

# LIFE AND BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

The following abbreviated biography of Nicholas Sparks is provided so you may become more familiar with his life and the historical times that possibly influenced his writing. Read this section and recall it when reading Nicholas Sparks & Micah Sparks' *Three Weeks with My Brother*, thinking of any thematic relationship between Nicholas Sparks' work and his experiences.

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## Personal Background

Nicholas Sparks was born in 1965 in Omaha, Nebraska, the second of three children. His father, Patrick Michael (Mike), was a graduate student for much of Nicholas' early life, so the family lived in a number of college towns before settling in Fair Oaks, California, when Nicholas was eight. Nicholas' mother, Jill Emma Marie (Jill), worked as both a homemaker and optometrist's assistant. Nicholas, his older brother, Micah, and his younger sister, Danielle, were all born within a three-year period, and the closeness in age created a strong bond between them.

## Education and Work Experience

Nicholas excelled in high school, graduating as valedictorian of his class and earning notice as a middle-distance runner. He accepted a full athletic scholarship to Notre Dame but found himself hampered by an injury the summer after his freshman year. With time on his hands, Nicholas wrote his first novel, *The Passing*, which was never published.

Nicholas graduated *Magna Cum Laude* from Notre Dame in 1988 with a degree in business finance and then married his wife, Cathy, in 1989. Shortly after his wedding, his mother passed away at the age of 47 from a horseback riding accident. That same year, Nicholas wrote his second novel, *The Royal Murders*, which also remains unpublished. Over the next three years, Nicholas worked in a number of industries and experienced two bright spots: the birth of his son Miles and the chance to coauthor *Wokini*—a spiritual allegory that sold over 50,000 copies—with Olympic gold medalist Billy Mills. In 1992 and 1993, Nicholas experienced more change, more joy, and more tragedy. He moved his family to North Carolina, where his second son, Ryan, was born in 1993—but he also learned that his younger sister had developed cancer—an illness that would later claim her life.

## Early Published Works

At the age of 28, Nicholas decided to give his literary career a real chance. To that end, he spent the second half of 1994 writing a novel he called *The Notebook*, scheduling his writing time around his family. A year later, while living in Greenville, South Carolina, Nicholas was offered a contract by a young agent with no published novels to her name. Despite her inexperience, however, Theresa Park was able to not only sell the manuscript to Warner Books but also to secure a \$1 million advance, much to Nicholas' shock . . . and elation! Ms. Park also secured a sale of the film rights.

The next year brought a further mix of success and tragedy: Nicholas' father died in an automobile accident at the age of 54, just a month before Nicholas embarked on a 45-city tour to promote *The Notebook*. That novel eventually spent 55 weeks on the *New York Times* hardcover and paperback bestseller lists and was translated into 35 languages. In 1997, *The Notebook* was nominated for an ABBY (American Booksellers Book of the Year Award), but it did not win.

Nicholas has written 17 books and seen six of his novels made into movies. He lives in North Carolina, where he continues his prolific writing career and lives with his wife, Cathy, and their five children: Miles, Ryan, Landon, and twins Lexie and Savannah.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE MEMOIR

The following section is provided solely as an educational tool and is not meant to replace the experience of reading *Three Weeks with My Brother*. Read “A Brief Synopsis” to enhance your understanding of the work and to prepare yourself for the critical thinking that should take place whenever you read any work of fiction or nonfiction. Keep the List of Characters and Character Map at hand so you can refer to them as you read the original literary work—this will help refresh your memory if you encounter a character about whom you are uncertain.

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## **A Brief Synopsis of *Three Weeks with My Brother***

*Three Weeks with My Brother* is two stories in one. On the surface, it tells of a trip around the world that Nicholas Sparks takes with his brother Micah. *Three Weeks with My Brother* begins on the day that Nicholas Sparks receives the flier in the mail and ends with the brothers returning home. In between, Nicholas Sparks recounts the sights, sounds, and spectacles of various countries and continents, taking the reader on the journey with him. But *Three Weeks with My Brother* is more than just a travelogue. The text is the memoir of a successful author who seemingly is living the American Dream. Yet unbeknownst to most of his readers, he has also lived the American Tragedy. The story follows two brothers and their journey to becoming the best husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, and friends that they can be. *Three Weeks with My Brother* is a no-holds-barred memoir that shares the good, the bad, and the ugly that made Nicholas Sparks the man he is today.

## **List of Characters**

**Nicholas Sparks** Co-author and narrative voice of the memoir.

*Three Weeks with My Brother* is both the story of a trip he takes with his brother, Micah, as well as the story of his immediate family as he grows up, marries, and has children of his own.

**Micah Sparks** Co-author and Nicholas' older brother. He accompanies Nicholas on the trip around the world—the trip that sparks the memories and the assessment of their place in this world.

**Dana Sparks** Younger sister of Nicholas and Micah.

**Jill Emma Marie (Thoene) Sparks** Nicholas and Micah's mother.

**Patrick Michael Sparks** Nicholas and Micah's father.

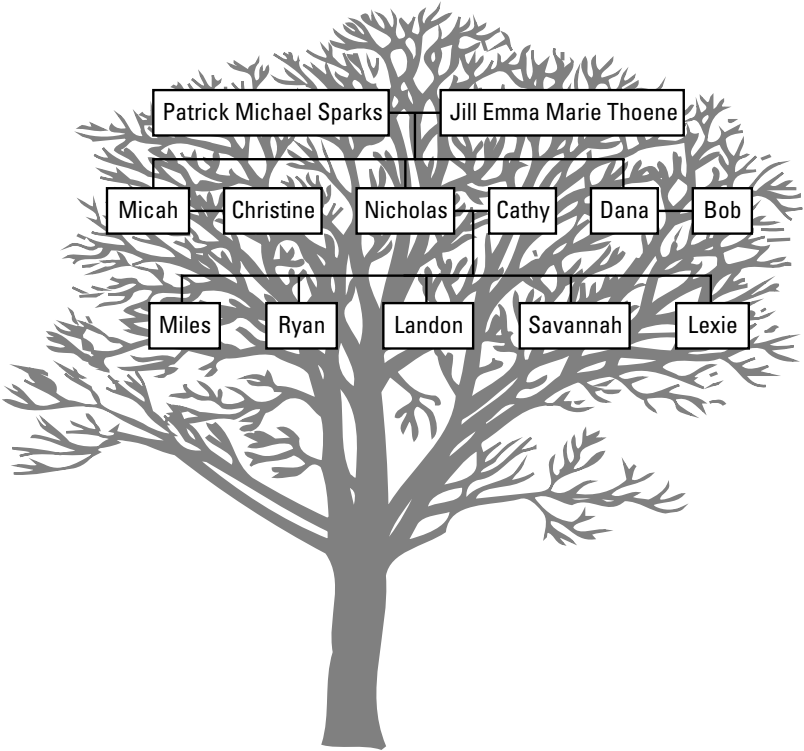
**Cathy (Cat) Sparks** Nicholas' wife.

**Christine Sparks** Micah's wife.

**Bob** Dana's husband and father to her twin sons.

**Miles, Ryan, Landon, Savannah, and Lexie Sparks**  
Nicholas' children.

## ***Three Weeks with My Brother*** **Character Map**





# CRITICAL COMMENTARIES

The sections that follow provide great tools for supplementing your reading of *Three Weeks with My Brother*. First, in order to enhance your understanding and enjoyment of the reading, we provide quick summaries in case you have difficulty when you read the original literary work. Each chapter summary is followed by commentary that points out and makes use of literary devices, character analyses, themes, and so on. Keep in mind that the interpretations here are solely those of the author of this study guide and should be used to jumpstart your thinking about the work. No single interpretation of a work like *Three Weeks with My Brother* is infallible or exhaustive, and you will likely find that you interpret portions of the work differently from the author of this study guide. Read the original work and determine your own interpretations, referring to these notes for supplemental meanings only.

# Prologue

## Summary

The Prologue opens with a single-sentence first paragraph that states the genesis of the memoir: a brochure that Nicholas Sparks receives in the mail in the spring of 2002. Nicholas describes a typical day in his household and how this particular brochure, which advertises a three-week trip around the world, piques his interest.

Although he has an interest in going, he knows that his wife Cathy is unable to take a trip at this time, and initially he puts the brochure away. The brochure is out of sight but not out of mind, and Nicholas shares the information with Cathy, who expresses interest but sees it as unrealistic. Two days later, Nicholas broaches the topic again, and this time, he suggests that he take the trip with his brother, Micah. After a moment of silence, Cathy states, “I think that would be a wonderful idea.”

That day, Nicholas calls his brother, Micah, who is interested but says that he must discuss it with his wife, Christine. Micah is enthusiastic about the trip and promises his little brother that this will be the “trip of our lives.”

### From Nicholas

**Micah receives a coauthor credit for this memoir, yet the voice is clearly yours. How involved was Micah in the authoring of this text?**

*Though the story is written in my voice, Micah was involved throughout the process. He wrote scenes that I edited, and he edited scenes that I wrote. We worked through the memories, trying to make them as accurate as possible. We spoke on the phone daily and shipped pages back and forth. Still, most of the final writing was mine for the reason that you mentioned: Both of us believed the memoir would work best if it came from a single voice.*

## Commentary



Even though the memoir is a joint effort between Nicholas and Micah Sparks, the Prologue establishes that Nicholas Sparks is the narrative voice of the text. From the onset, he establishes an informal, conversational tone.



There are specific characteristics of relationships that recur as a theme: the difficulty of living with an author, the uselessness of arguing, and the magic words that many women long to hear: “You’re right, sweetheart.” This tongue-in-cheek statement helps Nicholas demonstrate the nature of his relationship with his wife: He is comfortable enough with her to speak of sucking up when he really is not. He also uses *sweetheart* as a term of endearment. But Cathy responds to him sarcastically, stating, “You’re such a big help around here” after Nicholas proudly announces that he helped by getting the mail that day. The casual conversational tone helps make their relationship more accessible to the reader.



Nicholas Sparks also reveals that “my wife . . . knows me better than anyone.” This comment is telling as to the nature and status of their relationship. Cat understands the relationship between Nicholas and Micah, and, although the reader is currently unaware, she knows all they have been through and realizes that the idea to take the trip with his brother is an excellent idea for a variety of reasons. Cat’s comment also suggests that this book is less about traveling and more about brotherhood.

Nicholas recalls the time a stranger questioned whether Cathy and Nicholas were insane for having five kids, and rather than be offended by the comment, Nicholas continues to refer to this question of sanity throughout the chapter.



The Prologue primarily provides exposition—answers to the reporter questions *who*, *what*, *where*, *why*, *when*, and *how*—for the entire text. For example, readers know that the “three weeks” of the title refers to a trip around the world that Nicholas Sparks takes with his brother Micah in early 2003.



In addition to providing exposition, the Prologue also provides a bit of foreshadowing, because Cat mentions that she thinks the trip is ideal for Nicholas to share with his brother; one can guess that there must be a reason why they need this time to be with one another, though the specifics are not revealed until much later in the narrative.

The Prologue also demonstrates the normalcy of the Sparks' life. Nicholas and his wife have a normal, if occasionally hectic, routine, receive junk mail, and experience typical frustrations. Nicholas Sparks has a nickname for his wife, Cat (short for Cathy), and Micah still calls his brother by his name's diminutive, "Nicky." Sharing these intimacies creates an understanding between author and reader, resulting in a trust and immediacy that does not exist in most fiction. A part of this intimacy is the obvious use of a first-person narrator: Unlike the narrator of a novel, the persona in *Three Weeks with My Brother* is not the creation of a literary artist but rather the writer directly sharing personal experiences and feelings from his life.

