ABOUT SUSAN...

I grew up in Maine and loved living in Vermont, California, Boston and China before I moved back to Portland, Maine where I now live. I’m on the faculty of the Stonecoast Writing Program at the University of Southern Maine and I’m the cofounder of the Telling Room, a creative writing lab for kids in Portland.

I’m the author of four books including my new novel, Elsey Come Home. My memoir, The Foremost Good Fortune, was the first book I published and it was an O, The Oprah Magazine Top Ten Pick, an Entertainment Weekly Memoir to Read, and the winner of the Maine Literary Award for Memoir. My novel, Paris Was the Place, came out after the memoir and it was a People magazine Top Pick, a Slate magazine Summer Read, and ELLE magazine Readers’ Prize Selection. My third book was a whole other animal: a photography collaboration called Stop Here, This Is the Place, which was a Real Simple magazine Must Read and also won the Maine Literary Award for Publishing Excellence.

My writing has also appeared in the New York Times Magazine, the Paris Review, the Virginia Quarterly Review, the Harvard Review, the North American Review, the New England Review, Ploughshares, and other magazines. I’ve been fortunate to receive fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference, the Maine Arts Commission, and the Massachusetts Arts Council.

OTHER WORKS BY SUSAN...

NONFICTION
Stop Here, This Is the Place  2016
The Foremost Good Fortune  2011

FICTION
Elsey Come Home  2019
Paris Was the Place  2013

RECOMMENDED READINGS...

Tove Jansson:  The Summer Book  
Peter Hessler:  River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze  
Nina Stibbe:  Love, Nina: A Nanny Writes Home
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *Paris Was the Place* presents the city of Paris in such detail—we even get advice on how to navigate a notoriously congested area: “The trick at the Arc de Triomphe is to stay in the outer ring of cars around the first half and then veer off quickly—as if shot from a cannon—over to the wide start of Victor Hugo.” (p. 208) What is the effect of such detailing mapping of place in the novel?

- One of the book’s central issues is immigrant girls who have requested French asylum. Immigration rights are a huge public topic these days. How is this larger, worldwide issue rendered on a personal and human scale in the novel? Does the novel foreshadow an immigration crisis that has only intensified since the book was written?

- What is the effect in the novel and on the reader when the girls in the refugee center learn to tell their stories?

- Why might *Paris Was the Place* be set in the 1980s, and what is the effect of placing it in that era?

- Macon and Willie’s relationship isn’t always easy—he has an ex-wife and a son, Willie makes a mistake that nearly costs Macon his job, and they both lose someone very close to them. What makes their relationship so resilient in spite of these things?

- Willie travels to India to research the poet Sarojini Naidu. Why is Willie so interested in her, of all poets, and why does she go?

- When Willie decides to stay in Paris, her father says, “Then really make it your place. Know it. Like the back of your hand. All the coordinates. All the side streets. Never feel like you couldn’t find your way home. It may be a life’s worth of work.” (p.350) What might he mean by this and how is he also affected by a sense of place in his own life?