

Discussion Questions for
These Healing Hills
by Ann H. Gabhart

- When you hear the word midwife, what image comes to mind? Did a midwife attend any of the births of your children?
- Fran wants to find a new start after her plans to marry her high school sweetheart fall through. Do you think she did the right thing to leave home and start a new life in a different place?
- The Frontier Nursing Service had a saying that no one came to the mountains by accident. What do you think they meant by that? Do you think it was true for Fran?
- Fran came from a city where many conveniences were taken for granted to an area where such conveniences were not available for many who lived in the mountains. How hard do you think it would be to adjust to such a drastic change in lifestyle? Have you ever lived without indoor plumbing, no telephone service and no electricity? Do you think you could?
- Fran likes to hear the mountaineers talk and thinks many of their unique expressions are poetic. On the other hand, Betty doesn't like it when Fran uses the mountain speak. Why do you think Betty felt that way? Do you think it was better that Fran wanted to know more about the mountain ways?
- Ben wants to come home to the mountains. Yet, at the same time, he's not sure he can stay there. In spite of his love of home, he wants to do something with his life besides subsistence farming or working in the mines. Why do think he was so conflicted about his future after the war?
- Becca came home to have her baby. Do you think it's a natural feeling to want your mother near when you are about to become a new mother? Do you think it would have been better if Becca had gone with her husband to Ohio?
- Woody was a fun guy to write about in the story. What did you like about him? Do you think he was right or wrong to tell the sheriff that it had to be an accident when he got shot? Why do you think Ben had such a hard time accepting Woody not wanting to accuse anyone?
- Sarge, the dog Ben gave Fran, was a very intuitive animal. Why do you think he bonded so quickly to Fran? Many of the Frontier Nurse midwives had their own dog. It was part of the recruitment promises – a dog, a horse and adventure. Why do you think Mrs.

Breckinridge made those promises to the women who came to the Frontier Nursing Service? Have you ever had a dog you loved the way Fran loves Sarge?

- Ben's father died while he was away in the war. Do you think that made it harder for Ben to accept his death? Have you ever lost a loved one when you weren't able to be with your family to grieve the death?
- Granny Em was one of those gift characters. I didn't plan her. She just showed up at that swinging bridge, but I was very glad she did. What do you think she meant about everything in life having a rhythm if a person only takes time to listen for it? Do you think that's true? Did you admire her independent spirit? What else did you like or not like about her?
- Did the story make you interested in the Frontier Nursing Service? Would you like to know more about Mary Breckinridge and why she wanted to help the mountain mothers and their children? Her autobiography, *Wide Neighborhoods*, tells much of her story. She wrote it partly to help raise funds for her Frontier Nursing Service.