

Up a Road Slowly Study Guide

Up a Road Slowly by Irene Hunt

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Overview

Up a Road Slowly is Julie Treling's story, beginning when she is seven years old and her mother dies, and ending with her entrance into college at seventeen. Julie and each of the diverse members of her family must learn to adapt to life's sorrows through selfdiscipline and to derive pleasure from the simple joys of hard work, caring for others, and earning respect and love.

Seven-year-old Julie feels abandoned on a very long and lonely road as she is forced to adjust to the loss of her mother and to the transition from a warm, enveloping home with her beloved older sister and father to a cold, stern living environment with a schoolteacher aunt in the country.

As Julie matures, she discovers that all people must walk their own equally lonely roads, many of which are beset with worse problems than her own. As Julie reflects upon the actions of adults and peers in her life, she begins to construct her own moral code based on the values of education, diligence, temperance, and compassion. Up a Road Slowly unites a fascinating story with a subtle but strong primer in ethics and proper behavior.

About the Author

Irene Hunt was born on May 18, 1907, in Newton, Illinois, the daughter of Franklin P. and Sarah Land Hunt. Educated in southern Illinois schools, she later obtained a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois in 1939 and a master's degree from the University of Minnesota in 1946. From 1930 to 1945 Hunt taught French and English in the public schools of Oak Park, Illinois. After receiving her master's degree, she became an instructor in psychology at the University of South Dakota (1946-1950), and later served as a teacher (1950-1965) and then director of language arts (1965-1969) in the public schools of Cicero, Illinois. Since the mid-1960s, she has worked as a writer.

Hunt's writing career began with a much-praised historical novel about the Civil War period, *Across Five Aprils*. Her interest in historical fiction has continued in *Trail of Apple Blossoms*, a story of the American pioneer days, and in *No Promises in the Wind*, which details the times of the Great Depression. But the author will probably be most remembered for her honest and sensitive presentation of the maturing process of children—Julie Trellick of *Up a Road Slowly*, the runaway Grondowski brothers of *No Promises in the Wind*, and the battered George Burgess of *The Lottery Rose*.

Hunt's novels have all received critical acclaim, but perhaps the best-known is *Up a Road Slowly*, which received the Newbery Medal in 1967. *Across Five Aprils*, a close second in popularity, was sole runner-up for the 1965 Newbery Medal and received the 1964 Charles W. Follett Award and a 1965 American Notable Book designation. Hunt also received the Friends of Literature Award and the Charles W. Follett Award in 1971 for *No Promises in the Wind*. In 1974 she was a nominee for the Hans Christian Andersen Award, given for an author's overall contribution to literature for young people.



Plot Summary

Up a Road Slowly is Irene Hunt's story of a young girl, named Julie Treling, coming of age beautifully, in spite of personal tragedies and insecurities. At the age of seven, Julie is sent to live with her unmarried aunt, Aunt Cordelia, when her mother dies leaving Julie, her younger brother, Chris, and their older sister, Laura. Laura is seventeen at the time, and the decision is made to let her remain at the family home with their father, because she requires little care. Chris and Julie, however, are sent to live with their mother's sister, Aunt Cordelia, who is an unmarried schoolteacher. Julie has only vague memories of her aunt but Aunt Cordelia's huge house in the country is familiar and eventually becomes a haven to Julie as she struggles to adjust to her new world without her mother.

Julie and Chris make friends with Danny Trevort, Jimmy Farris, and Carlotta Berry and remain friends throughout their school years. When Chris is sent away to boarding school, Julie lives alone with Aunt Cordelia and her quirky Uncle Haskell, who lives in the carriage house on the property. Julie adapts to Aunt Cordelia's rules both as a teacher and guardian and ultimately comes to love her aunt for her stability during some very insecure times during Julie's childhood.

Julie learns more of life's heartbreaks when an underprivileged classmate, Aggie Kilpin dies never having experienced any of the basic pleasures that Julie takes for granted. Aunt Cordelia is there to balance the guilt Julie feels at her mistreatment of Aggie and helps Julie to learn the lesson of compassion toward others more unfortunate. Throughout her grade school years, Julie plans to return to her father's home to live but, when the time comes, her father has recently remarried, and Julie opts to stay with Aunt Cordelia through her high school years so that she will not interfere in her father's new marriage.

Julie's security falters slightly, when she hears rumors that Aunt Cordelia is getting too old to care for a teenager but Aunt Cordelia never falters in her unconditional love for Julie. Julie also learns that Aunt Cordelia had once been in love with a boy named Jonathan Eltwing, who returns to town many years later to find Aunt Cordelia still unmarried due to family commitments. Julie feels that Jonathan still loves Aunt Cordelia and, when Jonathan's wife dies, Jonathan and Aunt Cordelia rekindle their friendship.

During high school, Julie learns her first lesson of betrayal, when she learns that her boyfriend, Brett Kingsman, dates her only because of the help she can provide him so that he does not fail his classes. Ultimately, Julie and Danny realize that they have loved each other since childhood and plan to marry after college. By the end of the story, Julie has not only surmounted personal grief but also enjoyed great happiness and has a firm starting point from which to continue her life's journey.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

As the novel begins, seven-year-old Julie Treling walks hesitantly toward some neighborhood children standing at the gate at her house. Julie had last played with these children in August but has been sick with the same illness that has claimed Julie's mother's life on this October day. Julie can hear the children whisper among themselves that they need to be nice to Julie, and then one of the children tells Julie that they know that she will not be living here any longer.

Julie screams at this mention of another drastic life change, when the last few days were filled with change and sadness. Julie's family's home has been filled with relatives and doctors and she knows that her father, Adam, is very quiet. Julie's screams send the children scurrying away. Her nine-year-old brother, Chris, who is nearby, calls to their older sister, Laura. She picks up Julie and takes her to the safety of her room.

Laura is unable to comfort Julie whose screams continue, until the doctor orders her to swallow a pill to help her calm down and sleep. When Julie awakes, she finds herself at the home of her mother's sister, Aunt Cordelia, a spinster schoolteacher.

Julie's vulnerability is increased, when she learns that Aunt Cordelia is out this morning, and Julie is in the care of a housekeeper named Mrs. Peters. Mrs. Peters has good intentions, but Julie is not interested in eating breakfast, getting dressed, or meeting the neighbor children, Danny Trevort and Carlotta Berry, who are waiting to welcome Julie.

Julie leaves these three strangers so that she can explore the relative familiarity of Aunt Cordelia's big house. Julie remembers the fear she felt once, when she had wandered into an upstairs room and encountered one of Aunt Cordelia's elderly, spinster aunts. To this day, Julie is afraid of the rooms on the second floor, because she is not sure who inhabits them.

Julie's mother and Aunt Cordelia have a brother, known as Uncle Haskell, who lives in a carriage house near the main house. Although there is more than enough room for Uncle Haskell in Aunt Cordelia's house, Uncle Haskell prefers his privacy to drink whenever he wants. Uncle Haskell is fifty-five-years old, and Julie loves his youthful demeanor and wit that he maintains even, when she and Chris try his patience. Julie remembers a time, when she and Chris had broken five bottles of Uncle Haskell's prized whiskey and received nothing more than a few stern words for punishment.

Julie remembers an old hiding place in a closet under the stairs and she climbs in hoping to avoid seeing Mrs. Peters, Danny, and Carlotta. Mrs. Peters outwits Julie and discovers the girl's hiding place but is unsuccessful at retrieving her. Ultimately, Aunt Cordelia returns home, learns of Julie's hiding place from Mrs. Peters, and climbs in beside Julie where aunt and niece hold each other and sob in their mutual grief.



Chapter 1 Analysis

The author uses personification in this chapter, when she gives human characteristics to inanimate objects. For example, when describing the bed sheets blowing in the breeze, Hunt writes, "...watched the wind whip great wrinkles in the white sheets that hung on the line. The wrinkles had come to look strange to me as I watched them; they grinned at me, malicious, hateful grins."

There is also personification, when Hunt writes, "There were evidences of prosperous years and tight ones, pressed shoulder to shoulder throughout the house."



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Julie and Chris have come to live with Aunt Cordelia while Laura, who is seventeen, remains at home with their father. Julie is envious of Laura, who retains all the securities of home but does not realize that Laura's memories of their Mother are more defined. Her grief is a burden that Julie cannot understand. With the gift of adaptability given to the young, Julie and Chris begin to meld into their new lives with Aunt Cordelia, who now acts as their guardian as well as their schoolteacher.

