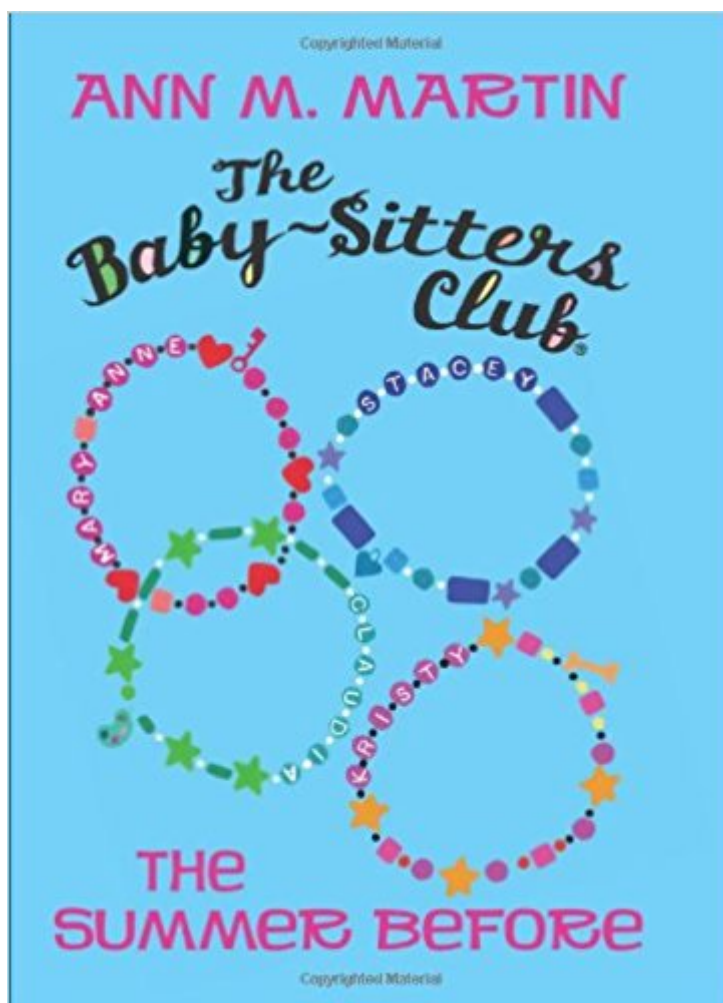


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The Baby-Sitters Club: The Summer Before



Synopsis

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES ONLY. During the summer before their seventh-grade year, Kristy, Mary Anne, Claudia, and Stacey tackle difficulties, including family problems, crushes, moving, and making new friends. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

Before there was the Baby-Sitters Club, there were four girls named Kristy Thomas, Mary Anne Spier, Claudia Kishi, and Stacey McGill. As they start the summer before seventh grade (also before they start the BSC), each of them is on the cusp of a big change. Kristy is still hung up on hoping that her father will return to her family. Mary Anne has to prove to her father that she's no longer a little girl who needs hundreds of rules. Claudia is navigating her first major crush on a boy. And Stacey is leaving her entire New York City life behind... ..in order to find new friends in Stoneybrook, Connecticut. *The Summer Before . . .* is a sweet, moving novel about four girls on the edge of something big - not just the Club that will change their lives, but also all the joys and tribulations of being twelve and thirteen. **Exclusive Interview with Author Ann M. Martin** **Q:** It's

been a decade since the last Baby-sitters Club books came out, and 24 years since the first book was published. What was it like to come back to the BSC after so many years away? Martin: I had a great time re-visiting the characters. It was fun to explore their lives in the prequel, *"The Summer Before,"* and to figure out what led the girls to form The Baby-sitters Club, something that would eventually change their lives. It was like a reunion with friends--friends who haven't changed a bit.

Q: Kristy, Claudia, Mary Anne, and Stacey are very different characters, which is in part why the series was and is still so popular. Every reader can relate to at least one of the characters. So, we have to ask you--which character are you most like? Martin: I am most like Mary Anne who is the shy and quiet one. Like me, Mary Anne enjoys more solitary pursuits such as reading and needlework. My favorite character, however, is Kristy. I think she's my alter ego.

Q: Were you allowed to baby-sit when you were twelve? If so, were there any funny or awful stories you'd like to share? Martin: Yes, I did a lot of baby-sitting when I was twelve. One of the worst and also funniest things that ever happened was when I was baby-sitting for our neighbors and the kids wanted to wash their parents' car. They started the job with much enthusiasm--using Brillo pads.

