



Summer at Willow Lake

Susan Wiggs

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The Lakeshore Chronicles have captivated thousands of readers with unforgettable characters, warm humor and engaging stories. *Summer at Willow Lake* is the story that started it all. Meet Olivia, Connor and the families and friends of Willow Lake that make these emotional romances must-reads.

Olivia Bellamy reluctantly trades a trendy Manhattan summer for her family's old resort camp in the Catskills to renovate the bungalow colony for her grandparents, who want one last summer together filled with fun, friends and family. A posh resort in its heyday, the camp is now in disarray and Olivia is forced to hire contractor Connor Davis—a still-smoldering flame from her own summers at camp.

But as the days grow warm, not even the inviting blue waters of Willow Lake can cool the passions flaring or keep shocking secrets at bay. The nostalgic joy of summers past breathes new promise into a special place and people...a promise meant to last long after the season ends.

Summer at Willow Lake Details

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From Reader Review Summer at Willow Lake for online ebook

Dorine says

Rated 4.5 - SUMMER AT WILLOW LAKE by Susan Wiggs is perfect for those who have fond memories of summer camp or camping. The setting is especially appreciated during an Ohio winter, when we're dreaming of campfire stories, fishing, boating, and hiking to revisit in summer. I loved the characters and the wilderness setting.

For all the fun cover color and clickable linkies, read this at my blog.

Why was this book in Dorine's TBR? Susan Wiggs' themes sound like the perfect beach read to me. That means I end up collecting them, with the good intention of reading them on vacation. Of course, that never happens. SUMMER AT WILLOW LAKE begged to be read because I was dreaming about camping. It resonated with me as I was making our summer reservations for our own wilderness getaway.

I'm thankful for the Backlist Glom theme this month for the TBR Challenge organized by Wendy the Super Librarian. I love finding books that are buried so deep in my TBR that I don't remember buying them. This novel was hidden on the 2011 paperweight, aka the Nook Tablet, which has outlasted my Kindles (total of three so far). I wasn't sure the Nook still worked. With 434 books, plus my favorite Plants Vs. Zombies game, I needed to charge it and check. Yes, it's still ticking! That didn't stop me from drooling over the new Nooks at the bookstore this week. SMH.

I avoided reading SUMMER AT WILLOW LAKE because I "thought" it was over 500 pages. The page counts on GoodReads vary wildly. My digital copy is 344 pages – not as overwhelming as the 534 pages listed for the 2006 print publication. Anyone else notice that with the larger Harlequin books? Do they really lengthen, or are they playing with the typeface sizes? Note to self – look at the page counts closely so you don't miss more great books!

I used to read what I call "tomes". Any book 500 to over 1000 pages got my attention, especially historical. Most of these are print books, and I still gravitate toward them to purchase in print, but rarely read them because they're too big for my lifestyle now.

I should start calling my library room "the tome tomb," as it's becoming a mausoleum of the unread!

The beginning plot...

Olivia Lolly Bellamy takes on the remodel of the century by accepting her grandmother's challenge. Her grandparents want to celebrate their 50th Wedding Anniversary by renewing their vows at Camp Kioga where they met and married. The Bellamys owned and operated the camp until about nine years ago when they closed it. Its rundown condition doesn't scare Olivia, until she realizes she needs help beyond what she and her cousins can do. And the only assistance available is contractor Connor Davis, the crush from her youth she'd rather forget.

Of course, Grandma has ulterior motives. Olivia has just ended her third engagement. Grandma feels Olivia has unfinished business in Avalon, New York, the Catskills home of Camp Kioga. It's also the source of her fears – those memories of childhood anxieties. Connor Davis was her best friend and first love at camp, but why did he move to Avalon? It's not like it was his hometown, or matched his lifelong ambitions as far as Olivia remembers.

My thoughts...

The wilderness setting is what drew me to this book and kept me reading. I grew to love the characters and was intrigued by Olivia and Connor's secrets. Dual timelines were helpful in metering out the details of this couple's past. As with most books like this, the family secrets and drama add to the main characters' unease.

