



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR BONE BY BONE: A MEMOIR OF TRAUMA AND HEALING

Thank you for discussing **Bone by Bone**. I am honored you feel that the themes in the book are worthy of thoughtful discussion. The following questions are intended as thought-starters. I would love to hear your reactions and receive suggestions for other groups. Thank you!

With gratitude, GERALYN

- 1) The book starts with an unusual event: a high-speed train derailment in a large American city that was front page news across the country. How might GERALYN's recovery have been affected if the event that injured her was a traffic accident, a violent crime, or a household fall? Does the source of the trauma matter in shaping the lessons we draw from it?
- 2) The opening section of the book quotes a Tibetan saying that "Wisdom is like rainwater. It gathers in the low places." Do you agree? Why might the "low places" of life offer deeper learnings than times of joy?
- 3) GERALYN says she is often struck by how ordinary the day of the accident began. We all understand that life can change in the blink of an eye, but no one wants to spend all their time dwelling on the possibility of bad things happening. Think about a time in your life when something extraordinary and unexpected happened (either good or bad). Is there anything you think you could or should have done in advance to prepare? Are there "resilience muscles" we can strengthen to help ourselves manage crises in a healthy way?
- 4) The book describes multiple instances of extraordinary kindness from strangers that GERALYN felt were very powerful. Can you describe an instance where you've drawn strength from unexpected kindness of a stranger? Or reached out to a stranger in a personal way to support them? How are those feelings different from kindness extended by a friend?
- 5) GERALYN's children were not allowed to visit her for two weeks after the accident. She was frustrated at that decision, but there was real concern that the sight of their mother on a ventilator would be too scary for the boys. What would you have wanted?
- 6) Tragedy leads some people to turn to faith and others to turn away from it. What are factors that might explain the difference?
- 7) GERALYN describes the unrealistic expectations she had for her recovery and her disappointment and frustration when those expectations were not met. How do we balance the need for optimism and positivity in the face of trying circumstances with the importance of accepting reality?



- 8) The opioid crisis continues to take a terrible toll on our society. How did you feel during the sections of the book when Geralyn described her challenges taking the medications and keeping them filled? Have we struck the right balance between the importance of addressing the addiction crisis and the legitimate needs of serious pain patients?
- 9) The accident had a major impact on the dynamics of Geralyn and Jonathan's marriage. If you have experience as a patient or as a caregiver, did the challenges in their relationship seem familiar to you? Are there things that the community can do to better support family caregivers?
- 10) Geralyn discusses the importance to her recovery of shifting from a place of depression and feeling powerless to being proactive, learning and trying new things to help cope with her pain and uncertainty about the future. Examples from the book include yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, reading books about the biology of pain, traveling, and sharing her experience with church groups and through writing her book. Others in her situation might have turned to music or art. What are your go-to practices that bring you comfort and joy? Are there others that you want to learn or develop?
- 11) Page 193 of the book quotes two Christian theologians on the subject of time. Regardless of your personal faith, discuss your reaction to the quote, "There is a great power in slowness." How can we appreciate the power of slowness in lives filled with deadlines, responsibilities, and other priorities?
- 12) The title of the book alludes to the reality that trauma recovery takes place slowly, step by step. Importantly, however, "Bone by Bone" is also a reference to a poem by Emily Dickinson. The poem is on page 53. Discuss your reaction to the poem.
- 13) Geralyn's family – her parents, siblings, children and husband - played a major role in her recovery but also suffered extreme stress and intra-family tensions. What advice would you give to family members of someone suffering a serious health crisis?
- 14) The U.S. healthcare system is often touted as offering the best quality care in the world. It also has well-documented shortcomings. What is your perspective - based on both personal experience and the stories in the book? How could the system be improved to provide quality care to all patients at reasonable cost? What advice would you give to a friend about to face a major surgery?
- 15) Were there times in the book when you laughed out loud? What do you think about how the author uses humor to tell parts of the story?
- 16) Returning to full-time employment after a prolonged absence from the workforce can be challenging, especially for women. Returning after a period of disability can be particularly difficult. What advice would you give regarding the right balance between the need to demonstrate fitness for the job and inspire confidence in the employer on the one hand, and to the importance of admitting vulnerability and the need for reasonable accommodations on the other?
- 17) Is there anything that you felt was missing from the book or would have like to see addressed?