

# A Reading and Discussion Guide

**Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Winner – 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards**

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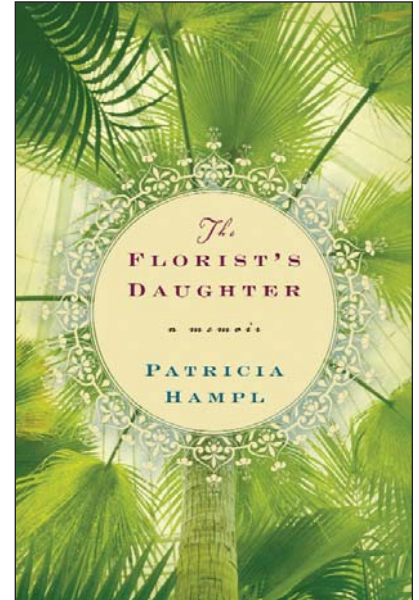
## ***The Florist's Daughter* by Patricia Hampl**

Harcourt, Inc.

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

### **SUMMARY:**

In her most personal book to date, Patricia Hampl revisits her childhood during the long farewell of her dying mother. Daughter of a Czech father whose floral work gave him entrée to Saint Paul's high society, and a distrustful Irishwoman with an uncanny ability to tell a tale, Hampl paints a picture of herself as someone who remained a devoted daughter well into adulthood.



### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the book's main themes?
  2. What is the significance of the author's choice of title? If the book had another title, what might it be?
  3. Whose story is the author telling? For whom is she writing the book?
  4. What emotions did you experience while reading the book?
  5. What role does humor play? What parts of the book made you laugh or smile?
  6. How has the author's relationships with her parents shaped the adult she has become? In what ways are you a product of who your parents are/were?
  7. What are the qualities of the narrator's voice and the overall tone of the book? What is the picture the author paints of herself and her deceased parents?
  8. What did you learn about Saint Paul culture and landmarks? If you were living in Saint Paul during some or all of the years covered in the book, how well does the author's portrayal of city life fit with your memories?
  9. What risks, if any, did the author take in writing such a personal book?
  10. If you were to write a memoir of your childhood, what would you choose as its title? What emotions might surface in writing the book?
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## A CONVERSATION WITH PATRICIA HAMPL:

### Q. What inspired you to write *The Florist's Daughter*?

For years I had a vague notion that I would write something I thought of as my “daughter book.” I’m not sure where the idea came from - maybe partly because I was close to my parents, geographically and otherwise. At first I thought no one else would be interested, but then I realized the very modesty of my parents’ lives and their deep attachment to Saint Paul, which is a pretty mysterious little city, made them emblems of a kind of middle class, mid-century life that is largely lost.

### Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

All my other prose books have required a lot of research – in archives, reading, travel, and sometimes interviews. But this one was straight from the heart. I consulted my memory. I didn’t even ask my brother for his version or for any stories. I dedicated it to him, but I wondered what he’d make of it. It was a big relief when he said he loved it.

### Q. How long did it take you to write *The Florist's Daughter*?

That’s tough to answer accurately. A book rolls around for a long while in my head in a lot of jagged pieces and a lot of empty spaces. That can go on for years. But I suppose I wrote the book, putting together bits and pulling it all together, in less than a year. I wrote one chapter as a stand-alone piece maybe a year before I began working on the rest of the project.

### Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

It’s always, for me, the same challenge: writing the sentences. My ear has to hear the music of the prose. I always wish it were easier. *The Florist's Daughter* had an added structural problem. All my previous memoirs involved travel, some kind of journey or even pilgrimage, that provided a narrative line. But my parents just stayed in Saint Paul. So it was a happy day, a lot of relief, when I came on the idea of pulling the entire book into the tight circuit of a single night, the night of my mother’s death.

### Q. What do you hope readers take away from this book?

My favorite moment is when a reader comes up to me and says something like, “Oh, I loved the part where you wrote about your grandmother’s Sunday dinners,” or something like that. I’ve come to know that’s the last I’ll hear about my grandmother, as the reader begins telling me about his/her grandmother’s Sunday dinners. That’s what I love – the feeling of having

transported the reader into his or her own life.

### Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I was one of those kids who loved to read and always wrote poems and stories. I can remember sitting at the kitchen table, asking my mother how to spell the hard words. I think most children, given the chance (and the TV turned off), love words and stories, and are natural writers. The real question is why some people stop and others keep at it. To that I have no answer.

### Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you’re not writing?

Reading, of course! I like the domestic arts too - gardening, cooking, and hanging out with my husband.

## ABOUT PATRICIA HAMPL:

Patricia Hampl and her husband live in Saint Paul. She is the author of four memoirs and two collections of poetry, and teaches at the University of Minnesota in the English Department’s MFA program. Hampl’s work has won many awards, and her fiction, poems, reviews, essays, and travel pieces have appeared in many publications including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Best American Short Stories*. Her books include:



*Blue Arabesque: A Search for the Sublime*, 2006  
*I Could Tell You Stories: Sojourns in the Land of Memory*, 1999  
*Virgin Time: In Search of the Contemplative Life*, 1992

For more information about the author and her work, visit [www.patriciahampl.com/](http://www.patriciahampl.com/).



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