Each day Julie and Chris walk to school alongside Aunt Cordelia while she monitors their posture and instructs them on nature's transitions during the change of seasons. Aunt Cordelia could be counted on for her pleasant demeanor and sense of humor, too. Julie begins to feel a love toward this woman, who has taken her into her home and now her heart.

Aunt Cordelia's income from her farm is sufficient to sustain her, but she retains her teaching job, because she feels that no one else can do a better job. Aunt Cordelia enlists the help of Julie, Chris, and Danny Trevort to clean the schoolroom each night and often treats them to a wiener roast or fried chicken dinners for compensation.

Aunt Cordelia enjoys all her students, is partial to the antics of Chris and Danny, but is challenged by how to help a poor, retarded girl named Aggie Kilpin. Aggie comes from an underprivileged family and exhibits all the signs of undernourishment and mistreatment with no social skills. Much to Julie's chagrin, Aunt Cordelia encourages Julie to befriend Aggie. Julie and the other girls are not prejudiced against Aggie's diminished mental capacities but cannot tolerate her dreadful hygiene.

When Julie, Chris, and Danny finish with their schoolroom chores, they sometimes spend time with Carlotta, Elsie Devers, and Jimmy Ferris. One day, on a bet, Danny kisses Julie, who promptly hits him in the face rendering him a swollen black eye. While Aunt Cordelia treats the injury with cold water, she tells Julie that the crime of a small kiss does not seem to warrant such a harsh punishment as a swollen eye.

Julie's shame and embarrassment over the kiss incident prompts her to visit her Cathedral of Four Silver Birches formed from the branches of four silver birch trees creating a private place in a woods near Aunt Cordelia's house. While Julie kneels in prayer over the incident, she is startled by the sound of footsteps and turns to find Uncle Haskell holding a golf bag and leaning against a tree.

Julie shares her tale of woe that Aunt Cordelia has chastised her for hitting Danny and Uncle Haskell tells her that Aunt Cordelia exhibits the same characteristics as her own mother, who preferred Haskell to Cordelia. Julie vows that if she ever has children, she will never show favoritism of the boys over the girls.



Julie watches Uncle Haskell leave and thinks his carrying the golf bag is odd, because the nearest course is five miles away, and he has no clubs in the bag.

Later that evening, Aunt Cordelia apologizes for being so judgmental in the kissing episode, and Julie falls in love with her aunt, once again.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The author uses the literary device of foreshadowing in this chapter, when she writes about Uncle Haskell. Uncle Haskell is wandering the woods carrying around his golf bag with no clubs and it is near dark with no possibility of reaching the nearest golf course to play even one round. This scenario alludes to Uncle Haskell's unstable state of mind and some activities that will become obvious as the novel progresses.

In spite of his quirkiness, Uncle Haskell begins to establish himself as a confidant to Julie. Their relationship begins to grow stronger, providing another source of comfort for the young girl.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Before the end of the summer, Julie and Chris stumble onto Uncle Haskell's activities involving his golf bag. Following Uncle Haskell into the woods one night, Julie and Chris watch Uncle Haskell retrieve a spade from his bag. He runs back to the house, when Uncle Haskell spots them and shames them into running away. Thinking that Uncle Haskell is probably burying all sorts of dead creatures in the woods, Julie and Chris unearth some of the little graves the next day only to discover empty whiskey bottles.

A few weeks after this grave-digging episode, it is announced that Chris will be going away to boarding school leaving Julie alone in the big house with Aunt Cordelia. Uncle Haskell spends more time with Julia to assuage her loneliness, and Julie revels in Uncle Haskell's quiriness that is in start contrast to Aunt Cordelia's always-proper behavior. Julie especially delights in Uncle Haskell's tales of his European travels although he has never traveled abroad and of the books he has written which unfortunately are now out of print. Uncle Haskell maintains that he is working on a massive book now although Julie never sees him at the typewriter.

Julie's father and sister, Laura, do not appreciate Uncle Haskell's exaggeration of the truth and try to separate Julie from Uncle Haskell on their frequent visits to Aunt Cordelia's house. It is during these times with Laura that Julie feels close to her mother again as they lie in bed together and pretend that things are the way they used to be.

Events in Julie's life are about to change once more, when Laura meets Bill Strohmer and marries him during the summer, when Julie is ten. Chris returns from boarding school, and both he and Julie participate as members of the wedding party. Julie acknowledges Miss Alicia Allison, one of Laura's former teachers, but does not notice her father's special attentions to Miss Allison.

Laura's wedding is a monumental change in Julie's life and it is a year before Julie travels the three hundred miles to visit Laura and Bill in their new home. When Julie arrives, she is shaken to see how ill Laura looks in her pregnant state. Even more disturbing is the fact that the times of Julie and Laura lying in bed talking before going to sleep are now over. The visit is also marred by the time Laura spends helping Bill in his research for his university thesis. When Bill takes Julie to the train on the day of her departure, he asks Julie to overlook Laura's crotchety behavior and assures Julie that Laura loves her as much as ever.

Julie is not convinced that she still has a prominent place in Laura's life and a kindly conductor on the train listens to her tale of woe. The conductor tells Julie that people tend to love themselves more than the person they claim to love, always wanting to be Number One to that person. The man encourages Julie to think about how she can be



loved and needed in a lower position. Julie spends many hours in her Cathedral of Four Silver Birches, contemplating the answer.

Julie's consumption with thoughts of Laura is replaced by missing Chris as the new school year begins. Before long, though, Julie's spirits are buoyed, when Bill calls with the news that Laura has delivered a baby girl, whom they have named Julie. Aunt Cordelia consents for Julie to spend a few days with Laura, Bill, and her namesake, and she secretly thanks the conductor for his sage advice.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The theme of transitions becomes very important in this chapter. Julie experiences not only Chris' departure for boarding school but also Laura's marriage to Bill. The relationship between the siblings had been dramatically altered with the death of their mother, which precipitated Julie and Chris' move to Aunt Cordelia's. Now the children are being separated even further through distance and new relationships.

The author also uses foreshadowing with the appearance of Alicia Allison at Laura's wedding, and Julie's later statement to Laura that she will never return home if her father chooses to marry anyone else.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Julie's family had always assumed that Julie would return to her father's home, when she entered high school so Aunt Cordelia agrees to host a birthday party for Julie's twelfth birthday since she would be leaving after this school year. All the girls, including the filthy Aggie Kilpin, are abuzz with anticipation for the party. Alicia Allison had sent Julie a box of pink note cards on which she writes each invitation in perfect penmanship.

Aunt Cordelia throws a pall on the planning of the festivities, when she notices that Julie has not included Aggie in the party invitees and will not allow Julie to have a party if Aggie is not invited. Julie wants no part of the slovenly Aggie and tosses all the invitations in the trash ending the hope of a party. Julie never reveals the reason for the party's demise to her friends, who assume that Aunt Cordelia's sullen demeanor surely has some factor in the sudden cancellation. Ironically, even Aggie verbally accuses Aunt Cordelia of bringing the party plans to an abrupt halt.

Aunt Cordelia does not allow Julie's birthday to pass unnoticed and makes two beautiful angel food cakes to school to share with the others at noon. Aggie is especially pleased to receive a piece of the lovely cake and attempts to join Julie at lunch, but Julie hostilely rebuffs Aggie much to Aunt Cordelia's chagrin.

The rest of the school year passes with Aggie never approaching Julie again, and Julie feels a small degree of remorse at her own reprehensible behavior on her birthday. During that summer, Julie's feelings of irritation turn into shame, when she learns that Aggie is dying from an infection caused from a cut that did not receive proper medical attention.

Aunt Cordelia attempts to provide some relief to the Kilpin family and visits with ice and cool drinks, but Mrs. Kilpin will not allow Aunt Cordelia to bathe Aggie or wash her soiled bedclothes in spite of the sweltering heat. After Aunt Cordelia's visit to the Kilpin house, she is especially short tempered with Julie and reprimands her niece for her lack of initiative in keeping her own bedroom clean.

A couple days later Carlotta arrives to take Julie on a ride in her new carriage drawn by her new pony received as a birthday gift. Julie dresses in a lovely summer dress, and Aunt Cordelia cuts some gladiola so that the girls can deliver them to Aggie. Carlotta and Julie look like a perfect picture in their summer dresses as they trot toward town taunted briefly by Danny Trevort and Jimmy Ferris riding their bicycles.

