

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

EARTHQUAKES

1. The author describes a host of items in this opening chapter. It's a powerful, seamless technique to create an impression on the reader and communicate subterranean meaning. Make a list of the items and reflect: how do they seem to both shape and mirror the author's inner life as a child and later as a teenager?

2. The author was left alone with "big forces" she couldn't control, beginning very early in life. Potentially, this contributed to the development of a life-long struggle with anxiety. Do you know anyone with anxiety? Is their journey similar? If you could help someone *not* develop anxiety—or try to cope with existing anxiety—where would you be inclined to start?

3. What is the function of control in a person's life? Do you believe it is negative or positive to want control?

4. At one point, the author visits The Mormon Rocks, as a way to "put them to rest." The first step is to "learn they had a name." Do you believe there is power in naming? What is the source of that power? Its result?

5. Why do you think some people are capable of seeking danger and others seem less inclined? What are the implications for society and for the individuals themselves?

FREEWAYS

1. Freeways are a staple of California life. What is a staple of the life you lead in your region? How are you affected by this, in ways either similar to or different from Californians' experience on their highways?

2. Joan Didion calls the California freeways a form of communion. What is a source of "communion" in your own region? If we wanted to create more "communion" in our country, how could we try to do that, so we could enjoy a sense of camaraderie even in the hard times?

3. When the author's father takes a "wrong" highway, a traumatic scene ensues. What was your own parents' response to things that went wrong? Has it affected your view of "mistakes," either positively or negatively?

4. "What *is* the real California, and can it ever be found?" asks the author about her home state. What *is* the real state *you* grew up in or live in now? And can it ever be found? What are the implications of that?

5. Have you ever tried to produce an epiphany from a symbolic gesture (the way the author tried to do by bringing home the ice plants for tea)? How successful were you, are you? What *do* you believe is the source of epiphanies? And is there a place for symbolic gesture in bringing illumination to a life?

6. Throughout the book, the author sometimes feels like she

does not understand her mother's penchant for art, curation, and collection. Yet they do hold these qualities in common at some level. How so?

BURBS

1. Going back to her childhood home, the author isn't sure what she is accomplishing once she's there. What do you believe she did or didn't accomplish? Have you ever gone back to your own childhood home? What did the experience accomplish or not accomplish for you?

2. The suburbs are discussed as a kind of dream or fantasyland—especially the Rossmoor development. What are the up and down sides to dreams and fantasies?

3. The author has a tenuous relationship with “the touchable things of the world.” What do you believe contributed to that? (Go ahead, conjecture.) What is your own relationship to objects? How do they either enrich or complicate your life—or both?

4. One afternoon on her way to the beach, the author's father tries to join her in a bike ride that ends a bit tragically (for him). Before he even fell down, what was the tragedy unfolding in that moment? Should he not have tried to bond with his daughter?

5. How does the tortoise story contribute to our understanding of the growing relationship between the author and her

mom, after years of tentativeness between mother and daughter?

THE BEACH BOYS

1. Living in California was not an easy arena in which a girl could learn to love her body and explore a healthy way to move through the world of relationship. Can you relate, even if you grew up elsewhere? What makes it easy and hard to love our bodies?

2. Explore the question of power in relationships, sexual or otherwise. What are the dangers? Is there any positive to it?

3. What are the boundaries of self in relation to geography, art, commerce? Is there any such thing as a strictly independent self? How does this interact with the American dream?

4. The author's father is a hard man to relate to, at least for her. What are some of the first indications that she has begun to understand this person who feels so outside of her—even at times in violation of her? What might this eventually achieve in her life? And what, if you face a similar situation, might such understanding achieve in yours?

5. Arguably, the author forgave her father for his anxieties and angers (less so, his indiscretions). However, she did not forget them. Describe the edges of forgiveness for yourself. Where do they begin and end for you? How do you deal with a person who never really changes but whom you can't quite erase

from your life and memories—and possibly don't want to either?

6. The question was raised: "What did it mean to be a daughter?" Let's think on that. What *does* it mean to be a daughter? A son? And are these different in relation to a father, a mother? How did the author's father exhibit a certain philosophy in these regards?

STARS

1. Define "celebrity." Is there any positive function for celebrities in society and your personal life? Conversely, are there any truly negative impacts?

2. Have you ever been to Hollywood? What was the experience like? Did you get a photograph with an actual or sidewalk star? How did/does that make you feel? Do you tell the story—why or why not?

3. How do you feel about being on camera, or screen? Do you seek or avoid it? Regardless of whether you personally enjoy being on camera or screen, how do you feel about others who are? Is there some kind of transcendence that enters the picture? Power? Immortality?

3. Have you ever been empowered by a film, story, or poem? In what way were they "real" to you or not?

4. What makes Disney so different from an ordinary amuse-