

No More Saturday Nights Short Guide

No More Saturday Nights by Norma Klein

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Overview

No More Saturday Nights treats a problem unusual to young adult fiction or any kind of fiction for that matter.

An unmarried young man, Tim Weber, decides to raise his child by himself.

When he discovers that the mother of his child is considering giving it up for adoption and receiving \$10,000 in return, he goes to court and sues for custody. He believes that he will have to raise the child entirely on his own since his much older father, Abner, seems to take no interest in Tim. In the course of the novel, Tim learns of his father's great love for him and of his ability to do well as a single father.

The book has an aura of realism about it, although critics may argue that things work out too well too quickly for Tim and his son Mason. For example, he finds an excellent apartment near Columbia University, which he attends as an undergraduate; the one of the three girls who share the apartment who is most opposed to his moving in falls in love with him; and he finds excellent, affordable child care in Manhattan. Also, he and his father become friends very fast, and his father dotes on Mason, even offering to take care of him while Tim completes school.

Still, the novel treats its material seriously and respectfully. It sensitively probes Tim's initial feelings of ambivalence toward Mason. It also traces Tim's growing love for his son, his changing attitude toward his father, including his attitude toward his father's romantic relationship with Margaret Hansen, and his problems as a single father and undergraduate.

About the Author

Norma Klein was born on May 13, 1938, in New York City. She grew up on Manhattan Island and died on April 25, 1989, also in New York City, after a brief illness. She was the daughter of Emanuel Klein, a Freudian psychoanalyst, and Sadie Klein. Although as an adult she became disenchanted with Freudian psychoanalysis, her interest in using her fiction to help adolescents with problems surely stems in large part from her interaction with her father.

Klein attended Dalton School from ages three to thirteen. She attended Elizabeth Irwin School during her high school years. Both were, she said, progressive schools, run on the model of Summerhill in England.

She attended Cornell University from 1956 to 1957, and received her bachelor's degree, cum laude, in 1960, from Barnard College, where she majored in Russian and became a member of Phi Beta Kappa. At Barnard, she took creative writing courses from Robert Pack and George P. Elliott. When she was nineteen, she sent out her first story. It was accepted by *Grecourt Review*. After this initial good fortune, she found it much more difficult to get published, claiming that some of her stories were rejected as many as fortyfive times.

She married Erwin Fleissner, a biochemist, on July 27, 1963. They had two daughters.

She received a master's degree in Slavic languages from Columbia University in 1963. She said that other than when she was at Columbia, she spent most of her time from age nineteen until her first daughter was born in 1967 writing short stories.

She is the author of novels and short stories for adults, adolescents, and children. She earned a number of awards for her writing: *Girls Can Be Anything*, a book for younger children, was chosen one of the Child Study Association of America's Children's Books of the Year for 1973; she received the Media & Methods Maxi Award for Paperbacks in 1975; her book *Sunshine: A Novel*, a novelization of a television special written by Carol Sobiesky, was chosen one of the New York Public Library's Books for the Teen Age in 1980; *Love Is One of the Choices* was chosen one of School Library Journal's Best Books of the Year in 1978; she received the O. Henry Award in 1983 for her short story, "The Wrong Man."

She started writing picture books as a result of reading to her older daughter. None of these books were accepted for publication until after the success of her first book for young adults, *Mom, the Wolf Man, and Me*.



Characters

No More Saturday Nights is set in Haysburg, a small town in Massachusetts, and New York City in and around Columbia University. It begins in Haysburg, where Tim's father teaches mathematics at Taylor College, a small woman's college. Tim has grown up in Haysburg, living alone with his father after his mother's death when Tim was twelve. Thus, the move to New York City to attend Columbia is a drastic one for Tim. He must adjust to being a college student at a demanding university, living in a big city, and being a single father trying to raise a baby without help from his family. The book begins three months before Tim's graduation from high school and ends during Christmas vacation shortly before the end of his first semester in college.

After his wife died, Abner became extremely silent and taciturn, in many ways neglecting his son. The birth of Mason leads to a genuine change in Abner, who not only expresses love for Mason but also begins to show strong love for Tim. In addition, the book treats the possibility of one's finding love at Abner's age. He starts dating Margaret Hansen, a librarian like Abner's wife, and finds a great deal of happiness in the relationship.

The central character and narrator is Tim Weber, a very sensitive, mature, intelligent eighteen-year-old high school student at the beginning of the novel. During the course of the book, he gains custody of his unborn son, whom he names Mason, and learns to care for and accept responsibility for his child. He moves to New York City and starts college as a premedical student at Columbia University. He moves into an apartment with three girls and falls in love with one of them, Vivian.