Julie is appalled at the conditions in Aggie's house and is shocked to see Aggie lying on a dirty mattress with no bedclothes. As Julie moves closer to Aggie, she can see that Aggie's eyes are so glazed over that she does not recognize Julie. Mrs. Kilpin brushes



off Julie's comments, meant to be comforting. Julie leaves the house, disturbed by what she has witnessed. Carlotta refuses to take Julie home so Julie begins the long walk back to Aunt Cordelia's but is rescued by Danny, who takes her the rest of the way home on his bike.

By the next morning, Aggie has died, and Aunt Cordelia, Mrs. Perry, and Mrs. Trevort, Danny's mother, arrive at the Kilpin house to help prepare for Aggie's funeral. Aunt Cordelia reveals to Julie that she had washed Aggie's matted hair and cleaned her body for a proper burial. Julie attends Aggie's funeral and notes that it is ironic that Aggie looks clean and beautiful in her coffin, when she looked so ugly and dirty, when she was alive.

In Julie's attempts to understand the meaning of death of a young person like Aggie, she seeks out Uncle Haskell for some advice. Julie shares her sense of guilt about the unkind way she had treated Aggie and Uncle Haskell tells her that Aggie has been saved future embarrassments and hard times through a merciful death. Julie does not fully understand or agree with Uncle Haskell on this point and leaves to ride Peter the Great for a short while. The next morning, a note from Uncle Haskell has been slid under Julie's door and she is somewhat relieved, when she reads his words, "I'll say to my sad-faced little Julie: Guilt feelings will do nothing for either you or the Kilpin child. But your compassion as you grow into womanhood may well become immortality for the girl you call Aggie."

Chapter 4 Analysis

The author uses the literary technique of irony in this chapter when presenting the sad state of Aggie's death. Aggie had spent her life in filth, which compounded with her compromised mental capacity, led to undesirability among the children in school. Aggie's mother would never allow any intervention on her child's behalf to improve her hygiene and educational needs. Ironically, only after her death does Aggie receive the tender washing and bodily care she desperately needed, when she was alive.

The author creates the irony in Julie's thoughts upon looking at Aggie lying in her coffin, "I was filled with wonder as I saw that she was gently, almost gracefully pretty in death. She was clean, so beautifully clean in the soft ivory-colored dress that my aunt and other neighbors had bought for her, a dress that would have sent Aggie into ecstasies if she could have had it while she lived. I noticed that her hair was, indeed, bright with copper lights in it, lights that sparkled when the afternoon sunlight, channeled in through the church windows, touched Aggie's head and face. It had been the filth and the stench and the silly grimaces, the garbled speech and the stupid responses that had made Aggie revolting. And now she was pretty."



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Toward the end of the summer, the news arrives that Jonathan Eltwing and his wife would be moving to town so that Jonathan could work on his next book. Julie had heard Jonathan's name periodically through the years at Aunt Cordelia's house and finally learns from Laura that Aunt Cordelia had fallen in love with Jonathan, when she had been a very young teacher and had helped Jonathan prepare for college entrance exams.

Jonathan had come from a farming family in which the father needed his sons for labor and discouraged education. Fortunately, Jonathan's mother had been intellectual herself and found a way to provide the best education possible for all her children. Aunt Cordelia was only slightly older than Jonathan was, and their late night tutoring sessions created rumors of impropriety in the town, but Aunt Cordelia's father squelched the rumors and planted Julie's mother as a little chaperone for the tutoring sessions.

It is assumed that Aunt Cordelia and Jonathan fell in love that year, but Aunt Cordelia's mother felt that Aunt Cordelia's responsibility was to the family and not to some boy gone off to college. Jonathan's letters to Aunt Cordelia went unanswered and Jonathan eventually fell in love and married a girl known for her musical talents.

After a phone call from Julie's father Adam one day, Aunt Cordelia announces that Jonathan and his wife would be coming for a visit on Saturday. In spite of all the cleaning and polishing to get the house in order, Aunt Cordelia never revealed one word that would indicate her former love for Jonathan.

On the day of the visit, Jonathan and his wife arrive promptly escorted by Adam, and the visit begins with small talk of life in the town and Jonathan's literary and academic success. Jonathan mentions to his wife that Aunt Cordelia is the person who had helped him prepare so that he could attend the university and Mrs. Eltwing vacantly acknowledges Aunt Cordelia. Julie and the others notice that Mrs. Eltwing seems very childlike in her eating and speech and comes to life only when encouraged to play the piano. Uncle Haskell applauds Mrs. Eltwing for her talents and makes his excuses to return to writing his book which most of the people in the room realize are imaginary.

As the Eltwings prepare to leave, Jonathan comments that Julie looks so much like Aunt Cordelia, a statement that registers horror in Julie and embarrasses the rest of the guests. When the guests have left, Julie offers to clean up the dishes, and Aunt Cordelia goes outside to rake and burn leaves until late at night. After freshening up from her day outside, Aunt Cordelia shows Julie an old photograph of herself, and Julie can immediately see her resemblance to her aunt who looks so beautiful, happy, and in love. Julie apologizes for her behavior earlier in the afternoon. Aunt Cordelia, of course, forgives her.



Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter, the author relies heavily on the use of memory as Laura recalls the story of Aunt Cordelia and Jonathan Eltwing and relays the story to Julie. In this way, the author can provide more information about Aunt Cordelia's character without the filters normally applied, when a person talks about himself. Laura is able to tell Julie about Aunt Cordelia's first and only love which she was forced to give up due to family obligations. This allows Julie some insight into Aunt Cordelia that she has not been able to glean from questioning Aunt Cordelia directly.

The author also uses visual imagery when describing the violent piano playing of the timid Mrs. Eltwing. "Waves of music crashed throughout the rooms of the old house, mountains began to shake and comets to fall under her hands while I could imagine tidal waves rolling in and the wind uprooting trees and sending ships spinning to the bottom of the sea. Then as my heart seemed almost ready to burst with the tumult, her music suddenly subsided and the sky became bright; the storm was over."



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Julie's last year in elementary school will also be Aunt Cordelia's last year of teaching. The little school is being closed so that the country children can have the benefit of an education in a city school. Aunt Cordelia has declined an offer to transfer to the city school claiming that she is too set in her ways to adapt to the rules of a new school system.

Amazingly, Aunt Cordelia does not seem sad by this upcoming change, and Julie is concerned that there has been no mention of herself, who is supposed to leave at the end of the school year, too. Julie has heard whispers from other people that perhaps Julie is too strong willed for someone of Aunt Cordelia's age and assumes that Aunt Cordelia is only too happy that she will soon no longer be burdened with raising Julie.

In an attempt to assuage her emotional hurts, Julie turns her thoughts to moving back home and anticipates moving into Laura's old room, which overlooks her mother's old flower garden. Julie also looks forward to spending more time with her father every day as opposed to the visits limited to dinners at fine restaurants.

Recently, Alicia Allison has accompanied Julie and father on their visits, and Julie is annoyed at the entrance of this woman into their outings but does not voice her opinions to her father. Eventually, Julie warms to Alicia and enjoys having the company of a woman younger than Aunt Cordelia is.

When spring arrives, Julie's father marries Alicia, and Julie helps in some of the redecorating of the house prior to her moving back in before the beginning of the school year. Julie hesitantly approves of the changes Alicia has made to the house but is appalled to discover that Alicia has converted Laura's old bedroom into an office. Alicia had no way of knowing that Julie coveted that room, and Julie begins to think that she should remain at Aunt Cordelia's house. That feeling is confirmed, when Julie walks in on Alicia and her father in an amorous embrace in the breakfast nook one morning.

Julie's feelings of alienation prompt her to discuss the issue with Aunt Cordelia who is very pleased that Julie chooses to remain living with her during her high school years.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The author uses the literary technique of symbolism by connecting Aunt Cordelia's retirement with the autumn of the year. The period in a person's life, when they end their professional lives, is typically described as the autumn years and it coincidentally occurs at the start of a new school year in which Aunt Cordelia will no longer participate.

The author also uses irony in this chapter in describing Julie's relationships with Alicia and Aunt Cordelia. Julie is drawn to Alicia's youthful sensibilities. However, it is the older and wiser Aunt Cordelia, who makes Julie truly happy, by taking the time to understand her as a person.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Jonathan and Katy Eltwing move into a house about three miles from Aunt Cordelia's, and there is speculation in town if Jonathan hopes that living in a small town will minimize the scrutiny of his volatile wife. Julie secretly thinks that Jonathan is still a little bit in love with Aunt Cordelia.