The Prologue ends with an overview of the entire text, indicating that *Three Weeks with My Brother* is about a physical journey—their three week trip around the world—as well as the metaphorical journey of their lives that ends with Nicholas and Micah Sparks becoming “the best of friends.” This juxtaposition of journeys serves as an analogy for the Sparks brothers, who indeed are somewhat opposites themselves.

### From Nicholas

**You told *Catholic Digest* that *Three Weeks with My Brother* was your favorite among all of the books that you've written. Why?**

*I'm proud of the structure, style, texture, and emotional impact of the memoir, and I'm pleased that I was able to write a story about a normal childhood that kept the readers interested. There was a time in the publishing world when the only memoirs worth publishing, it seemed, were those written by celebrities or politicians, or those that chronicled childhood abuse. Although I suppose I am a celebrity of sorts, there's very little in the memoir about my being an author. It was included because it's part of who I am, but it wasn't what the story was about. This was a story about the importance of brotherhood; it was a memoir that was not only supposed to let others know about our family, but also to cause them to think—and remember—their own families and childhoods as well. I think this memoir does exactly what we set out to do.*

## Glossary

- strewn** scattered
- mayhem** a situation characterized by confusion and noise
- peruse** to look at closely
- Mayan** related to the culture of a tribe of Central American Indians having an advanced civilization in parts now known as Guatemala and British Honduras
- Incan** related to the culture of a tribe of South American Indians found in Peru during the Spanish conquest
- Polynesian Cook Islands** an archipelago (group of islands) southwest of Samoa near New Zealand
- Ayers Rock** a large sandstone rock formation in the southern part of the Northern Territory, central Australia
- Angkor Wat** a temple complex at Angkor, Cambodia, built for the king Suryavarman II in the early 12th century as his state temple and capital city
- Phnom Penh, Cambodia** capital city of Cambodia
- Taj Mahal** a beautiful mausoleum at Agra built by the Mogul emperor Shah Jahan (completed in 1649) in memory of his favorite wife
- Amber Fort of Jaipur** the ancient citadel of the ruling Kachhawa clan of Amber
- Lalibela, Ethiopia** a town in northern Ethiopia; one of Ethiopia's holiest cities and a center of pilgrimage for much of the country
- hypogeum** an underground, pre-Christian temple or a tomb
- Northern lights** the common name for a natural light display in the sky, particularly in the Polar Regions, caused by the collision of charged particles directed by the Earth's magnetic field
- Arctic Circle** line of latitude near but to the south of the North Pole; it marks the northernmost point at which the sun is visible on the northern winter solstice and the southernmost point at which the midnight sun can be seen on the northern summer solstice
- cacophony** disagreeable sound
- bunco** a parlor game played in teams with three dice

# Chapter 1

## Summary

“The rhythm method *doesn’t* work” is one lesson that Nicholas learned from his mother. Early on in Chapter 1, Nicholas Sparks wonders about his parents’ readiness for marriage, let alone their readiness for parenthood. He then recounts the history of his parents’ relationship. They met at Creighton University, and before they knew it, Patrick Michael Sparks and Jill Emma Marie Thoene married and had three children in three years (curiously, all three had December birthdays, and both Nicholas and his younger sister Dana were born on December 31).

His parents moved near Watertown, Minnesota, when his father enrolled in University of Minnesota master’s program. One of Nicholas’ earliest memories is of running away with his brother and sister when they were all under the age of four. The end of that anecdote includes the mention of a flyswatter, an object that holds memories all of its own.

The final story from the chapter is one of Micah running away from their father, not wanting to get swatted. Hours later, a dirty but swat-free Micah returns home and goes to bed.

### From Nicholas

**How important was the choice of photos used throughout the book? Who chose them? Do you have a particular favorite?**

*Micah and I poured through old photo albums, selecting close to 30 photographs that were sent in along with the manuscript. In the end, though, my editor, Jamie Raab, selected the photos that were finally included. Because of the style, structure, and voice of the story, she didn’t feel that it was necessary to include more. She thought it would weaken the narrative of the story, and both Micah and I understood her point. As for a favorite . . . no, I really don’t have one. Each of them brings back a specific memory. And memories are the only way that my sister and parents still remain a part of my life.*

## Commentary



Chapter 1 begins the second narrative thread of *Three Weeks with My Brother*: the story of the brothers growing up together in a number of different cities and a number of different situations, but always together and always looking out for one another.

Nicholas Sparks again uses humor, this time remembering his parents and his early upbringing. Joking that all three children were accidents not only enables Sparks to seem more relatable, but also it demonstrates that nothing in his family history is off limits. In addition to creating a personable tone, the humor makes the memoir an enjoyable read.



Although he questions her readiness for being a parent, Sparks paints a very compassionate picture of his mother, because she is essentially alone and isolated while raising three kids in cloth diapers for two very long years.



Micah began to learn responsibility—as Nicholas believes all people must. This thematic statement is important because it presents the idea that responsibility is not something that one just magically acquires when it is needed or when you turn a certain age. And from an early age, Micah Sparks had been given many opportunities to learn how to be responsible. One of the reasons the Sparks children developed responsibility was something their mother often told them: “It’s your job to take care of your brother and sister, no matter what.” This quotation not only establishes her expectation as a parent but also created a mindset that would follow the siblings throughout their lives.



Stylistically, Sparks uses both literal and figurative imagery. Not only does his writing enable readers to know what he did, but also it enables them to experience things that he experiences, even something as simple as the popping of a balloon.

Nothing in Chapter 1 relates to the trip at all, and this indicates that the trip only plays a part in this memoir—and perhaps not even the most important part.

## Glossary

**Balto** Siberian Husky sled dog who led his team on the final leg of the 1925 serum run to Nome, in which diphtheria antitoxin was transported from Anchorage, Alaska to Nenana, Alaska by train and then to Nome by dog sled to combat an outbreak of the disease

## Chapter 2

### Summary

A couple of days after Micah receives the brochure from his brother, he calls Nicholas, confirming that he is joining his brother; Micah is more excited about the trip than Nicholas.

When the boys' father is accepted into a doctorate program at USC, the family moved to Los Angeles. The narrative contrasts the boys' parents and their relationship with their children. The Sparkses were living below poverty level, but the children were unaware of the fact at the time. The boys learn important life lessons about living independently from living in the projects. Then they move to Playa del Rey. One important memory was of Blackie the raven, when Micah saved Nicholas from the bird's attack.

### Commentary

Christine's understanding of Micah's need to spend time with his brother alludes to difficult times that they endure together, but instead of exploring that, the narrative flashes back to their growing up in L.A.



The brothers' mom often told them, "What you want and what you get are usually two entirely different things." And this reality is something that the boys still understand today. Micah's saving Nicholas from the pecking of the raven is another example of Micah being a superhero for his younger brother and Nicholas wanting "more than anything to be just like him." His hero worship is grounded in reality because his experiences with his brother enable him to know what he longs to be.

The brothers need to establish the type of life that they lived together growing up in order for readers to understand why they need to take the trip around the world together. The purpose of this chapter is to establish the genesis of the brothers' complex relationship, as they grow from being brothers to being best friends.

## Chapter 3

### Summary

Chapter 3 opens with a return to the present narrative, as the brothers make necessary preparations for their trip. Micah is getting more and more excited about the trip, but Nicholas is seemingly more and more disinterested. Nicholas explains that his seeming disinterest is due to the guilt he feels about leaving his family for pleasure instead of a legitimate work-related reason. Micah and Cat want Nicholas to be eager to go, but he is ambivalent. The differences the brothers have in their approach toward this trip mirrors the differences they had during their school years.

Micah was often getting in trouble and being suspended from school, whereas Nicholas excelled at school. The boys began to excel in different areas. In Cub Scouts, Micah made the superior rocket and earned a second place ribbon. Nicholas earned an “honorable mention” ribbon, though neither boy read the ribbon correctly and mistakenly thought the word was “horrible.” Nicholas’ mother provided some comfort for him when he showed her the ribbon, but he was still left with a somewhat bitter pill to swallow.

His parents had unconventional parenting methods during the earthquake aftershocks and their after school childcare situation—and the Sparks children seldom received any medical attention, usually because it was too expensive. When Dana got sick with epiglottitis and had to go the emergency room, Micah and Nicholas were instructed to wait outside near the parking lot. And they waited there for hours, accepting neither food nor drink from anyone. When Micah fell from a tree and landed on his wrist, it began to turn black and blue. The brothers did not know if his wrist was broken or not, but they did not disobey their mother and did not leave the area in which they were told to stay.

### Commentary



The contrasting attitudes exhibited by the brothers as they prepare for their trip indicate their vastly different personality types.



Nicholas' analogy of streams, rapids, and waterfalls reveals that the past three years have been waterfallish for him, illustrating his perceived need to work harder and faster, in a frantic attempt to avoid being swept over the edge by an inescapable force, and his use of fragments emphasizes this fact: "Mentally. Physically. Emotionally." Structurally, these fragments represent the state of his well being.



Cat develops through Nicholas' eyes, and simultaneously, he develops through her eyes. And in contrast, Micah develops through his words and actions—calling Nicky, telling him "anticipation is the essential part of this whole trip," and then relating his attitude toward the trip to his attitude toward life. Their different priorities serve as a transition out of the present narrative and back to the story of their childhood.

The incident with the Cub Scouts wooden rockets illustrates the complex relationship the brothers had growing up, where Nicholas was both proud and jealous of his older brother. It also illustrates the dynamic between the two. Neither was able to read correctly, but Micah assumed the word was "horrible," and Nicholas naturally believed his older brother.

The image readers have of the Sparks parents also continues to be developed through their words and actions. Their mother consoles her son during his grief over the ribbon, and both parents display protective words and actions during the earthquake. His father also uses the natural phenomenon to impress his children with his powers—to stop earthquake aftershocks and rain—albeit for just brief periods of time.



The incident with Dana's hospital visit illustrates a number of things: first, it shows how poor the Sparks family was, only being able to seek medical attention in dire emergencies. It also shows the siblings' concern for one another. Finally, it shows their staunch obedience to their mother.

## Glossary

**Richter Scale** a logarithmic scale of 1 to 10 used to express the magnitude of an earthquake on the basis of the size of seismograph oscillations

**FEMA** the Federal Emergency Management Agency: an independent agency of the United States government that provides a single point of accountability for all federal emergency preparedness

## Chapter 4

### Summary

Chapter 4 opens with Nicholas second-guessing his ambivalence toward the trip, especially when everyone—his wife, his brother, his agent—favors his taking it. Nicholas contemplates his struggles with needing to keep busy. During the past three years, Micah has had his own struggles, particularly with his faith. Nicholas begins to view the trip as a means to rediscover who he was and how he developed the way he did.

Thinking again about his parents and comparing his parents' struggles and challenges to the ones he himself has now faced as a parent, Nicholas realizes that his parents must have faced immense daily pressures, both as parents and as spouses.

In 1972, the Sparks children began to recognize warning signs for their father's mood: DEFCON 1 was merely whistling. DEFCON 2 added mumbling to the whistling. The progression continued up to DEFCON 5, where his tongue was protruding from his mouth—the kids knew it was best to run and hide because the belt had replaced the flyswatter as the favored disciplinary tool.

#### From Nicholas

**Do you have any musical ability (singing and/or instruments)? Do your children?**

*None whatsoever. Music, in fact, is one of the great mysteries to me. I honestly have no idea how people can create music. It strikes me as something amazing because my mind simply doesn't work that way. A couple of my children, on the other hand, do have a bit of musical ability. Both my daughters sing and play the piano. It's wonderful to listen to them practice.*

Their mother defended her children but also ruled with an iron fist. And their father was not always so strict—he allowed them to watch horror movies, played his guitar for them, and would occasionally sing for them. During this time, their parents' marriage begins to suffer under the weight of parenting. While their father was finishing his dissertation, he was physically and emotionally absent; therefore, their parents began to fight.

One important memory Nicholas shares, however, is that his father always tucked them in at night, no matter what time he got home. Their parents' marriage difficulties led to the "only miracle" of their young lives: their father bringing home presents for them—these weren't toys for Christmas, their birthday, or someone else's birthday. Their miracle was the gift of two swords and a crown—toys that the children used and cherished. As their parents continued to fight, the siblings continued to seek comfort from each other.

#### **From Nicholas**

**You wrote about the decision you and your brother made to take care of your sister. Have you found that you both actually have a chivalric notion to take care of all of the women in your life?**

*I suppose a case can be made for this. We're both married, after all, and both of us love our wives. Both of us want happy marriages, and part of that is showing that you care for your spouses. At the same time, our wives also take care of us, so it's not as if it's a one way street. With my sister though, things were different. Because we had little growing up, because we moved so frequently when we were young, our mother continually stressed the importance of family to us. She reminded us constantly that friends will come and go, but siblings will always be family. By the time our sister needed our help, both Micah and I felt as if we had no other choice because it was the right thing to do. Because she was family. Because we loved her.*

## Commentary



Literary  
Device

Metaphorically, Nicholas places himself in one of three boxes—father, husband, writer—and these result in his being extremely busy fulfilling one of those three roles, but leaves him no time for other things. These roles keep him busy with activities and responsibilities, but he doesn't place himself in the role of brother, and this serves as another bit of foreshadowing about the impending bad news.

His parents' difficulties were part of the reason that the siblings grew so close. Dana becomes the princess that the brothers are sworn to protect.



Literary  
Device

In another bit of foreshadowing, Nicholas Sparks writes about their need to protect their sister, especially because she nearly died, and “in our imagination, we would never let it happen again.”



Style &  
Language

The use of the word *imagination* is significant because it refers to the games that the siblings are currently playing with their new toys. But it also refers to the adult Nicholas looking back, accepting the reality of his sister's death—which has not yet been revealed to readers.



Character  
Insight

The image of three children huddled and praying for peace in their family is a somber one because sometimes it seems they have their prayers answered and sometimes not. The siblings end up turning to each other in times of strife—which is exactly what their mother wants her children to do. But despite their fighting, which she undoubtedly wants to shield and protect her children from, she provides them with a means to survive in the world.

Minimal information is shared about the trip around the world, and when it is discussed, it is in the context of using the trip to recapture something that was lost and missing in the relationship of Nicholas and Micah. The trip becomes a means to an end, at least for Nicholas.

# Chapter 5

## Summary

Chapter 5 opens with the necessary, last-minute details of packing for a trip that will take the brothers from the southern hemisphere in the middle of the summer to the northern hemisphere in the middle of winter—all in one suitcase.

Nicholas is still attempting to muster enthusiasm for the trip and even packs his writing notebook, in case he has time to work on another uncompleted novel. Nicholas' flight has him arriving in Fort Lauderdale approximately 30 minutes prior to Micah's arrival, yet when Micah arrives, everyone knows that he is there. Micah's enthusiasm for the trip is in stark contrast to Nicholas' subdued interest. Micah asks his brother if he thinks he is depressed.

Nicholas begins to be influenced by the infectious nature of his brother's attitude. The Sparks brothers are two of 86 individuals taking the trip. At the social hour that evening, the brothers meet Jill Hannah, the trip doctor, who advises them not to eat any vegetables or salads, no matter "how nice the hotel is," and not to use tap water to brush their teeth.

The story of Nicholas and Micah's childhood continues with the family's move to Nebraska, or, more accurately, with the siblings and their mother's move to Nebraska. At the time, the children believed they were moving around the block from their maternal grandparents to allow their father time to complete his dissertation. In reality, although their father did complete his dissertation, their parents had separated.

In Grand Island, Nebraska, the physical differences between the brothers was becoming more apparent: Micah was "taller, stronger, and more athletic." Nicholas was becoming a tag-along "nuisance" instead of a brotherly companion. And Nicholas was once again jealous of his older brother. The brothers have their first fight. Nicholas feels sorry for himself and is unsure about his place in the family. His sister, Dana, offers to be his best friend if he and Micah are no longer best friends. Nicholas begins to spend more time with his sister as

Micah spends more time with his new friends. At this point, their mother creates a daily evening ritual where each child has to name three nice things that his or her sibling did for him or her that day.

Their grandparents' idea of medical treatment mirrored that of his mother's: when Micah was cut in the forehead by a shingle cutter, he got bandaged up and told to keep working. The attitude was "good thing there was a garden hose."

Out of the blue, during the next school year, their mother announced that they were moving back to California. Their father had taken a position at California State University at Sacramento, and unbeknownst to the siblings, their parents had reconciled.

## Commentary



Style & Language

From now on, the chapters have subheadings, identifying the location and dates of the three week itinerary. This serves as a means of allowing readers to follow the brothers' itinerary and keep up with the days and places more easily.



Theme

Micah directly states an important theme regarding how to live one's life when he tells his brother, "You choose the kind of life you want to live." Not only does this put the responsibility for choices in the hands of the individual, but also it serves as another bit of foreshadowing for the growing up narrative.

### From Nicholas

**Have you embraced Micah's philosophy of "choosing the kind of life you live"? If so, has it changed much since the writing of *Three Weeks with My Brother*?**

*I changed for a while, but human nature is hard to change. The years from 2008 to 2010 were exceptionally busy for me: we built a home, I was coaching track, I wrote screenplays and novels, I promoted three movies, I had extensive foreign tours . . . I was at least as busy as I was when I originally took the trip with Micah. With that said, I'm more aware of the importance of "choosing the kind of life I live." The lesson, and the importance of that statement, still ring true, and I try to remind myself of them daily. Like everyone else in the world, I'm a work in progress.*



Style &  
Language

The degree of closeness that the brothers currently have serves as a transition from the current narrative thread to the one of the brothers growing up because they were not always so close.



Character  
Insight

Bits and pieces of important information about their mother is often identified in one chapter and then further illustrated or expanded in later chapters. Here, readers learn that if the truth would hurt her children, Jill would keep it from them. The fight between brothers demonstrates Nicholas' typical pre-adolescent and middle child difficulties, with his confusion about love, individuality, and his role in the family.



Theme

Their mother's concern for her children is most apparent when she forces them to name three nice things about each other. Her lesson is succinctly summed up in her own words: "Friends come and go, but brothers and sisters always stick together."



Style &  
Language

The end of the chapter, a single-sentence paragraph, captures both the end of this brief sojourn as well as the end of the chapter. At this time in their lives, the brothers' relationship experienced some of the typical growing pains, but thanks to their mother's machinations, they learned to appreciate one another. Jill fostered in them a sense of love and respect that continued with them into adulthood.

## Glossary

**topography** the configuration of a surface and the relations among its man-made and natural features

**epiphany** a sudden realization or comprehension of the (larger) essence or meaning of something

**Spitfires** a British single-seat fighter aircraft used by the Royal Air Force and many other Allied countries through the Second World War

**Japanese Zeros** a long-range fighter aircraft operated by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service from 1940-45

**elusive** hard to express or define

## Chapter 6

### Summary

The first stop on the world tour is in Guatemala. Nicholas shares his knowledge of Mayan civilization from his youth. As the tour progresses toward Yaxhá, the brothers are confused as to what they are supposed to be seeing, until they learn that the jungle literally swallowed the abandoned city. They are shocked to learn that the city was overcome by the jungle not once but twice—80 years ago, sections of the city were restored. Micah is incredulous: just six hours removed from Fort Lauderdale and bagels with cream cheese, the Sparks brothers are literally in a whole new world. Micah and Nicholas are the first two who are able to climb to the top of a temple. Nicholas calls Cathy from his satellite phone to share his excitement and she shares his enthusiasm.

That night a number of the tourists fail to heed the warnings of the physician and eat vegetables; some remain sick for the remainder of the trip.

#### From Nicholas

**How much of the knowledge that you share regarding the ancient civilizations did you know from your own reading and studies prior to the trip? Did you learn most of it during the trip? Did you conduct additional research as you were writing the memoir?**

*I knew quite a bit before I visited the sites: they had been, after all, of interest to me since I was a young child. With that said, I certainly wasn't an expert in any of them. Both Micah and I took extensive notes on everything we learned (as well as notes on the conversations we had). On the trip, we were also given packets of information that we kept as well. By the time we were ready to start the book, some of the specifics had faded, of course. Rather than using new sources, we relied on what we had saved.*

Micah wants his picture taken on the sacrificial stones, which is considered disrespectful by the local tour guide and the local culture. The tour organizers realize that the Sparks brothers may be trouble-makers on the tour.

The brothers discuss their wives and their lives and remember their parents. Nicholas admits that he received his love of learning from his father, and the narrative returns to the past.

In Fair Oaks, California, a suburb of Sacramento, the family rented a new house, Dana got her own room, and the family got a dog—a Doberman pinscher named Brandy. Though their parents had reunited, “they continued to lead largely separate lives.” Yet this lifestyle seemed to work for them, and for the next four years, Micah and Dana flourished with new friends, whereas Nicholas experienced a slew of bad luck. The closest friends that Nicholas developed each year either moved, changed schools, or ended up not being in any of his classes the following year. So Nicholas began to read enthusiastically. He went through both the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the Bible.

Nicholas’ nose was not always in a book; he also spent time with Micah and their friends playing with their BB guns. Unlike most boys, though, the Sparks brothers shot at each other. One time when playing, Micah cut his ankle, and even though he was bleeding quite profusely, their mother merely put a Band-Aid on it, told Micah to hold it for a while, and counseled him to rest a bit before returning outside to play.

Although their lives were sometimes hectic, their mother always made sure the children attended Mass every Sunday. Dana was the most devout of the siblings, but she also was the tardiest and was often the reason the family arrived late.

Dana did not appreciate the occasional wildness in playing, as her brothers did. But one time, when visiting the Grand Canyon, Dana not only suggested the boys and she slip behind the viewing rope but also had the grand idea to stand on a ledge and pretend to have slipped, pretending to be in danger. Although their mother loved the stunt, the park ranger made the family leave the area immediately.

The final story involving the BB guns was how the sheriff confiscated them. He first took Micah’s because of a game Micah was playing with first graders, shooting their pants. Then he took Nicholas’ after Micah used it to shoot holes in neighbors’ windows.

## Commentary



This chapter is the first one to be split almost equally between the two narrative threads. The two narrative threads will continue, distinct yet related, until they merge with the arrival of the brochure advertising the trip.



One of the most important aspects of Nicholas' character is exposed when Nicholas states that his place in the world seems precarious based on the rise and fall of civilizations. He realizes that his life is just one small part of the entire universe.

The similarities and differences between Micah and Nicholas are evident as they begin the tour. First of all, they both married women similar to their mother—"smart women with big hearts, who adore their children unequivocally."



Talking about their wives and then remembering their parents serve as a seamless transition to the past and second narrative thread of *Three Weeks with My Brother*.