Cheryl Banks is the mother of Tim's child. She and Tim dated during their junior year in high school. Although Tim is convinced the pregnancy is an accident, Abner is sure that Cheryl became pregnant deliberately so that she could marry Tim. She later becomes engaged to Harry Tyson, a pharmacist in his thirties. Harry's meanness stands in marked contrast to Abner's great love for Tim and Mason. Like Abner, Harry is marrying a woman much younger than he; unlike Abner's love, Harry's love for Cheryl is questionable. She fights in court to be allowed to give up her child for adoption, and later she and Harry make veiled threats about taking the child away from Tim.

Charles Moore is Abner's best friend.

He is the lawyer who successfully represents Tim in his court case for custody of his unborn child. His daughter Joely has been a friend of Tim's for many years, and the parents have for years been hoping the two of them would marry, but Joely is a lesbian.

Among other significant characters is Nate Rafalsky, one of Tim's high school friends. He talks with Tim about their high school experiences during the senior prom while Joely dances with her female friend. He also goes on a picnic with Tim. Tim's being able to go — Abner takes care of Mason — is one of Tim's first indications that help is available to him, if he is only willing to make use of it. Another notable character is



Margaret Hansen, a librarian at Taylor College who was Tim's mother's best friend. While Tim is at college, she begins to date Abner, and they fall in love with each other. Vivian Imhoff, one of Tim's roommates, initially opposes Tim and Mason's moving into the apartment, but she eventually falls in love with Tim.

Other important characters include the Sidels, who want to adopt Cheryl's unborn child; Tim's other two roommates, Fern and Lindsay; Janie Lewis, who baby sits for Mason; Mrs. Peters, Janie's aunt who does day care for Mason; Chambers Evans, dean of students at Columbia; and Sandor, Vivian's boyfriend when Tim moves into the apartment.

Setting

No More Saturday Nights is set in Haysburg, a small town in Massachusetts, and New York City in and around Columbia University. It begins in Haysburg, where Tim's father teaches mathematics at Taylor College, a small woman's college. Tim has grown up in Haysburg, living alone with his father after his mother's death when Tim was twelve. Thus, the move to New York City to attend Columbia is a drastic one for Tim. He must adjust to being a college student at a demanding university, living in a big city, and being a single father trying to raise a baby without help from his family. The book begins three months before Tim's graduation from high school and ends during Christmas vacation shortly before the end of his first semester in college.

Social Concerns

No More Saturday Nights deals with a situation very prevalent in 1990s culture: the responsibility of an unmarried father to his child. Tim Weber, decides to raise his child by himself when he discovers that the mother of his child is considering giving it up for adoption and receiving \$10,000 in return. He goes to court and sues for custody even though he believes that he will have to raise the child entirely on his own since his much older father, Abner, seems to take no interest in him. In the course of the novel, Tim learns of his father's great love for him and of his ability to do well as a single father.

The book has an aura of realism about it, although critics may argue that things work out too well too quickly for Tim and his son Mason. For example, he finds an excellent apartment near Columbia University, which he attends as an undergraduate; the one of the three girls who share the apartment who is most opposed to his moving in falls in love with him; and he finds excellent, affordable child care in Manhattan. Also, he and his father become friends very fast, and his father dotes on Mason, even offering to take care of him while Tim completes school.

Still, the novel treats its material seriously and respectfully. It sensitively probes Tim's initial feelings of ambivalence toward Mason. It also traces Tim's growing love for his son, his changing attitude toward his father, including his attitude toward his father's romantic relationship with Margaret Hansen, and his problems as a single father and undergraduate.

Social Sensitivity

Klein's novels for young adults have been the source of controversy since *Mom*, *the Wolfman*, and *Me* first appeared in 1972. Her works have been banned and challenged in many school libraries because of her treatment of family problems, adult and young adult sexuality, racism, sexism, contraception, and abortion. *No More Saturday Nights* is for the more mature young adults. The publishers of the Fawcett edition recommend it in terms of interest level for people from the tenth grade up, and the editors of *Booklist* recommend it for grades 9 through 12.

It is frank in terms of language as well as its treatment of masturbation, sex, sexual orientation, abortion, and sexism. It tends to be nonjudgmental about these things, but it does make clear that responsibility should play a large role in sexual activity.

The novel focuses on an unusual but not-unheard-of topic, an unwed teenage father who decides to go to court and fight for the right to raise his child. It also looks at some of the seamier aspects of life, especially in connection with Abner Weber's feeling that Cheryl wanted Tim to get her pregnant so that she could marry above her class (her father is a garbage collector), Cheryl's desire in effect to sell her baby, and Vivian's unhealthy relationship with Sandor.