Living in the country does not have the peaceful influence on Katy that Jonathan had hoped, and she is unnerved when visitors arrive unannounced and is even found wandering alone down country roads and in nearby fields and woods. For some reason Katy is unable to play the piano anymore and many times Jonathan must leave work to return home to console his hysterical wife. On many evenings, Jonathan would seek out the comfort of Aunt Cordelia's big house as a retreat from the stress of his own life.

One night Aunt Cordelia was in town listening to a lecture when Julie is startled by the sound of Uncle Haskell's voice yelling at her to come downstairs. Uncle Haskell had found Katy in the middle of old creek bridge afraid to cross over in the swollen waters. Katy's hair hung in wet strings, and her evening dress is torn from climbing through brambles. Julie tries to comfort the woman who is visibly upset by Julie's touch, preferring the calm demeanor of Uncle Haskell.

Julie places a phone call to Jonathan who arrives in minutes at Aunt Cordelia's house to find his wife's feet being washed by Uncle Haskell. Katy tells Jonathan that the "golden-haired man" found her, and she was no longer afraid. Katy is comforted by Uncle Haskell's presence and soon falls asleep as Uncle Haskell relays the details of his hearing Katy's cries during a walk through the woods. Jonathan reveals that Katy usually allows no one else, but Jonathan to come near her, and he is grateful for Uncle Haskell's rescue of his wife.

After that night, Uncle Haskell and Katy Eltwing become an odd pair of friends with Uncle Haskell taking time to listen to the troubled woman and playing some halting songs on the piano which Katy can no longer play. Sometimes Jonathan calls Uncle Haskell to the Eltwing home, because Uncle Haskell is the only person who has a calming influence on Katy.

In spite of Uncle Haskell's presence, Katy's health declines rapidly exacerbated by her refusal to eat. Jonathan is perplexed about what course of action to take on his wife's behalf and soon she is bedridden with no hope of recovery. Uncle Haskell, who had been visiting every day, tells Jonathan he can no longer watch Katy in this condition and refuses to return to the house. Katy dies soon after and Uncle Haskell does not attend her funeral, preferring to stay home and get drunk.



Chapter 7 Analysis

The author uses symbolism to help explain Katy's attraction to Uncle Haskell when she will not let any other people come near her. During a night of despair, Jonathan talks about Katy's love for all fine things, especially gold and velvet. Jonathan further explains, "She enjoyed all good things - good food, beautiful objects, beautiful people. She had a great fondness for gold; every piece of jewelry she selected was of gold. I used to think that the metal pins and necklaces she bought were too heavy for her, but they were what she wanted. And velvet for her dresses - soft velvets and gold. How she loved that combination." Julie makes the connection that Uncle Haskell had been wearing a black velvet jacket when he first met Katy, and that she must have been attracted by the fabric and Uncle Haskell's gleaming blonde hair. That physical brilliance in conjunction with Uncle Haskell's kindness made him a source of comfort and beauty for the troubled woman.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Carlotta thinks that Julie's decision to live at Aunt Cordelia's house during her high school years is a sign of madness, because no boy will want to drive out to the country to pick up Julie for dates. If the distance from town were not enough of a deterrent, surely no boy would want to encounter Aunt Cordelia if he did not have to. Carlotta's predictions are amazingly accurate for Julie's first two years of high school, and Julie's social life exists of attending college programs with her father. Although her father introduced Julie to some of his college students, they were more interested in girls on campus, and Julie resigns herself to her fate of not being one of the "in-group" girls in town.

Julie's luck with boys changes during her junior year when a boy named Brett Kingsman enrolls in school when his father is transferred to town. All the girls are envious, when Brett selects Julie for his girlfriend. Even she is not sure why he has made this choice. Julie's happiness takes on romantic novel proportions, and she defends her relationship with Brett to Aunt Cordelia, her father, and Alicia, who are not enthusiastic about Brett's influence on Julie.

One day, Brett is especially outspoken about his distaste for English class and schoolteachers in general after Alicia has just handed out a writing assignment on Thoreau's essay, *Civil Disobedience*. Alicia ignores Brett's temper tantrum but asks Julie to see her at the end of the day. Brett cannot commit to Julie that he will meet her after her meeting with Alicia but promises to call this evening.

Julie's meeting with Alicia begins on a fine note with Alicia extending an invitation to a concert, which Julie declines because of a date with Brett. Alicia takes this segue to introduce the real reason for the meeting which is that Brett's papers show clear evidence that Julie is helping Brett, even to the point of his copying her exact words in theme papers. Julie can only defend her desire to help her boyfriend, but Alicia declares that if the trend continues, Brett will fail the class, and Julie will be sent to the dean's office for punishment.

Julie leaves Alicia's office upset with herself and Alicia and begins the five-mile walk home. After a little while, Julie sees a speeding car coming her way and realizes that it is Danny, who pulls over to pick her up. Danny usually drives Julie home from school every day, and he is irritated with Julie. She had not told him she was staying after school today, and he didn't know where she was.

Later that night, Brett comes over to Julie's house, because he needs help with his homework. Julie tells Brett about the meeting she had had with Alicia and tells Brett that she cannot help him with his homework any longer. Brett's temper explodes at this denial, and rising to go, he tries to coerce Julie to walk with him in the woods. Normally,



their little walks were private times, and Julie enjoyed them. However, tonight, Brett's mood scares her yet she agrees to go with him. Soon Julie notices Uncle Haskell nearby, and he convinces Julie to return to the house while he manages to get Brett to leave without trouble. Later on, Julie learns that Aunt Cordelia had summoned Uncle Haskell, because she had feared Brett's temper.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The author uses much visual imagery in the novel and in this chapter, she describes the world as Julie views it by moonlight. "It was a wonderful night; the world looked as if it had been dipped in some liquid silver poured out of the moon."

In another instance, the author writes of Julie's fragile love for Brett, when she and Aunt Cordelia bristle at Brett's outburst. "I thought that foot beside the dining room table was going to fly through the door. Even my love cracked a little." Obviously, Aunt Cordelia's foot cannot fly through a door and love does not crack, but the author uses exaggerated imagery to add drama to the tense situation.

The author also uses a simile to succinctly describe Alicia's style in delivering the extensive Thoreau assignment. "She was as smooth as ice cream." There is no doubt from this description that Alicia speaks coolly and without concern for the reactions she is creating among her students.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Julie's refusal to do Brett's homework for him is the end of their romance and Brett begins to date Carlotta. Danny asks Eden Brownlee to the prom, and Julie has an especially bad end to her junior year. Julie's father tries to mitigate her sadness over losing Brett by taking her on outings, and Alicia and Aunt Cordelia are especially kind taking care not to gloat over Julie's misery.

After almost two miserable months, Julie wakes one day with the realization that she has finally dismissed Brett from her mind and for the first time in a long time she is happy and peaceful. Julie's good mood extends through a big breakfast, and then a whirlwind of housework, both of which please Aunt Cordelia. Later that day, Julie rides Peter the Great past Danny's house, and he joins her in riding horses.

Julie and Danny begin spending more time together and soon are joined by Chris, who is home from college for the summer. Laura, Bill, and little Julie come for a summer visit, and Julie is happy to have her entire family near her once again.

At the beginning of her senior year, Julie is sad that she does not have a boyfriend and Danny advises her to stay away from Brett especially now that there are bad rumors going around about Brett and Carlotta. All that Julie knows is that Carlotta has gone to Idaho to live with an aunt for a while, but Julie does not remember Carlotta ever speaking about this aunt before.

Eventually Danny stops dating Eden and declares his love for Julie, telling her that he has loved her ever since they were little children. Julie is in love with Danny too and finally feels secure that she has found her place in the world.

Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter is filled with visual imagery, when the author describes Julie's emergence from depression over the end of her relationship with Brett. "It was a bright summer morning and every leaf on the trees outside seemed to have been polished, glittering as they were in the sunlight. The white curtains at my window moved just a little at the touch of the breeze that drifted inside, and my room somehow became a vivid picture to me as if I had pulled aside some veil of indifference and was suddenly aware of it."



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

During her senior year in high school, Julie begins to write some poetry and short fiction pieces and asks Uncle Haskell's advice in critiquing her work. This diversion becomes especially important for Uncle Haskell, who discovers that he is dying from cirrhosis of the liver brought on by so many years of alcohol abuse. Julie is hesitant to engage Uncle Haskell further in her amateurish work, but Aunt Cordelia feels that it is good for Uncle Haskell to have some purpose at this point in his life.

Julie enjoys moderate success, when one of her stories is published in a university magazine, and the entire family supports her efforts and celebrates with her. Uncle Haskell shies away from a family gathering preferring the silence of the woods to the chatter of the family voices, and Julie makes a point to rise early to talk to her uncle about her success.

