

# That Went Well

## READING GROUP GUIDE

1. The weeping willow tree in the Harris' front yard got split in half by lightning the same week Irene was born. In what ways does the wounded tree mirror Irene, herself?
2. When Terrell's father paints a healing tar on the wounded trunk, he says, "It's still a pretty tree, even like this." How does this statement reflect his hope for things broken? How does his optimism affect his family, and his relationship with Irene?
3. Terrell learns to hide from her problems. Once Irene's situation comes to light, Terrell often seeks refuge and solitude outside, away from her house. Did this hurt her in her life, or help her grow?
4. Do you think Terrell was damaged or enriched by having Irene in her family? What about the rest of the Dougans? How do you think their reaction to Irene's problems was different than other families with a special needs child?
5. How did having Irene for a sister affect Terrell's relationships with friends, and especially boyfriends? Did it make it harder for her to feel she fit in at Stanford or in a sorority? How do siblings with special needs affect us in good ways or bad ways?
6. In working as a volunteer for the Arc, which advocated and began so many of the community programs for the mentally disabled, do you think Terrell gave up too much of a normal life?
7. How do you think parents feel about the role of brothers and sisters in relation to their special needs child? How did having Irene for a sister change Terrell's social interactions? How did it change the way people saw Terrell, especially throughout her childhood?
8. Do you think Terrell was overprotective of Irene? If so, do you think Terrell's overprotective treatment of Irene damaged her? Would Irene have blossomed even more without Terrell's ever-watchful hounding of group home staff? Or was this a good thing to do?
9. What do you think about the philosophy of "the least restrictive alternative" when assisting those with developmental disabilities in their efforts to live as full citizens in their own communities? Can it go too far, to their danger, or to the annoyance of the community?
10. Terrell's Uncle Bob made it possible for Irene to have a duplex to live in, but many disabled people live out their lives in homes if they do not have a living relative to advocate for them. Is this a failure of the system? Does the system do a good enough job in helping the disabled live rich, full lives?
11. Do you think mentally disabled people should be allowed to live on their own? How do nursing care facilities help the disabled? How do they hinder or even hurt those in their care?
12. Why do you think the firemen showed up at Irene's house? In what ways does her community embrace Irene? In what ways does she change her neighborhood for the better?

