problems in their relationship other than the MPD.

In chapter thirty-seven, Joan wrote that she didn't "suddenly become one" that January day but that she was not unified, though she retained aspects of all those personalities. She noted that she wouldn't call it "integrated" because she still feared that "parts of me would die."

By July of 1986, Joan had graduated from Harvard and was teaching in Chicago. Lynn supported Joan's decision not to marry Steve, believing that it wouldn't work out. In January of 1987, Joan was living in Washington while Lynn had become involved in a group called the Society for the Study of Multiple Personality Disorder. She was treating others with MPD, said she considered Joan her daughter and that the treatment of others with MPD wasn't nearly as intense as it had been with Joan.

In chapter thirty-eight, Joan went through a series of bad relationships but when she told Lynn about them after the fact, Lynn congratulated her on surviving them intact and without creating a personality to deal with those situations. Joan talked with Lynn and Gordon one night and they reaffirmed that they were proud of her accomplishments. In chapter thirty-nine, Joan got a phone call from Lynn's daughter informing her that Lynn and Gordon had died in a sailing accident just two days after Joan had last talked to them. Joan said that her life was now on track, that she was an adoptive mother and was happy with her life, though she often wished she could tell Lynn and Gordon about some event or seek out their guidance.

On some level, Renee became angry at Lynn around the time she was leaving for Harvard. She said that she knew she'd always been a multiple personality and that it just happened to be Lynn who diagnosed it, but that she was struggling more now to keep the Flock functioning because all the individual pieces were so much healthier and demanding.



Characters

Renee

The dominant personality through much of Joan's life, she was writing the story from the first-person perspective though she came to be called "Joan" after the personalities merged. Renee was outgoing and was usually charged with pleasing people and smoothing over situations. Renee was probably one of the first of the personalities to become fully aware of the fact that there were other personalities within the body. As the personalities approached the point of merging, Renee became belligerent and argumentative with Lynn, a relationship Lynn later recognized as having been typical of an adolescent on the verge of adulthood and her mother. Renee arrived as part of the Flock when Jo was being raped by her high school psychology teacher. Jo had trusted the man during a time when she was struggling with her parents' separation. Renee said that she enjoyed the sex but under Lynn's prompting, realized that it was traumatic for Jo. Renee sought out help for the Flock as a whole whenever any one of them was in danger or crisis. When they were seeing Lynn, she made sure that they arrived so that all of the personalities could get the help they needed.

Lynn Wilson

A social worker working as a clinician, she was available for an appointment when Renee called for the first time. Lynn later said that if Renee's call had come a year earlier or later, she might not have had the time to invest in the treatment plan she eventually developed. Lynn was aware that some people didn't believe in Multiple Personality Disorder and that some of her colleagues were skeptical or disdainful of her treatment of and her relationship with Renee and the Flock. Lynn quickly began to recognize the various personalities and was able to address each by name, usually as soon as they put in an appearance and even before they spoke. Lynn decided early on that treating each of the personalities in order to make the group healthier as a whole should be the goal and she set out to do that. She realized that Missy needed constant reassurance and attention but Josie always had to be restrained in order to keep her from hurting herself. Lynn said that she trusted her instincts with regard to choosing the course for the therapy but also came to rely heavily on the book, "Sybil," saying she saw some differences but that there were many parallels between the Sybil personalities and the Flock.

Gordon Wilson

Lynn's husband, he was a school teacher and was called on by Lynn to help when Josie became too violent for Lynn to restrain. He quickly accepted the diagnosis of MSD but argued that a collective consciousness wasn't that uncommon. It was Gordon who came up with the term, "the Flock."



Steve

A professor, he is Renee's boyfriend when Renee first takes the Flock to see Lynn. Steve initially discounted the idea of a multiple personality diagnosis altogether. Later, he came face-to-face with three of them over the course of a few minutes and realized it was true. He wavered, sometimes saying he wouldn't marry Renee because she was MSD and later claiming to be in therapy to learn to deal with it. They didn't marry.

