



***SOARING into Strength* Discussion Guide Questions**

You can use this discussion guide for self-reflection, journaling, or in a group setting for your book club or discussion group.

1. When tragedy struck in Lisa’s life, she felt at times that it would break her. However, she discovered that she was much stronger than she could have imagined. What does SOARING into Strength mean? Choose an example from the book that embodies this concept. Now, identify a time in your life when you experienced inner strength.
2. The subtitle of the book is “Love Transcends Pain.” There are numerous powerful examples of love in action between family members, friends, neighbors, and strangers throughout Lisa’s story. What does the phrase “Love Transcends Pain” mean to you?
3. Lisa weaves humor throughout the book as her family encounters challenges and setbacks—using the ability to laugh, even in the most dire situations. Funny examples include when Gary jacks up the social hall, when Lisa’s dad wants to wear his gorilla costume on the oncology floor, the bereavement support group kitty litter candle-lighting ceremony, and the “SHUT UP!” shouting match in the emergency room. How did humor buoy Lisa and her family, and what impact did it have on you as you read the book?
4. There are several catchphrases that come up throughout the book. Look at the list below and select which phrases meant the most to you and how you will use them in your life moving forward.
 - Open to being open
 - Take an active role in your self-healing
 - The power to heal
 - Chosen family
 - Still, small voice within
 - You are not alone
 - Pay-it-forward
 - Words from the heart enter the heart
 - Never give up!
 - No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted

5. From a young age, Lisa had a knowingness where she was comfortable with unseen, invisible, synchronistic messages and connections. For example, when she discovered the butterfly as well as the heart-shaped charm on the sidewalk following Gary's death as a reminder he was still with her; when the cardinal landed next to her car immediately before her first speaking engagement after her dad died; when she had the calling on the beach; or when the book was flashing light to her in Barnes & Noble. She calls this being "open to being open" and believes that *everyone* has this ability. Can you share any synchronistic experiences from your life? What does being "open to being open" through synchronicity mean to you? How has reading this memoir inspired you to be more receptive to these coincidences and messages in your life?
6. Lisa was always a helper—with her baby brother, with the blind duck, being a candy striper, and launching Soaringwords. Her parents and brother also exemplify altruistic traits and led their lives by following a generosity of heart. How do you think this benevolent approach helped Lisa and her family cope when they encountered difficulties and tragedies?
7. There are many circles of support that create ripples of kindness throughout the book—such as Krishna the babysitter; various friends who set up appointments with a top cardiologist and the visiting Rabbi for Jonathan; and others who provided home-cooked meals and love. Think of times in your life when you relied on others. Think of people in your life right now who are or could become part of *your* circle of support. Think of examples from your life when you were that supportive person to someone else.
8. At the height of his illness, eight-year-old Jonathan surprises everyone by asking to bless the Rabbi who just bestowed a blessing on him. Grace can be witnessed and given even in the most dire situations. How did this young child's blessing impact you?
9. Faith is the foundation of Lisa's essence and life. Discuss the quiet and powerful ways that her faith enabled her to flourish even in the midst of overwhelming pain. Faith does not always mean religion "with a capital R." Lisa's faith includes her relationship with God, nature, and the unseen. Over time, her faith in herself also deepens. Faith can look different for everyone. How has or can *your* faith be strengthened?
10. While no one wishes for tragedy or trauma to happen in their life, it is often inevitable. How did the trifecta of trauma—Gary's death, Charlie's cancer diagnosis, and Jonathan's illness—change Lisa's life and the life of her family? How did these challenges strengthen their sense of gratitude and resilience?
11. Relationships and love play an essential role in Lisa's life. Which relationship examples from the book connect with you the most? How are you inspired to appreciate the relationships in your life?
12. We cannot protect our loved ones or ourselves from pain or loss. The duality of wanting to shield one another, contrasted with the reality of being unable to do so, presented itself numerous times throughout the book for Lisa and her family. However, the book also includes several examples where people soothe themselves and others during difficult times with strategies such as singing, laughter, kindness, and the healing power of an ice cream cone with sprinkles. Think of ways *you* have been a healing presence for yourself and others. Consider what you can do in the future to access the power to heal.
13. Lisa's coming of age occurs during the 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s as we experience the opening of malls, big hair, and disco music. How did reading stories from these decades tap into nostalgic memories for you? What resonated from the book, and what are some defining generational experiences from your life?

14. Lisa recounts stories of her Jewish heritage, upbringing, and culture throughout the book. She shares this because it's an important part of her identity and life experience. While the rituals may be different from your practices or culture, they can strike a universal emotional chord. Consider: How have your culture and personal experiences impacted your worldview, habits, and behaviors?
15. During the trifecta of trauma, Lisa encounters her life purpose while on a sunrise walk along the beach during the height of her son's illness. How have inflection points—pivotal life moments—led you towards a purpose larger than yourself?
16. People are complex—comprised of different life experiences, strengths, and vulnerabilities. Gary's risk-taking behavior impacted the entire family. On the one hand, he considered himself to be invincible and engaged in self-destructive acts. On the other hand, Gary had a playful, unflappable, generous spirit. Think about situations from your life where your personal experiences shaped your beliefs and actions in complex ways.
17. After surviving two bouts of cancer and later living in the aftermath of five strokes, Lisa's father Charlie still had indefatigable passion and positivity. How did experiencing Charlie's positive mindset change how you might think about staying positive even in the mindset of illness?
18. Lisa's mother Janice is a quintessential caregiver. How did her advocacy and courage impact her family: Lisa, Gary, Charlie, and her grandchildren?
19. Lisa is a powerful storyteller. What stories were most memorable for you and why? What story resonated with you most?
20. How did this book change you?