An interesting thematic statement is mentioned when talking about the aspirations his mother had, namely that "dreams are always crushing when they don't come true." This not only pertains to their mother and her desire for horses but also to all the personal hopes and dreams that all the members of the Sparks family have and share. *Three Weeks with My Brother* is about individual hopes and dreams as well as the response you have when it appears that dreams cannot or will not come true.

## Glossary

**conquistadores** Spanish adventurers, especially those who led the conquest of Mexico and Peru

**Petén** a department (region) of the nation of Guatemala. It is geographically the northernmost department of Guatemala, as well as the largest in size

**UNESCO** the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization; an agency of the United Nations that promotes education and communication and the arts

# Chapter 7

## Summary

This chapter opens in Lima, Peru, the second stop on the tour, where the weather is very hot. They visit Casa Aliaga, a house that is an example of early Spanish architecture and the name of the 400-year-old home for the Aliaga family. The estate is also home to an incredible art collection.

That night is the Superbowl. Many on the tour watch the game via satellite television, but the commentary is in Spanish. The bar shows the Superbowl instead of a soccer game. Micah's team, the Oakland Raiders, is losing to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, and at half-time Nicholas tells his brother he has to have faith, which leads to a conversation regarding Micah's religious faith.

Because Oakland is getting blown out, the brothers leave the bar during the second half. After working out at the hotel gym, they return to their room, and their conversation about Micah's incessant desire to have a good time transitions the story from the trip to their growing up.

Their parents gave them bows and arrows after their BB guns were confiscated. They had an incident with some construction workers, and the sheriff confiscated their bows and arrows as well. Nicholas then recounted visiting relatives in San Diego. The Sparks children were a destructive force, often breaking their cousins' toys. Their relatives were often glad to see them leave.

One time, the siblings witnessed a dog getting killed by a car traveling at 60 miles per hour—this story ends the chapter on a serious note.

## Commentary



Nicholas' reflections on Pizarro demonstrate his ability to analyze historical portraits and not just accept the version told by the winners. This perspective illustrates his inquisitive and intellectual nature. It also demonstrates his sense of history and respect for that which has come before them.

The power of persuasion is illustrated when the locals give up watching a soccer game for the group of tourists who favor watching the Superbowl. This demonstrates the economic power that the tourists have as well as the clout the tour employees had—or, at least, they understood local culture enough to manipulate the situation.

### From Nicholas

**Most of your chapters end on a somber note—even if you and your siblings are together, you've just watched a dog get killed or someone else dies. Structurally, how did you make the decision to end most of the chapters this way? Was this thematically important? Important for character development? For pacing?**

*Structurally, the memoir was unlike anything I'd ever read. It was a story of life that essentially began and ended at exactly the same point in time: on the day I received the brochure in the mail. To write a memoir—or a novel—in that way presented certain challenges and at the same time, I wanted to write a story (albeit a true one) that was interesting to the readers. I wanted to write a memoir that evoked the entire realm of human emotion, if only because that's a reflection of life itself. In childhood, we laughed and cried. In our teens, we laughed and cried. As adults, we laughed and cried. And in between, we were always trying to make sense of things. In this, we're not unique. We're pretty much like everyone else, and by remaining aware of these simple truths while actually writing, each chapter also became "a little life of its own." As much, each chapter had to evoke emotion appropriate to what was being described. It sounds more scientific and thought-out than it actually was at the time. I am, for the most part, an instinctive writer. I write and edit until something feels "right." Then, and only then, am I willing to move on.*



When the conversation transitions to faith, an important thematic topic of *Three Weeks with My Brother* is introduced. Obviously, faith in Micah's team is only the catalyst that brings about the brothers' talk about their religious lives and beliefs as well as the role that faith has in helping them handle difficult situations. It is interesting that the discussion is taking place in the present narrative thread yet the need for faith will be most prominently illustrated in the other thread. This juxtaposition is one of the many things connecting the two narrative strands.



The brothers also have divergent views on the power of prayer: Micah's turning away from prayer because "bad things happen anyway" is another bit of foreshadowing; it is also in stark contrast to Nicholas' realization that he has been "depending on prayer for as long as he'd been avoiding it." This difference is clearly another one between the two brothers and serves as a means of illustrating how different people respond to the same type of stresses and difficulties in their lives.



In the midst of all the stress and difficulties, Nicholas is able to keep a light tone, which prevents the narrative from becoming too dark. For example, his use of onomatopoeia—*snap*—is not only the best way to demonstrate what happened to their cousins' toys but also keeps the tone light because it presents the information in a humorous and relatable manner.



How the siblings dealt with the death of Sparky, the dog, by themselves is indicative of how they learned to lean on one another during times of struggles and strife. Although their contemplation of "why terrible things happen" deals specifically with this incident, it is a recurring theme throughout *Three Weeks with My Brother*.

## Chapter 8

### Summary

Chapter 8 takes place in Cuzco and Machu Picchu, Peru. Cuzco is the “oldest permanent settlement in the Western Hemisphere.” The brothers are becoming friends with fellow tour mates Bob and Kate Devlin, who have been married for 41 years. Their lengthy marriage becomes the subject of the brothers’ conversation regarding a successful marriage. Nicholas thinks that commitment is the source of a successful marriage, whereas Micah thinks it is communication. Nicholas prefers actions over words.

In the cathedral of Cuzco, which is larger than St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City, Micah fixates on seeing the painting of Jesus eating a guinea pig. The brothers visit many museums and view a lot of boring pottery, but they do find the bones quite interesting.

The trip to Machu Picchu as well as the ruined city itself are breathtaking—so much so that it is Nicholas’ “favorite stop on the entire journey.” That night, both brothers taste guinea pig. Micah calls this action “the latest in a long line of stupid things that we’ve done,” and the narrative shifts back to their growing up.

The boys continued to grow up and, to some extent, grow apart. They were doing similar things, but not together. Nicholas continued to read; Micah continued to get in trouble. Dana, who was not a good student, gets horseback riding lessons. Nicholas’ perception was that he gets nothing: For Christmas that year, Nicholas received a shiny but used bike, whereas both Micah and Dana received new bikes. His mother posted Nicholas’ grade card on the refrigerator but only for one evening because “It hurts the other kids’ feelings.” Looking back, the adult Nicholas is able to see the insecurities that his siblings had, even though that was not apparent at the time.

Jill had three basic statements about life, which she often used in a variety of sequences when arguing:

1. It is your life, usually with some added social commentary.
2. What you want and what you get are usually two entirely different things.
3. No one ever said that life was fair.

Although Nicholas hated having these conversations, because he failed to win the arguments, he respected his mother's experience and grew to internalize her philosophy.

## Commentary

The topic of marriage is an important component of *Three Weeks with My Brother*—the brothers examine their parents' marriage as well as their own marriages.



Details about their spouses as well as their comments about what is the secret for a successful marriage indicate the respect the brothers have for the institution. Any marriage that has both commitment and communication will be a success, so both brothers are correct in their assessment. Even though their parents' marriage and parenting style may not be considered conventional, it worked for their family, and the brothers both acknowledge and respect that.

The beauty of what the brothers see and experience on their trip is important because it is living up to Nicholas' expectations from what was advertised in the brochure. And readers who have not had a chance themselves to take such a trip are able to live vicariously through Nicholas' finely detailed recollection. In addition to visiting the places, Nicholas and Micah made time to *experience* the sites they were visiting. Rather than just continue with the tours and the non-stop looking, they made the time to be alone at sites. This enabled them to learn and feel a sense of history and place.

Nicholas' allusion to *Sophie's Choice* is an adult way of explaining the feelings the young Nicholas had. *Sophie's Choice* is about an impossible choice that a parent had to make between her children. In this intense comparison, Nicholas feels that he would have been the one to be sacrificed.



In a seemingly throw-away line, Nicholas suggests that perhaps he should try another sport instead of football; this foreshadows a major part of Nicholas' life because he becomes a very successful runner.

## Glossary

**palatable** agreeable

**surreptitiously** acquired through improper means

**Urubamba Valley** the Sacred Valley of the Incas in the Andes of Peru

**Hiram Bingham** an academic, explorer, treasure hunter and politician from the United States who made public the existence of the Quechua citadel of Machu Picchu in 1911

**marauder** someone who attacks in search of booty

**Yosemite** a national park spanning eastern portions of Tuolumne, Mariposa and Madera counties in east central California, United States

**Half Dome** a granite dome in Yosemite National Park

# Chapter 9

## Summary

After Machu Picchu, the tour travels to Easter Island, “the remotest inhabited island in the world,” which is over 2,000 miles from Chile. The first thing Nicolas Sparks notices about the island is the lack of trees. This is partly due to the using of trees to transport the Moai statues; mostly, though, it was the combination of overuse and overcrowding. Imported trees were diseased, so instead of helping the situation, the problem was exacerbated.

Watching the sunset, Micah informs his brother that Nicholas is too stressed and needs to spend time with guy friends. In return, Nicholas quotes scripture, First Corinthians, Chapter 10, to support his view that God did not abandon the brothers in their time of need. Nicholas tells his brother that he should not abandon God.

For Nicholas, viewing the statues becomes similar to viewing the pottery—that is, a little repetitive—but how the statues were transported from the volcano quarry to their current location fascinates him. While enjoying the view, the brothers also enjoy the memories of their lives together growing up and having fun, although, at this point in their youth, they continue to grow apart.

Because they have the same birthday, Dana began a tradition of singing “Happy Birthday” to Nicholas, and he sang it back to her. Dana shared a wish that when she grows up, all she wants is to be married, have kids, and own horses.

The family soon moved into the only house Jill and Patrick ever owned. During the move, they broke their Volkswagen van, but at least all the siblings had their own rooms. The chapter ends with two food-related memories. The first was when their father became a chef and served burnt beans for dinner; the second was their obsession with food in general and their father’s Oreos specifically. When his children would eat his hidden stash of Oreos, Patrick would refer to them as “G-D-N VULTURES!”

## Commentary



Micah's comment that "relationships are the most important thing in life" captures the essence of *Three Weeks with My Brother*. The memoir is about the relationships between parents and their children, between siblings, between spouses, and between individuals and God.



*Three Weeks with My Brother* is also about the function of family and memory. Although the brothers are able to draw "comfort from the other's voice," they are not always together. When they are apart, they draw strength from their memories. One of the memories they share is what they had and did not have growing up. Material possessions were often few and far between. Extra food, when it was available, was devoured. Christmas presents began to be of a practical nature—specifically, tools.



Micah was able to turn every situation to his advantage—for example, using the tools to sneak out of the house. Although they did not have luxuries, what the siblings did have was one another. Even as they developed their own personalities and friendships, they developed a close-knit bond with their mother's guidance. At this point, Nicholas and Dana were closer than Nicholas was with Micah.



Both food-related stories in the chapter are humorous and illustrate that the family was not starving, but when they were growing up, there was not often a lot to spare. Therefore, the siblings enjoyed time at friends' houses or raiding their father's hidden stash of cookies.

## Glossary

**Moai** monolithic human figures carved from rock on the Polynesian island of Easter Island, Chile between the years 1250 and 1500

**La Niña** a sustained sea-surface temperature anomaly of magnitude greater than 0.5°C across the central tropical Pacific Ocean, producing predictable variations in local and regional weather patterns

**gulag** a Soviet prison camp for political prisoners

# Chapter 10

## Summary

After visiting Easter Island, the tour continues to Rarotonga, on the Cook Islands, in the South Pacific. There the brothers have the day to themselves, with the tour scheduled to leave for Australia the following morning. The Cook Islands are known for their black pearls, and Nicholas and Micah purchase some for their wives. They explore the island on motor scooters, and Nicholas does not even think of work—for the first time in years he feels as if he were actually on a vacation.

