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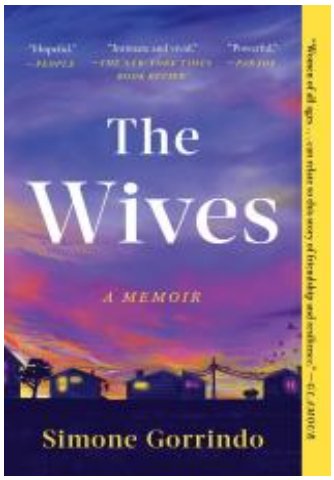
The Wives: A Memoir

by Simone Gorrindo



About the Book

A captivating memoir that tells the story of one woman?s experience of joining a community of army wives after leaving her New York City job --- a profoundly intimate look at marriage, friendship and today?s America.

When her new husband joins an elite Army unit, Simone Gorrindo is uprooted from New York City and dropped into Columbus, Georgia --- a town so foreign she might as well have landed on the moon. With her husband frequently deployed, she is left to find her place in this new world, alone --- until she meets the wives.

Gorrindo gives us an intimate look into the inner lives of a remarkable group of women and a tender, unflinching portrait of a marriage. A love story, an unforgettable coming-of-age tale, and a bracing tour of the intractable divisions that plague our country today, THE WIVES offers a rare and powerful gift: a hopeful stitch in the fabric of a torn America.

Discussion Guide

1. ?If I have to choose between you and the Army, it?s the Army,? Andrew tells Simone in a strained moment during their early conversations about his enlistment. Despite her strong reservations about the war and fears for him, she still leaves the job and the city she loves to follow her new husband to the South and support his military aspirations. Discuss how you might have reacted in Simone?s position. Do you understand Andrew?s decision? How much of your own lifestyle would you compromise for your partner?s dreams? Does love necessitate sacrifice? Is the answer to this question different for men than it is for women?

2. What are the stereotypes attached to an ?Army wife? and military families in general? How does Simone challenge our understanding and assumptions about their lives? Did anything surprise you about the wives? Do you identify with any of the wives? Why or why not?

3. Central to Simone?s memoir is the search for belonging and community in unfamiliar spaces, the desire for a true and enduring feeling of home. Consider the varied meanings of *home*. Is home a place, a person, a state of mind? How do we discover it in ourselves, in our environments, in each other? How do we know when we?ve found it?

4. As she begins to adapt to the ways of life of her new community in Georgia, Simone quickly recognizes that for the wives of the Unit, motherhood ?allowed you to take up space.... It made you matter.? Discuss the role of children and pregnancy as a source of connection and a grounding force for the wives. How does Simone?s relationship with the wives change during her pregnancy? Then consider your own views on motherhood. How much do you think the time and place in which you were raised influences your attitudes on women?s priorities?

5. ?I had a high tolerance for loneliness,? Simone writes early on in her memoir. This tolerance is quickly challenged by the grueling circumstances of Andrew?s repeated deployments, and as anxiety and depression settle in, she establishes a kind of codependence with the wives for her own survival. Have you ever formed a relationship built on circumstances of mutual need? Discuss Simone?s dark spiral, Rachel?s support, and the beauty and strain of these essential bonds.

6. ?The men had the architecture of the Army to hold them up wherever they were.... The wives, on the other hand, were left to erect their own scaffoldings.? Reflect on the unique dynamics and hierarchies of the wives? gatherings, based on such factors as their husbands? ranking, their age, their child status and others. Delve into key commonalities and differences between them. As Simone works to find herself and her place in their midst, how does she decide what parts of herself to let go of, compromise or allow to be altered? Consider how being deeply vulnerable with others creates room for growth and transformation in Simone?s life, and in your own.

7. In many ways, communication, or lack thereof, is an essential thread in THE WIVES: what is shared or goes unspoken, what is forbidden to discuss, what can be translated across distance. In Andrew?s world of confidentiality, communication is fraught with risk; for Simone, as a writer, words carry great importance, but the wives? primary assignment is silence. Discuss the ways in which both partners navigate these obstacles and come to terms with the unknowable parts of one another. How does love transcend secrecy? What are the limits?

8. Love and violence coexist closely in Simone?s world. Describing the initial strength of her marriage, she writes, ?Time wouldn?t tear it down. You?d need heavy equipment, a fire fed with kerosene. You?d need violence. That?s how I felt about our relationship.? Later, confronted with one of Andrew?s weapons, she memorably asks of herself --- and readers --- ?Tell me why you allow violence to put food on your table.? In another exchange with Hailey: ?Do people ever think about what it?s like to be married to...rough men? That these guys we?ve hitched ourselves to are killers?? In the final passage of the book, we find the piercing revelation: ?It was terrifying to love someone.? Delve into this further, discussing the ways in which an acceptance of violence underpins much of modern life in forms both visible and invisible.

9. ?These days, *Wife* was my entire identity. At times, the title sounded like a nag to me.... I chafed so fiercely against the title?s constraints.... No one here knew me as a writer. Everyone knew me as a wife,? Simone admits. Consider the term ?wife? and all that is associated with it in Simone?s world --- and your own. How does it at once serve as a ?badge of honor? and an erasure of identity? In what ways is it empowering --- and limiting? What new associations does the title of the memoir carry for you after reading?

10. Discuss the symbolism of the ?grog? and the ?glow of belonging? on the night that Simone decides she?s ready to

start a family with Andrew. What does Simone realize about her husband, and about herself, during the Ball? Why now?

11. What is the enduring glue that holds the wives together? Do you think a wife who lost her husband in service would still remain part of the group? What about a wife who gets divorced? Is theirs a deeper connection that will outlast their circumstances, or only as long as they are married to a soldier in the Unit? Reflect on the relationships that Simone formed in Georgia that may or may not carry on in her new life in Washington, and the importance of friendships that serve temporary but meaningful roles in our lives.

12. Discuss the continued relevance of Simone?s story in today?s America. How do you think THE WIVES would be different if the events within took place during or after the Trump presidency? How have relationships across political, social and class divides shifted or weakened? How might you transcend differences and foster stronger relationships and communities within your own life?

Author Bio

Simone Gorrindo?s writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *New York* magazine, *Longreads*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Best Women?s Travel Writing*, *Self* and others. She holds an MS in journalism from Columbia University, and has received fellowships and grants for her writing and reporting from the International Women?s Media Foundation, the Georgia Council for the Arts, and the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Sciences. She lives in Tacoma, Washington, with her husband and two children. THE WIVES is her first book.

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