



## Discussion Questions: ***Slow Waltz in Cedar Bend*** by Robert James Waller

Excerpted from Wolfner Library, Missouri Dynamcis Book Discussion Group

### **Author**

Robert James Waller is a versatile artist who grew up in the tiny midwestern town of Rockford, Iowa. He attended the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls as an undergraduate, then earned his doctorate at Indiana University. He went on to become a professor of management, economics, and applied mathematics at his alma mater, eventually serving as dean of the College of Business and publishing in numerous professional journals. In addition to these accomplishments, he was also an all-conference college basketball player and is a dedicated musician and vocalist, playing guitar and flute as well as writing and performing original songs. On top of all that, Waller is a world-traveled photographer.

### **Abstract**

Michael Tillman is a middle-aged college economics professor in Cedar Bend, Iowa. He is a romantic loner, dedicated to questioning society, academia, traveling, and the Shadow, a motorcycle he has kept running since he was 15. He first meets 40-year-old Jellie Braden during a reception at the dean's home. They discover a shared passion for India and are immediately attracted to each other, but she is married to one of Michael's colleagues. When Jellie unexpectedly returns to India, Michael follows, and learns the secret Jellie has hidden for years. Some descriptions of sex.

### **Preliminary Questions**

1. How many people enjoyed this book? How many of you are wondering why we chose this romance novel for a book discussion?
2. What are some similarities between the author and his fictional character Michael Tillman?
3. At the beginning of the novel, when Michael's first love Nadia leaves him, she says, "I'm beginning to think only children are raised to be alone." Do you think that is a valid statement, considering the only children you have known?
4. What other aspects of Michael's background made him a loner?

5. What did you think about Michael's campaign to save the ducks? Did you ever find yourself crusading for an unpopular or slightly-ridiculous cause?
6. Michael feels something akin to "love at first sight" when Jellie first walks into the faculty party. Did you ever feel that way? How did it work out?
7. Most people associate "love at first sight" with naïve teenagers, not middle-aged adults. Waller seems to be refuting that stereotype intentionally. Can you think of other stereotypes that the author debunks in this novel?
8. The novel paints a picture of academic life, with Michael as a professor and Jellie as a student. Does this make you nostalgic for your college days? Or if you have never experienced college life, does it make you wish you had?
9. Jellie traces her taste in men back to her great-great-grandmother Elsa, the radical feminist and proponent of free love. Do you trace any of your traits or habits back to your relatives? Did you "inherit" a sense of humor, a knack for fixing things, a tendency to worry, athletic ability, or something else?
10. When Michael describes India, from its smell of "smoke from factories, and open cooking fires, leaded gas, excrement from humans and animals" to the women in saris, the questionable transportation systems, and casual bribery of officials, do you get the feeling that he is at home there? Or at least more at home than he was as a college professor in Cedar Bend? Why?
11. Jellie eventually chooses Michael, the adventurous loner, and then India, over her husband Jimmy. She chooses to fulfill her personal needs at the expense of others'. Do you think this is justifiable? Would you make a different choice if you were her?
12. Do you think Michael and Jellie found a balance between the exciting life and the quiet life by the end of the novel?
13. When Jellie returns to Michael at the cabin in White Bear Canyon, she does not tell him that she is coming. Why not? Do you think that she was unsure about returning?
14. One of the novel's central concerns is love. What different kinds of love are explored in this story?
15. Other than love, what are the main themes explored in this novel?
16. Does everyone understand now why we chose this romance novel for a book discussion?