I don't always enjoy a dual timeline. It depends on whether I'm interested in what's happening, so I don't get frustrated when one plotline drops to go back to another. The switching back and forth in this novel was enjoyable because I adore stories about kids at camp, as much as I gravitate toward remodeling stories with adults. Throw in a wilderness setting, where everyone is forced to enjoy the old-fashioned things like fishing without the aid of a fish finder, and I'm completely enthralled.

Some details seemed skimmed over where I wanted more. But, that would have made the book longer, and then I might not have read it. I think it has first-book-in-a-series-itis. There are a lot of characters to introduce, and intrigue to build, to keep us coming back for more. With all that going on, plus the backstory, there isn't room for more detail without making the book a tome. So, I did notice the skimming which made the book feel choppy or rushed in a couple places, but it didn't bug me enough to dislike the style or the story.

This book made me smile, especially the last few pages. There is the big misunderstanding that made me want to shake the main couple for not talking about it right away. That's not my favorite plot device, but that didn't dissuade me from loving this book.

SUMMER AT WILLOW LAKE made me happy I chose it for this month's challenge. The setting won out as my favorite part, and now I wonder what will happen at the lake next. I've already had a sneak peek when I read and reviewed book nine, RETURN TO WILLOW LAKE, in 2012. I'm speculating about Jenny Majesky in book two and Daisy in book eight. I may just have to jump ahead to find out Daisy's story because of Julian, the wild child. He's a great character in book one, and I'm super curious about the man he grows up to be.

Review by Dorine, courtesy of The Zest Quest. Digital copy purchased.

Asheley says

4.5/5

I loved this book. This is the beginning of a series of family saga stories with a lot of time spent focusing on the main characters, there is also much (maybe equal?) page time given to introducing the secondary cast for future installments.

In this case, the entire extended Bellamy family gathers at Camp Kioga in rural New York. The Bellamy family has owned the camp for years and years, but it has not been operational in a long time. Olivia Bellamy, with her career in staging homes for real estate sales, has been asked by her grandmother to fix up the camp so she and her husband can renew their vows for their 50th wedding anniversary. Olivia and her assistant move to the camp and get started on the work right away, inviting the entire family to come stay and help out because the job is so big. After Olivia arrives, it turns out that one of the locals that she hires to help is Connor Davis.

Olivia and Connor know one another from way back when they were both young campers at Camp Kioga.

Over the course of several summers, the two grew quite close. Then a Big Major Event happened that split them up and they haven't crossed paths since. Naturally, working together will bring up those friendship/love feelings that they had in the past, and maybe the two will work through what happened so they can have a relationship in the present...all while we (the readers) find out the backstories of the rest of the cast.

So, I loved this. *I love these types of series*. I LOVE the relationships between the siblings and cousins and the entire family, and I love second chance romances. And I love small-town romance with a lakeside setting. All of these things are present in this book. That - along with "summer" in the title - is what drew me to this one at this particular time.

It took a little while to get the reason Olivia and Connor had such a bad parting many years ago, but the development of their newfound relationship was nice while I waited. I love that these two come from very different backgrounds and are able to look beyond that. Much of this story is told in flashbacks and there are multiple POVs. I'm excited for several of the upcoming installments because I liked certain characters so much. Actually, I'm surprised at how much I liked Olivia; I sometimes find the female characters in books like these to be less interesting than the male leads for one reason or another. But I liked both Olivia and Connor very much.

I'm curious to see what happens with the rest of these characters over the course of the series, and I'm hoping for more of this lakeside setting because I liked it so much.

Audiobook Notes: 12 hours, 48 minutes, Unabridged. Published by Brilliance Audio. Audiobook narrator was Joyce Bean. When I look at audiobook reviews, I see pretty mixed reviews for this narrator. I think she was okay but there it feels like a little bit of overacting with the male voices - they're noticeable to me where I really forgot I was listening to a narrator at other parts. I loved listening to this book in the evenings during my kids' exams and last week of school; it was like completely de-stressing before I went to bed each night. I already have the audiobooks for much of this series already in my audio library, so I'll be listening while I alternate reading with my paperback copies.