Isis

A lesbian, she was self-confident and believed herself to be something of a cosmic being. She felt she had always existed and had dropped into the body around the time Joan was thirteen but said she was able to leave whenever she wanted. She was one of the three who banded together to form an "alliance" in order to make things smoother for the Flock while at Harvard.

Joan Frances

The personality who wanted nothing more than to please and be loved by her mother. When the Flock went to Richmond for a visit and received nothing but negative comments from her mother, Joan Frances became suicidal. Faced with yet another rejection, she decided to fulfill her mother's prophecy and to become psychotic. She purchased the puzzle that symbolized the integration of the personalities.

Jo

The personality who seemed to be the core, she was amnesiac when not in the front. This meant that she was constantly "waking up" in strange places with no idea how she got there. Renee called her a "twit", though Jo was actually very bright. When she was needed for specific studies, she did as was expected. She and Renee were initially very much at odds but came to respect the strengths in each other.

Joan Casey

The name of the woman who played host, in a sense, to the Flock. She wasn't really a player in the book by this name but was probably the personality known as Jo. After the personalities had unified, she said she preferred to be called Joan, though none of the personalities had previously preferred that name. That could be the reason she chose it.

Missy

Perpetually stuck at age five, Missy was a creative personality. She was in constant need of reassurance and feared rejection. Missy loved to color and create things and

sometimes spent an entire afternoon on projects - a fact some of the other personalities resented as a waste of time. Missy was one of the personalities who could use both hands equally though she preferred her left. She referred to herself in third person.

Rusty

Created when Joan's father had masturbated in front of her, Rusty claimed to be a boy because he felt it was safer than being a girl. He was young and professed to be unable to read because Ray had written things in the sand that he wanted Rusty to read. Rusty eventually merged with Little Joe.



Objects/Places

MPD

Multiple Personality Disorder, a disorder diagnosed in Joan Casey when she was in her twenties.

The Flock

An analogy used by Gordon Wilson, he said that the multiple personalities were like a flock of birds - sometimes seeming completely disorganized but with a group mentality.

The University of Chicago

Where Renee worked and attended school when she went to see Lynn for the first time.

Richmond

Where Nancy lived.

Kenosha, Wisconsin

Where Lynn and Gordon had a cottage and where the Flock stayed part of the summer of 1983.

East Junior High School

Where the Flock attended junior high.

John F. Kennedy High School

Where the Flock attended high school and where they were when Jerry Dunlap raped her.

Harvard

Where the Flock attended graduate school for her doctorate degree.



Chicago

Where Joan took a teaching job after graduating Harvard.

Washington

Where Joan moved after leaving Chicago.



Themes

Self-Awareness

An incredible sense of self was exhibited by the various personalities, especially the five who were autonomous - Jo, Renee, Mary Frances, Missy and Isis. Each of them felt a sense of worth though in some cases that sense of worth depended heavily on validation from others. The fact that several of these personalities expressed a decided objection to the possibility of merging all the personalities into one was a sign of that sense of self. Renee was especially against the idea and cited the fear that part of her would die if she were integrated with all the others. This idea that she was important was not specific only to Renee, though she was most vocal about it from the beginning. Renee's sense of worth came to the forefront again and again as the various personalities were either in crisis or destructive. Renee felt that the body - and therefore herself - was valuable and didn't deserve to die. From early on, Renee sought the ability to control the entire body and to remain at the forefront without giving in to the needs of any of the others. The fact that she wanted to be in the front is a sign of her self-awareness and the fact that the others also sought turns were signs of theirs. This changed over the course of the book as other personalities became more self-aware and sought validation. At one point, Missy threatened to tell if she wasn't allowed playtime and at another time Renee took therapy time for herself, despite the fact that she'd traditionally given up that time to the other personalities.

The Ability to Cope

Joan was one of the personalities least able to cope in life because she so often had no idea of the events that put her in a current situation. She admitted to not knowing what clothes she had on and complained to Renee at Harvard that she couldn't even find her way from her dorm room to the classroom. Despite this, Jo learned to take in her surroundings and the look for clues as to her whereabouts and the tasks that the others had set up for her. The fact that the personalities had created an internal coping system was impressive to Lynn, who touted it to the various personalities in order to make them understand that they had to have faith in that system. The clearest example of this coping was seen when the Flock went away to Harvard to graduate school. There, they split up the workload - including classes - so that the personalities were all being used to their best abilities. This meant that Jo took some classes while the newly-formed alliance of Isis, Renee and Kendra took others. It's here that Renee noted that she and Kendra were taking notes at the same time, writing with both hands in distinctly different handwriting. This coping mechanism went further, creating a new personality named Unity when things got out of hand with no external help available.



The Effects of Abuse

There are many aspects of abuse, both mental and physical, described in the story. Perhaps the earliest was seen when Joan was less than a year old and her mother, frustrated because the child wouldn't crawl, stepped on her hand with a high heel. That prompted a split in Joan's personality that included the Missy personality. Another of the effects occurred when her father sexually abused her. Joan had felt sad after reading a book and had gone to bed with her father while he watched television. She woke during the rape and dreamed of throwing herself against the wall in order to block out the pain of the attack. That prompted another split and the personality Josie was created. Josie stepped back to the front often in times of stress and always tried to hurt herself, sometimes succeeding. Rusty was another personality created to deal with the abuse, this time the mental abuse of Ray and Nancy making no secret that they found their daughter lacking because they'd wanted a son. Isis was created when Rusty felt his father's erection. Another obvious effect of the abuse is seen in Joan Frances who, as a smart successful graduate student, almost committed suicide because of her mother's continued mental abuse.

Style

Perspective

The story was written in first person from two specific perspectives, though one of those was split into many other perspectives. The first of those was Lynn Wilson, a clinician who happened to be available and open to the idea that Joan Casey was suffering from Multiple Personality Disorder. The second was Joan herself, who revealed twenty-three distinct personalities over the course of her treatment with Lynn. The book was written after Joan's personalities merged into a single being. That being became known as Joan, though there weren't really any of the personalities prior to the merge who were known as Joan. The parts of the story that were not told by Lynn are told by this integrated personality that became known as Joan. However, at the time of the events being related, the personality most often conscious and at the forefront was Renee. Lynn referred to her by that name and she thought of herself as that name. To differentiate between the personalities for the purpose of this study guide, each is referred to as his or her preferred name. Those referred to only occasionally are identified as a personality. For purposes of this study guide, any reference to the group as a whole or the entity as a whole was referred to as "the Flock." The name Joan is only used after the integration, which was the name she selected. This perspective became incredibly confusing because each of these personalities was living inside the body known to most as Joan. This confusion was noted by Lynn who, at one point, made plans to take the personality Renee with her for a shopping trip while leaving the personality Rusty to help Gordon around the house.

Tone

The overriding tone of the story was one of hope and accomplishment, though there were moments of distress and despair as a natural part of the story. Renee and the other members of the Flock were often in chaos and had trouble figuring out how to cope with everyday life. However, the story had an epiphany, ending in some respects with Joan arriving almost miraculously at a resolution within herself. The process of getting there was often painful and it seemed at times that the story couldn't possibly be resolved, though the fact that Joan was co-author of the story meant that there was. The story was written in a fairly straight-forward style. Though one of the writers was a clinician and there was the potential for a great deal of jargon, the authors avoided that. The story can be easily understood by the layperson. There were references to other "famous" multiple personality cases - Eve and Sybil. While the reader who has at least a basic understanding of these stories will gain from that understanding, it's not necessary to know anything about them.

Structure

The story was divided into thirty-nine chapters. The chapters were of varying lengths. For example, chapter twenty-nine was sixteen pages while chapter thirty-nine was only three. Many of the chapters ranged from four to six pages and several others were up to ten. There were not many chapters more than ten pages in length. Each chapter was numbered with numerals only. The book was also divided into four "books." These were titled with the word "Book" and a Roman numeral. Book I was chapters one through twelve and covered the events beginning with the first appointment with Lynn and continuing through a holiday break. Book II was chapters thirteen through nineteen and covered a period between that return and a major crisis that brought the Josie personality to the foreground. Book III ended with chapter twenty-five and covered the events leading up to the Flock's trip to Harvard. The final book, Book IV, was the conclusion of the book, ending with the final integration of the personalities and the deaths of Gordon and Lynn. The book also included a prologue written by Lynn in which she detailed the reasons for writing the book - including the need to tell the story of survival. The book also included an afterward written by Frances Howland, M.D., who offered additional insight into Multiple Personality Disorder from a clinical standpoint dated years after Lynn's treatment of the Flock began.



