

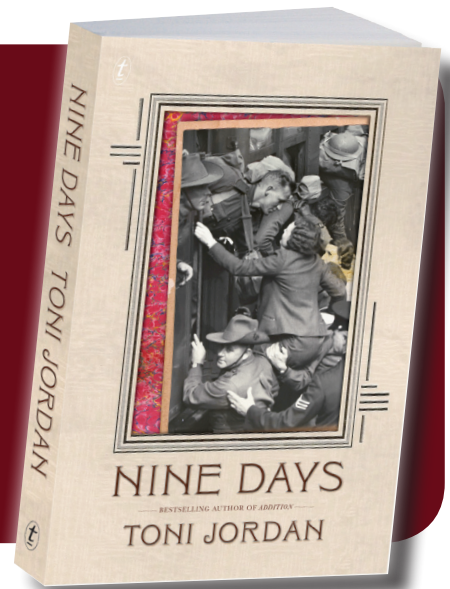
## Nine Days

Toni Jordan

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Fiction, Trade Paperback



### Praise for *Nine Days*

'Toni Jordan has written a beautiful novel which captures the loves and fears of an ordinary Australian family through hard times and better times. It reminded me of Elizabeth Stead's books.' *Australian Bookseller + Publisher*

### A reader's introduction to *Nine Days*

*Nine Days* is a sweeping saga that spans four generations of the Westaway family. Told in nine parts, each chapter tells of a day in the life of one of the family members — the most important day of their life, the day that everything changed for them.

We first meet Kip Westaway as a young stablehand in the inner-city suburb of Richmond, on the eve of World War II. Kip — twin brother of 'Saint' Francis, later the husband of Annabel and father to twins Stanzi and Charlotte — is the glue that holds the Westaway family together. His remarkable life, spanning eight decades, illustrates the dramatic changes that took place in Australia during the twentieth century.

Linking the stories of Kip's family are three heirlooms: an old shilling, an amethyst necklace and a black-and-white photograph of a WWII serviceman kissing his sweetheart goodbye at a train station. The couple in the photograph are Jack and Connie, Kip's sister. The story of their bittersweet love affair is the heart of this novel.

*Nine Days* is about the importance of family and of remembering the past. It's about the choices you make, and how one small decision can echo through generations. Mostly, though, it is about love.

Through nine unique voices, Toni Jordan reminds the reader that happiness can be fleeting, that love is a gift, and that every day in life counts. By turns funny, tragic and heart rending, *Nine Days* is a wonderful book-club read, filled with vivid characters, thought-provoking insights and interesting themes.

### About Toni Jordan

Toni Jordan was born in Brisbane. She has worked as a sales assistant, molecular biologist, quality control chemist and marketing manager. In 2006 she received a Varuna Awards master class for *Addition*. Toni now lives in Melbourne where she works as a freelance copywriter.

### Questions for discussion

1. *Nine Days* is a story about the moments and decisions that change your life. What are some of the life-altering decisions that the characters make? Do you think this is this a story about fate, or about the consequences of people's actions? Are they different things?
2. The key moments in the characters lives are set against the backdrop of turbulent moments in history: the start and end of World War II, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the weeks following September 11. Why do you think the author chose to set her novel against these events?
3. The shilling, the amethyst necklace and the photograph link the lives of four generations of the Westaway family. To what extent do you think it is the passing on of these heirlooms, rather than the objects themselves, that gives them meaning and importance? Does your family have any objects that hold special meaning?
4. Alec says of the older Westaways: 'Everyone knows who they are. They know every drop of blood in their veins. Where they've come from... Grandpa can track his blood. Uncle Frank's right: he's the lucky one.' (pg 213) Why do you think Alec feels this way? Do you think Kip and the other characters know who they are because of 'their blood', or for other reasons? Is knowing your family history an advantage in life?
5. Connie says that the 'secret to happiness is to be grateful' (pg 244). What do you think the other characters think the secret is? Are any of the characters truly happy?

6. Attitudes towards single mothers have changed dramatically since the 1940s, as the vastly different outcomes of Connie and Charlotte's unplanned pregnancies show. What caused such a dramatic shift in public opinion in only fifty years? Do you think abortion still carries the same social stigma that it did in the 1940s?

7. In what other ways does *Nine Days* show the changing attitudes of and towards women in Australia in the twentieth century?

8. Stanzi's analysis of her female clients is that their 'giddy assortment of suburban problems' boil down to the fact that they are angry that 'the world has not kept its side of the bargain' (pg 41). Do you agree with this assessment? Compare this feeling to the attitudes of Connie, Jean and Annabel.

9. Are the men in the pre-war period bound by society's rules as much as the women? What expectations does society have of Kip, Francis and Jack — and are they different from Alec's experiences as a young man in today's world?

10. Jean tells Connie: 'Some rules belong to Jesus and other rules belong to men who want to keep others in their place.' (Pg 184) What role does religion play in this story?

11. Kip and Francis are twins, but with very different characters. Do you think that the lives they lead are the result of their inherent personalities, the choices they make, or the parenting they receive? Can the same be said for Stanzi and Charlotte?

12. Discuss the significance of the amethyst pendant. Francis and Annabel's relationship ends when he takes the necklace back. Do you think this one action changes the course of his life more than the day he stole it?

13. Toni Jordan has said that the story of the Westaways came to her after seeing the photograph of the young couple kissing at the railway station. Does the story of Jack and Connie match your own impression of the photo?

14. There are two great romances in the novel, Kip and Annabel's and Connie and Jack's. But there are also many other examples of love. What are they, and in

what ways are they just as great as the romantic love the couples share?

15. There are some moments of very light — and uniquely Australian — humour throughout *Nine Days*. Which moments did you particularly enjoy or find amusing?

16. Do you think Jean has Connie's best interests at heart when she organises the abortion for her? What do you make of her feelings of resentment towards Kip? Discuss whether you think Jean is a good mother.

17. Do you feel a stronger affinity for one particular character than the others? Why?

18. How has setting the novel in the inner-city suburb of Richmond served to highlight the changes that Australia underwent in the twentieth century?

19. A number of characters in *Nine Days* make difficult sacrifices. What are some of these sacrifices and why are they made? Are they worth the result? What would you have done in the same circumstances?

20. The last line of the novel is Connie's feeling that 'everything will be all right' (pg 245). How do you feel at the end of the novel? Do you believe *Nine Days* is a story about hope, or does the tragedy overwhelm it?