Techniques

No More Saturday Nights is in many ways a realistic and serious treatment of the problems facing a young adult male who decides to raise a baby. Although Mason is an almost ideally placid child and although the relationship between Tim and his father grows warm too quickly to be wholly believable, Klein does show Tim coping with sleepless nights, dirty diapers, Mason's illnesses, finding child care and sitters, and trying to maintain a B average so that he can keep his scholarship while caring for Mason. Tim tries to do all these things with minimal help from anyone else, including his father and the administration at Columbia. In fact, he does not even tell the university authorities about Mason until the dean of students calls him into his office to discuss his midterm grades.

Through most of the book, Tim's typical answer when anyone offers to help him is, "I can handle it." A sign of his continued maturation is his ability, toward the end of the novel, to begin accepting help from others, including the dean and his father. Accordingly, although Tim begins the novel as a fairly mature young man, the story is in part about his growing up, an act which involves his learning not only about his capabilities but also, and probably more important, his limitations. When the story begins, he knows how to assume responsibility for his actions. By the time the story ends, he has learned how to share responsibility when it is appropriate.

In addition to being a well-written story about Tim's care for Mason, *No More Saturday Nights* is a fine story about the relationship between Tim and his father. Tim was without a mother for six years before the story begins. During this time, he did not have what he perceived to be a caring or concerned father. By the time the book ends, Abner shows that he cares for and is concerned about both Mason and Tim, and Tim recognizes his father's care and concern.

A literary technique Klein uses extensively is foreshadowing, a way of presenting material so as to prepare the reader for later events in the story. The foreshadowing is sometimes straightforward, such as Tim's admitting that he will need to put Mason in day care once he gets to New York City and then hunting for day care for Mason. It sometimes is ironic, such as Klein's portraying Vivian as the most antagonistic of the three roommates in terms of allowing Tim and Mason to live with them and then having Vivian and Tim fall in love.

No More Saturday Nights also gives a feeling for the texture of life in a small college town contrasted with college life at Columbia University in New York City. It does especially well at capturing the flavor of life in the city, probably in large part because of Klein's careful use of descriptive details to convey her points.

Themes

On the whole, *No More Saturday Nights* is a very serious novel about the hardships and joys of single fatherhood. It is also about the family itself in the absence of a mother since Tim's mother died when he was twelve and he has not felt very close to his father, Abner, who was twelve years older than his mother, who was head college librarian at Taylor.



Topics for Discussion

1. Tim makes a decision few unwed fathers-to-be make: he decides not to marry his pregnant girlfriend and to raise his unborn child without a mother's assistance. Do you think he makes the right decision? Does he think the problem through adequately?
2. When Tim first gets to college, he deliberately keeps hidden from the college authorities the existence of Mason. He even lies to one of his teachers, claiming Mason is his sister's child.

Does Tim do the correct thing in these cases?

3. Through most of the book, Tim sees Abner as a stubborn, self-centered, uncommunicative person. To what extent is this characterization of Abner accurate? To what extent might it be the result of Tim's problems?
4. Why do you think Tim's emotions are so mixed when he hears about the relationship between Abner and Margaret Hansen? Tim thinks it has to do with his relationship with his mother, and even Abner indicates that it does when he reassures Tim that no one will ever take Tim's mother's place in Abner's heart. Is this explanation satisfactory? Does Tim ever come to accept his mother's death?
5. When Tim comes home during Christmas vacation, Abner offers to keep Mason in Haysburg while Tim is taking courses in New York. Tim finds Abner's offer very tempting but finally decides not to accept it. Why does Tim make this choice? Does he make the right choice?
6. During the scene when Cheryl Banks and Harry Tyson visit Mason at Abner's house, Harry appears to be a genuine villain. In what ways is he vicious? Is there any justification for his viciousness?
7. No More Saturday Nights ends with Mason reaching out and putting his hands over Abner's ears. Why is this or is this not an appropriate ending for the novel?
8. Klein entitled her novel, No More Saturday Nights. Why? Is this title appropriate? Is it accurate?
9. Several of the marriages in No More Saturday Nights involve men who are more than ten years older than their wives. What kinds of problems, if any, do such marriages present? Why does Klein choose to include marriages of this sort in this particular book?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. At first glance, Tim and Abner seem very different. But Klein tends to be a realist, and realistically, fathers and sons often resemble one another.

In what ways are Abner and Tim really very much alike?

2. What kinds of problems would an unwed father of eighteen or nineteen years old really face?

3. Klein uses foreshadowing in her novel. She uses both straightforward and ironic foreshadowing. Study her use of foreshadowing in connection with Abner's growing love for Tim and Mason or the developing relationship between Tim and Vivian.