The brothers share memories of watching scary movies with their father, something they would not do with their kids even though they are at similar ages. After snorkeling, they plan on a pub crawl, but their afternoon nap turns into sleeping through the night.

The narrative transitions back to high school memories. At this time Micah was threatened with military school for marijuana possession and a pierced ear. Nicholas and Micah grew closer, not just as brothers but as friends. During their adolescence, their father had three rules: A. Do not drink and drive. B. Do not get a girl pregnant. C. Be in by your curfew.

### From Nicholas

**Your father had three ironclad rules. Do you have similar rules for your children? What other aspects of your raising children can you attribute directly from your father?**

*Yes, and the rules for my children are exactly the same. I found them reasonable as a teenager, and I find them reasonable as an adult. My oldest sons abide by them, as will my younger children when the time comes.*

*My dad, like me, was always a learner. He read constantly, and I've certainly turned into much the same kind of person. My dad was also kind and patient. Yes, he had struggles, but then again, I've had struggles, too. And through it all, he remained my dad, a man that I admired.*

As Micah got wilder and wilder, Nicholas began competing in track and field. Harold, an older runner, served as a mentor and encouraged Nicholas. Nicholas spent the summer training, and at the end of the summer, he convinced Micah to join the cross country team in the fall. Even though he had an outstanding year, his sophomore year was even better. For the first time in his life, Nicholas was better than Micah at something. Nicholas started to read, taking up the classics as well as Stephen King, and he had a very scheduled life between work, running, school, and having a girlfriend.

Micah articulated that he wanted to be a millionaire by age 35. Nicholas made his goal five years earlier. A part of Nicholas envied his brother, specifically Micah's ability to "*live*, without having to *achieve*." In hindsight, Nicholas realizes that he was pursuing goals for the sake of attaining them but had little joy attempting to achieve them. Nicholas did become class valedictorian—another goal to cross off his list.

#### From Nicholas

**You mention Stephen King a couple of times in your memoir. What effect has his style had on your writing? Do you have an all-time favorite Stephen King book?**

*Stephen King is one of the great writers of the 20th century. The scope and breadth and quality of his work is staggering; this is a man who's written everything from award-winning short stories, to novels, to screenplays and teleplays, to standard novels and epic novels. No other writer in history has shown the range and ability of Stephen King.*

*Yet, what I learned from him most was simply this: never lose sight of the fact that you're telling a story that should interest the reader. Language is important, style is important, length and character development are important . . . but tell a story that keeps the reader wanting more. Though I work in a different genre, I try to do exactly the same thing. As far as a favorite novel, I've read them all. And every short story. And every novella. It would be impossible to pick just one.*

Dana has her own insecurities at this time. She is concerned about her looks and feels inferior compared to her brothers. She is also worried about not being asked to the prom, but both brothers, independently of each other, ask their sister to attend.

## Commentary

This chapter is important because it demonstrates how the friendship that is quite evident in the present-day trip narrative was formed and developed. At this time in their lives, the brothers are not only becoming adults, they are becoming friends.



The chapter is also important because much of it focuses on their father. Up to this point, Patrick has been pretty much an enigma to readers as well as to the children. But as adults looking back, they recognize the things their father did and did not do, and appreciate the way he raised them. He was a good listener, which was a way to help the brothers work their way through their own issues, problems, and concerns. Their father's ironclad rules not only worked for them growing up, they were the only rules that Micah actually seemed to follow.

## Glossary

**Captain Bligh** a British admiral who captained the *H.M.S. Bounty* in 1789 when part of the crew mutinied and set him afloat in an open boat

**draconian** very severe, oppressive or strict

# Chapter 11

## Summary

After the Cook Islands, the trip continues to Ayers Rock, in the middle of the Australian outback. Ayers Rock is “the largest monolith . . . in the world.” Initially, at dawn, the brothers are unimpressed with the rock, but at the right moment under the right conditions, the rock appears to start glowing and is quite the spectacle.

They enjoy a hot helicopter ride but not so much the lectures on Aboriginal history. The evening in Australia is exciting as they see stars that are completely foreign to their eyes. Relaxing on the bus back to the hotel, Nicholas is reminded of his first year at Notre Dame.

A strained Achilles tendon mixed in with being far away from home, missing his girlfriend Lisa, and not being the smartest student at school, made for a rough year for Nicholas. He ran a little in the spring, enough to be a part of the school record relay team, but he hobbled most of the summer. One day, while he was pouting, his mother encouraged him to “write a book.” So Nicholas wrote his first novel, which, by his own admission, was not very good. The death of the family dog, Brandy, was the first of many tragedies to strike the Sparks brothers.

During Nicholas’ sophomore year at Notre Dame, his mother got a horse, Chinook, which was soon followed by another one, Napoleon. Horseback riding became a means for his parents to reconnect—with the children out of the house, his mother began to mention divorce more and more often.

For the last spring break of Nicholas’ college career, he and friends traveled to Sanibel Island. There he met Cathy. On that spring break he told her, “You and I are going to get married one day,” a statement that proved to be correct. What he did not know was what he wanted to do after his college graduation. Nicholas did not get accepted to law schools. He began to wait tables during the day and wrote at night, completing a second novel. Soon after, he became an apprentice real

estate appraiser by day while waiting tables and still writing at night. Soon he saved up enough money to purchase an engagement ring, and after Cathy agreed to marry him, he asked Micah to be his best man at the wedding.

## Commentary



### Theme

Patrick Sparks comments on dreams in this chapter, and his words have great thematic significance. Even though Nicholas' dreams did not work out the way he planned, his father was proud of him, stating, "Too many people never really try." This indicates the importance of taking the initiative to try something, regardless of the outcome. Those who attempt to make a dream come true will not live a life of "what if?" and "if only."

Even though Micah had moved out of his parents' house and was living on his own, the brothers were still quite close. When Nicholas returned home from school, Micah, it seems, was always there. And even though the siblings were now adults, their mother was still taking care of them, hiding the truth about Brandy's death, to make it easier for her children to handle the loss.



### Character Insight

This chapter also introduces Cathy, who, along with Micah, becomes one of the two most important relationships of Nicholas' adult life. This chapter serves as a transition into Micah and Nicholas' adulthood. They are finding their place in the world, and through all of the changes, they still turn to each other, in good times and bad. This is something that has not changed.



### Style & Language

The chapter ends in typical Sparks fashion—a juxtaposition of the good with the bad. He mentions asking Micah to be the best man at his wedding because he wants his brother to continue to be "by my side," but the sentence and the chapter close with the ominous foreshadowing of "no matter where the future took us." Initially, this may be read as a positive, cheery statement, but astute readers who pick up on the clues from the trip narrative will realize that Micah continues to be by his brother's side, but through a series of extremely difficult times.

## Chapter 12

### Summary

Chapter 12 takes place in Cambodia—the most disturbing spot on the tour, with Nicholas and Micah both feeling “out of place” in Phnom Penh. They visit Angkor Wat, whose “City Temple” is the “largest religious monument in existence.” The language difficulty is most apparent in Cambodia, and although the temples are impressive, the brothers soon tire of the lectures and ask if they can climb the temple ruins on their own. At this point, both brothers are missing their wives and kids.

The narrative then shifts back to Nicholas’ wedding. He and Cat were married in New Hampshire, took a honeymoon to Hawaii, and settled down in Sacramento. Six short weeks after their wedding, at a family barbeque, Nicholas kissed his mother goodnight, and that was the last time she spoke to him. The next day, when she and Patrick were out horseback riding, Chinook stumbled. Jill ended up rupturing her spleen and suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. She was 47 years old when she died.

### Commentary



Artistically, the form of the chapter mirrors the feelings of the characters. There is a juxtaposition between the old and new narratives—the out of place feeling in Cambodia paralleling the feelings of inadequacy and loss at the hospital when Jill died. The trip around the world is supposed to be wonderful—just like the embarking of a newly married life—but the painful poverty of Phnom Penh mirrors the sense of loss the brothers feel at the death of their mom.

Even though organs from their mother’s body would “go on to save the lives of three people,” that information proves to be little solace in their time of grief. Jill’s death is a significant event in the history narrative because it is the beginning of a series of losses and disappointments that rock the world of the Sparks brothers.

## Chapter 13

### Summary

Chapter 13 is a return to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where the brothers visited the Holocaust Museum and the Killing Fields. They demonstrate obvious apprehension regarding “events people want to forget despite knowing that they never should.” The museum and the Killing Fields are both very difficult to tour.

Then they travel to a Russian Market for “frivolous shopping.” The day leaves Micah thinking about his mother and his regret that he was not able to say goodbye. Nicholas tells his brother that he misses her, too.

In the past narrative, the brothers see signs of their mother everywhere, even though she is gone. Nicholas struggles to settle into marriage and take care of his father. Micah becomes their father’s confidant, and Cat becomes his buddy, but Nicholas became an outlet for his father’s grief.

Nicholas has a struggling business manufacturing orthopedic wrist braces. Soon, he and Cat suffer another loss: the loss of an unborn child. Like Jill, the baby dies “for no apparent reason at all.”

Nicholas was now experiencing the normal stresses of life. He was working multiple jobs and writing a book with Billy Mills. After the birth of a son, Nicholas took a job as a pharmaceutical rep. By 1992 everyone in the family had moved on from their mother’s death as best they could, and Nicholas and Cat decided to move east. Nicholas offered Micah a chance to take his position with the pharmaceutical company.

Out of the blue, Bob, Dana’s boyfriend, called, and said that Dana had had some sort of seizure and was in the hospital. Nicholas was torn between leaving his sister and starting a new life in North Carolina with his family. Micah convinced his brother to move, because Nicholas had his own family to take care of now.

The chapter closes with the image of a teary-eyed Nicholas waving goodbye to his similarly teary-eyed brother: Nicholas is driving away as Micah’s image grows smaller in the rearview mirror.

## Commentary

This chapter is about loss. The tour of the Holocaust Museum and the Killing Fields represents one of the worst—if not the worst—stop on the trip. The gamut of losses that make up life are covered in this chapter—dealing with the loss of a parent, enduring the pain of the loss of an unborn child, handling unexpected sickness in a family, and addressing the difficulties of moving your family across the country.



The dominant attitude is that you must find a way to move on because varying degrees of loss are always a part of life. And part of being able to move on is the knowledge that families are always there for each other.

During these difficult times, the brothers are able to find strength in the words of their mother, reminding themselves that “what you want and what you get are usually two entirely different things.” They miss their mother, but they keep her memory alive by quoting the words she used to say to them, whether to each other or to their own children.



The closing image of the chapter literally and figuratively is the closing of one door and the opening of another. Nicholas gets in his car and drives away from his family and life in California and simultaneously drives toward his family and life in North Carolina. Nicholas experiences a shift of responsibilities from his father and siblings to his wife and children.

## Glossary

**Khmer Rouge** a Communist organization formed in Cambodia in 1970 that became a terrorist organization in 1975 when it captured Phnom Penh and created a government that killed an estimated three million people

**Pol Pot** the leader of the infamous Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. He was responsible for the deaths of almost 3 million people—almost half the population of Cambodia

**Killing Fields** a number of sites in Cambodia where large numbers of people were killed and buried by the Khmer Rouge regime

# Chapter 14

## Summary

Chapter 14's tour narrative takes place in India. The brothers gape at the poverty of Jaipur as the tour guide raves about its beauty. Another member of the tour points out that, compared to, say, Bombay or Calcutta, Jaipur really is a beautiful city.