Courtney says

I wish that I agreed with the other reviewers who seemed fascinatedly in love with this book, but I am not able to. I did like the idea behind the story, and a few of the characters in the most general sense, but found much of the book to be schmaltzy and unrealistic. It felt like a weird mash up of Dirty Dancing, every movie or book about a summer camp that you've ever heard of, and a harlequin romance novel. The leading male character, Connor, was wholeheartedly unbelievable- from his 80's/90's era "good looks" of long hair, pierced ear, and motorcycle/rebel attire, to his professed love for the "fat girl" turned "beautiful swan" Lolly/Olivia. I have rarely met a man in real life who is such a "rebel" and, at the same time, a totally sappy romantic. I can't explain to you how much I disliked this book- the writing was cliched, the characters nearly unbelievable, and the story hurried. When I got to the end, I cheered in pure excitement that I was finished with it. I mean no disrespect to the author, as she obviously has a large following who love this sort of story, but I can assure you I will not be reading any more of her books.

Stacy says

Camp Kioga means many things to many people. For Olivia Bellamy, whose family operated the camp in the

Catskills, it's all about bad memories. Although she was just as rich as the other attendees, she was never as pretty or thin or self-assured. The only thing that kept her from being completely miserable was the arrival each summer of Connor Davis. For Connor, the camp took him away from a life far different than Olivia's and showed him how life could be. Connor and Olivia finally have a relationship, which seems to scar her heart. Years later, a slimmed-down, professional Olivia is asked by her grandmother to prepare the camp for her fiftieth wedding anniversary. Connor is still in the area, and as soon as she hires him to help with the project, feelings arise on both sides.

Jessica ❁ ➡ Silverbow ➡ ❁ Rabid Reads-no-more says

2.5 stars

Originally I rated this 3 stars, but then I thought about it some more and realized that I didn't care enough about any of the secondary characters to consider continuing the series.

This is one of those family/anyone-loosely-connected-to-the-family sagas, so there are numerous threads to follow/pique your interest . . . except they didn't--with one possible exception (male MC's brother), I couldn't care less about any of them.

SO. Docked half a star for the sheer mediocrity. Even the summer camp-ness elements couldn't keep this one from being solidly MEH.

Ally72 says

To all of my "Virgin River" goodreads friends: Run...do not walk to get this book (if you have not already)!

Wow! I am so happy to have accidentally stumbled upon this author recently. The "Virgin River" books by Robyn Carr are one of my favorite contemporary romance series and I am always looking for another series like it. I have found it with these books by Susan Wiggs! The story is told with a combination of flashbacks and present day situations. I was not sure I would like it and I found myself loving it! Summer at Willow Lake also tells the story of other characters that are related to the main ones. I loved Lolly and Connor's relationship. As the book unfolds, we learn that they had been each other's first love at Lolly's grandparents' Summer camp. Connor grew up in a difficult household and Lolly did too. The circumstances were totally different, but that was one of the bonds they shared. I could go on and on about how much I loved these two and why this story worked for me, but I will not bore any of my goodreads friends who are kind enough to read my review! I just want to add one more quick point in case anyone is wondering...This story was not as steamy as maybe some of the "Virgin River" books, but I enjoyed it just as much. It definitely was a romance and I am anxious to read more!

Misty Baker says

When I was a teenager I loved romance novels. I would spend hours on the beach reading Harlequin's and had an obscene number of Nora Robert's novels stacked around my room. I absolutely adored the "happily ever after," the moment where I knew everything would be ok, that life would return to normal, (like at the end of the hour on The Brady Bunch.) Since then however, I have drifted away from conventional

(contemporary) romance novels. I would like to tell you my aversion was due solely to literary growth, but then I would be lying. I'm not sure if I ate too many paint chips as a child, or if my inner snob finally took hold of me in my early 20's but the OLDER I got the HARDER it got for me to stomach romance "covers." Yes... you read that correctly. I cannot, as much as I try, get past the sometimes hazy looking, almost always cheesy, bare chested, clichés that grace the covers of 70% of today's romance selections. Thankfully, owning a Kindle has cured me from this little problem. I no longer have to see the cover every time I pick up my book to read it, therefore I don't have a problem picking it up. Yes... I know I'm completely off my rocker.