4. When Tim finds out that his father is seriously interested in Margaret Hansen, he experiences a variety of emotions that he cannot understand.

What are these emotions, and what do they tell about Tim?

5. Klein uses Tim's dreams to give the reader insight into Tim's life and feelings. Find one of his dreams and discuss its meaning in terms of what it reveals. Does it reveal things to the reader about which even Tim may be unaware?

6. Compare and contrast Tim's view of fatherhood before Mason is born with his view of fatherhood when Mason is five months old.

7. Several times in the book Abner comments on how lucky he is. Early in the book, Tim does not pay much attention to what his father means when he makes this comment. In what ways is Abner really lucky?

Literary Precedents

Klein indicated that the three biggest literary influences on her were Anton Chekhov, D. H. Lawrence, and J. D. Salinger. From Chekhov she learned to probe the darker side of human life; this influence is clearly evident in *No More Saturday Nights* in the treatment of Harry Tyson and Sandor, as well as her treatment of such topics as abortion and baby-selling. D. H. Lawrence taught her to approach sexuality honestly in her writing; Lawrence's influence is clearly visible in *No More Saturday Nights* with its frank and forthright treatment of adult and young adult sexuality. From J. D. Salinger, Klein learned about using a colloquial style and humor in her writing. Although *No More Saturday Nights* tends to be very serious, there is a subtle humor in things like Tim's reaction when a nurse asks him, "You're going to bottle feed?" Tim responds: "Well, I don't think I have much choice." Humor is also seen in Klein's treatment of Abner's devotion to Mason and in Tim's observations of Mason at play. Thus, Klein works into this novel for young adults many of the techniques and themes associated with serious adult fiction.

For Further Reference

Klein, Norma. "Books to Help Kids Deal with Difficult Times, I." *School Library Media Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1987): 161-164. This article reproduces an address Klein gave in 1986 to a conference sponsored by the American Association of School Librarians. In it, she discusses her own works in connection with two meanings of her topic, helping children deal with the difficult times we are all living in, and helping them deal with their own individual problems.

She talks about her own reading as a teenager, her adult reading, and some of her main goals in her fiction for young adults.

"Norma Klein, 50, a Young-Adult Novelist." *New York Times* (April 27, 1989): B16. This is an obituary notice for Klein. It includes a short summary of her life and treats her fiction for young adults and for adults.

Phy, Allene Stuart. *Presenting Norma Klein*. Boston: Twayne, 1988. Phy's book contains a general overview of Klein's work up to 1988, so it does not directly treat *No More Saturday Nights*. Still, it provides a good context into which to fit *No More Saturday Nights*. The final chapter, entitled "The 'Outrageous' Norma Klein," is especially useful and interesting.

R[ochman], H[azel]. Review of *No More Saturday Nights*. *Booklist* (October 15, 1992): 399. Rochman treats the novel fairly positively but does not minimize the novel's problems, including insisting that "Tim's first-person narrative is too insightful for his years."

Smith, Brenda, ed. *Senior High School Library: 1989 Supplement to the 13th ed.* New York: H. W. Wilson, 1989.

This volume recommends *No More Saturday Nights* for senior high school libraries. It includes brief excerpts from two reviews, one of which praises Klein's use of firstperson narrative.

Related Titles

Klein's works tend to deal with highly controversial subjects, so much so that she has been labeled "outrageous" (by Allene Stuart Phy). In fact, she once said that she intended to deal with one taboo subject a year for the rest of her writing career. One of the main areas of controversy she treats is sexual activity among young adults.

Many of her older characters—and some of her younger ones—are, like Tim, sexually active. They also, like Tim, think about the sexual activity of their parents. Paul Gold in *That's My Baby* is a case in point. Yet Paul is far less mature than Tim. He tends to be insensitive to others, including his sexual partners. He also tends to be demanding in ways Tim is not. His lack of responsible behavior stands in marked contrast to Tim's almost compulsive sense of responsibility.

Klein also said that her novels were intended to help children with problems. Thus, her books like *Mom*, *the Wolfman*, and *Me, Taking Sides*, and *Bizou* present young adult characters like Tim who are trying to handle situations involving families with one parent missing or with parents who are separated. As a consequence, like Tim, these characters too have to deal with feelings of alienation. *My Life as a Body* handles the problem of life, including sexual activity, for the physically handicapped. Like these works, *No More Saturday Nights* is to a certain extent a "problem novel." Most of Klein's central characters, like Tim, handle their problems fairly well. Yet Tim tends to be more sensitive and aware than they are in terms of his solutions to problems that might overwhelm other people.



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Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

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