They take an elephant ride from the base of the Amber Fort up to its main entrance. The fort is an excellent example of the blending of Hindu and Muslim architecture, and the Hall of Mirrors is the most impressive sight. Its detailed workings of stones and gems with mirrors are a sight to behold.

After traveling through a series of slums, the brothers arrive at a hotel that is a virtual paradise—the “most luxurious hotel . . . on the tour.” Instead of sightseeing the next day, the brothers elect to rest at the hotel. Discussing their guilt about not visiting India leads to a conversation about Nicholas' guilt and Micah's taking over for their mother in the family.

The brothers agree that their mother was the center of their family, and her death led the three siblings to become even closer. They also agree that their father was left without a center in his life. And although their parents may have had some questionable methods, the brothers are both “happily married, successful, [and] ethical,” a credit to both of their parents.

Then they visit the Taj Mahal, a crypt which is often considered “the finest monument to love ever constructed.” Nicholas' thoughts turn to his sister.

Nicholas had not been in North Carolina three weeks before he came back to California. A new MRI revealed that Dana had a brain tumor and required immediate surgery. Although the surgery went well, not all of the tumor could be removed. Other post-surgical notes included the doctor's opinion that she would be unable to have children.

Back in North Carolina, Nicholas had a new house, a new job, typical family issues, and a father who was now far away—all stresses

to contend with. Nicholas and Cat found it quite difficult to share the news of Cat's pregnancy with Dana. But soon there was good news about Dana's radiation treatments as well as a warming of relationship with Nicholas' father, who even started dating.

At Thanksgiving, the family met in Texas. His father seemed happy. Dana and Bob had broken up, yet Dana was pregnant. Soon, everyone found out that she was expecting twins. Nicholas' father kicked Dana out of the house, and then everyone learned that the woman he was dating was using him, so his father bought a German shepherd named Flame.

Bob did not know about the pregnancy until right before the twins' birth. He and Dana eventually reconciled. During the time that Nicholas and Cat celebrated their fifth wedding anniversary, Nicholas started writing again. The brothers' company was sold and in the restructuring process, Nicholas took a new position in South Carolina, but Micah left the company.

## Commentary



The poverty of India is apparent to readers in the details that Nicholas shares as well as the tone established in his writing. When talking about the guide's insistence that Jaipur is one of India's most beautiful cities, Nicholas writes, "he seemed to believe it as well," indicating that Nicholas clearly does not agree with that assessment. Throughout *Three Weeks with My Brother*, Nicholas Sparks uses a conversational tone in order to more easily relate to his readers. For example, using the word "crashing" to indicate that they were going to bed commits to a degree of familiarity with his readers that offers a personal connection.

### From Nicholas

#### **How difficult was it to experience the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty that you experienced throughout the trip?**

*It wasn't hard at all, if only because Micah and I have been poor, middle class and rich. And yet, we also know that happiness in life isn't simply about money. It's about relationships. We met wonderful, happy people in every country we visited. Still, with that said, it was a sober reminder of how much people take things for granted. Trust me when I say that we were often reminded how lucky we are to have been born in a country like the United States.*



The images of poverty that pervade the chapter—including the smell of diesel fuel—not only provide a realistic account of the city but enable the brothers to gain a better appreciation for all that they have in the United States. The images also enable readers to share the experience and appreciate their own standard of living.



The positive comments about their parents' parenting techniques also contain another subtle form of foreshadowing, for the brothers say “we’re happily married”—*we* referring to both brothers, and “we remained close as siblings”—with *we* referring to all three children. But the verb tense in the second statement is past—a clue that at this point in time (during the trip), Dana is dead; otherwise, they would have written “we remain.” Another bit of foreshadowing is the information about the five year survival rate for patients with Dana’s type of cancerous cells being less than two percent.



Toward the end of the chapter, Nicholas foreshadows his first successful novel—*The Notebook*, which was indeed inspired by his wife’s grandparents. Micah’s final words in the chapter also foreshadow Nicholas’ impending literary success, for he tells his younger brother, “maybe you’ll be out of the pharmaceutical business soon, too.” Readers know that this is indeed true.

## Glossary

**Maharaja** a great raja; a Hindu prince or king in India ranking above a raja

**manic-depressive** suffering from a disorder characterized by alternating mania and depression

**cenotaph** a monument built to honor people whose remains are interred elsewhere or whose remains cannot be recovered

**oligodendroglioma** a rare slow-growing type of brain tumor that begins in cells called oligodendrocytes, which provide support and nourishment for cells that transmit nerve impulses

**astrocytoma** cancer of the brain that originates in star-shaped brain cells called astrocytes. This type of tumor does not usually spread outside the brain and spinal cord and it does not usually affect other organs

**glioblastoma multiforme** the most common and most aggressive type of primary brain tumor in humans

## Chapter 15

### Summary

Chapter 15 takes place in Ethiopia. The city of Addis Ababa is comparatively wealthy, and due to a recent meeting of African nations, unusually clean. The next morning they fly to Lalibela to see the famous cave churches. The people of Lalibela wear western clothing, revealing that the town is essentially “an Ethiopian tourist trap.” The churches were carved into the stone. Visiting the churches helps the brothers transition into a discussion about church.

Micah doubts the existence of God and believes that prayer does not work. Nicholas, who experienced the same bad things as Micah, views the situation in a different way, not believing that the “bad stuff was God’s fault in the first place. Things just happened.” That belief makes it easier for him not to think that God was going to change anything. Nicholas explains that when he gets overwhelmed with sadness, he throws himself into this work.

#### From Nicholas

**Your faith plays such an important part in your life, yet it’s downplayed in *Three Weeks with My Brother*. For example, you mention the Footprints story to explain a Bible passage, sending a message not only to Micah but to all of your readers. How important is it to make your faith a part of your writing?**

*I view my faith as my own. It works for me, it works for my family, and I’m comfortable in what I believe. That’s why it played a role in Three Weeks with My Brother. Because it’s part of who I am and to have ignored it wouldn’t have been truthful.*

*At the same time, because I view faith as something personal, I’ll work faith into those stories where it’s appropriate and benefits the story. Faith was a central element in *A Walk to Remember* and *The Last Song*, but it wasn’t central in *The Choice* or *A Bend in the Road* or *The Guardian*. The depiction, or lack of it, depends on the story and the characters in the story.*

As the brothers share a common experience, their concern switched from their sister to their father. Nicholas' living across the country mixed with his looking for a new house and working a new job made it easier for him to deal with his father. Additionally, his son Ryan was developing differently than their first son, Miles, another concern that took up much of Nicholas' time.

At this time, Nicholas was also looking for a literary agent. After he found one and the manuscript was ready, Warner Books offered a million dollars for it. Right after hearing the news and not having anyone to share it with, Nicholas had to make a pharmaceutical presentation to a group of doctors.

Cat and Nicholas were cautious and responsible with the windfall. He did not quit his job. Besides, they had more pressing concerns, namely Ryan's medical condition. When Miles had a doctor's appointment, the doctor wanted to spend some time with Ryan. After a brief examination, he told Nicholas and Cat that he thought Ryan may be autistic.

Nicholas and Cat were uncertain of how to deal with this news, so they tried many things: Tests. Evaluations. More tests. More evaluations. Through all of this they were unable to get a clear diagnosis. After eight months they still had no results. Their son was now 3 years old and was not talking.

Meanwhile, Nicholas' father had reconciled with his brother, and Nicholas and his father professed their love for one another. Nicholas then found out that his father was going to get remarried and that Micah had met a girl named Christine.

When a film crew was at his house to shoot a segment for the television show *48 Hours*, Nicholas received an important phone call from Micah. Nicholas found out that his father had been killed in a car accident. His entire phone conversation was captured on tape, but the producer agreed not to air it, reminding Nicholas "once again of the goodness of people."

Nicholas was torn. After his father's funeral, he was supposed to start a three-month book tour to promote *The Notebook*. Micah convinced him that both of their parents would have wanted him to continue with the tour, so he does.

After returning from the tour, Nicholas realized what an awful year Cat had been having too. Although he sent her to Hawaii in order

to relax, they end up getting into an argument on the phone. She understood the stress that he had had, but initially, he did not seem to understand what her past year was like: she spent most of her time worrying about Ryan, while simultaneously taking care of the other children and the house and supporting her husband in his time of need. After the phone call, Nicholas vowed to cure their son.

He began to work with Ryan six hours a day. His first breakthrough was the word "Apo" (apple). The next day, after working with Ryan again for six hours, Ryan spoke to his mother on the phone, and his first words to her were "I wuff you." That night Nicholas quit his pharmaceutical job to take on the job of working with Ryan three hours a day, seven days a week because now he knew his son can learn.

Life continued to progress: Ryan was getting better, Dana got married, Nicholas' second novel, *Message in a Bottle*, was published, and Micah finally got engaged. On her honeymoon, Dana suffered another seizure, and the family finds out that for the first time in years, her tumor was growing.

## Commentary



Theme

This is an important chapter for the development of the brothers' thoughts on faith. When Micah tells his brother that "I'm not even sure I believe in God anymore," he is serving as an Everyman. Nicholas' response to his brother is a testimony to his personal faith. Nicholas has a view of God and God's place in the world in which prayer does not exist in order to change or solve the problems in the world but rather to help individuals deal with life.

This chapter continues to show that successful people deal with the same problems as everyone else. The juxtaposition of highs and lows clearly demonstrates that just because a person may receive a million dollar advance for a novel does not mean his father will not die in a car accident or his sister's brain tumor will not start growing again.



Style &  
Language

Stylistically, Nicholas Sparks uses fragments when describing his feelings: "Denial. Guilt. Anger. Fear. Hopelessness." Not only are these single-word sentences, but together they form a single-line paragraph. Both are powerful techniques that emphasize his feelings and

enable readers to understand the various and conflicting emotions that are racing through Nicholas Sparks.



Other stylistic devices that Nicholas Sparks uses to emphasize his points are anaphora and syntax. In the lines, “My mother. My sister. My dad. My son. Too many worries in too short a time,” the repetition of *my* draws attention to the personal nature of the many tragedies. Structurally, the sentence artistically achieves a balance that, paradoxically, the writer is not feeling. Thus, the structure of a sentence captures the mood of the writer and the situation.

Paradoxically, the siblings are now “together and alone” as orphans, although adults are not considered orphans. Nevertheless, the loss of parents often leaves people in a childlike emotional state.

Earlier in the chapter Micah admitted to not getting answers to prayers, making readers think that when Micah agrees to pray for Ryan it will not be successful. But readers are wrong, and the experience serves as support to Micah that perhaps his current views about prayer might also be incorrect. But this is an emotional and realistic chapter, for Ryan does not have a miraculous recovery: Ryan is able to develop due to hard work, dedication, and commitment. The miracle is not the recovery—it is the effort that Nicholas made.

This chapter continues with the series of bad things happening to good people. You have no control over the terrible events in your life; you only have control over how you respond to them. Life is a mixture of highs and lows.

Astute readers will recognize that when Nicholas writes that Dana “seemed perfectly healthy,” that is actually another indication that there will be problems. The problems are emphasized with the single-sentence final paragraph of the chapter: “My sister’s brain tumor was growing again.” This powerful sentence gives the reader a taste of the way Nicholas and Micah felt.

## Chapter 16

### Summary

This chapter opens in Valletta, Malta. After a long flight, the European “flavor and atmosphere” of the island energizes the brothers, who were feeling sluggish. Highlights include the Tarxien Temple, “the oldest known freestanding statue of a deity” and the megalithic temples, “the oldest freestanding stone buildings ever discovered.” They visit the Hypogeum, discover that many things they are viewing are replicas, and have a good time laughing about the horrible incidents in their lives. They sing a Kenny Rogers song, visit more replicas, and have their picture taken on a crypt. Then the narrative returns to 1998.

