

# Julie Short Guide

## Julie by Catherine Marshall

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# Characters

The characters portrayed in *Julie* are residents of Alderton, a steel town in Western Pennsylvania. Julie Paige Wallace is a teenage girl who arrives with her family in Alderton from Timmeton, Alabama. Her father, Kenneth Timothy Wallace, has decided to leave the ordained ministry in order to become the owner and editor of Alderton's local newspaper, the *Sentinel*. The Wallace family also includes Mrs. Louise Wallace and Julie's brother and sister, Tim and Ann-Marie. As editor, Kenneth Wallace is helped in his efforts to keep the struggling paper alive by Dean Fleming. Fleming, a retired working man is also a member of a secret Christian organization known as the Preparers. This group, which Wallace joins, is a society of men who work together on charitable projects without attracting publicity. In Alderton, Kenneth Wallace encounters Thomas McKeever Sr., board chairman of Yoder Steel and head of the prestigious Hunting and Fishing Club, and his colleague Munro Farnsworth, both of whom oppose the editor's reform movement.

Julie Wallace is challenged to seek the improvement of the steelworkers' lives by the model of a young minister, Spencer Meloy, who leaves a prosperous church to minister directly to the needs of the workers. He is outspoken in many ways, including in his love for Julie and his belief that they should be married. Randolph Munro Wilkerson, assistant manager of the Hunting and Fishing Club, is a man torn between loyalty to his aristocratic background and his growing awareness of the needs of others who are not as privileged as he is. The progress of his romance with Julie is seriously affected by the issue of his class loyalties.



## Social Concerns/Themes

The social conditions which are presented in *Julie* have been taken from the author's own life as a teenager in Keyser, West Virginia, where her father served as a Presbyterian minister and from the events surrounding the tragic Johnstown flood of 1889. In the foreword to the first edition of *Julie*, Leonard LeSourd writes that Catherine Marshall prepared for the writing of the novel by studying the techniques of running small-town newspapers as well as the social issues and political pressures that their editors face. Marshall also did research on the events of the Depression years during the 1930s and the growth of the early union movement. Christy explores many issues of social concern which have been marked by controversy. Race relations come into focus as the reader learns of the rejection faced by Julie's father, an ordained minister, when he attempts to integrate his Southern church congregation. In the North, it is the relationship between different economic and social classes that leads to conflict. Spencer Meloy, young minister of Baker Memorial Church, is forced to leave his pastorate when he attempts to introduce members of divergent social backgrounds into this prosperous and established congregation. Meloy's work among the steelworkers, especially his efforts to build a community center which will improve their lives, is condemned by his Board of Trustees.

It is the hypocrisy of the steel mill's owners and their refusal to upgrade the wages and benefits of workers that lead to the formation of a union at the Ardmore, Pennsylvania plant. Through the heated dialogue of the Brinton brothers, the "pros" and "cons" of the union movement are explored. Julie sees for herself the poverty and crowded housing conditions the steelworkers endure when she visits their companyowned settlement. Later in the novel, she learns a bitter lesson about class snobbishness when the uncle of Rand Wilkerson makes it quite clear that she does not come from the right background to marry his nephew.

The social issue that is explored most dramatically in *Julie* is ecology. In the early pages of the novel, several characters are concerned about the safety of the dam located at Lake Kissawha, above the town of Alderton where they live. The owner of the dam refuses to take the matter seriously and uses violent tactics to prevent Julie's father, who has bought the town newspaper, from alerting others to the possible danger that lies ahead if the dam is not reconstructed. The flood which results when the dam bursts is seen as a direct result of a lack of concern about the preservation of the environment and the welfare of the community.

The struggle of Kenneth Timothy Wallace, editor of the *Sentinel*, to bring social issues to the attention of his readers without constraints, focuses on the importance of First Amendment freedom of speech and the responsibility of the journalist to use his writing as an instrument to improve the world around him.

The social issues in *Julie* are clearly described, yet the author is careful not to stereotype any particular class of people as evil. The reader is reminded that labor is just as prone to corruption as management. Industrialists are seen not only as men who



use their wealth to dominate and oppress others but also as contributors to the American way of life who have created jobs for many workers.

The novel also contends that the willingness to face crises is valuable for achieving spiritual growth. Kenneth Wallace, who leaves the ministry, not only because of the pressures of his pastorate but also because of his own weakness, learns that greater confidence and faith in God will lead to growing strength in himself. He also learns the importance of seeking support from other Christians in order to work more effectively for the good of others.

A final social issue concerns women's changing role in society. Julie finds a growing sense of self-assurance through work on her father's newspaper. She also is able to make a stable, enduring marriage. Catherine Marshall, who combined a writing career with family life also shows that the modern woman can find fulfillment in both roles.

# Techniques

As in her previous novel, *Christy* (1967), Marshall combines a colorful portion of American culture and history with facets of her family background in *Julie*. Two events of American history formed the basis for *Julie*: the Johnstown Flood of 1889 and the conditions in the steel towns of the Depression-ridden 1930s.

*Julie* continues Marshall's tradition of carefully researching the background of her characters. The reader is exposed to a detailed description of their social background and their work.

The Slavic phrases which would be customary in the speech patterns of a newly arrived immigrant are included.

Marshall is similarly thorough when she is writing about the English family history and crest of *Julie*'s suitor, Randolph Wilkerson. The working world of the characters is authentically presented. The author uses Kenneth Wallace's job at the *Sentinel* as an opportunity to describe the craft of journalism and newspaper printing. The labor dispute at the steel mill leads Marshall to describe the workings of the mill as well as important events in the history of the American Labor movement.

*Julie*, like *Christy*, balances themes of social justice with a concern for the personal life and spiritual growth of the characters involved. *Julie*'s development as a young woman and a person of faith is just as important as her involvement in the social issues of her day. Kenneth Wallace's success as a newspaper editor does not overshadow his need for spiritual maturity.

The concluding pages of *Julie* describe the consequences of the Alderton flood. Dramatic tension is sustained throughout the twenty pages of the flood episode. Not only is the physical devastation accurately portrayed by a succession of scenes such as the pileup of debris at the railroad bridge, but the terror of the victims, exemplified by *Julie* and others who are caught in the wake of the flood, is convincingly portrayed.

## Literary Precedents

As in her earlier work, Christy, Marshall incorporates some of the devices of the romance novel in this work as she presents her social, political, and spiritual themes. Other Christian writers who present their stories in the trappings of the romance novel include Janette Oke and Eugenia Price. Marshall's social concerns in this work — the exploitation of factory workers by a greedy upper class — are reminiscent of those of muckrakers such as Sinclair Lewis.

# Copyright Information

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