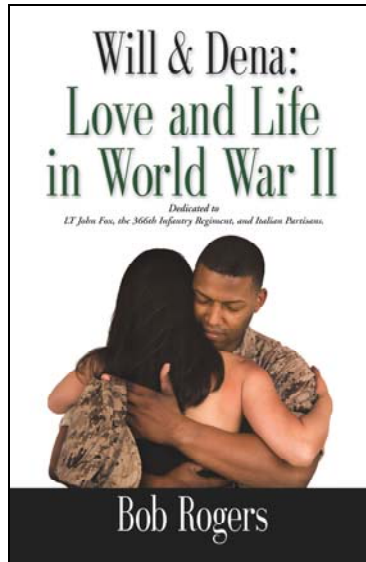


Discussion Questions for *Will and Dena: Love and Life in World War II*



Suggestion: To avoid spoilers, it is recommended that you read the book before reviewing the questions.

1. Significant changes have occurred in American law and society since Will and Dena's time in 1943-45, but, do you believe that men and women of color are still limited professionally by prejudice? Do you believe today that economic opportunity is available to all without invisible barriers?
2. Do you believe Dena's mother, Jessie, was justified in ordering her daughter to stop seeing Will? How much influence should parents have on their children's choice of a mate? Have you been directed not to have a romantic relationship with a person you chose? How did you feel? Have you experienced the departure from your life of a person (who was the object of your affection) because of pressure from your beloved's family?
3. What was your reaction to Dena's encounter with two policemen at the Charlotte, North Carolina bus station? How would you have responded in Dena's place?
4. Other than Will or Dena, which character did you find the most interesting? Which character did you find the least interesting? Which character was the least likable? Please explain your responses.
5. Young people in Oakton were terrorized by a bully. Bullying is a serious topic. Can you suggest ways Oakton could have curbed Jason's bullying before he was sentenced to jail time? How is bullying dealt with in your city?
6. At various times in twentieth century American history, the terms "ping pong diplomacy" or "good will games" were used. What role did "baseball" play in Oakton?

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7. Has anyone ever told you that you would not amount to much, or that you would not succeed in life? If so, how were you affected? If not, how do you think a comment of this nature might affect a person? How did Will respond to this comment?

8. What was your reaction to the deal negotiated by Big Will with the Oakton Redbirds?

9. Bill Stevens and Ernie Martin made changes in their beliefs and behaviors as a result of their baseball work with Lil' Will and his father. How did their characters evolve or change? What impact have you observed in yourself or others from experiencing working or social relationships with persons from different ethnic and social backgrounds?

10. What was your reaction to Dena's rejection of Ralph and her determination to give her heart to Will? Would you have handled Jessie's response to Dena's rejection of Ralph differently? Explain.

11. Today, which of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's promised four freedoms (freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from fear, freedom from want) do you believe are shared by all?

12. African Americans set out to win two victories in World War II. What were they? How many did they win? Explain.

13. Why did Lil' Will and his fellow soldiers repeatedly debate the merits of African Americans fighting in Europe?

14. Why did Lil' Will and Zack declare that the 92nd Infantry Division commander, Major General Edward Almond, was their enemy? How did General Almond destroy the 366th Regiment of which Will, Zack, Joe, and Sam were so proud? Why did General Almond destroy the 366th?

15. Differentiate between what public officials like Oakton's Mayor Andy Mitchell or the late Senator Strom Thurmond may think in private versus what he puts forth as his image? Why is there this disparity? How is governing affected? How do voters react to politicians like Mitchell and Thurmond?

16. What was your reaction to the separate conclusions to the stories of each of these characters: Will, Dena, Zack, Sam Reynolds, and Joe?

17. Comment on the novel's strengths and weaknesses (character, plot, dialogue, etc).