At this time, Micah was running two businesses and helping his sister deal with her health. Dana’s tumor was inoperable because it was so deeply imbedded in her brain, and her only option was chemotherapy. The next year for Nicholas was a combination of working with Ryan, promoting his book, attempting to write another, and worrying about Dana. Also during that year, Micah got married.

Nicholas used Dana as the source of inspiration for the protagonist in his next novel, *A Walk to Remember*. His son Ryan became the source of a character in *The Rescue*, his following book, and Dana’s condition, though periods of hope, ultimately continued to worsen. Ryan started school in the fall of 1999, and that December was the last birthday call Dana ever made to her brother. Nicholas realized this, but he and readers are not sure that she did.

Nicholas’ son Landon was born in January 2000. During the next five months, Nicholas watched his sister die, making as many trips to see her “as I thought I could,” not “how much I wanted to.” Dana died when she was just 33 years old, just days after her twins turned six years old.

Again, the chapter ends with an image of the brothers, this time, standing together at their sister’s grave. “It was just the two of us now. Brothers.”

## Commentary



This chapter chronicles Nicholas' struggle with his faith—intellectually, he knows that all the bad things happening in his life are not God's fault. In fact, he knows that it is not anyone's fault, these things just happen. But knowing this and accepting this are two very different things. Oftentimes when there is a conflict between intellect and emotion, it is human nature that allows the emotion to win out. To help him through the tough times, Nicholas again turns to his mother's words: "No one ever said that life was fair" and "what you want and what you get are usually two entirely different things." Turning to words of wisdom helps Nicholas continue his work with Ryan, and again enables him to keep the memory of his mother alive.

This chapter also juxtaposes the good and bad, the highs and lows of life—Nicholas is touring for a book while his sister has a growing brain tumor, and he has to find a balance between the extremes in his life. As the Sparks family narrative inches closer and closer to the current trip narrative, time passes more quickly.



The pacing of the memoir is mirroring the pace of life. Events seem to be passing very quickly as his kids get older, his wife gives birth again, and his writing career takes off.

### From Nicholas

**Do you find yourself repeating some of your mother's statements about life, wanting and getting things, and life not being fair to your own children? How much of an impact has she had on the way you raise your children?**

*I repeat much of what my mom once said to me. There was a lot of simple wisdom in the way she viewed the world. Because life isn't fair. Because what we want and what we get are sometimes two entirely different things. Combine her toughness—and the fact that she hated whining—with affection and love and in the end, she helped to create a family that genuinely cared about one another. That protected one another. That believed in one another. She was a terrific lady, and I can only hope that I've done as good of a job with my own kids.*



The final single-word paragraph of the chapter, “brothers,” evokes the image of the two of them—Nicholas and Micah—standing side-by-side at their sister’s gravesite. The visual image captures their sense of loss and loneliness while simultaneously providing a sense of hope and unity. Now readers have a complete understanding of what the brothers have endured and why it was important for them to spend time together on this trip around the world.

# Chapter 17

## Summary

Chapter 17 opens in Tromsø, Norway, with Nicholas' call home to Cat. While Nicholas has been away, his children have been taking turns being sick. The brothers reflect on the current state of their lives, and Nicholas shares with Micah what he tells his older sons about having each other in their lives. They end up visiting a Norwegian bar and singing karaoke—once again encountering “Coward of the County” on this trip—and dancing to “Greased Lightning.”

After a long morning at the Tromsø museum, they go dogsledding. Nicholas believes that “*saying* that you went dogsledding in Norway . . . is more fun than the sledding itself.” When it becomes clear that the aurora borealis is not going to happen, the brothers beg off visiting another museum.

### From Nicholas

**Throughout the memoir you write of “endless lectures,” “boring museums,” and “pottery.” What effect did you hope to achieve by writing so honestly about the sites you were visiting?**

*If writing is about truth, then writing a memoir means writing the absolute truth. I didn't mind the museums at first, but after a while, they began to sort of run together. I wrote as much because it was true. Believe it or not, I did get some angry letters from readers because of it, but I would rather have told the truth and received the angry letters than to have written a falsehood. Still, at the same time, I did my best to express my sense of wonder at the places we visited. I consider myself lucky for having visited Easter Island or Lalibela and even though years have passed since then, the images from that trip stay with me. It was a trip I'll never forget, and I did my best to be truthful about that, too.*

They begin to talk about the losses in their lives, and Micah states that loss increases exponentially instead of cumulatively. Then the narrative returns to the time immediately following Dana's death.

After his sister's passing, Micah changed. Nicholas notes how Micah began to simplify his existence, getting rid of material possessions, believing that "life was for *living*, not for *having*." Micah also took over Dana's tradition of singing to Nicholas on his birthday. During this period, Micah also lost his faith. Nicholas turned his grief toward his work and used his brother-in-law Bob as inspiration for *A Bend in the Road*. Nicholas began to do so much—for his wife, his children, and his career—that he was sleeping only five hours a night.

Micah tried to get Nicholas to relax and de-stress; Nicholas attempted to get his brother to return to church. Nicholas' life continued to be busy—with publishing deadlines, newborn twins, publicity tours, and the regular stresses of life. The upcoming year, 2002, seemed to be even busier than any previous year. It was in that year that the travel brochure arrived.

## Commentary

As the trip and the memoir come to a close, the brothers begin to provide some closure to the narrative.



Theme

Nicholas is speaking to readers as well as his brother as he recounts why Miles and Ryan have each other: so Ryan could learn that "anything is possible" and Miles could learn "patience and persistence and how to overcome challenges." These ideas not only reflect Nicholas' attitudes toward his sons, they also represent why Nicholas and Micah have each other, and on a more universal level, they represent what all brothers could be for one another.

### From Nicholas

**You are an ardent reader. What are some of the most recent books that you have read that you would highly recommend?**

*This is always such a difficult question because I do read so much, but I'll limit it to the past few weeks to make things easier. I enjoyed, They Would be Kings, which told the true story about Dreamworks, I enjoyed The Passage, and I enjoyed Matterhorn.*

**Character  
Insight**

When Micah tells Nicholas what he really wants to say to people who call him after experiencing the death of a loved one, which is, “even after years, you still find yourself thinking about the person you lost, and get sad about it. And you still miss them all the time,” he is also speaking to the readers about the reality of loss. Yet Micah realizes that is not what people want to hear, so he tells them that “the pain goes away.”

**Theme**

Nicholas’ response to Micah’s honesty is a direct thematic statement that applies to the entire memoir: “It hurts, but you’ve got to go on anyway.” That is what the brothers are doing with their lives. Their lives continued to be hectic, yet they realize that they have their wives, their families, and each other, and that is how they are going to go on anyway.

# Epilogue

## Summary

The Epilogue recounts the brothers' journey home. By this time, the two narrative threads have joined into one, and it is a chapter of reflection. Nicholas' thoughts are of his wife, his children, his parents, and his sister. Micah concedes that he is going to go to church with his family when he gets home, primarily to teach his children that "you're part of God's plan." He then credits his mother, stating, "Mom did it for us, and look how we turned out."

As the brothers' trip comes to an end, they realize that even though their parents might be considered crazy, "whatever they did, it worked." So, they will continue to cling to each other, because "it's the way it should be." They realize that this indeed was the "trip of a lifetime," and the memoir closes with the brothers in an embrace, each telling the other that he loves him.

### From Nicholas

***Three Weeks with My Brother* is nonfiction, yet it is as easily read as any of your novels. Stylistically, do you see major differences between fact and fiction?**

*Stylistically, it's sometimes easier to write non-fiction because you're able to "tell" instead of "show." And yet, Micah and I wanted to create a poignant work of non-fiction, which meant that I had to draw on many of the lessons I learned in crafting a novel. There's a fine line between drama and melodrama; in that, writing non-fiction was exactly the same as writing fiction. It looks easy when you read it; trust me when I say it wasn't as easy to write it. Neither Micah nor I wanted to manipulate the readers; we wanted the events—and any emotion evoked—to speak for themselves.*

## Commentary



Nicholas says quite clearly that he is “an optimist like my mom was,” which helps to explain how he is able to survive and endure the multitude of tragedies that he has encountered. Even though Micah does not explicitly state it, his endurance in the face of these tragedies suggests that he is an optimist, too.



The final image demonstrates a bit of effective artistic license. According to the text, the brothers are hugging in a crowded airport, “oblivious to the crowd weaving around us.” Yet, if they were oblivious, how would they know that there was a crowd weaving around them? The image of two brothers in a meaningful embrace is a physical representation of the deep and lasting emotional and spiritual connection that they share with one another.

### From Nicholas

**In the prologue, you write that this is a book about brotherhood. Yet, after reading the memoir many readers may think that it’s more accurate to say it’s a memoir about all familial relationships. Would that be a fair assessment or should these readers refocus on the relationship with your brother?**

*The specifics of our past—that of Micah and I—necessitate that this memoir explore the concept of brotherhood. And yet, I understand the question being raised because it is, of course, also a story about family. It’s a story about growing up, a story about parenting, a story about the obstacles of life and how we overcame them. Still, it’s important to understand that one of the goals that Micah and I had while writing the memoir was to not only make it accurate, but to “evoke” the feeling of family that many people remember. Our childhood—though we may have had a bit more freedom than other kids—was otherwise ordinary. We weren’t rich or famous; nor was our past littered with physical or emotional abuse. We succeeded and failed. We dreamed. We made mistakes and tried to learn from them. And we loved our parents and our sister. I think that’s why so many people enjoyed the memoir. Because our childhood struck people as the same kind of childhood they remember.*



At this point, the narrative has come full circle. The epigraph states that “a brother is born to help in the time of need.” And by the time readers have completed the Epilogue, they know that the *brother* mentioned in the epigraph simultaneously refers to both Micah and Nicholas Sparks—they are brothers and friends who are loyal and always help the other in his time of need.

#### **From Nicholas**

**In the words of Micah, “How’s Ryan” today, six years since the publication of this memoir?**

*Ryan is doing well. He’s 16, attending a rigorous college-prep high school (that my wife and I founded), he’s getting good grades, and is driving. He has hopes and dreams and is going to attend college, just like his older brother. Watching him develop has been one of the most amazing experiences of my life.*

# CHARACTER ANALYSES

The following character analyses delve into the physical, emotional, and psychological traits of the literary work's major characters so that you might better understand what motivates these characters. The writer of this study guide provides this scholarship as an educational tool to which you may compare your own interpretations of the characters. Before reading the character analyses that follow, consider first writing your own short essays on the characters as an exercise to test your understanding of the original literary work. Then, compare your essays to those that follow, noting discrepancies between the two. If your essays appear lacking, that might indicate that you need to re-read the original literary work or re-familiarize yourself with the major characters.

<b>Nicholas .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Micah .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Dana .....</b>	<b>60</b>

## Nicholas

Nicholas is the main character of *Three Weeks with My Brother*. Although both brothers are mentioned in the title and are coauthors, Nicholas is the narrative voice, and readers experience his perspective on most of the events in both narrative threads. As a character, Nicholas represents true love, true faith, and true artistry. In one sense, Nicholas is a contemporary “everyman.” He represents the typical middle child, who, growing up, often feels lost in the shuffle. He represents the committed father who works tirelessly to improve the quality of life for his children. He represents the ideal husband who loves his wife and works to maintain their personal relationship. And he represents the best possible brother anyone could hope for.

