



The Long Awakening

The Long Awakening: a Memoir
by Lindsey O'Connor

A Reader's Guide

Thank you for choosing *The Long Awakening* for your book club. In this memoir, author Lindsey O'Connor offers a searingly honest account of the 47 days she lost while trapped in a coma following the birth of her daughter—and the haunting journey to recover her health, relationships, and self that went missing.

Discussion Questions:

1. The author describes her coma experience as “a place of nothingness” where “time had become irrelevant.” “There was no past or future.” Can you imagine such a place? How might experiencing this state of nothingness affect your concept of time after waking up?
2. On page 21, the author, who was experiencing a later-in-life pregnancy, offhandedly comments to her husband: “some women still die in childbirth.” Do you believe this comment divinely signaled the grave danger that lay ahead? Or was it merely a coincidence? Have you experienced a similar sense of foreshadowing before a life event?
3. Early on, the author’s husband, Tim, made a decision to operate as though O’Connor could hear everything around her during her comatose state. How might Tim’s belief have led to the author’s recovery?
4. As Jacquelyn, the author’s daughter, assumes the role of sister-mother upon her mother’s absence, she finds herself doubting her faith. On page 48 she makes a decision: “Life is pain, life is hard, God isn’t going to protect you from the reality of the world, but at least, with God, there’s hope.” Eventually, Jacquelyn chose to face her crisis with God. What happened as a result of this decision?
5. On page 60, O’Connor relates the humiliating experience of a nurse shaming her for her soiled sheets. How do the nurse’s comments affect her? What does this episode teach us about caring for those who can’t care for themselves?
6. Slowly regaining her strength, the author places her hands over a computer keyboard and realizes she has forgotten how to type. If you experienced a coma or physical or mental trauma, what one life skill would you most want to regain?

7. As a journalist and storyteller, O'Connor relates she was always seeking a beginning, a middle and an end to her long awakening. She eventually, realized, however, that her story wasn't so simply packaged. What part of your life story do you wish was more neatly packaged—the beginning, the middle, or the end?
8. "You're such a miracle!" was a common response to O'Connor's recovery. Yet the author could not muster up a "reciprocal happiness," noting that "when they got their happy ending my nightmare had begun." Why are so many people quick to assume healing and happiness should come soon after traumatic or stressful events? What would it look like to help friends and family members face crises more realistically?
9. One lesson learned: choice, having a say in what your day holds or what route to take or event to participate in "is a beautiful aspect of life." What choices do you take for granted? What choices in life are you most grateful to have?
10. On page 161, the author presents a list of "What I Learned about Living by Almost Dying." Which of these discoveries can you most relate to in your life's journey—and why? Why did O'Connor believe this, but also struggle with this list?
11. In chapter 26, O'Connor learns, to her shock, that her husband had twice signed a DNR on her behalf. What made him change his mind? How does one know they have made the right choice in such a tough decision?
12. The author dedicates her book "to Caroline Aileen," the daughter born hours before her mother slipped into a coma. How might this story affect the relationship between mother and daughter as Caroline enters adulthood? What gifts might their relationship bring to others around them?
13. The medical story and aftermath are the unique aspects of this memoir. What are the universals? The main theme and sub-themes?
14. The metaphor of water is used throughout the book. A "chair" is used as symbolism in several places. How would you describe these?
15. The book is written with layered storytelling and classic three act structure. It's not told chronologically reveals some of the storyline as the author learns of her missing events. Discuss how this and the alternating point of view impacted the book.
16. In the "Author's Note" in the back of the book, O'Connor describes her reporting methods. How did this effort to adhere to factual truth as well as emotional truth impact the memoir?
17. What did the author's realization at the end of the book—"know who you are and be that"—mean to you?
18. What did you take away from this book?

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Lindsey's website is lindseyoconnor.com, Twitter: [@LindseyOConnor](https://twitter.com/LindseyOConnor), Facebook: [LindseyOConnor](https://www.facebook.com/LindseyOConnor), Instagram: [lindseyoconnor](https://www.instagram.com/lindseyoconnor).