

also are due to Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in whose elegant Linderman Library I wrote much of this book while my studio was under construction.

My siblings, Marijo Grogan, Timothy Grogan, and Michael Grogan, trusted me to tell this story accurately, honestly, and sensitively, even while recognizing that each of us sees our shared past through a unique prism; I appreciate the faith they put in me. My siblings also helped me reconstruct many of the scenes in this book, sharing their own insights and memories, and Michael dedicated hours to helping me find and catalog a half century of family photographs, movies, memorabilia, and documents. My mother, Ruth Marie Howard Grogan, even in advanced age, continues to inspire me with her wit, spirit, and boundless sense of humor, and her lifelong gift of storytelling is reflected in these pages. My late father, Richard, remains a strong presence in my life, guiding me by his past example, and I often find myself asking the W.W.D.D. question—what would Dad do? My eternal debt of gratitude to both my parents for a happy childhood, and for a love so deep and unconditional it defines the word.

Finally, a big affectionate thank-you to my loving wife, Jenny, and children, Patrick, Conor, and Colleen, for once again allowing me to mine our family experience and their lives for my inspiration. Thank you for your support and understanding and for always being there for me at the start and end of each day. This book is about family, and I am so grateful for mine. I love each of you beyond words.

Before there was a dog named Marley, there was a boy named John . . .

JOHN GROGAN, the author of the phenomenal number-one *New York Times* bestseller *Marley & Me*, works his magic once again, this time turning his keen eye to the story of his own childhood in a devout Catholic family outside Detroit in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite his loving parents' best efforts, John's attempts to meet their expectations failed spectacularly. Whether it was making—disastrously—his first confession, spying on his sunbathing neighbor through a telescope, sneaking swigs of sacramental wine at Mass, or shooting fireworks at a cranky elderly neighbor's house, John discovered that the faith and fervor that came so effortlessly to his parents somehow had eluded him.

And then one day a few years later, the fledgling journalist met a young woman named Jenny. As their love grew, John began the painful, funny, and poignant journey into adulthood—away from his parents' orbit and into a life of his own. It would take a fateful call and the onset of illness to lead him on the final leg of his journey—the trip home again.

The Longest Trip Home is a book for any son or daughter who has sought to forge an identity at odds with their parents', and for every parent who has struggled to understand the values of their children. With his trademark blend of humor and pathos that made *Marley & Me* loved by millions, John Grogan traces the universal journey each of us must take to find our unique place in the world.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. John Grogan's parents were devout Catholics. How did their faith impact John? How did his struggle with his parents' Catholicism shape his way of dealing with life, and death, most notably when his father was dying?
2. What kind of household were you raised in? How did your parents' faith, or lack of it, influence your life?
3. Discuss John's relationship with his parents. Could you have been as accepting as his parents were during his adolescence? If you are a parent, talk about your relationship with your own children. If not, what kind of parent do you think you'd be?
4. What is the role of parents in children's lives? Do you think this role has changed from what it was in the 1960s and 1970s when John Grogan was a boy?
5. In your opinion, what were the most important lessons John learned from his parents?
6. Grogan had to depart from his parents to find his way back to them and back home. Do you think his is a common experience?
7. What role did meeting Jenny play in John's transformation? How did John and Jenny's relationship compare to that of John's parents?
8. Becoming a parent himself was a motivating element in John's journey. Can someone truly understand their parents if they remain childless?

9. It is often said that we "become" our parents as we age. How does John resemble his parents? How have his experiences made him different?
10. At the end of the book, when John is visiting his mother, she tells him, "Once they leave home, that's it. They come back to visit, but it's never the same." John wants to protest but acknowledges that she is right. Do you agree? Why is it "never the same"?
11. Doris Kearns Goodwin praises *The Longest Trip Home*: "Every now and then a memoir is so well-written that readers are able to find elements of their own life story in the chronicle of the writer's life." Do you agree with her? If so, what elements of your own life did you discover while reading?
12. A baby boomer born into a solidly middle class midwestern household, John Grogan came from a very traditional American family. How might his story compare to others from different backgrounds? Can someone from another background—say the child of a single mother growing up in a large city—relate to his story? Why or why not?
13. Consider John at the various stages of his life. How are you similar and different from your younger self?
14. Did *The Longest Trip Home* affect the way you see your own childhood and family?
15. John Grogan writes openly and guilelessly about some very painful and deeply personal moments in his life. He also speaks freely of the mischievous and sometimes devious adolescent that he was. If you were to write your own memoir, how honest could you be? Do you think you could face and expose your weaknesses and strengths the way he did?
16. Do you think writers like John Grogan see the world differently, or more clearly, than other people?

17. John meets a Catholic priest who tells him that he “was a fan of what I did for a living, of using words to reach out to a larger community. As he put it in one e-mail, ‘Just remember: Jesus’s favorite and most frequent way of teaching was telling stories. Is it any surprise that as things have come and gone with the passage of time, storytelling remains? It is part and parcel of what makes us human—and puts us in touch with our humanity.’ He called my writing my ‘ministry’ and added, ‘In your own way, John, you are doing God’s work.’” What do you think about this?

18. In his memoir, John Grogan touches on the themes of morality and grace, spirit and faith, and the powerful love of family. How are these demonstrated? Give some examples of each.

19. Speaking of the themes above, how does memoir differ from fiction in conveying universal truths about the human condition? Do you think the message is stronger or more indelible when it is transmitted through a memoir rather than a novel?

20. If you’ve read John Grogan’s previous book, *Marley & Me*, how does it compare to *The Longest Trip Home*? Are the tales similar? Do you see a connection between the two?