Julie's joy is short lived, though, because Uncle Haskell's body is discovered the next morning in the water near the old creek bridge. Julie cannot bring herself to enter Uncle Haskell's carriage house for a long time, until Aunt Cordelia asks for help in sorting through Uncle Haskell's personal items. Aunt Cordelia shares some of the sorrows from the childhood she shared with Uncle Haskell, and Julie feels even more gratitude for the abundance of love she has received in her life.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The author brings to closure the foreshadowing used at the incident of Katy Eltwing's panic attack at the old creek bridge earlier in the book. Katy nearly meets with disaster on the creek but is rescued, when Uncle Haskell hears her cries. Now, Uncle Haskell has met his demise at this same spot. This is also ironic, because Uncle Haskell had been able to save Katy, but there is no one to help the incapacitated Uncle Haskell.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Julie's plans to stay with Aunt Cordelia during her college years are thwarted when, one day, Aunt Cordelia suggests that Julie attend the state university instead of the college in town so that she may experience some of the world. At first, Julie's reaction is one of fear and instability, but ultimately, she understands that Aunt Cordelia has her best interests at heart. Aunt Cordelia wants both Julie and Danny to experience the world before they marry, and Julie hesitantly agrees. Aunt Cordelia wants Julie and Danny to prove their love for each other, and she is concerned that Julie is taking on her own characteristic of inflexibility. She does not want that trait to rule Julie's life, as it has driven her own.

Julie is named valedictorian of her graduating class, and the whole family makes plans to come home to attend the ceremony. Aunt Cordelia enlists the help of Chris, Danny and Julie to clean the entire house just as they used to clean the little schoolroom many years ago. Even Jonathan is pulled into the cleaning jobs, when he stops in to return a book one afternoon. Jonathan seems to enjoy himself by being a part of this happy group and lingers past dinner to lead singing at the piano.

The out-of-town members of the family arrive for the graduation, and Julie spends a few private moments with her father, who finds this day to be bittersweet. Julie's father is grateful to Aunt Cordelia for raising Julie, but he is sad that he does not know his daughter in the ways that only Aunt Cordelia can. Julie vows to involve her father more in her life, and the family leaves for the graduation ceremony.

Julie delivers her speech flawlessly and no one in the audience is prouder than Aunt Cordelia.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The symbolism of the book's title becomes clear by the end of the story in that Julie learns that she has learned many lessons but has many more to learn along the road of her life. In retrospect, Julie has conquered many challenges in her young life and receives validation from her family for her private and academic challenges. Julie has learned most of her life lessons from Aunt Cordelia, whose example has taught that obstacles can be overcome with perseverance and compassion and by viewing life as a wonderful journey.



Characters

Julie Treling

Julie is the protagonist of the story that spans her life from the age of seven to seventeen. As the novel begins, Julie is only seven years old. Her mother has just died from an unnamed illness from which Julie herself has recovered. Julie and her brother, Chris, are sent to live with their Aunt Cordelia, because their father's profession as a university professor does not allow time to care for young children. Julie is vaguely familiar with Aunt Cordelia and her huge house and finds a degree of comfort with the woman, which grows into full-fledged love over the years. As a young girl, Julie learns lessons of compassion and responsibility through her interactions with classmates and family.

Julie grows to love the beauty of nature and aesthetic and cultural pursuits such as poetry and writing fiction, which help her to express her feelings as she matures. Through her high school years, Julie learns the sting of the loss of love but also the joy of finding authentic love with Danny, her childhood friend. Through it all, though, stands Aunt Cordelia, who provides love unconditionally. Julie's story is one of transitions learned early, but she proves that she can adapt to life's obstacles and successes with grace and determination.

Aunt Cordelia

When Julie first encounters life with Aunt Cordelia, her prospects seem dark, but Aunt Cordelia loves Julie without measure and raises her as if she were her own daughter. Aunt Cordelia had never married because of commitments to an ailing mother and unmarried sisters and has dedicated her life to teaching school in the same little room where she once attended as a student herself. Aunt Cordelia not only provides structure and discipline to Julie's life but also the example of compassion extended to those less fortunate.

Aunt Cordelia's cool demeanor is a protective covering sheltering her from wanting more from life than she has been allowed to have. Aunt Cordelia was raised by a mother who favored her son, although Aunt Cordelia was burdened with her mother's long-term care. Denied a long-term relationship with her first and only love, Aunt Cordelia lives her life in service to other people and comes to regret the choices she has made which prevent her from becoming a complete woman. Aunt Cordelia's sensitivity allows her to understand her students and family members and provide guidance and compassion at all times.



Uncle Haskell

Aunt Cordelia's brother, Uncle Haskell lives in the carriage house on the farm, where he and Aunt Cordelia grew up. This arrangement not only provides Uncle Haskell with the privacy he requires for his drinking problem but also removes him from any responsibilities in the main house where Aunt Cordelia and Julie live. Uncle Haskell's quirky nature is difficult for the young Julie to admire but, as she matures, she sees Uncle Haskell's love for her, which he finds difficult to voice. Uncle Haskell was adored by his mother but despised by his father, and he has spent his entire life trying to compensate for his shortcomings as defined by his father. Always falling short of expectations, Uncle Haskell retreats into a life of alcoholism and a fake writing career. As a young girl, Julie discerns Uncle Haskell's penchant for exaggerations and is concerned that her imagination and inclinations toward writing mean that she has inherited Uncle Haskell's negative qualities. Uncle Haskell has a large capacity to love, though, as exhibited by his unselfish care of the volatile Katy Eltwing. In Julie's life, Uncle Haskell's odd life style serves as a foil to Aunt Cordelia's strict demeanor. Toward the end of his life, Uncle Haskell tells Julie that each person has a blend of good and bad and she will use that advice in crafting the characters about whom she will write.

Laura Treling

Laura, Julie's older sister, is seventeen at the time of her mother's death and is allowed to stay with her father to finish high school, because she does not require much daily care. To Julie, Laura is a heroine with the most feminine qualities, and their relationship is very close in spite of their living in different homes. The relationship changes, when Laura marries, and Julie feels that she is not as important in her sister's life. However, when Laura names her daughter Julie, the sisters' relationship is cemented. Laura takes on the role of advisor for Julie during her school years, and it is Laura, whom Julie would most like to emulate.

Chris Treling

Chris, Julie's brother is nine-years-old at the time of his mother's death, and he is sent to live with Aunt Cordelia along with Julie. The author does not provide much insight into Chris' emotions, but he makes friends easily, especially with Danny Trevort and Jimmy Ferris. Chris spends only two years with Aunt Cordelia before leaving for boarding school, and Julie misses his presence in her life. Chris eventually attends college out of town but returns to participate in family events such as his father's marriage to Alicia and Julie's high school graduation.

Adam Treling

Adam is father to Laura, Chris, and Julie and is so devastated by the death of their mother that he cannot bear to raise the two younger children. A university professor,



Adam provides the educational and socialization experiences for his children but is not available for them emotionally. Julie comes to regard him as a "holiday parent," because he is in her life for only good times and special occasions. Adam regrets the loss of knowing Julie through her childhood and hopes to know her better as an adult.

Carlotta Berry

Carlotta is Julie's first friend after Julie moves to Aunt Cordelia's house in the country. Carlotta is a spoiled child indulged by her parents, who prefer to bestow gifts instead of discipline, resulting in Carlotta's lack of discrimination and compassion. Julie and Carlotta remain friends, even when they attend high school in town. Carlotta is much more interested in boys at an earlier age and eventually dates Julie's ex-boyfriend, Brett Kingsman, and becomes pregnant and must move away temporarily during senior year.

Aggie Kilpin

Aggie is the ill-fated underprivileged girl in Aunt Cordelia's school and is the source of derision and ridicule among the other students. Not only is Aggie mentally retarded, but she is also dirty and odiferous which drives the other students away from her. Aggie's death provides invaluable lessons to Julie about compassion and tolerance for those who are less fortunate.

Alicia Allison

Alicia is Adam Treling's second wife. Alicia had been one of Laura's teachers in high school and meets Adam at Laura's wedding. Alicia becomes both friend and stepmother to Julie and provides the feminine indulgences for Julie's life to balance out Aunt Cordelia's strict guidance.

