

It's Okay to Laugh (Crying is Cool Too)

by Nora McInerney



End in Mind

1. Humor plays an important part in both Nora's experience of illness, loss, and grief and in her daily life and writing. How can humor help in such difficult times? How can one hold on to a sense of humor amid feelings of sadness? What's the particular nature and effect of the dark or gallows humor Aaron and Nora share? Knowing that laughter can also serve as a defense or even be hurtful, however unintentionally, how might one determine what humor is appropriate and what is not?
2. Both the title of the book and Nora's podcast (Terrible, Thanks for Asking) suggest that we need more honesty about difficult truths in our everyday interactions and conversations. What's the value of being more honest about how we're feeling? Why do you think this is difficult for people? What are good ways to explore and express painful truths? When might such personal truths be withheld? In what ways are social media platforms good for these kinds of truths or not? Can we "share" too much?
3. What are the benefits and challenges of accepting the idea that you have "one wild and precious life"? Do you see this notion as freeing or stressful?
4. Aaron "always had a story to tell, yet always wanted to listen" to Nora's tales. What's the value of storytelling? What did it bring to their relationship? Why is effective, careful listening so powerful and important, and how can we become better listeners?
5. Nora claims that while "serious problems" deserve and require a medical professional, being happy is also something "you have a hand in making, every day." What does she mean? What are some specific examples in her life and in yours? Do we always have to focus on happiness? Is it wrong to sometimes feel angry, or sad, or discontent?
6. Nora realizes when she stops wearing her wedding ring that not every step or gesture should be a Big Event loaded with meaning. What has led her to this recognize this? To what extent do people generate meaning that is not connected to an object or gesture? Can letting go of objects freighted with meaning be freeing?
7. Nora claims that her strength "isn't superhuman" but "the most human thing of all." Explain her meaning. How has this been valuable to her?