Q: More than 200 BSC books were published in the eighties and nineties. Are there any that you are particularly fond of and why? Martin: My favorite Baby-sitters Club book is *"Kristy's Great Idea,"* which is the first book and sets the series in motion. I also like the more serious books such as *"Claudia and the Sad Good-bye,"* which deals with the death of Claudia's grandmother. This book was written shortly after my own grandmother died. My other favorite BSC books include *"Kristy and the Secret of Susan,"* in which the members of the BSC baby-sit for a child with autism, and *"Jessi's Secret Language"* in which the girls learn American Sign Language in order to communicate with a sitting charge with profound hearing impairment.

Q: Why do you think that the series is so well-loved and has endured over so many years? Martin: I think the characters in the BSC books are easily relatable. The books deal with timeless topics including friendship, family, and school. Also, the books tackle serious issues including racism, bullying, kids with disabilities (physical and mental), and death of a loved one. These issues were relevant to kids in the 1980s and 1990s, and are still relevant to kids today. In addition to being relatable, these are characters readers can aspire to. The kids run a business--in this case, a baby-sitting business. They are entrepreneurial, independent, creative, and confident. And at the heart of the series is the friendship--the "glue" that binds these characters. Sure, they have fights, but they're loyal and they support one another. I think a lot of us--even adults--can relate to that.

Q: *"The Summer Before"* takes place during the summer before the girls enter the seventh grade--where suddenly there's a ton of pressure to fit in. The months leading up to it can be filled with anxiety, excitement, and

anticipation. Do you remember how you spent the summer before seventh grade? Martin: I was nervous that summer because in the fall I would be going to a new school -- the junior high (this was in the time before middle schools). Even the words "junior high" seemed terribly grown-up. My friends and I would be attending school with eighth-graders, who were one step away from high school. I spent that summer reading, going to the community pool, taking a family trip to Cape May, New Jersey, doing some baby-sitting, and also recovering from surgery. But the knowledge that I would soon be in junior high school colored every day and every activity and did lend the summer an air of both anxiety and anticipation.

Q: Despite the fun the girls have together in "The Summer Before," they're all dealing with pretty tough problems--moving away, an absentee father, a first crush. How did you choose the issues you wanted to focus on? Martin: One of my favorite things about writing a series was that the characters themselves generated plot ideas for later books. One of the themes that developed as the series progressed was that of Kristy's relationship with her father. It was an idea I enjoyed exploring, and when I had the opportunity to write the prequel I realized that this summer would be a charged time for Kristy, and that I could introduce the issues she had with her father here; then they could unfold in the later books. The same applied to Stacey. Her reasons for moving to Stoneybrook had been revealed in later books, but I realized that during this particular summer the reader could actually watch the events take place. The other issues--a first crush, wanting more independence yet still feeling like a kid--are themes that I felt would resonate with most "tween" readers.

Q: Even though the books have been out of print for ten years there are still some very devoted fans. Surely you must have received a ton of letters about the series over the years. Are there any that stick out in your mind? Martin: The most memorable are stories of girls who have written to me and told me that I've made an impact on their lives, that The Baby-sitters Club books have turned them into readers. Some have also said that the BSC books made them aspire to become writers. I've also heard from a lot of the original fans who grew up to become teachers, librarians, editors, journalists, entrepreneurs, etc. To know that this series inspired a generation of readers and writers is very humbling.

Q: There's been a lot of speculation in the blogosphere about where Claudia, Kristy, Mary Ann, and Stacey would be now, in 2010, had they grown up. Do you have any thoughts on what path each would have taken? Martin: I understand the fascination of the older BSC fans who would like to know what happened with the characters when they got older. It's thrilling to realize that after all these years the fans remain passionate about the books and the characters in The Baby-sitters Club. I can see Kristy running a business--I can also see her being in politics. I think Mary Anne became a teacher. I imagine Stacey went into fashion--not as a designer,

but maybe on the business side. And Claudia became an artist. I think fans can fill in for the rest of the characters!

