

**Discussion Questions for**  
***The Tribal Knot: A Memoir of Family, Community, and a Century of Change***  
**by Rebecca McClanahan (tribalknot.com)**

1. *The Tribal Knot*, the title of the book, is both an actual (lost) artifact, and a metaphor for the book. Discuss how it does or does not resonate metaphorically throughout the book. What are some other metaphors for the generational, familial and communal weavings of this book?
2. The author includes several discomfiting events in the book, including a family murder/suicide, G.E.'s membership in the 1920s KKK and Sylvia's attraction to it, Ivan's involvement in the Mine Wars, and the author's own emotional breakdown. How do you feel about writers revealing the darker sides of family history?
3. Did you learn anything new about history/society/culture that you did not already know? Did any of the information surprise, intrigue, or trouble you? Did it change your perspective in any way?
4. The book covers more than a century of personal/public history. Which era most interested you? Why?
5. Discuss the relationship between the author, Rebecca, and Great-Aunt Bessie. Bessie begins and ends this narrative. Why do you think the author made this decision?
6. Discuss Rebecca's own story within this narrative. How is her story an extension of her family's? How does it differ? What might be some of the reasons for this?
7. While both men and women are characters within the book, the matriarchal line provides the main narrative line. How does this structural decision shape the story?
8. Several main themes run through the book. Choose one or more of the following to discuss, or supply other themes that you noticed:
  - benefits and costs of connectedness (family, neighborhoods, churches, fraternal and other organizations including the KKK, etc.)
  - home, home place, displacement, lost places and times
  - motherhood, childlessness, orphanhood, surrogate parents
  - war and its effect on families
  - the "blue devils"
  - beauty, aging
  - women's changing role in society
9. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable about these passages?
10. If it were possible to meet any character(s) in the book, who would you most like to meet? What would you talk about, what questions would you ask?
11. Much of the author's knowledge of her family's history is drawn from letters and photographs. What has been the role of letters in your own family? How has that changed over the generations? Do you have family/ancestral photographs you keep near you? Why? (Why not?) Do you write letters? Keep a diary? How will your story be passed to future generations?