

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

/ Was So Much Older Then

1. Danny experiences several families other than his own biological family. What are some of the strengths as well as weaknesses of these "extended" families, e.g., the Lawtons, Shepards, Wades, Willa and Micah? What coping skills does Danny develop to deal with these families, including his own mother and father? Do you see any of these skills or characteristics in yourself or your family of origin?
2. What is the effect on Danny of his mother Anne's telling him "... you must never leave me ... You're all I've got"? Why does Anne think she can't ever leave, first, the hotel room, then, later on, the apartment she and Danny share? Have you, a friend or loved one ever exhibited similar methods of coping with the external world?
3. Is Danny's negative assessment of his father entirely fair or accurate? Can any of Clay's behavior be explained due to his circumstances or background? Does he have any redeeming qualities at all? Have you ever known anyone like Clay?
4. Which of Danny's "family" members, from his mother and father to his bandmates, did you find the best role models or mentors? Do they qualify as full-fledged heroes or flawed human beings? Have you had similar mentors in your own past who, seemingly perfect at first, seemed less so as time wore on? What was their ultimate effect on your life?
5. Two huge influences on Danny are music and religion. As contrasts to his dysfunctional family life, are these influences equally capable of helping him learn who he is, discover his path in life? Do you approve of the choices he made, e.g, walking out on his baptism, apparently choosing Dale and the band over Neil and God? Discuss other such choices Danny made and the potential for positive or negative consequences. Can you remember a major decision you made when you were young that set you on the right or wrong path?
6. What are some effects of sexuality and women on Danny's life, from his earliest experiences with the prostitute Claire, to Sally Sykes, Rebecca Wade, Teresa "Crotch" Crotty and eventually Willa? Looking beyond the end of the novel, can you predict how Danny will relate to women later in life? Who has influenced you the most in terms of relating to the opposite sex?
7. Are Danny and Micah more alike or different? What is the real basis of their friendship? If Danny had not ended the relationship, can you predict the future of Danny's new "family" in the next year? Did you ever experience an

"extended" family based on friendship rather than biology? If so, were there drawbacks as well as benefits?

8. How much do you think the novel's setting or geographical location (West Virginia, Appalachia), influences Danny's life? His mother and father's? Neil Shepard's? Rebecca Wade's? Micah Plumly's? Were there more advantages or disadvantages to a boy of Danny's race and class growing up in Appalachia in the 1960's and 70's? Name several effects of your "coming of age" in the region and decade where you spent your formative years. Would you have preferred growing up in another time or place?
9. Can you think of other creative works you've read that fit the label "Appalachian literature?" In what ways is / Was *So Much Older Than* similar to or different from these works? Does the novel seem to reinforce or contradict stereotypes associated with the region? Compare it also to popular culture representations of Appalachians, e.g., *Andy Griffith*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Coalminer's Daughter*, *the Waltons*. In what ways does your place of origin differ or compare to Appalachia?
10. Did the novel's conclusion provide a satisfying or unsatisfying resolution of the conflicts, plot and theme? What was missing, if anything? Can you predict what Danny's life will be like a year later? Five years later? Ten? Describe a time when you were at a similar "jumping off point" in your life.
11. Did you find the novel well-structured, life-like and compelling or too episodic, with too many characters coming and going, the events too aimless and disjointed?
12. What, if anything, does the novel have to say about Appalachia, the 1960s and/or life in general? Is the message one that pertains more to the region, culture and time period of the book, or is it more universal, applying to anyone, anywhere?