

Book Group Discussion Questions for
Home by Another Way: Harvesting Taproot's Wisdom
by Timothy Diebel

Content Questions for *Home by Another Way*:

1. What do you think the title is referring to? For Tim, what is "home?"
2. Tim and Lori have named their acreage "Taproot Garden." What is a taproot and how did this name fit their decision to buy a farm and their life on the farm? On p. 71, Diebel writes, "And yet, we came to Taproot for this. In fact, it was almost redundant to order seeds for this place where everything about this endeavor had to do with seeds already planted. Dreams, imagination, lives, spirit – seeds of a very different variety carefully and naively palmed and carried to this new beginning and thumbed into what already felt like fertile soil – at least for the soul's prosperity." Why do you think Diebel used the word "naively" when he talked about the seeds of dreams, imagination, lives, spirit already planted. In what ways were his and Lori's lives like the seeds he planted? In what ways were they different?
3. How does the book make use of the concept of humus? In what ways does Tim's life reflect the concept of humus? (see pp. iii, 55-, 183, 213)
4. In Chapter 1, Tim writes: "We are primarily feeding chickens, hogs, cattle, cars, and processing plants – not people." What is Diebel talking about? What sorts of problems did the food that Tim and Lori had been preparing have?
5. Tim says, "We discovered, we agreed in principle but differed on details." In what areas did he and Lori find they "agreed in principle but differed in details"? How did they tend to resolve such problems?
6. What does terroir mean? Why is this an important concept for Tim and Lori? "Terroir is about more than just geography and climate; it is also about a sensibility, or even a spiritual quest." (p. 36.)

7. A foundational aspect of our country, The United States, is the concept of the ownership of land. Why does Diebel dig into the history of the land he bought? (See chapter 5) What is his attitude toward that land.
8. Who was Walter Lowdermilk and what role has he played in the author's life? (See chapter 7)
9. What lessons did the Chickens teach the Diebels?
10. On p. 209, Tim asks the question, "So What?" What is Tim's answer to the hypothetical question?

Personal questions this book asks:

1. Tim writes, "And as the biblical book of Genesis suggests, when words are spoken out loud, new worlds are created. Can you think of a time in your life, for better or for worse, that words, once spoken by you or heard by you, changed your world?"
2. Diebel writes: I was probably 16 years old, impatient, and so invested in my delusion of autonomy as to have no visceral capacity for comprehending how tiny I was. Have you ever had an experience of tininess? A time when you deeply comprehended the immensity of creation and your miniscule place in it?
3. Think about the terroir of the place where you live. What is particular about your "place" that sets it apart from any place else?
4. We have all launched off in our lives into a place we had only dreamed about or imagined. (perhaps going off to college, beginning married life, becoming a parent, movement to a new town, new job, new calling.). What were your easiest "launchings"? What were the most complicated and/or hard? Why?
5. Diebel writes on p. 71, "I dream well, but as happened that first time I climbed the ladder to the swimming pool's high diving board decades before, more often than not I peer off the end into the distant and watery abyss, hesitate, and climb with a clinging shiver back down." The

metaphor is, “Life is like a swimming pool with a high dive. Are you more apt to do as Tim did—climb up and walk out and then, fearful of change, refuse to jump? Or is your tendency to jump without knowing how deep the pool is, or even how to swim? What is your tendency?”

6. What did the Diebel’s discover about growing fruit. (See chapter 11, p. 123) Thinking metaphorically, what is the “fruit” in your life that needs tending? What lessons might we learn from Tim’s struggle to grow fruit? What advice for us is embedded in this last sentence of chapter 11, “Regardless, I kept my pruners handy. They would eventually be needed. Nature had taught me when to prepare; and when to repair”?
7. In chapter 13, Diebel discovers the pervasive intrusion of weeds into his garden. What lesson about life did he learn from this? What lesson for your life is possible from this chapter? What is your resistance to learning this?
8. Chapter 14: Ecclesiastes tells us that “for everything there is a season.” What might the life cycle of the hens teach us about our own lives, our creativity, our relationships.
9. Tim writes, “Wedged between winter and spring, then, tis liminal space between safety and soaring. Like so much of life.” If you think of the stages of your life as being like the seasons of the year, what season are you in? Does this metaphor help you wake up and begin using your time more carefully? What do you feel like during each of the seasons Diebel describes?
10. Diebel makes reference throughout to books such as Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, that moved his thinking from one place to another. What role have books played in your life? What was your favorite book when you were a small child? Why do you think you gravitated to that book? Can you think of one or two that altered the way you think or feel about yourself, your marriage, your kids or parents, your country in some profound way?