Jonathan Eltwing

Jonathan is Aunt Cordelia's first and only love. Their relationship bloomed, when Aunt Cordelia, in her first year of teaching, tutored Jonathan for his college entrance exams. The relationship is thought to be inappropriate by the townspeople, but Aunt Cordelia and Jonathan are the same age and fall in love despite their student-teacher relationship. Jonathan's requests for Aunt Cordelia to come to him after he left for the university went unheeded so he married a music student named Katy. Jonathan and Katy eventually return to town so that Jonathan can work on his novel. Upon Katy's untimely death, Jonathan and Aunt Cordelia resume their friendship begun many years ago.



Danny Trevort

Danny is one of the first friends of Julie and Chris after they move to Aunt Cordelia's house in the country. Danny and Chris spend a lot of time together as they grow up, and Julie spends more time with girlfriends. Danny gives Julie her first kiss and receives a black eye from her in return. Eventually, Danny and Julie realize they love each other during senior year in high school and promise to marry after they both finish college.

Jimmy Ferris

Jimmy is another one of the first friends of Julie and Chris after they move to Aunt Cordelia's house. Jimmy, Danny, and Chris spend much time together riding bicycles and flirting with girls as they grow older.

Mrs. Eltwing

Katy Eltwing is Jonathan's wife, whose mental state is volatile from an unnamed illness. Jonathan returns to his childhood hometown in the hopes that the peace and quiet will be a respite for Katy's nervous inclinations, but she never adapts and spends her time walking dazedly through the countryside endangering her life. Katy takes a special liking to Uncle Haskell, whose physical appearance and musical talents appeal to her troubled mind.

Brett Kingsman

Brett is the transfer student, who cagily chooses to date Julie after he finds out that Alicia, his English teacher, is also Julie's stepmother. Brett's attentions flatter Julie, who is not accustomed to being a popular girl among the boys. Her heart is broken, when she realizes Brett's true intentions.



Objects/Places

Aunt Cordelia's House

Aunt Cordelia's house is huge and open, with white columns, a veranda spanning the front, and some brick steps leading into a curved pathway to the gate near the road. The house is a source of comfort and familiarity to Julie throughout her childhood years.

Cathedral of Four Silver Birches

The cathedral is Julie's private place, formed from a cluster of four silver birch trees, whose intertwining branches create a roof.

Peter the Great

Peter is the huge farm horse, which Julie rides during her stay at Aunt Cordelia's house.

Uncle Haskell's Carriage House

The carriage house is where Uncle Haskell lives apart from the big house on the farm where Aunt Cordelia lives.

Aunt Cordelia's Schoolroom

The schoolroom is the one-room country schoolhouse where Aunt Cordelia has taught for over thirty years.

The Old Creek Bridge

The old creek bridge is the site of Katy Eltwing's panic attack and the location of Uncle Haskell's body.

Uncle Haskell's Golf Bag

Uncle Haskell's golf bag contains a spade, instead of golf clubs, for burying empty whiskey bottles.



The Woods

The woods near Aunt Cordelia's house are where Uncle Haskell buries his whiskey bottles, and where Julie spends time walking.

Laura's Room

The bedroom in Julie's father's home had been a source of comfort for Julie as a little girl, and it is the room she covets when Laura leaves home after marriage.

Setting

Although neither dates nor locales are identified, the setting appears to be a small midwestern community, perhaps in the late 1940s or early 1950s. Until her mother's death, Julie lived in the college town where her father, Adam Treling, is a scholarly, overworked college professor. Because Professor Treling feels overwhelmed with the responsibility of being a single parent, his two younger children, Julie and her nine-year-old brother, Christopher, are sent to live with their fifty-three-year-old spinster aunt, Miss Cordelia Bishop, and her older bachelor brother, Haskell, who lives in a renovated carriage house "out back." Until Julie's arrival, the home has seen little lighthearted pleasure, because Cordelia, in addition to teaching, has spent half of her life caring for her aged mother and two very old spinster aunts. Although Julie is initially apprehensive about living in the country, she grows to love her new home.

Social Sensitivity

At the center of this novel are serious subjects such as death, alienation, poverty, alcoholism, and teen-age pregnancy, but none of these is treated as more than a slight, temporary discomfort. For example, when Julie's mother dies, Julie forgets her quickly, and her father remarries after a few years. Additionally, the novel is subtly moralistic.

Socially acceptable people have only transitory problems that can be solved with dedication to proper values.

Problems are the fault of the individual, never of society, and it is taken for granted that ethnic minorities do not live in town. In spite of these observations, however, the life that Hunt portrays in *Up a Road Slowly* did exist in many small midwestern towns during the 1940s and 1950s, and many older readers can identify with the novel's small-town atmosphere. In this light, the book is true to a bygone era and reflects a time when life, at least on the surface, may have appeared to be simple and uncomplicated.

Literary Qualities

Up a Road Slowly projects a tone of warmth and innocence as it depicts a world where the positive aspects of life are emphasized and the ugly side of reality is usually suppressed. When Carlotta Berry leaves town to live with a relative, her pregnancy is a hushed event, and although it is understood, it is not discussed. No characters are portrayed as being truly evil, not even Brett Kingman; at worst, they are misguided. Even Aggie Kilpin, a victim of poverty, is beautiful in death, as Julie comments, because her body has been washed and the surface dirt cleansed away. Julie learns this symbolic wisdom from Aunt Cordelia; the teacher's mature outlook enables her to see through to Aggie's soul and disregard the dirt.

Uncle Haskell, a lying alcoholic and the pariah of the Bishop family because of his bad habits, is nonetheless described in glowing terms as being "slender and supple; when he walked it was as if he heard an inner music that delighted him down to his heels." Julie and her brother Chris observe that Uncle Haskell keeps cases of bottles of a "beautifully colored red-gold liquid" bearing the English translation of "Le Vieux Corbeau" in his basement, but despite the melodious French name that Uncle Haskell invents for it, the sparkling liquid is actually "Old Crow," a cheap, potent alcoholic beverage. Symbolism and effective imagery emphasize positive aspects of people and nature as well as soften what might otherwise be interpreted as ugly realism. Hunt's gentility of diction, poetic descriptions and metaphors, and use of mature vocabulary enable the story to affect the reader both intellectually and emotionally.



Themes

Transitions

As the novel's plot line is the coming of age story of a young girl, the theme of transitions is inevitable. The most obvious one at the beginning of the story is the death of Julie's mother, which alters Julie's living situation, but also her sense of security in the world. As a young girl, Julie must now direct her affections away from a missing mother to her Aunt Cordelia and in a smaller part, to her sister Laura. Julie's father is essentially absent from her life so Julie must make the transition to her new life with the help of Aunt Cordelia's structure and regimen. There are other obvious transitions for Julie such as her leaving the one room schoolhouse to attend high school in town and her ultimate decision to leave town to attend the state university.

Other less obvious transitions include Julie's falling in love and then betrayal by Brett, which is soon replaced by Danny's authentic declarations of love. Julie also matures from a girl, who relies on intimate discussion with Laura, to a young woman, who assumes the advisor role for her niece, little Julie. There are obvious transitions for other characters too, such as the deaths of Aggie Kilpin, Katy Eltwing, and Uncle Haskell. The loss of these characters affects the lives of those who love them, who must transition through grief and coping. The novel holds events of happy transitions too with the weddings of Laura and Bill, and Adam and Alicia. Even Julie and Danny's commitment to each other signals a positive major life change. Ultimately, the title of the book suggests the nature of the change inherent in the lives of each person, who must travel his own road and effect and adapt to transitions.

Compassion/ Maturity

Aunt Cordelia's first lesson to Julie is that of compassion, when the woman seeks out the frightened Julie in the closet and holds her while the child cries in grief and fear after the death of her mother. Julie remembers thinking at the time that she loves Aunt Cordelia for this unconditional love. Aunt Cordelia acts as both teacher and guardian for Julie and imparts lessons of tolerance in the classroom, when Julie and the others alienate the offensive Aggie Kilpin. Outside of the classroom, Aunt Cordelia instructs Julie in compassion, when Aggie is near death and instructs Julie to take flowers to the dying girl. Julie is so struck by the bleak circumstances of Aggie's death that she cannot ride home in Carlotta's pretty horse-drawn cart. This sense of compassion stems from Aunt Cordelia's example, and Julie's maturing into a loving individual. Julie also shows compassion closer to home by indulging the eccentricities of Uncle Haskell brought on by years of alcohol abuse and a wounded self-esteem. Eventually, Julie is able to see both sides of a person's character, realizing that no one is either all bad or all good. This balanced viewpoint helps Julie to gain empathy for those she encounters, and her compassion deepens as she matures.



