

## Discussion Guide



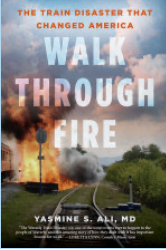
### Summary

Showing how a single community's tragedy became the catalyst for radical change, this first book to examine the Waverly Train Disaster of 1978, penned by a medical writer and Waverly native, examines how this disaster laid the groundwork for the future of emergency management and disaster relief.

### Questions

1. Author Dr. Yasmine Ali's descriptions of the Waverly train disaster are deeply descriptive, incorporating first-hand observations, emotions, and details that are often uncomfortable and shocking. What other contemporary or historical disasters came to mind as you read her description of the events as they unfolded?
2. Many federal agencies exist to provide regulatory oversight on behalf of the government. The catalyst for the formation of FEMA – The Federal Emergency Management Agency - was the Waverly train disaster. How does the book's description of the disaster, investigation, and aftermath make you think about how other agencies came into being? How do these regulatory agencies play a role in improving society and individual health? Can you think of examples?
3. The author's father, Dr. Subhi D. Ali, was a surgeon on staff at Nautilus Hospital the day of the accident, treating hundreds of patients. In a chapter devoted to her father and other hospital staff, she illustrates their resilience, professionalism, and deep medical knowledge, attributes that were crucial in the hours after the fire. Does her depiction impact your impression of emergency workers, EMS, ER doctors and nurses?
4. The genesis of the Waverly accident directly traces back to the formation of America's railroad system and its exponential growth before and after World War II. Dr. Ali provides vivid descriptions of the many past and current problems of the US railway system, which is as necessary for the country as its highways and roads. What did you learn about America's railway infrastructure, its history, and its complexities?
5. Police Sergeant Elton "Toad" Smith, who was badly burned during the train explosion, endures, and emerges from trauma. His body as well as his spirit must process and recover from pain and heartache because of the accident. How does his long process of recovery – and his commitment to Waverly – make you think on your own powers of resiliency through hard times?

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*Walk Through Fire*  
Yasmine S Ali MD

Citadel Press  
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247 pages  
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**Disasters and  
Emergencies**

7. *Walk Through Fire* describes disasters that have happened around the world involving hazardous materials, from Chernobyl to Fukushima to the ammonium nitrate explosion in Beirut in 2020, which devastated not just the city but the entire country's economy. How does this make you think about the people who handle hazardous materials every day? How would you describe hazmat workers? Would you do it if you had the training?
8. Dr. Yasmine Ali painstakingly reconstructs the multiple errors that happened in the leadup to the Waverly explosion. To thoroughly understand the myriad of communication breakdowns, mistakes, and protocols that needed to be set in place, a full review was conducted, examining the event from every possible angle. How does Dr. Ali's style of writing reflect this process? How does her attention to detail impact your understanding of the full series of events?
9. FEMA, the agency whose establishment was catalyzed by Waverly's train disaster, would be on hand to assist Waverly in an even more severe crisis – the catastrophic flood of 2020. Discuss how the book's final chapter about the town and its reliance on FEMA to help it, brings the story full circle.
10. Over and over, *Walk Through Fire* features examples of leadership and heroism, of people who are facing chaotic, unknown, and dire circumstances and step up to help. What do their behaviors teach you about the nature of crisis and of human behavior? How do people react during a traumatic event? How do you think you would react under duress?