Anyways, finding my new found freedom I decided to venture back into the world of the overly-dramatic-but-always-entertaining with a little bit of Susan Wiggs.

Olivia Bellamy was a very unhappy kid. As a matter of fact, she was a very unhappy kid who was forced to spend her summers at Camp Kioga. But while most kids would relish in the freedoms that camp afforded them Lolly was the complete opposite. Known as the "chubby know-it-all" she had no friends, (that is of course unless you count Conner, the tragically beautiful maintenance man's son who would only speak to her after everyone else had gone to bed.) Olivia is no longer that kid though. Dropping the weight and changing her hair was only the beginning of Lolly's new and improved life. Not only did she start a successful "staging company" in NYC but she's also about to become a Mrs. Unfortunately, (once again,) things don't go exactly as planned and before she knows it Lolly finds herself back at Camp Kioga, only this time she is running the show. What happens when an old flame turns out to be a necessary part of her new journey. Will the secrets that haunt her family's past wreck her future, and will Olivia ever accept responsibility for her own actions.

Before I dive into the negatives, I want to point out a few of "Summer at Willow Lakes" sparkly moments. For example: Wiggs does a fantastic job of giving her readers "just enough." We get just enough emotion to feel attached to the characters, just enough drama to keep us guessing, and just enough "huba huba" that it doesn't distract, but adds to the story. The overall concept of the novel is fantastic, and if not 100% original, it's at least written well enough to disguise any similarities. The only problem I had with this novel is its predictability. Not the "stories" predictability (although you would have to be a complete moron not to see what was happening) I'm referring to Wiggs need to add a million different "supporting actors" for future use, (which by the way I checked on and yes... there are about 10 more books in this series) I wanted to read a story about Olivia and Conner, and yes, I got that, but I also got character set-ups for at least 6 other books. Just when I would get excited about where the story was going I would flip the page and find myself knee deep in Daisy-the-cute-niece's story, NOT Lolly's. As a matter of fact, I got so frustrated in some parts that I found myself skipping 2 or 3 pages at a time to get back to the original plot line. Did this destroy the book? No, of course not, (this is a pretty common occurrence among romance novels) but I will say that I was annoyed enough to drop a star from its rating.

All in all, it was a pretty decent story for someone who wants more than just bed hopping in their books. If that is you, go for it... you might just find a new series to get involved in, however if you are a woman (or man...I'm not going to judge you) that likes a little more sizzle with their steak... this one is probably a little too tame for you.

Happy Reading my fellow Kindle-ites and remember: keep a few books in your car that make you look like a rocket scientist, just in case.

Siany says

I had high expectations of this book even though the only books I have read from this author are her older

"historical" romances ones and I remember loving them, however I don't think this matched them.

I expected the story to be a bit more in depth to what it really was.

It starts of with Olivia (Lolly) hating Connor over what happened one summer when she was 17 and years later asking him for help on renovating their old camp.

The story took a while to get started and it consisted of one chapter being the present and the next one being in the past, either back to Olivia's father's past or hers and Connors past.

It just didn't flow right for me...and I really don't know what the point was in having the side story with her father in...it didnt really add anything to the story.

I also think the "wrong" that Connor did to Olivia wasn't explored enough and when you realise what he did...it was a bit silly especially as he didnt have anything to do with it.

It also didnt feel that they had been around each other an entire summer. They seemed to fall in love incredibly quick. Nothing seemed to be explored fully in this and it all happened very quickly without much explanation of things and then ended just as quick.

I do have Just Breathe on my TBR so I reserve full judgement on the author and her contemporary romances until I have read that one. But I didnt really enjoy this one.