Love

Love is an important theme in the novel, because it is both a source of joy and of pain for all the characters. Julie's loss of her mother's love impacts her dramatically and she is able to transfer some of that feeling to Aunt Cordelia and Laura. Julie struggles to find her place in the hearts of people, because she has learned early that love can be snatched away without warning. One of the most important lessons Julie learns is from the train conductor, who tells her that a person does not have to be Number One in another person's life for that other person to love. The real measure of love is to determine how a person can love and support another person even if from the lower position of second, third, or possibly even fourth place. For example, Julie's love for Laura never falters, but Laura's marriage and the birth of her child dictate different priorities for Laura as a young wife and mother. The conductor tries to help Julie understand that Laura's love for Julie has not died, but that it has moved to a different place at this point in Laura's life. The natural progression of life and the nature of love shifts for all people at different times. Adam is able to love again and marry Alicia. Aunt Cordelia finds that her love for Jonathan still exists. Julie learns the betrayal of false love with Brett. Finally, Julie realizes authentic love with Danny Trevort.



Themes/Characters

The novel is peopled with sympathetic characters, with two exceptions: Julie's high school love, Brett Kingman, whose attention to Julie is prompted by her willingness to write his English themes, and Julie's selfish, spoiled childhood friend, Carlotta Berry, who becomes pregnant by Brett. But, as Julie notes, the flaws Brett and Carlotta exhibit are largely traceable to poor parental guidance.

Aunt Cordelia leads a thoroughly proper, refined, self-disciplined life, which she devotes entirely to the welfare of others—her mother and aunts, her students, and Julie. As Julie matures, she learns that her aunt's proper demeanor and strict rules are not signs of coldness. Instead, they are Cordelia's method for coping with a life that does not allow for close friendships and, in her own words, "completeness in love."

Beneath Cordelia's firm, unyielding exterior is a warm, sensitive, and loving person. As Julie develops her capacity for love, first for Aunt Cordelia and much later for Uncle Haskell, all three lives become more complete.

Haskell Bishop plays an important role. Intelligent and sometimes charming, Haskell is also an "alcoholic and pathological liar." For decades, Haskell has lied about the impending publication of the great novel he pretends to be writing and about the purpose of his twilight walks with a golf bag full of empty whiskey bottles that he "buries" in shallow graves. His life changes when, at sixty-five and after years of a dissipated, selfish life, he is asked by Julie to critique her short stories. He expends much effort in showing her how to improve her writing skills. Because of Julie, Haskell experiences one of the finest satisfactions in his life—the joy of helping someone he loves and of being loved in return.

Cordelia and Haskell are diverse and well-rounded characters, but it is Julie Treling who seems most likely to step from the page into life. As she matures from an impetuous child who unintentionally hurts others and herself with her outbursts, she learns that living by rules, being a good student, and giving to others lead to happiness for herself.

She also discovers that excelling in school and rejoicing in the beauty of nature and the wisdom of poets are not enough to make a person complete. She perceptively recognizes that a conductor, during a brief train ride, gives her some of the best advice she has ever received. When Julie weeps on the return trip from Laura's house because her sister has put her husband into "first place" above Julie, the conductor advises Julie to make herself "loved and needed in the Number Two, or Three, or Four spot." Through the death of Aggie Kilpin, the mentally retarded, dirty, and odorous child whose friendship she has rudely rejected, Julie learns humility and tolerance. And through her shared love with Danny Trevort, she learns what it means to be "complete," as described by Cordelia.

Up a Road Slowly suggests that a child's maturation to virtuous adulthood is difficult for both the child and the adults who love the child, but Julia's story shows that education, generosity, and self-discipline may lead to happiness.



Style

Point of View

The story is told from the third person limited point of view, which means that the reader can understand the plot line told from Julie's perspective. The reader also has access to Julie's thoughts and feelings and understands the emotions and motivations of the other characters as Julie would be able to ascertain them. This perspective works well for most of the novel, but there are points where the dialogue or thought process is inconsistent for a girl of Julie's age. Unfortunately, the author provides Julie with characteristics that are more mature for a young girl. This leads to a choppy and unrealistic progression of some points in Julie's life. For example, when the young Julie loses her mother, the author writes that Julie must be taken to Aunt Cordelia's house in a sedated state and soon after Julie has almost forgotten her mother and any ties she had to her earliest years. There are also big gaps in the chronology of Julie's life and it is assumed that the author's intentions are to provide thematic lessons as opposed to a well-formulated plot line.

Setting

The location and time of the story are never identified, but it can be assumed that the location is somewhere in the Northern or Midwestern states in the 1940's or 1950's. The type of trees and the changing of the foliage noted by Julie plus the biting cold and snowstorms would indicate a Northern location. It is clear that the story is set in a small town just large enough to host a local university where Adam Trelling teaches. Aunt Cordelia's one-room schoolhouse in the country would indicate a large rural area where children are far enough away from town to make the rural school necessary.

The sense of naivety and innocence are defined through the simple activities of the children, who ride bicycles and horses for their main source of entertainment. There is no mention of any electronic communications such as televisions or radios and nights are spent reading in Aunt Cordelia's library where a roaring fire blazes every night, sometimes even in the summer. The nearby woods provide a source of privacy and contemplation for Julie as well as Uncle Haskell for necessary retreats from stress.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is relatively formal even in the dialogue attributed to Julie, who seems more mature for her character's age at points in the story. There are lapses in the formal tone occasionally, for example, when Julie switches from calling Jonathan Eltwing simply "Jonathan," an assumption of familiarity that seems out of place for a girl speaking to an older man. In another time and place, this practice is perfectly acceptable, but Julie has been trained in decorum and manners and informalities such as this seem out of character and context for this book.



The author also uses excerpts from the works of Shakespeare, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Sara Teasdale as touch points used by Julie to anchor her to some especially poignant moments. Aunt Cordelia's speaking style is the formal tone expected of a long-time schoolteacher, but Uncle Haskell's clipped witty banter makes him appear to be more impish than sage.

Structure

The novel is presented as the progression of ten years in the life of Julie Treling from the age of seven to seventeen. Throughout the piece, there are elements of memory introduced into the current plot to help define a character's motivations. This is especially true in the cases of Aunt Cordelia and Uncle Haskell, whose pasts are explored more thoroughly than any others are. The author's intent is to provide background material so that the reader will understand the characters' foibles and acts of integrity.

The author also uses beautiful visual imagery in describing the book's settings, particularly the woods next to Aunt Cordelia's house. Julie is also presented as an artistic person, who appreciates aesthetics and mood and the author is able to provide this feminine perspective through the imagery. The insertion of lines from sonnets and poems also helps to further define Julie's character, when she herself is incapable of expressing her emotions.



Quotes

"That was the one time I have ever known her to cry, and it was the first time I remember her holding me in her arms. We sat in the dark closet together for a long time; then when there were no more tears left, we crawled out and began our decade together." Chapter 1, pg. 12

"There was never a doubt in Aunt Cordelia's mind but that *her* teaching was the best to be had, and she would have felt that she was denying something beyond price to the handful of country children who sat in her classroom, if she allowed a younger or a less dedicated woman to take over." Chapter 2, pg. 15

"It happens the world over - we love ourselves more than we do the one we say we love. We all want to be Number One; we've got to be Number One or nothing! We can't see that we could make ourselves loved and needed in the Number Two, or Three, or Four spot. No sir, we've got to be Number One, and if we can't make it, we'll rip and tear at the love done till we've ruined every smidgin of love that was ever there." Chapter 3, pg. 42

"I made my decision. The little pink envelopes went into the wastebasket, and I had to tell all the girls at school that there would be no party. There was general indignation directed toward Aunt Cordelia, indignation coming from my closest friends, from some of their mothers, even from Aggie, who muttered that Miss Cordelia was mean to Julie, never once suspecting that she herself was the cause of all our broken plans." Chapter 4, pg. 48

"I wanted to bathe the poor child and put clean sheets on her bed, but Mrs. Kilpin wouldn't allow me to touch her - said she wasn't going to have her girl catch pneumonia by having a bath.' Aunt Cordelia closed her eyes briefly in exasperation. 'Afraid of pneumonia, but not of filth and the agony of heat and fever. I wanted to tie that woman up outside the room and see to it that Agnes was cared for properly - for just once in her life.'" Chapter 4, pg. 51