In many regards, Nicholas is the ideal man—faithful, idealistic, emotionally strong, a writer, and helpful to those in need. After enduring many tragedies, Nicholas Sparks is almost too good to be true. He has a strong relationship with family and a strong faith. Yet he does admit to his struggles with faith at times and realizes that he is not perfect: He is just trying to do the best with what he has been given. His own reflections and insights reveal that he is a real person and not just the creation of a literary artist.

## Micah

Micah is the typical older brother—first-born, energetic, and ambitious. He is a reliable leader, a mover, and a shaker. But he is also a nurturer and a caregiver. When needed and without being asked, he takes over as a parent figure for Dana, and he pushes Nicholas to move his family to the East coast. His relationship with Nicholas reveals the essence of true brotherly love—where one is able to develop one’s own talents, skills, and abilities and be supportive of the other. Micah is the Yin to Nicholas’ Yang and together they form a whole.

## Dana

Dana, the youngest of the Sparks siblings, is the brother’s princess. Early on, she was as a connective and unifying presence for the siblings. It is no wonder Nicholas refers to her as “the best person I’ve ever known.” And her death, unfortunately, illustrates that no one in this world is immune to suffering and tragedy.

# CRITICAL ESSAYS

The following pages provide critical scholarship on various aspects of Nicholas Sparks' *Three Weeks with My Brother*. These interpretive essays are intended solely to enhance your understanding of the original literary work; they are supplemental materials and are not meant to replace your reading of *Three Weeks with My Brother*.

## Narrative Techniques: Sparks' Literary Form

Instead of starting at the beginning and telling the story in chronological order, Nicholas and Micah Sparks begin *Three Weeks with My Brother* toward the end of what would be a linear narration and then employ both the framing technique and flashback to tell their tale. Most of the memoir consists of two narrative threads—one of the trip and one of their lives growing up.

The contemporary storyline is the journey around the world. This narrative strand begins in the spring of 2002 and continues through February 15, 2003. Important information that shapes their time on the trip occurred years earlier, though. If you imagine a picture in a frame, the narrative about their life growing up is the photograph, and the trip around the world frames this memoir-photo.

This framework technique provides the structure of the plot, and flashback is the technique Sparks uses to tell the stories. Characters reveal these “framed” stories through their shared and private memories.

Stylistically, the narrative techniques work well because *Three Weeks with My Brother* is not just a memoir about an exotic trip around the world; it also explores the development of a fraternal bond—a bond that would not exist without the shared experiences, and the framing technique enables Sparks to weave the past together with the present, leading to the emotional climax and creating a compelling read along the way. The juxtaposition of the past and present parallels the contrast between the joys and pains of life. Micah and Nicholas Sparks use the trip around the world to reaffirm their relationship and need for one another. Their journey around the world is both literal and metaphorical, for their memories and experiences from the past clearly affect and impact the present, and the present-day trip serves as preparation for their future.

## The Value of Contemporary Texts

During the past decade or so, the emphasis of literary studies has been moving away from the study of specific works and moving toward students' participation and involvement with writing. This shift has included the idea that students need to take an active role in discovering knowledge rather than being passive receptors of information. Traditionally, the great works of literature have established what is in the literary canon, and those works needed a "sage on the stage" to decipher, explain, and interpret for the uneducated masses. However, contemporary theory prefers teachers to be the "guide on the side" who encourages students to make connections and meanings with literary texts that students find significant, compelling, and worthwhile. Few debate the importance of reading aesthetic texts. What is debated, however, is the types of texts through which high school students should experience this aesthetic reading.

The adolescent and adult worlds are not one in the same; the primary concerns of young adult readers are not the same ones that adults have, and therefore it is important to recognize reading readiness. High school readers who may not be ready for *Crime and Punishment* can still discuss the thematic topics of love, societal bounds, and faithfulness, and popular contemporary titles, such as *Three Weeks with My Brother*, are more accessible than many other adult titles in the literary canon. Unlike many titles in the canon, *Three Weeks with My Brother* is straightforward and immediately accessible. This is a source of empowerment for readers: Readers who can relate to the characters can readily affirm or contradict what they read. The point of reading literature is to engage in ideas important in life, as well as develop literacy. Contemporary titles like *Three Weeks with My Brother* should be used in classroom settings as a bridge from childhood reading to adult reading. Although some students may cross that bridge earlier than others, all students deserve the opportunity to read something that is important to them.

# CliffsNotes Review

Use this CliffsNotes Review to test your understanding of the original text, and reinforce what you have learned in this book. After you work through the review and essay questions, identify the quote section, and the fun and useful practice projects, you are well on your way to understanding a comprehensive and meaningful interpretation of *Three Weeks with My Brother*.

## Q&A

1. Who claims that *commitment* is the key to a successful marriage?
  - a. Jill
  - b. Micah
  - c. Nicholas
2. What popular fiction writer does Nicholas begin to read in high school?
  - a. Robin Cook
  - b. Stephen King
  - c. Dean Koontz
3. Who first suggests that Nicholas write a book?
  - a. his brother
  - b. his mother
  - c. his wife
4. Who uses the “footprints story” to explain God’s relationship to man?
  - a. Nicholas
  - b. Micah
  - c. Patrick
5. In addition to his brother, with whom did Nicholas Sparks coauthor a book?
  - a. Cat
  - b. Dana
  - c. Billy Mills

**Answers:** (1) c. (2) b. (3) b. (4) a. (5) c.

## Identify the Quote: Find Each Quote in *Three Weeks with My Brother*

1. “The rhythm method *doesn’t* work.”
2. “You choose the kind of life you want to live.”
3. “Friends come and go, but brothers and sisters always stick together.”
4. “Prayer doesn’t fix anything. Bad things happen anyway.”
5. “It hurts, but you’ve got to go on anyway.”

**Answers:** (1) Jill, telling a 12-year-old Nicholas that all three children were accidents. (2) Micah to Nicholas, in Fort Lauderdale, right before they leave for the trip. (3) Jill to Nicholas, when he and Micah were drifting apart during their grade school years in Nebraska. (4) Micah to Nicholas, as he attempts to explain why he no longer attends church or even prays. (5) Nicholas to Micah, when he explains what he says to people who ask him about the pain that is felt over the loss of a loved one.

## Review Questions and Essay Topics

1. What role does Cat play in the memoir? What key information does she provide? Why does she encourage her husband to take the trip? What statements foreshadow future events? Make a list of the other minor characters. What important roles do other minor characters play in *Three Weeks with My Brother*? Be sure to consider how they develop both characters and themes in *Three Weeks with My Brother*.
2. How do the brothers characterize the women in their lives, specifically their mother, their sister, and their wives? Are these realistic portrayals or romanticized versions of how they want to know and remember these significant individuals?
3. What is the relationship between *religion* and *faith*? Which brother is more religious? Why? Which brother has the stronger faith? How do you account for the differences between the two brothers when it comes to their spiritual lives?
4. Identify the different settings in the growing up narrative thread of *Three Weeks with My Brother* and analyze their significance for developing character and theme.

5. Consider all the stops the brothers took on their trip. Which ones are most significant to the development of their character and to the themes in *Three Weeks with My Brother*? Which spot most interested you? Why?
6. What impact does the passage of time have on the events and the significance of the events in the memoir? What is the emotional resonance of more contemporary grief, as compared to older ones?
7. What role does the physical journey (the trip around the world) have on the memory journey of the brothers growing up? Could this memoir have been as effective if it were written any other way? What is the relationship between form and theme?
8. *Three Weeks with My Brother* is clearly a mainstream text, having charted on the *New York Times* and *Publisher's Weekly* best sellers list. Yet, the stylistic devices along with the character and thematic development seem to suggest a more literary text. Consider what makes a text literary and compile a list of characteristics. Use this list as the basis to evaluate the literary merit of *Three Weeks with My Brother*.

## Practice Projects

1. Perspective and point of view are essential to understanding any literary text. Focus on Micah and consider the events that transpire in *Three Weeks with My Brother* from his perspective. Prepare an argument in which you make the case for Micah being considered the protagonist instead of Nicholas. Discuss the thematic significance of such an interpretation.
2. Choose one of the brothers and create a timeline chronicling the ten most significant events in that brother's life. Consider the impact of the event on the other's life. Discuss similarities and differences between responses.
3. Most high school English classes read the classics and tend to stick to fiction instead of nonfiction. Consider the pros and cons of using a memoir, like *Three Weeks with My Brother*, in a high school English class. Then hold a debate where you attempt to determine the appropriateness of this text for classroom use.
4. Knowing what you do about Cat, Christine, Dana, and Jill, write about an event mentioned in the memoir from the perspective of one of these minor yet significant characters who do not have a true voice of their own in *Three Weeks with My Brother*.

# CliffsNotes Resource Center

The learning does not need to stop here. CliffsNotes Resource Center shows you the best of the best—links to the best information in print and online about the author and/or related works. And do not think that this is all we have prepared for you; we have put all kinds of pertinent information at [www.cliffsnotes.com](http://www.cliffsnotes.com).

## Books and Periodicals

This CliffsNotes book provides a meaningful interpretation of *Three Weeks with My Brother*. If you are looking for information about Nicholas Sparks, check out these other publications:

Cohen, Adam Buckley. “Heroes of Running 2008: The Philanthropist: Nicholas Sparks.” *Runner’s World*, November 1, 2008.

Gaston, Elaine. “Sparks Writes about Life Choices.” *The Sun News* (Myrtle Beach), September 23, 2007.

“Nicholas Sparks.” *Contemporary Authors: New Revision Series*. Volume 151. Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 354-359.

“Nicholas Sparks, Author of *Nights in Rodanthe* and *The Notebook*.” *The Washington Post*, September 17, 2008.

“Sparks, Nicholas.” *2001 Current Biography Yearbook*. New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 511-514.

Valby, Karen. “True Believer.” *Entertainment Weekly*. September 10, 2008, pp. 38-42.

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## Internet

For more information about Nicholas Sparks and *Three Weeks with My Brother*, head to [www.nicholassparks.com](http://www.nicholassparks.com).

## Films and Other Recordings

*Message in a Bottle*, Warner Brothers, 1999. A feature film based on the novel, starring Kevin Costner, Robin Wright Penn, and Paul Newman.

*A Walk to Remember*, Warner Brothers, 2002. A feature film based on the novel, starring Mandy Moore and Shane West.

*The Last Song*, Touchstone Pictures, 2010. A feature film based on the novel, starring Miley Cyrus, Liam Hemsworth, and Greg Kinnear.

*The Notebook*, New Line Cinema, 2004. A feature film based on the novel, starring Ryan Gosling, Rachel McAdams, James Garner, and Gena Rowlands.

*Nights in Rodanthe*, Warner Brothers, 2008. A feature film starring Richard Gere and Diane Lane.

## Send Us Your Favorite Tips

In your quest for knowledge, have you ever experienced that sublime moment when you figure out a trick that saves time or trouble? Perhaps you realized you were taking ten steps to accomplish something that could have taken two. Or you found a little-known work-around that achieved great results. If you have discovered a useful tip that helped you study more effectively and you want to share it, the CliffsNotes staff would love to hear from you. Go to our website at [www.cliffsnotes.com](http://www.cliffsnotes.com) and click the Talk to Us button. If we select your tip, we may publish it as part of CliffsNotes Daily, our exciting, free e-mail newsletter. To find out more or to subscribe to a newsletter, go to [www.cliffsnotes.com](http://www.cliffsnotes.com) on the Web.