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Family Tree #4: Home Is the Place

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In her growing-up years, Georgia struggles to make sense of the paranoia of her over-protective mother, the rift between her grandmother and great-grandmother, and the unexplained death of her great-great-grandmother. While piecing together these puzzles, Georgia also learns from loss—she watches her older brother make choices that lead to her teacher's death in a car accident, sees her father struggle with unemployment, and experiences the horrors of September 11, 2001, hearing that her friend's father has died in New York City. Georgia also tries to find her own way as a musician, although her mother, Francie, can't understand why. As Abby, Dana, Francie, and Georgia sit down in a four-generation heart-to-heart conversation, differences are resolved and light is shed on family secrets.

This fourth installment in the series ties together a ribbon of common themes that Georgia and her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother have faced. These themes include mother-daughter relationships, the responsibility to care for siblings—both as youth and as adults—the long-lasting influence of childhood friends, and the adaptations needed to move from one town to another or from one age to the next. In the Family Tree series, characters learn from the changing nature of family life: the birth of children and much-younger siblings; the death of parents, grandparents, and other relatives; the separation of parents and melding of new stepparents. Throughout the series, the girls deal with disability, depression, discrimination, diseases, and the divisive decisions of past generations. While Ann M. Martin takes on the risk of treating these issues appropriately for young readers, she does so in a natural way that allows readers to love the characters just as much as readers of earlier decades loved The Baby-Sitters Club and Baby-Sitter's Little Sister series.