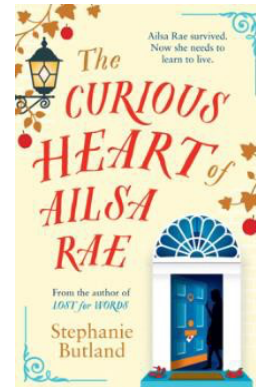


Discussion Guide

The Curious Heart of Ailsa Rae

By Stephanie Butland

1. Why was her blog called "my blue blue heart?" Was she literally blue?
2. Why did Ailsa like polling her followers? What things did she opt for doing once she was well? What was chosen?
3. How was impulsivity a new freedom for Ailsa? How different would your life be if you had to weigh the amount of energy (and recovery) each task you scheduled would expend?
4. Making friends starts with a name. What did Ailsa name her new heart? If you had to name yours, what would you choose and why?
5. Ailsa said: "I'm alive, thanks to a freak set of circumstances, which includes someone else's misfortune. And I think of that every day." How did this lead her to be grateful? But then how could she still feel sad sometimes? Use this quote to help you explain: "Remember, son, just because you've got what you want doesn't mean you have to be happy all the time." Is there a difference between gratefulness and happiness?
6. What does this mean: "Being ill is a pain. Being ill and explaining yourself is exhausting"?
7. Why was Ailsa such an advocate for people being on the donor transplant list? If you aren't and want to be, in America, go to organdonor.gov/register.html.
8. Why is it important to have that conversation about organ donation with your loved ones, especially with those who would have the power to make those decisions for you? What makes some people not want to donate, or to not allow their loved one to do so? Should next of kin be allowed to overrule a dead person's choice?
9. Why doesn't Ailsa think "think grief is a good place to make decisions from"?
10. How did Ailsa's interviewer want "simple answers to things that are complicated"? Do you think her questions were baited, or that the interviewer, like some of those who wrote about Seb, "write the article before they meet"?
11. Why did Seb tell Ailsa "If people are arses...or in any way abusive, block them straight away. Don't engage." Was this good advice if you're in the public eye?
12. Ailsa, and even Lennox's parents, struggled with and made choices about "Birthdays of the people we've lost, or anniversaries of their death, are things I don't know what to do with. You can't ignore them, because it feels wrong, but every day is an anniversary of their loss." What are some good ways to celebrate or commemorate the memory of a loved one every year? Should you have to do something every year, or is it ok to not do something sometimes too?



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13. Now that she wasn't dying, how did Ailsa have to find her own identity? How did dying consume her entire identity and schedule before?
14. How did Seb teach Ailsa to "not mind" what others said or thought about her? Why was that a survival technique once your life moved into the spotlight? What events made it more challenging for Ailsa to ignore the comments of others, especially in the papers, despite how hard she'd worked to lose weight?
15. What was Seb's transplant and how did he end up needing one? How was he, and how are we all guilty of taking our bodies for granted sometimes?
16. What do you think of Ailsa's statement that "It's not bravery that means spending months in hospital...and submitting to blood tests, via-the-nose biopsies, CPR and God knows what else. It's the absence of choice" ? Is there another choice?
17. What happened with Ailsa's father when she was a baby, the full, true story her mother hadn't told? What did Tamsin and Hayley do with his stuff after and why?
18. How was dancing tango "sort of a rest" for Ailsa's brain because of the concentration it required? Why is it good to have mindless tasks like this, especially for people with anxious minds or mentally draining jobs?
19. Why was there conflict with Seb after the second article? Do you think he handled it well? How were they resolved?
20. Hayley and Ailsa had had a very codependent relationship when Ailsa was young. How did that change after the surgery? Why did Ailsa want it to? Why did Hayley have a difficult time with it?

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