Rossy says

This was not just a new series for me, but author as well. I've had this book for a while but kept putting it off on my TBR. I'm glad i was finally able to read it, the book was really good.

The characters are those that you can relate with, and the story is able to bring different emotions from the reader. There were some parts where i even found myself laughing out loud. A secret is revealed in this book that sets up the premise for the following story. It was quite intriguing and enjoyable to see how the characters involved reacted to it.

This book was quite long but i thought that was perfect because it built the setting for the future books. I have to say that the way the camp was portrayed made me wish i could back to those times again myself. There seems to be mixed reviews about the flashbacks, but i have to say i enjoy it. It gives first hand knowledge not just on what happens but how participant were those involved. It was interesting to see how in some of those flashbacks the characters involved rationality of the event varied from my own.

The only downside for me and is more a personal taste than the author's fault, was the heroine's self image. For me, it was exaggerated to the point where i just wanted to shake her. Tell her to take a look at how old she was and how far she had come. To really listen to what others who really matter in her life think of her and not some childhood vision. Honestly get a psychiatrist already! Not that the hero was any better, they both just lacked a great amount of communication. There were some issues that could have been avoided simply by an honest conversation. Instead we had to deal with self preservation excuses that were kind of unfounded.

Another thing i didn't like much was how after all the struggles the main characters go throughtout the book, there's this big blowout that happens and they are separated. Then suddenly their heads finally start to work and boom HEA. Just how quickly they can come together after watching them struggle for so many pages was a bit absurd, but seems to be a theme for the author on all the books.

Overall though i can excuse the parts i didn't like much because deep inside am just a sucker for a romantic

ending. These HEA may have happened in a rushed manner but had all the trimmings i like in a story.

Raven Rose says

So far I'm on page 105 and have learned a good lesson: why NOT to use flashbacks. The story itself seems to be ok but I'm getting so tired of the "here and now" being interrupted that I'm about to give up on it. Also there seems to be too many characters to keep track of...

Tammy says

In this day and age of books that contain one-word sentences, run-on phrases and attempts at wittiness that can sometimes be downright nerve-racking, I found SUMMER AT WILLOW LAKE to be a breath of fresh air. This story is engaging, the characters had real depth and the descriptions are beautifully written. Even the secondary characters were interesting and the subplots were easy to follow. Maybe parts of it were a little "Thornbirdish" in nature, but I still truly enjoyed this one. Family saga or not.

At the awkward age of 12-years-old, insecure, shy and overweight Olivia "Lolly" Bellamy meets Connor Davis for the first time at summer camp. Lolly comes from a privileged and wealthy home (her family owns the summer camp situated on Willow Lake) while Connor is the son of an alcoholic. Lolly's parents are going through a difficult divorce. Connor's parents could care less about him to the point of neglect. Lolly and Connor are paired together on a hike - Lolly's only friends, her cousins, do not attend summer camp this particular time - and become good friends after a somewhat rocky beginning. The book follows their relationship as it progresses over the years until the summer after high school graduation when Connor and Lolly return to camp - this time as counselors. Connor officially becomes Lolly's first boyfriend; however, the summer ends with a humiliating incident and Lolly is unable to get over it or discuss it. She heads off to college at her mother's insistence and never speaks with Connor again.

Nine years later, Lolly is a sophisticated, beautiful city girl who owns a successful business in NY as a property fluffer/stager. She has been engaged 3 times. After her latest disaster of a relationship ends, her grandparents ask her to leave NY and restore the now-defunct summer camp at Willow Lake for their 50th wedding anniversary celebration. Lolly recruits several family members and a local contractor to help her with renovations. Unbeknownst to her, Connor Davis is the contractor that she has hired. The reunion scene between Lolly and Connor is creative and I will only say it involves a flagpole, a damsel in distress and a devastatingly handsome man in black leather on a motorcycle.

Much of this story is told in flashbacks, written in separate chapters so as to avoid any confusion. The scene where the grandparents finally renew their wedding vows had me in tears. Trust me when I say that I have never gotten emotional over a book before. This one really did it for me. The romance is sweet and sometimes funny, but not overly sexy.

