

Discussion Questions

1. Marlena always wanted to please her dad. And yet she defiantly opposed him over and over. Why? Has there ever been this kind of push-pull tension in relationships in your life?
2. As a child, she seemed to be thrashing about under layers of confused identities. Was she more German, Paraguayan, or North American? How is this important in understanding her motivations?
3. Numerous temperament studies have shown that individual differences in temperament are apparent within the first few months of life and become dramatic by the latter half of the first year of life. What aspects of Marlena and her father's temperaments fueled the conflicts between them? Has temperament fueled any conflicts in your life?
4. Marlena's parents were living the American dream before they were abruptly called away from all of that a few months after she was born. The last time her mother was a stay-at-home mom was just a few months after Marlena was born. She was largely absent from the family after that, standing loyally at her husband's side as together they pioneered the leprosy work. How did these family system dynamics impact Marlena's early child development?
5. Although she was unaware of it, Marlena's father was beginning to lose his footing as the undisputed leader of the leprosy work at about the same time he disowned her as they stood on the veranda on that blisteringly hot and humid day in November of 1969. In what ways was this a pivotal moment in their relationship?
6. One of the themes in the book is the notion of sinfulness. How does Marlena's confusion about sin and sinfulness impact her life? How do you define sinfulness?
7. Did marrying Steve obliterate the old dance between Marlena and her father or did it merely put it on hold? Why did she return to Paraguay to marry Steve, rather than staying far away once she had "escaped?" And why did she and her new husband commit to building a house for her parents?
8. When Marlena's second marriage fell apart she became increasingly aware of how utterly she was failing at establishing an identity as a good wife and mother. At about the same time, she began to notice her father's physical and professional decline. They simultaneously entered a phase of increasing brokenness and vulnerability. Was this stage of brokenness essential for them to move toward a healthy relationship? Was there ever a time when brokenness marked the

- beginning of healing in your life? Or was it a time leading to greater conflict?
9. Did either Marlana or her father *willingly* enter into this stage of brokenness? Does it matter?
 10. Did either of them see at the time of their brokenness that it was actually an essential step toward their wholeness and healing? If so, when did they become aware of this?
 11. Besides their mutual brokenness, what factors helped Marlana and her father disengage from the destructive conflicts? What factors have helped you disengage from conflicts in your life?
 12. In the end, it seemingly became possible for Marlana to engage in an intimate relationship with a man from an increasingly secure and self-assured place. Why did it take so long for her to achieve this with Ed? Why did they fight so hard in the beginning of their relationship?
 13. What is the importance of “that skin thing” that she does with Ed? In what ways was it a part of her healing?
 14. Marlana and her father said the words “*Doa ess nuscht tweschen ons* – there’s nothing bad between us” each time they parted for the last fifteen years of his life. What, if any, is the significance of the repetitions?
 15. What parts of Marlana’s developmental journey can you relate to? Which ones are foreign to you? Why?