

Julie's Summer Short Guide

Julie's Summer by Crystal Thrasher

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Overview

Julie's Summer portrays Julie Robinson, a young girl with definite opinions about life, struggling for personal and economic independence in a small community that seems to be ruled by an unwritten code of conduct and gossip. She stays behind to finish her senior year of high school when her parents leave the hills of Greene County in southern Indiana. Julie stays in a spare room at the back of Maud Arthur's dress shop where she works part-time for her room and board. Her life soon becomes a grim routine when the proprietor of the dress shop, Maud Arthur, puts a stop to visits by Floyd Perry, a childhood friend. Julie is determined to abide by Maud's strict rules because a high school diploma will help fulfill her dream of going to college and becoming a teacher. Then Chance Cooper, a young man working with the electric company to bring electricity to Greene County, appears in town and further complicates Julie's life.

After Julie earns her diploma, Floyd helps her find a job in a nearby town, and she sets out to make a new life for herself. She soon finds that whom she spends her time with, where she goes, and what she says seems to become everyone's business but her own. She sees no reason why she should have to choose between Chance and Floyd and wishes everyone would just mind his or her own business.

Thrasher examines the universal need for young people to assert their independence and stay true to their own feelings, and Julie's Summer makes a worthy contribution to the reader's understanding of the struggle poor people faced in rural America during the Great Depression.

About the Author

Crystal Faye Thrasher was born on December 5, 1921, in Oolitic, Indiana. She was the fourth of six children of Virgil Leroy and Rozella (Bennett) Knight. Crystal Knight graduated from Salisbury High School and married Joseph Martin Thrasher in 1939. At seventeen she felt ill-prepared for adulthood and the challenge of raising three children, Carol, Joseph, Jr., and Janis.

Her life in a home where parents allowed her to be herself and encouraged her to do what she wanted to do, contributed greatly to her love of books and writing. Her home was a poor one with the coming of the Great Depression and her father's loss of a job. At the age of ten, she and her siblings moved with their parents to Greene County, Indiana, where they planned to wait out the Depression. Thrasher spent the years from ten to seventeen in Greene County. Everyone there was poor.

Although she says her work is not autobiographical, her growing up years have had an influence on her writing.

She writes about people in a way that exhibits her deep understanding of what it takes to survive and maintain dignity in a hostile environment. The reader of Julie's Summer will find the same attitudes among its characters as Crystal experienced in the hills of Greene County. Everyone knew everyone else's business and girls who had more than one boyfriend at the same time were not well thought of. She says it was dark in those hills. The sun set quickly and the days were short in the winter months. This added to the feeling of despair among those living there.

When asked about her writing, Thrasher says, "I can't say when I started writing, can't remember when I couldn't write and I can't remember when I didn't try to write stories or tell them. I've been writing all my life; stories I wrote usually were assignments in school."

Her husband's job kept him away from home for long periods at a time.

During the years prior to her writing career, she worked at Sears, Roebuck and Co. and the Ft. Wayne, Indiana, Country Club, raised her children, and moved numerous times to be near where husband, Joe, was working.

They haunted libraries, took frequent walks, read, wrote stories and poems, and grew up together. She says she has garbage bags filled with her writing from those days.

At age fifty, she quit her job at the country club and said, "I've worked the first fifty years of my life, now I'm going to play the next fifty years." When asked what she was going to do, she said she was going to write a book.

Her children encouraged her to take some writing courses at the Ft. Wayne Campus of Indiana University. They even bought her a typewriter and supplies so she would have



no excuse not to sign up. Her first book, *The Dark Didn't Catch Me*, was the result of an assignment in one of her classes. The assignment won her a spot in a writing workshop on Indiana University's Bloomington campus, where she was encouraged to submit the novel to an editor in New York City. Three more books followed about the young protagonist, Seely Robinson. *Julie's Summer* was written to tell readers what happened to Seely's older sister, Julie, when the family left Greene County and left Julie behind to complete her high school education.

Thrasher has won numerous awards, including: the American Library Association's Book of the Year for *The Dark Didn't Catch Me*, in 1976, and *Between Dark and Daylight*, in 1979; the Friends of American Writers Award for *Between Dark and Daylight*, in 1979; the Parents Choice Award for *End of a Dark Road*, in 1980; the Children's Book of the Year Award from the Children's Book Committee for *End of a Dark Road*, in 1983; the Children's Round Table Award for *Between Dark and Daylight*, in 1982, *End of a Dark Road*, in 1984, and *A Taste of Daylight*, in 1985.

She writes compelling, historical novels that allow her readers time to know and care about her characters.

Setting

Julie's Summer is set in Greene County in southern Indiana at the end of the Depression. The action focuses on a rural small town with no electricity.

The smallness of the community in which Julie lives following graduation contributes to the behavior of the people. They know a great deal about their neighbors and have a general mistrust of newcomers. As a result of the Depression, people have little money for diversions, consequently scrutiny of others becomes a common pastime.

Julie struggles to stay true to herself and her own feelings in this narrow minded, gossip riddled setting.



Social Sensitivity

Julie's Summer is about people suffering poverty because of the economic depression of the 1930s. Thrasher respects the dignity of her characters, showing how people can maintain their dignity, respect the privacy and rights of others, and still support their neighbors and friends in their times of need.

People today have the same needs.

