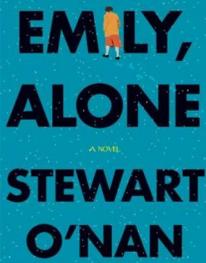




Discussion Guide



About the Book

Book Title: *Emily Alone*

Author: Stewart O'Nan

Published by: New York: Penguin Books, 2011

Author Website: <https://stewart-onan.com/>

Questions for Discussion

1. What were your general impressions of this book?
2. This book follows the main character during the “last chapter” of her life, as she deals with the loss of her husband and close friends. How does O’Nan develop Emily’s character? Does this resonate with people you’ve known at this time in their lives? If so, in what ways? If not, what did he portray differently?
3. Here we have a male author telling the story of a woman, who would probably be old enough to be his mother. Do you think he accurately portrayed the story from a woman’s point of view? Why or why not?
4. Have you thought about what your life might be like when you reach Emily’s age? In what ways do you think her story is your own, and also different from your own?
5. Who do you identify with the most in this story? Emily and/or Arlene, Emily’s children, or her grandchildren? Why?
6. The book spends time with Emily grappling with the issue of death, the loss of her parents and her husband and also preparing for her own death. How do you think O’Nan handled these topics? How is it similar or dissimilar from your own views?
7. Read over the MAMs comments on the book. Which of them do you most agree with and why?
8. In what ways, if any, will this book change your life or perspective?

Other Links...

Book Lust with Nancy Pearl featuring Stewart O’Nan on YouTube

Stewart O’Nan on Emily at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIVDFTHSQCY>

New York Times Book Review by Joanna Smith Rakoff at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/03/books/review/book-review-emily-alone-by-stewart->



NANCY: Such an unusual book, taking us into the interior life of an older woman as she contemplates her life, interacts with her adult children and grandchildren, experiences the deaths of those with whom she has shared her life. Written very simply, yet delving into the experiences of the last chapter of life. I found it at times sad, at times revealing, at times causing me to think of my own mortality and how I will live these later years. A very real portrayal of life.



SALLIE: “The Cat’s in the Cradle” comes to mind. Emily reflects on her life as a girl and her conflictive relationship with her mother, fully aware that it replicates her relationship with her own daughter. Very interesting the way O’Nan deals with Emily’s self awareness, and her inability to talk about her limitations with her own mother, and with her daughter. Well written.



ABIGAIL: I found myself intrigued with Emily’s spiritual life. She felt guilty and repented of her sins, and yet we find she was also somewhat skeptical of the after-life. She thought she should visit the sick more, and felt bad about not doing it. I found myself wondering if she loved her self. Perhaps not.



MOLLY: So, here we have the person who outlives her spouse and many friends. A lonely journey. As I struggle with cancer, hoping I live into this later phase of life, I find myself contemplating, which is preferable. You’d think we all want to live as long as possible. But maybe it’s not all that great to be the last person standing. The loneliness of later years may be harder than dying early?



PRISCILLA: Well, bless her heart. Emily tried hard to be a good wife and mother. She seemed to know she had difficulty being tactful. I thought O’Nan wrote that well. She knew she didn’t say things right, but couldn’t figure out how to do it better. Isn’t that often the case? Some people just don’t have a way with words!



KATHARINE: Well, here we have Emily, a college educated woman, who felt she was just a little better than others, and yet O’Nan somehow reveals that in the end, these distinctions don’t really matter. You have a sense Emily thinks that she is better than Arlene, but then she also realizes how much she relies on her friendship as they lose others.



JANE: A gutsy lady, buying a Subaru! And you know they say that’s the choice of the lesbians.. And then she felt most like her granddaughter, Ella, who turned out to be a lesbian. Did Emily prefer women? She’d never admit that. Instead she seemed upset about how Ella’s choice might make her life difficult.

But what I liked about this book was that Emily took the bull by the horns, and started to live again, after being secluded for a while as a widow.