"Dear Julie: What you were seeking tonight was a good, gray uncle, full of wisdom, and you came to an uncle who is neither good nor gray nor very wise. I am annoyed with you, my sweet. I do not like stepping out of character even for a little niece who kisses me good night and, by that token, makes a vapid old fool of me. But I'll be for a few minutes your good, gray uncle, full of wisdom. I'll say to my sad-faced little Julie: Guilt feelings will do nothing for either you or the Kilpin child. But your compassion as you grow into womanhood may well become immortality for the girl you call Aggie." Chapter 4, pg. 64

"Oh, they were in love, all right. She herself once admitted as much to me when we were young together,' Mrs. Peters told me in a low voice as we washed the outside of the living room windows and kept on the lookout for any sudden appearance of Aunt Cordelia. 'But after he left, the months went by, and she would have to say no to



Jonathan's urging that she come to him - there was always sickness or debt or another worn-out old woman to be cared for. One couldn't blame Jonathan - he waited and hoped for a long time, and after a while I suppose that if the memory of her hurt, there were other women to soothe that hurt." Chapter 5, pg. 72

"I'm a beast, Aunt Cordelia, an ungrateful, bad-mannered beast. I'm cruel and hateful.' She gave my shoulder a little shake. 'Now, now, that's enough. Let's have no more of this.' She lifted my face with her hand under my chin and looked at me with a little smile. 'You're neither cruel nor mean; basically, you are a very good child. You're just young,' she added, and it was as if she said the last words to herself." Chapter 5, pg. 87

"I tried to put into words the feeling I had for Father and Alicia: 'I like them very much, Aunt Cordelia; I admire them too, but it's as if they are sort of holiday parents. Everything is just fine and new and beautiful; we're all polite and careful of one another's feelings. But they'll just have to understand: you and I are closer.'" Chapter 6, pg. 106

"According to Mrs. Peters there was an old cliché among the men of the neighborhood, the gist of which was the fact that they had never known Haskell Bishop when he wasn't drinking, but neither had they ever known him when he was drunk. He was drunk, however, the day Katy Eltwing was buried, sadly and pathetically drunk. He never spoke of that day afterward, nor did he ever again mention the little woman who had loved him - or who had loved something he represented." Chapter 7, pg. 119

"And then suddenly, there was Brett Kingsman. Suddenly there was a new chapter of my life opening before me. It seemed very beautiful and marvelous, but there were tensions and anxieties arising as suddenly as love had arisen, and I felt bewildered as I tried to face them." Chapter 8, pg. 122

"I was neither angry nor contemptuous; I just remembered a beautiful boy I had once loved and it was as if something inside me said, 'Well, wasn't that lovely? And now, shall we think of other things?'" Chapter 9, pg. 149

"You know, Aunt Cordelia, there will come a time when I'll eat berries like these some morning, fresh, dewy berries like these, and I'll think, What's the matter? These are not like the ones I ate with so much pleasure long ago. And then I'll tell myself, Of course not, for where is the sunny kitchen overlooking the woods, and where is the beautiful room upstairs where you awakened that morning, where is the aunt who quoted from one of Shakespeare's sonnets and above all, where is the sixteen-year-old girl who had just experienced a miracle? It will never be the same, Aunt Cordelia; I'll never eat raspberries like these again." Chapter 9, pgs.151-152

"I ran my hand across the smooth velvet of Uncle Haskell's jacket; I remembered his hair. There was, indeed, something of velvet and gold about him, something that Katy Eltwing's troubled mind had glimpsed. It was shoddy velvet and tarnished gold, and there lay the tragedy, for the shoddiness and the tarnish might have been prevented." Chapter 10, pgs.182-183



"Four more years with me and you'll be as dogmatic and opinionated as I am.' She actually grinned at me. I was amazed; Aunt Cordelia often smiled primly, but I couldn't remember ever seeing her grin as though she were sharing a joke with me. 'Spinster aunts serve a need, but they should know when the time comes to push young nieces out on their own.'" Chapter 11, pg. 184

"Don't fall in love with someone else, Danny,' I said. I tried to make it sound gay, but I was terribly in earnest. 'I'm not worried about me; it's you losing your head if some poet barges in on my territory,' Danny said grimly." Chapter 11, pgs.186-187

"Do you agree with Aunt Cordelia that Danny and I should be separated - that we should get out into life and have new experiences?' I asked her. 'Yes, Julie, I do. I know it isn't what you want to hear, but I think Aunt Cordelia is right, dear.' 'I've worked so hard getting up to this plateau; now it seems I have to start out on another climb.' 'One never stops climbing, Julie, unless he wants to stop and vegetate. There's always something just ahead.'" Chapter 11, pg. 194

"Finally, there at the end of the row was Aunt Cordelia, stiffly erect, poised, confident that no niece of hers could do other than well in this maiden speech. 'Oh, Aunt Cordelia, how funny you are. And how I love you!' I said to myself. She wouldn't have approved of such a childish thought; she would have expected me to be high-minded, reaching for the stars - that sort of thing." Chapter 11, pg. 195



Topics for Discussion

1. Although Cordelia Bishop has only a high school education, she is very successful in preparing students like Jonathan Eltwing, Julie, and Danny for winning scholarships to prestigious universities. What types of learning responsibilities would those successful students have accepted that some students might consider unusual today?
2. What particular character traits would Aunt Cordelia need to develop in order to be happy with her adult life?
3. In what ways do Julie and her friends entertain themselves in an era before television and sophisticated toys?
4. Julie is angry when Jonathan Eltwing calls her "little Cordelia." Why does he call her that? Would she have responded differently to this statement when she was older?
5. Why does Aunt Cordelia place so much stress upon herself and Julie following self-imposed guidelines for daily routines?



Essay Topics

The author does not delve into some of the negative social issues presented in the book, i.e., Uncle Haskell's alcoholism and Aggie Kilpin's poverty. How would the lives of these characters be different if they had lived in the 21st century instead of the middle of the 20th century?

Discuss how Julie's connections with her extended family would be different if she lived today as opposed to the 1950's.

In what ways has Aunt Cordelia benefited Julie's life and how has she hindered her?

Why does Aunt Cordelia never expect any help from Uncle Haskell although he lives on the same property?

Discuss the emotional impact of first love and the betrayal of that love by someone who has unethical intentions such as Brett's false love for Julie.

Why does Aunt Cordelia press Julie to leave town and attend the state university for her college education? What lessons is she hoping that Julie will learn in addition to her studies?

Should Julie have moved back to her father's home during her high school years or did she make the right choice by staying with Aunt Cordelia? How would her life have been different if she had had her father's influence on a daily basis?

Discuss the brief, but invaluable, lesson of the train conductor and the impact on Julie's life.

Aggie is an undesirable character in the book but she is able to teach Julie many lessons about herself. Discuss Julie's behavior before and after Aggie's death and how Aggie changed her.



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Irene Hunt also wrote *The Lottery Rose*. In what ways are *Up a Road Slowly* and *The Lottery Rose* very different in their portrayals of people and life? What might account for these differences?

2. Imagery plays an important role in allowing the reader to understand and sympathize with characters. Where is imagery used particularly effectively in bringing the reader inside the lives of Julie, Cordelia, and Haskell?

3. Uncle Haskell is a very different person at the end of the book than he is when he first appears. What specific experiences cause him to change?

4. Aunt Cordelia has very firm ideas about a young adult's personal behavior and interaction with adults. What are the strongest lessons she teaches Julie?

What techniques does she use to teach Julie these lessons? Of these lessons, which would still be valuable today, and why?

5. Several lines of poetry written by Edna St. Vincent Millay and Sara Teasdale are quoted in this novel. How does this poetry extend the meaning of the story?

Further Study

Evory, Ann, and Linda Metzger, eds.

Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series. Vol. 8. Detroit: Gale Research, 1983. Includes a short biographical sketch that covers Hunt's personal and career highlights.

Gelhardt, Lillian. "Review." *Library Journal* (February 15, 1967): 894. Gelhardt calls *Up a Road Slowly* "a top-flight" novel for girls because it presents "a description of the conflicting pressures of Julie's maturing years" and reveals "the insights about their elders that will never fail to intrigue young teenagers."

Hopkins, Lee Bennett. *More Books by More People*. New York: Citation Press, 1974. The reprise of an interview with Hunt contains reminiscences that help in understanding the biographical background of her writings.

Kirkpatrick, D. L., ed. *Twentieth Century Children's Writers*. New York: St.

Martin's Press, 1978. Provides information about Hunt's life and writings.

"Review." *Horn Book* (February 1967): 72-73. This review of *Up a Road Slowly* praises Hunt's ability to see "the characters more clearly than most of us see people" and sees the novel as one which allows readers to "exorcise... guilt feelings for unkindnesses committed during the struggle to grow to maturity."



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