Praise for *The Summer Before* "[T]houghtfully crafted... Martin credibly and affectingly blends the friends' stories and resolves their issues, while deftly foreshadowing what lies ahead." *Åçâ –â ç Publishers Weekly* "[E]ngaging, entertaining... Series fans and newcomers alike will enjoy each girl's lively alternating first-person stories." *Åçâ –â ç Booklist* "Book candy at its best." *Åçâ –â ç Kirkus Reviews* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It's been years since I've read a BSC book, and this one brought it all back. It takes place the summer before the original series began, and it explains how the BSC almost never became a club because of all the dynamic shifts with the friendships of Mary Anne, Claudia and Kristy. It also introduces Stacey into the mix, even though she's not yet a friend of the rest of the group. I don't think the BSC series necessarily needed this prequel, but I found it interesting as I already started reading book #1 that this whole book is summed up in one long paragraph in the first chapter, like the story had already been written thirty years ago, just not published until 2010. And I found it really interesting that the book is careful not to give away any clues as to what year it really takes place in, keeping the series just as timeless as it has been. Personally, I would have liked to see a fast forward instead of a prequel, because I cannot imagine what all of these characters are doing as adults, and I would be interested in finding out.

Obviously we're not talking literary classic here, but I'm 32 and read the first 60 or so BSC books when I was in 5th and 6th grade. It was really fun to revisit the series and remember those times. The characters are like old friends. There are no big surprises here; it's loyal to the characters and the tone of the series. I remember when I was an adolescent thinking that Ann M. Martin was very tuned in to my frame of mind, and I think kids that age benefit from reading her books, because the characters are all at once role models of responsible and well adjusted kids, but they're also fallible and relatable. It's also nice to hear from an adult author who understands your adolescent struggles.

I practically learned how to read by reading BSC books (including the Little Sister series) and I have quite the collection from the very first to the last along with the special editions. At one point in my life, I even had the movie memorized. 'The Summer Before' brings a great sense of nostalgia. Seeing Kristy, Mary Anne, Claudia and Stacey again was such a treat, and the book remains true to

the series in terms of their personalities and their individual story line. A must-read for any BSC lover.

I was a huge BSC/Ann M. Martin fan back in the day - and OK, I admit it, I still read the books today, when I just want to read something fun and lighthearted. There was something "magical" about the characters - obviously, as an almost-30-year-old (me) still reads them and I know I'm not alone! This was a great tribute to the series, and a nice way to remember my childhood. That being said - and I enjoyed this book, believe me - it's not my favorite book of the series. I don't think I could read it over and over as I can with, say, #91 or #77. (I can picture the titles and the book covers of those, mind you.) Yes the BSC spirit was captured and preserved in this book, but the story wasn't up to par with the others. I know a lot of those were ghost written, perhaps that's why. Overall it's a great book for those of us who grew up with these girls. But if you're new to the series, I'd stick with the originals first.

It's been 20 years since I picked up my first BSC book, so when I discovered that a prequel had been published I quickly ordered copies for me and my best friend. It was wonderful to revisit the characters and Stoneybrook. I was especially impressed that Martin wrote this to be rather timeless, making it appropriate for someone who read the books when they first came out in the 80s or for a girl reading about the BSC for the first time - no mention of computers or cell phones.

I've always loved the BSC franchise ever since I was a little kid. I started reading the books when I was seven years old. I used to watch the old television show. I even owned the movie at one time. Growing up, I didn't have too many friends, so I sort of imagined myself as one of the BSC members... sort of a secret member. The BSC was literally a friend of mine. And then recently, I saw a YouTube video about *The Summer Before*, and I'd been dying to read it. I bought it, read it, and liked the fact that Kristy had a vulnerable side. The book kind of expanded on that. That's mostly what I liked about the book.

This is an excellent story. I always wondered what happened the summer before Kristy's great idea for the baby-sitters club. What happens is that Kristy still has hopes that her father would come back to Connecticut and remarry Kristy's mom (her parents divorced a long time ago.). Mary Ann wants to show her father that she's responsible for her age. Claudia tries to search for the perfect boyfriend. Finally, Stacey and her parents are moving from New York City. If you want to know what happens,

read the book to find out!

I have not even finished with this prequel to the Babysitter's Club series yet, but it has already given me a warm and fuzzy feeling. Particularly if you liked the series as a girl, this book will be a delightful addition to your BSC library. What I think makes the book likable besides the nostalgia factor for older readers is the truth that being a girl involves some life experiences that are universal, and this novel touches on many of them. Your first real relationship with a boy, drifting apart from childhood friends and back together again, the independence found in earning your own money - these milestones stay with us into womanhood. Claudia, Kristy, Mary Anne, and Stacey are a PG version of the Sex and the City girls in that they all represent different aspects of a woman's personality - fashionable, assertive, sensitive & shy, and sophisticated. Give this book a chance and you will find Ann M. Martin and the girls to be just as welcoming as ever!

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