Quotes

"Anyone can walk a tightrope. All it takes is practice and luck."
Chap. 1, p. 1

"No two participants in any event remember it in exactly the same way. A single broken promise, for example, among thousands of promises kept, might not be remembered by a parent, but may never be forgotten by the child who was disappointed."
Chap. 7, p. 34

"I read Sybil when it was first published, but dismissed it as overdramatized and fictionalized. Now it has become my bible."
Chap. 9, p. 45

"If I were alone in the body, I'd have lots of friends and be satisfied with my life as long as I felt people needed me. If I were alone in the body, I'd be happy."
Chap. 11, p. 55

"Jo listens politely, flinching only a little when a particularly strong accusation has been made against her father, and then calmly explains why things couldn't have happened that way. She'd much prefer that I perceive the personalities as lying rather than abused."
Chap. 14, p. 87

"From that day on, I was determined to block out all the other personalities, but quickly learned I didn't have the power." So I worked to keep track of what the others did when they were out, and I enjoyed myself when I had control."
Chap. 17, p. 122

"Watch them flutter in swirling confusion and then, abruptly, move together in perfect formation again, each knowing its part in the whole. That's what I mean by group minds."
Chap. 20, p. 155

"Over the years, we had divided up the tasks of living. Most of us were a little flexible - I could respond adequately in a graduate seminar and Jo could cook dinner - but in general the personalities performed the tasks they liked."
Chap. 21, p. 162

"I was surprised when Isis told Lynn that Rusty was another personality and not an external playmate of Missy's, but I still didn't think he'd ever much matter to any of us. I didn't want to think about an adolescent boy living in my body."
Chap. 22, p. 169

"Although Renee and Jo, in particular, often express frustration about the others, they both seem eager to listen to ideas of how to make life more comfortable for everyone,



not just for their individual selves."

Chap. 25, p. 193

"I don't know how to get them through that trauma and handle school and handle all of the new relationships I'll be developing with other students and professors. I hereby resign as leader/manager/whatever of the Flock."

Chap. 26, p. 198

"Kendra and I were then forced to take turns. A switching of pen from hand to hand was more acceptable than two pens writing in different scripts simultaneously."

Chap. 27, p. 213

"I am all of them and more. That night, for the first time, I spoke for everyone."

Chap. 37, p. 187

"The three of us had long ago decided that, in some way we didn't understand, the bonds we shared transcended the seven years we had spent together. We renewed our cosmic promise to share our next life as well."

Chap. 39, p. 296



Topics for Discussion

How did the term "Flock" come to be used? Was it accurate? Describe Gordon's role in the therapy. Describe his role in the life of Renee and the other personalities. Was his presence important? Why ?

Describe the life of Joan Casey. How did the various personalities emerge? Why did they emerge? What are the events in her life that define her as an adult? Why are these important?

The various personalities usually divided up tasks to be accomplished, according to Renee. What impact did this have on the personality known as "Jo?" What was different about the moments Jo came to the front compared to when Renee did? What did Gordon say Jo should do when she found herself seated in front of a book with the obvious task of studying?

List at least ten of the personalities and tell the role and origin of each. What unique qualities did each bring to the whole? What problems did each bring?

Who was Nancy? Ray? Steve? Keith? Gordon? Larry Dunlap? How did each of these people interact with the Flock over the years?

List the five major "autonomous" personalities. How were they different? How were they similar? What were their attitudes about therapy?

How did Lynn Wilson come into contact with the Flock? What was her role in the therapy that followed their meeting? How might a different attitude on Lynn's part have impacted the therapy? Would Joan have recovered if she had been under the care of another therapist? Support your answer.