Please note that this book is nearly 600 pages, hence the reason why it sat in my TBR pile for so long. But I enjoyed it so much that I read it in less than 2 days. I am off to view the author's website now ...

DAISY DISNEY says

I am a Susan Wiggs fan after reading this book! I enjoyed reading every page of it. I truly loved the campground atmosphere that the story had and all of the natural descriptions of the campground. I was able to really visualize in my mind the sunsets and the moonlights. I did enjoy the different stories entwined into Lolly and Conner's love story too. I especially enjoyed reading on Lolly's father and his lost love. I was very sad when his girlfriend broke up with him and was never heard of again. I really sympathized with him and his heartbroken self when she told him she didn't want to see him again and that the whole summer had been nothing but a mistake... HOW SAD WAS THAT!!

Lolly and Conner's love story was a sweet one; one that started when they were teens and then got re-kindled when they were adults. I liked Connor's character as he was an average hard working regular guy. I liked that even though Lolly came from money and was from a higher social society that Connor, she was still grounded and down to earth.

Some readers have said that the story was hard to keep up with because of the going back and forth of different timelines throughout the book, but I disagree. To me the going back and forth was a great element to that book that brought out more of the character's feelings and explained what made them what they were. I found it easy to keep track of each story and memory and enjoyed going back in time with some of the characters such as Phillip.

Overall this book was very sweet. It had the most elegant touch of a love story that a book can have without it being cheesy. There was just enough of everything for my liking! I can't wait to pick up the second book in this series!

Dale Harcombe says

Definitely not my favourite of hers. I have read this author before and enjoyed her books. But not this one. Not even sure why I continued to read it. Maybe because I kept waiting for this one to get better. I skipped bits. I got sick and tired of hearing about the Connor's erections and the size and shape of breasts of various females, though that was not the term used in the novel. Since I abhor the other term and never use it, I will stick with the correct terminology. I also got tired of hearing how good looking Connor was and how often Lolly/Olivia underestimated him. It seemed to me that these two who knew each other as teenagers and were supposed to have a relationship and be able to talk about anything didn't actually talk to each other.

Otherwise issues could easily have been cleared up. Instead it dragged on.

To me the most romantic part of this story was the against the odds enduring marriage of Olivia's grandparents celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary at Camp Kioga which has been such a vital part of their lives, as well as Olivia's and Connor's.

TJ says

This book had a lot of really good points and only two not so good but those two continued throughout. I loved the backdrop of summer camp and all of the memories adults would carry of it. What a wonderful idea for a series of books! I really enjoy Susan Wiggs writing style, her characters always seem real and it is easy to lose oneself in their stories.

I had trouble with the choice in this book, however. While I enjoyed the secondary characters, their stories took up entire chapters NOT relating to the main plot. Also, there were too many of them! Along with the

storyline of Olivia and Conner (the main characters), there was her Father, his past and present storyline and her uncle Greg and his family's story - all substantial parts of the book. I would begin to be pulled into the plot of one when the chapter would end and abruptly change to a completely different story and character, throwing the flow of the book completely off. I found this very frustrating. I prefer one plot with sidelines, not three plots simultaneously running if not related.

Leah says

Property expert Olivia Bellamy reluctantly trades a trendy Manhattan summer for her family's old resort camp in the Catskills, where her primary task will be renovating the bungalow colony for her grandparents, who want one last summer together filled with fun, friends and family. A posh resort in its heyday, the camp is now in disarray and Olivia is forced to hire contractor Connor Davis – a flame from her own summers at camp. But as the days grow warm, not even the inviting blue waters of Willow Lake can keep shocking secrets at bay. The nostalgic joy of summers past breathes new promise into a special place and people... a promise meant to last long after the season ends.

