

Reading Group Guide

1. Rebecca Winn opens her memoir with an observation on family ties: “Parents, spouses, children, jobs, and friends; these roots provide the anchors around which we spin our ever-tighter lives. The safe lines. The ones we can freely move up and down. They are safe, but fragile. Very fragile. Inevitably, whether from pressure or aggression, one or more of the spider’s safe lines will break, leaving the remaining anchors to hold more weight than was entrusted to it.” Reflect on the ways in which a relationship can be both safe and fragile, and how you have navigated “safe line” conflicts in your own family.

2. In “The Spiderweb,” the author reflects on the importance of facing the darkness in one’s own life: “The mist was moving on and the sun peaked over the horizon behind me. As it rose, a long shadow stretched out before me. My shadow. And I knew I had to walk into it.” Drawing from personal experience, how has confronting a difficult memory helped shape you into the person you are today? How was this work essential for growth, healing, and expanding your consciousness?

3. For the author, her garden was her escape—it was her place of sanctuary and beauty. Where do you go to find peace? Do you retreat to a physical place? Meditate? Rely on the company of a friend?

4. In “Desperately Seeking Self,” the author considers loyalty, especially in regard to her husband’s personality: “I always described him as the most honorable person I had ever met, and loyal to a fault. That ‘loyal to a fault’ part showed up as a lifelong pattern of staying in friendships and professional relationships that were not at all healthy or equal to him.” How can doing away with the traditional definition of loyalty strengthen or heal our healthy relationships? How, to paraphrase the author, does holding on hold you down?

5. When the author first planted her knockout roses in “Living in Sleeping Beauty’s Castle,” she let them grow and grow, because their height made her feel safe. How did the gradual

trimming of these roses symbolize the author's process of healing? How do you cultivate feelings of safety in your own life?

6. In "Letting Go," the author is confronted with the devastating realization that her beautiful roses will be dead in two years. How did she cope with this forthcoming loss? How did shifting her perspective—and accepting the inevitability of her situation—allow her to cultivate new opportunities? What would adopting this kind of mindset look like in your own life?
7. In "One Hundred Daffodils," when the author purchased one hundred flowers for herself at her local grocery store, she called it a "radical act of self-care." In your own life, what has the power to overwhelm life's many negativities? Do you ever withhold things from yourself that would feel nurturing? If so, what drives that choice?
8. In "The Plane Truth," the author examines the connection between age and self-esteem. How do you feel about aging? Are you hopeful? Fearful? What does aging gracefully look like to you? Do you harbor a self-imposed shame about your appearance that is keeping you from being your most joyous, liberated self? What would life look like without this shame?
9. In "Deep Trust," the author defines the concept of the same name as "releasing the need to be in control of anything, let alone everything." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Where does deep trust manifest in your own life?
10. In "No Need for Validation," the author speaks of her invisible-yet-debilitating addiction to external validation: "I am a meticulous perfectionist and a dedicated overachiever, who makes sure my work is good enough that people are more than happy to say so in the most effusive and exuberant ways." How can perfectionism work against self-trust and compromise what the author refers to as our "personal barometer?"

11. When the author read *The Giving Tree* to her son in chapter five, she hated the book; she did not, however, get rid of it. Before she realized she was like the tree itself—a living thing that had given and given until there was almost nothing left to give—why do you believe she kept it?
12. In “Cottonwood Chorus,” the author came to the realization that her voice was ready to be heard. Have you ever felt that you did not have permission to say what you wanted (or needed) to say? Have you ever said *I’m fine* when you weren’t?
13. In “Raucous Raccoons,” we learn that the sudden appearance of a raccoon, in many cultures, is the Universe’s way of indicating it’s time to “let go” of something: “The Universe will whisper to you. Then it will call to you. Then it will shout to you. Then it sends in the raccoons.” Have you ever experienced a similar “send in the raccoons” moment?
14. In “A Prairie Dog Companion,” the author realizes that she is the one who continues to berate her body. On a scale of one to ten—with one being not at all accepting and ten being completely accepting—how would you rate your level of body acceptance? If your number is below a seven, where do you think this lack of acceptance originated? How does this lack of acceptance affect your day-to-day life? What would you be willing to do differently to have a more loving relationship with your body?
15. In “Chop Wood, Carry Water,” the author says, “We teach people how to treat us. I’m ready for a new lesson plan.” If there are patterns in your life that do not feel nurturing, what steps might you be willing to take to change these patterns?
16. In “Blank Canvas,” the author observes that life is a series of comings and goings, and that each day is an opportunity to create our lives anew. Have you ever experienced something that felt like a loss, but later revealed itself to be a gift?

17. "Into the Great Unknown" invites readers to fearlessly pursue their dreams. Where, in your life, have you let fear or self-doubt stop you from going after what you really want?