



***Camel from Kyzylkum* — Book Club Discussion Guide**

Opening Reflection

- What was your first emotional response to the memoir? Did it surprise you, move you, or remind you of your own family's story?
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Themes to Explore

1. Resilience and Hope

- Lara's story is shaped by moments of hardship and uncertainty. Which scene best illustrated her resilience to you?
- How did hope influence the decisions she made along her journey?

2. Identity and Belonging

- As a stateless refugee, Lara faced the challenge of finding a place to belong. How does her story make you reflect on your own sense of home or identity?
- What role does language, culture, or memory play in how we carry our identity when we move or change environments?

3. Family and Community

- How does the memoir portray the role of family bonds in survival and adaptation?
- Which relationship in the book resonated with you most, and why?
- How did the sudden rift and betrayal among family members resonate with you?

4. Crossing Borders

- Lara's journey takes her from Ukraine to the Kyzylkum Desert, then through Austria and Italy, and finally to America. Which transition stood out to you as the most pivotal?
 - What did the book make you realize about the courage required to leave one life behind in search of another?
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Deeper Personal Reflection

- If you were in Lara's shoes, what would have been your greatest fear—or your greatest source of strength?
 - The title, *Camel from Kyzylkum*, is striking. What do you think the camel symbolizes within the story?
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Closing Prompt

- How has reading this memoir shifted your perspective on refugees and immigration stories today?
 - If you could ask Lara one question directly, what would it be?
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✨ **Optional Activity:** Invite members to bring a personal item or short story that connects to their own family's journey—whether immigration, travel, or overcoming hardship—to share after the discussion.



Notes to my readers:

I am often asked:

- *When did you begin writing this memoir?*
- *Did you always envision the camel as the central metaphor for your life journey, or did that symbolism emerge later, as you reflected on your experiences?*

My answer to these questions:

I had wanted to write about my life journey since 2000 — perhaps even earlier — but while I was working, there was never enough time. Still, I always knew what the title would be: ***Camel from Kyzylkum***.

You see, I spent twenty years of my life working in the Kyzylkum Desert, observing camels up close. I arrived there at eighteen, just stepping into adulthood. So much happened to me in that vast and unforgiving landscape — experiences I endured, survived, and carried forward. The Kyzylkum Desert became embedded in my soul; I have carried it with me ever since.

During the quiet, uncertain days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when we could not travel, I found myself looking back and reflecting on the path that brought me here. That reflection became *Camel from Kyzylkum* — a memoir of loss, resilience, and the search for belonging.

So, to answer your question, the camel as the central metaphor for my life journey had been growing within me long before I began writing the memoir.

Author Website: <https://laragelya.com>

Amazon: <https://amazon.com/dp/Bo9Y7GTZQS/>

Barnes & Noble: <https://rb.gy/lz7rzg>

AudioBook: <https://tinyurl.com/yfnzp8nr>

Press Release: <https://shorturl.at/8Bjfr>

Author spotlight by Angela G. Williams:

<https://shorturl.at/OooGS>

Two videos:

Kyzylkum Desert:

https://youtu.be/cGZsHyfXh_k?si=-FcqEGMcOC09aLvT

Book Trailer:

<https://youtu.be/hDXOoOxaB7M?si=Ch7WplEKLb5srHG5>

About the Book:

*In a world that is constantly redefining borders, ideologies, and identities, the award-winning **Camel from Kyzylkum: A Memoir of My Life Journey** emerges as a truly powerful narrative that breaks through cultural divides and speaks to the core of human experience.*

The memoir traces a gripping path from Ukraine to the Kyzylkum Desert in Uzbekistan, and onward through Austria, Italy, and finally America. Along this journey, the author navigates personal truths and aspirations, illustrating the resilience and determination

required to forge a new path in unfamiliar lands. This memoir tells the story of an ordinary person who lived the American dream.

At its heart, the memoir asks a universal question: what does it mean to start over in a new country with nothing but a suitcase and hope?

The "camel" of the title becomes a powerful symbol: a creature built for endurance, carrying its sustenance within, much like the author herself.

Camel from Kyzylkum is a must-read book that opens your eyes to a new world that might be outside of your own.

CAMEL FROM
Kyzylkum

A Memoir of My Life Journey



LARA GELYA

Insight on *Camel from Kyzylkum: A Memoir of My Life Journey*

Camel from Kyzylkum stands as a deeply human and emotionally resonant memoir that traces not just a physical migration across continents, but an internal evolution shaped by resilience, sacrifice, and identity. At its core, the book is a portrait of survival and reinvention. Beginning in Ukraine and moving through the harsh and symbolic terrain of the Kyzylkum Desert in Uzbekistan during the Soviet era, the narrative immediately situates the reader in a world defined by political constraint, environmental hardship, and cultural complexity. These early chapters are not merely backstory; they establish the emotional and psychological foundation of a protagonist forged through adversity.

What makes this memoir particularly compelling is its multi-generational lens. The author does not only recount her life as an immigrant, but as a mother and grandmother, roles that add depth, warmth, and relatability to her journey. Her story becomes more than an individual pursuit of a better life. It transforms into a universal

narrative about legacy, family, and the quiet strength required to rebuild one's identity in unfamiliar lands. The transitions through Austria and Italy serve as cultural bridges, each location representing a different stage of transformation, adaptation, and self-discovery before ultimately arriving in the United States.

The prose style, described as simple and engaging, works to the book's advantage. It allows the emotional weight of the experiences to come through without unnecessary complexity, making the story accessible to a broad audience. This clarity enhances the authenticity of the voice, which is crucial in memoir storytelling. Readers are not just observing events; they are invited to feel them, to experience the uncertainty, fear, hope, and determination that define the author's path.

About the Author:

Born and schooled in Ukraine, Lara Gelya spent the next two decades in the Kyzylkum Desert of the Republic of Uzbekistan, working at geological sites and expeditions of the Mining Industry. At that time Ukraine and Uzbekistan were parts of one country — the Soviet Union.

In 1989 Lara left the Soviet Union, lived in Austria and Italy as a stateless refugee before she, at last, found her way to the United States in 1990. Starting her life from ground zero again, and trying on so many hats, she was able to make a lengthy professional career that led to her eventual retirement on the shores of sunny Florida.

Now, enjoying her retirement, Lara fills her days with enriching activities like writing, creating videos and pictures, reading, gardening, cooking, traveling, and immersing herself in nature or entertainment. Her diverse interests and active lifestyle after

retirement show a deep appreciation for life's pleasures and a continuing curiosity about the world around her.



QR code for Author Website <https://laragelya.com>:

