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## While I Was Gone (Oprah's Book Club)

*By Sue Miller*



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**While I Was Gone (Oprah's Book Club)** By Sue Miller

“Riveting . . . While I Was Gone [celebrates] what is impulsive in human nature.”

–The New York Times

“Miller weaves her themes of secrecy, betrayal, and forgiveness into a narrative that shines.”

–Time

Jo Becker has every reason to be content. She has three dynamic daughters, a loving marriage, and a rewarding career. But she feels a sense of unease. Then an old housemate reappears, sending Jo back to a distant past when she lived in a communal house in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Drawn deeper into her memories of that fateful summer in 1968, Jo begins to obsess about the person she once was. As she is pulled farther from her present life, her husband, and her world, Jo struggles against becoming enveloped by her past and its dark secret.

“[While I Was Gone] swoops gracefully between the past and the present, between a woman’s complex feelings about her husband and her equally complex fantasies—and fears—about another man. . . . [Miller writes] well about the trials of faith.”

–The New York Times Book Review

“Quietly gripping . . . Jo shines steadily as the flawed and thoroughly modern heroine. As in her 1986 novel, *The Good Mother*, Miller shows how impulses can fracture the family.”

–USA Today

“Marvelous . . . poignant . . . powerful.”

–Seattle Times/Post Intelligencer



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## **While I Was Gone (Oprah's Book Club) By Sue Miller Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

In her still startling debut, *The Good Mother*, Sue Miller explored the premium we put on passion--and the terrible burden it places on a mother and child. Her fourth novel, *While I Was Gone*, is another study in familial crime and punishment. But this time, her wife and good mother is accessory to more than emotional malfeasance. Jo Becker has everything a woman could desire: a loving spouse, contented children, and a nice dog or two. When her New England veterinary practice takes on a new client, however, her past comes back to haunt her. Long ago, it seems, Jo had escaped her family and identity for a commune in Cambridge. Her Aquarian illusions came to an abrupt, bloody end when one of her housemates was brutally murdered.

Now this unhappy era returns in the person of Eli Mayhew, who had been the odd man out in Jo's boho household. His appearance is both tantalizing and upsetting: "Inside, I slowed down. I felt numbed. I had two last patients, and then I told Beattie to go home, that I'd close up.... I refiled the last charts, sprayed and wiped the examining table. I reviewed my list of routine surgeries for Wednesday. All the while I was thinking of Eli Mayhew, and of Dana and Larry and Duncan and me, and our lives in the house. Of the horrible way it had all ended." Sue Miller's fine novel is a penetrating--and sensuous--portrait of a woman besieged by her conscience. *While I Was Gone* also demonstrates that in the face of distance and betrayal, a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing indeed. --Winnie Wheaton

### From Publishers Weekly

The shadowy and inexorable nemesis of past secrets to a reclaimed life, and the inability even of those who are intimates to really know one another, are poignant themes in Miller's resonant fifth novel. Narrator Jo Becker, now a veterinarian married to a minister in a small Massachusetts town, was once a runaway bride who assumed a false name and lived with other disaffected '60s bohemians in a group house in Cambridge. Her special friend in the house was sweet-spirited and generous Dana Jablonski, whose shocking?and unsolved?murder broke up the group and left Jo with unresolved questions about her own identity. She manages to ignore the memories of that time until, almost three decades later, one of the former housemates, Eli Mayhew, moves to her town. Eli, now a distinguished research scientist, provides a revelation that acts as the catalyst provoking Jo to face her guilt about her past behavior?and to act impulsively once again. Her moral conundrum occasions a heartrending change in her heretofore strong marriage and undermines her relationship with her three grown daughters. As usual, Miller (*The Good Mother*; *Family Pictures*) renders the details of quotidian domesticity with bedrock veracity and a sensitivity to minute calibrations of family dynamics, especially the nuances of sibling rivalry. But while the pacing, tone and measured exposition are handled with masterly skill, the way in which Jo's decision to make amends for her past rebounds on her present life seems staged and convoluted, since her husband and children seem to think that retribution for a murder should take second place to their own emotional needs. That cavil aside, Miller's narrative is a beautifully textured picture of the psychological tug of war between finding integrity as an individual and satisfying the demands of spouse, children and community. 150,000 first printing; Random House audio; BOMC selection; author tour.

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### From Library Journal

Thirty years ago, Joey Becker's carefree bohemian life was shattered by the brutal, unsolved murder of her best friend, Dana. Joey coped with her loss while building a career, marrying, and raising a family. She thinks she is happy, but ever since her children have left home Joey has felt a vague sense of disappointment. She cannot share the depth of her feelings for Dana with anyone, even her husband. Then Eli, Joey and

Dana's former housemate, arrives in town. Joey and Eli are first drawn to each other because they both loved Dana and still mourn her, but their mutual attraction grows until it threatens Joey's marriage and her relationship with her daughter. Miller (*The Good Mother*, LJ 5/15/86) presents a suspenseful, penetrating look at the tenuous bonds of love, the ease with which even a good marriage can be destroyed, and the need to forgive ourselves for the mistakes of the past. Highly recommended for all public libraries.

-?Karen Anderson, *Superior Court Law Lib., Phoenix*

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Nancy Wiersma:**

Now a day people that Living in the era everywhere everything reachable by connect to the internet and the resources included can be true or not involve people to be aware of each data they get. How people have to be smart in receiving any information nowadays? Of course the solution is reading a book. Examining a book can help people out of this uncertainty Information specially this *While I Was Gone* (Oprah's Book Club) book because book offers you rich info and knowledge. Of course the details in this book hundred percent guarantees there is no doubt in it you probably know this.

#### **Arturo McDaniel:**

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#### **Krystal Sutherland:**

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