Susan Wiggs is the author of numerous books. I'm not entirely sure how many, but it must be at least 20+ if not more, although I don't think Susan is as well known in the UK than she is in America, with only a few of her novels having been released in the UK. However, when I was offered the chance to review Summer At Willow Lake, I liked the sound of it. It had a pretty cover, an intriguing synopsis and is 'perfect for fans of Cathy Kelly' so I decided to give it a go. Summer At Willow Lake was actually originally released in America in 2006, and it's only hitting the UK market now, in 2011. In fact, this is the first novel in the Lakeshore series and so far there are 7 books in the series. After finishing Summer At Willow Lake I will certainly be checking out the fellow novels in the series.

I don't think I can necessarily pinpoint what it was that I loved so much about Summer At Willow Lake. What initially interested me in the book was the fact the novel is set at a former summer camp, Camp Kioga. The Camp holds a lot of memories for Olivia Bellamy, not only do her grandparents own the camp but she went there herself when she was a young child until she was well into her teens each summer. The book moves seamlessly from the present day all the way back to Olivia's times at the camp back in the early-to-mid-to-late Nineties. I figured there would be more to the backstory than there was, but there was only a smattering of chapters throughout the book dedicated to the time Olivia, Connor and co. spent at Camp Kioga. They were nicely timed though, allowing us a little insight into how Olivia was as a teenager and we learn how she and Connor were outcasts, if you will, compared to all the other kids who frequented Camp Kioga.

I loved that Olivia was returning to the camp some years – 9 – later to help get it ready for her grandparents fiftieth wedding anniversary, it was clear that Olivia had unresolved issues about the camp and coming back to bring it back to its former glory allowed Olivia to overcome them. Namely Connor Davis. We don't know much of what happened between Olivia and Connor, apart from what I mentioned above of them being outcasts and becoming friends. That's unravelled as the story unfolds but the chemistry they had was really something else. I've not known two characters so perfect for each other and I loved how they sparked off each other and managed to fall back into their easy friendship despite the fact they hadn't seen each other since their final (disastrous) night at Camp Kioga nine years previously. They carry the story beautifully and all I wanted to do was rush to the end to see if they got a happy ever after. Susan Wiggs sure can build up the romance, lemme tell you.

Apart from Olivia's story there's a lot more that goes on in the novel. It's not just about Olivia and Connor. There's a big secret back from when Olivia's own father went to Camp Kioga – which I must admit, I

guessed immediately, but I still found riveting. Julian, Connor's younger brother, feels all out at sea and resorts to jumping off high things to feel alive and get attention and ends up having to spend the summer with Connor to save him from juvie. Olivia's Uncle Greg has a marriage that's falling apart so uses the summer to spend some time with his kids, Daisy and Max. I thought it was a real family affair and I found all of the stories to be incredibly real and touching. They were all as engaging as the next and all of the characters were wonderful. They're such an ensemble cast but I found it very easy to remember who was who and what they'd done and why I was reading about them. I've got no idea how Susan managed to keep them all going, all the different strands, but it all worked beautifully. There's nothing like a book that comes together perfectly.

Summer At Willow Lake is a hugely engaging story. Honestly, the novel is 544 pages long and I finished it in a day, because quite simply I didn't want to put it down. Is it the most perfect book I've ever read? Probably not but it's one of the books I've found hardest to put down because I wanted to reach the end. I wanted to make sure everybody was OK come the final page, I felt invested in them and I really felt for them. I'm totally looking forward to continuing on with the series, although I know the other books are more companion novels than direct sequels as they feature other characters. I do hope however that Connor and Olivia re-appear as I found them to be truly enjoyable characters. With some characters you just "know" and with Olivia and Connor I knew. I knew they were absolutely perfect for each other and they just needed to get over their individual issues and forget all that happened in the past. This might not be a traditional Chick Lit novel, I'd probably say it's more romance than Chick Lit, but I think Chick Lit fans will find it just as engaging as I did. Despite it's length, it never lags. In fact, I can't believe it was so long because it felt shorter. It felt as if I'd finished it in a flash and I must admit I kind of miss the characters already. Definitely a brilliant summer read, with a wonderful setting.