Julie's Summer can be a positive force for young adult readers to help them develop sensitivity in their own relationships with others. Further, Julie's determination to better herself through education sets a meaningful example for others.

Literary Qualities

Thrasher uses many of the idioms from the period and place of her story, often in an almost poetic fashion. Her use of simile and metaphor paints vivid pictures for the reader—for example, "They had evaporated and faded away like gray wood smoke in a heavy fog, leaving me feeling as lost and unwanted as a poor relation at a family reunion." Her dialogue is lightly peppered with colloquialisms typical of the people, place, and time.



Themes and Characters

Julie Robinson, the protagonist in the story, is striving for independence. She wants a better life for herself than her parents have, and a secure future.

Thus, she dreams of a college education following high school and knows it is the key to a better life and secure future. Illustration by Richard Williams for *Julie's Summer* by Crystal Thrasher. Atheneum: New York (1985).

future. She strives to stay true to her own feelings, beliefs and convictions in the face of people who expect her to conform to their standards.

Julie is honest. She learned to work hard from her parents. They are poor, like all their neighbors and friends during an economically difficult period in history. She is idealistic, trusting, and naive. Julie possesses a complex personality that changes in the course of the story and matures as she deals with difficult situations and suspicious, gossipy people. Because of her openness, she develops friendships with three adults and learns to tread softly even among friends. She also learns the meaning of love.

Floyd Perry, a friend since childhood, demonstrates his love for Julie through his protective concern for her, first as she is in the home and employment of Maud Arthur, then in helping her find work in Linton. We see him change as he struggles to allow Julie to be herself, allowing her time to resolve her feelings for him and Chance Cooper, and freeing her to pursue her dreams. Floyd is a very honest dependable, caring person.

Chance Cooper is the opposite of Floyd Perry. His carefree love of fun and evident fondness for Julie put her emotions in a tail spin. It seems to Julie that he likes to live dangerously, handling the hot wires as he works with the electric crews stringing the wires into Greene County. He tempts Julie to take chances that jeopardize her employment, her place to live, and her reputation.



Topics for Discussion

1. Julie is headstrong and has her mind set on a diploma. Her parents allow her to make the decision to stay in Greene County. How would you make a choice about whether or not you would stay to finish school if your family moved?

2. Julie thinks she is lucky to be able to stay with the Arthurs and work in Mrs. Arthur's dress shop. What does Floyd mean by his statement, "You may find things a mite different here now that you're alone with no where else to go," Floyd said under his breath. "Could be, you ain't as fortunate as you think."

3. After Julie's graduation from high school, she begins looking for a job in Linton. How would you seek a job?

How would you prepare for an interview? What kinds of questions could you expect to be asked? What kinds of questions should you be prepared to ask? How does this compare to Julie's job search?

4. In chapter eleven, when Julie leaves the Aliens to work for Halcie Hissem at the dime store, she moves to a boarding house. What is a boarding house? Why would people live in a boarding house instead of a home of their own or an apartment? What advantages and disadvantages does this arrangement have for Julie?

5. Chance excites Julie. He makes her take chances that Floyd would never consider. Yet, she knows she has always loved Floyd. Why does Julie have such mixed emotions over Floyd and Chance?

6. In chapter seventeen, Angie shares information with Julie that could be gossip. This information gets Julie in deep trouble later. Why do people gossip? Why does it hurt?

7. At the end of chapter eighteen, Julie and Chance talk about his uneasiness around girls and his fear of marriage. Do you think chance is being honest? Is this an old-fashioned response to male/female friendship or is Chance "feeding Julie a line"?

8. At one point Julie and Angie talk about sleeping with a man before marriage. Julie has grown up in a very strict, strait-laced home and has very definite ideas about sex outside of marriage. Is her conviction old-fashioned or does it have relevance in today's society?

9. Before you read the last chapter, what would you have predicted for how the story would end? The ending is startling. Would you have it end as it does or differently? Why?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Using situations in *Julie's Summer*, write about how the depression affected Julie's life. How might her life have been different, had her parents owned property?
2. Did other parts of the world experience the Great Depression? How were other countries affected by it?
3. When Julie sneaks out to go to the class reunion with Chance, the people there were square dancing. What can you find out about the historical development of the square dance?
4. There was no minimum wage law during the Depression. Research the development of that law. What did it do? How would it affect Julie today in a similar situation?
5. Analyze the relationship between Floyd Perry and Julie. What changes occur in their relationship? Why? How does Julie change?
6. Analyze the relationship between Chance Cooper and Julie. How does their relationship develop? Why is Julie fascinated by Chance Cooper and willing to jeopardize her reputation?

At first glance, Chance seems insensitive to Julie's situation. Is he?

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Related Titles

Crystal Thrasher has written four books about the Robinson family in addition to Julie's Summer. Seely Robinson, Julie's younger sister, is the protagonist in *The Dark Didn't Catch Me*, *Between Dark and Daylight*, *End of a Dark Road* and *A Taste of Daylight*. These novels are each stand alone stories, but for the full impact of Seely's life and her loyalty to family, the reader needs to start with *The Dark Didn't Catch Me* and progress through them to the last one in the series, *A Taste of Daylight*.

Julie's Summer is independent of the other titles in the series, but a reading of these titles featuring Julie's younger sister, Seely, will help the reader gain a greater insight into Julie's character.

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