



I LIKED MY LIFE

by Abby Fabiaschi

About the Author

- A Conversation with Abby Fabiaschi

Behind the Book

- How Did *I Liked My Life* Come to Be?

Keep On Reading

- Reading Group Questions

Also available as an audiobook
from Macmillan Audio

For more reading group suggestions
visit www.readinggroupgold.com.



ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN

A
*Reading
Group Gold
Selection*



A Conversation with Abby Fabiaschi

What kind of experience has writing your book been for you?

I always wanted to be a writer. When I was young, I'd win little poetry/short story contests, which my family celebrated, but my father didn't sugarcoat how difficult it would be to earn a living at it, or romanticize how stressful it is to live paycheck to paycheck. He encouraged me to go into business and wait for a time to come when I had enough money saved where I could write without desperation. When I finally went for it, I warned everyone that the chances of getting published were slim, but my father wasn't one to indulge excuses. He wisely quoted Taj Mahal: *Many fish bite if you've got good bait.*

"I talk out loud with my characters."

Tell us anything about you as a working writer that might be interesting or unusual:

Most things about me are unusual. . . .

I had no formal writing education. While writing a first draft, I talk out loud with my characters. My best ideas come in my sleep: in the morning I wake up with texts to myself, notes scribbled on tissue paper, and, once, a thought written right on the wall of my bedroom.

Did you have any interesting experiences while trying to get the book published?

A year after I quit my job in high tech to pursue this dream, I overheard my son talking to kids in his preschool:



Toddler 1: My mother is an attorney.

Toddler 2: My mommy is a teacher.

My son: My mom writes books, but nobody reads them.

This served as great motivation.

You cofounded the nonprofit Empower Her Network. Could you tell us a little more about what the mission is, and your work there?

I have long been a believer in economic solutions to social and cultural problems. For marginalized populations, fiscal independence is key. Empower Her Network provides ready survivors of human trafficking with housing, educational opportunities, and employment to help get them on their way. Twenty percent of my net proceeds, including foreign and film rights, are donated to causes supporting vulnerable women and children. You can learn more about Empower Her Network at www.empowerhernetwork.org.

Who are your favorite authors?

I read addictively and across genres. From the classics, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is my all-time favorite. (And yes, I enjoyed *Go Set a Watchman*, naysayers be damned.) Love Jane Austen. Edith Wharton. Charles Dickens. It's such an obvious list, it's boring.

My short list for contemporary writers includes Elizabeth Strout, Lisa See, Ken Follett, Jodi Picoult, Bill Bryson, Chris Bohjalian, Per Petterson, Eleanor Brown, and Colum McCann.

*About the
Author*



How Did I Liked My Life Come to Be?

Work on *I Liked My Life* began when I was twenty-four as something to tinker with when I couldn't give the corporate world any more: nights I couldn't sleep, long flights, weekends.

The story started with Eve. I lost one of my closest friends in a car accident when I was fifteen and it remains a defining moment in my life. I stopped relating to my peers—caring about a homecoming date or begging my parents for Doc Martens seemed ridiculous after a loss like that. I became obsessed by the thought that the grown-ups around me all hid the private hell of the losses they'd experienced in life. Instead of seeing the smiles on their faces as resilient and strong, my teenage capacity interpreted their happiness as fake. I matured quickly, but not gracefully. *I Liked My Life* was born from a desire to explore mourning at that tender age.

When I finished the draft, I'd been married less than a year and had no children, so Maddy and Brady's realities were hard to reach. The story stayed on my computer, unready for eyes that weren't my sisters' while I remained engaged in my career in high tech.

My first child was four months old when I lost my father to a catastrophic heart attack. He was only fifty-three. Inwardly his death flattened me, but I had a job and a newborn baby and a son who arrived seven months later, putting my kids eleven months apart—



no one does that on purpose—and my writing hobby was replaced with ear infections, diapers, and feedings. It was as if I had three identities: one in a business suit creating and presenting global sales programs, one in sweatpants with a toddler hanging off each arm, and another, when everyone else was asleep at night and I remained awake and empty, consumed by loss.

My kids turned three and four in what felt like one season and I missed a lot of it. I wasn't unhappy—I was too busy to think about squishy things like happiness—but I was on a treadmill in a marathon that never ended and eventually it struck me that I worked my ass off to support a lifestyle I didn't even want. Around this time, I happened across *I Liked My Life* while searching for another file. It hadn't been touched in seven years, and I felt compelled to revisit it, as I now understood the difference between mourning as a teenager who can fully indulge grief, versus an adult with a mortgage to pay and children who depend on your sanity. I had witnessed the nuances of grief between men and women, and had a decade of marriage to unravel the layers and complexities of that institution. But most importantly, as a mother myself, I knew what I would hope for my children if I left the world too soon.

The book turned out to be a way to pass my heartache on to unsuspecting characters. I've become a believer that there is clarity and insight above the fog and haze of grief, but it comes at the expense of whatever you lost, so you have to digest the injustice of that.

Behind the Book



Reading Group Questions

1. Through Madeline's past, *I Liked My Life* explores the day to day of stay-at-home moms. Do you feel Maddy's experience generally represents the realities of that lifestyle? What, if anything, would have changed if the Starlings weren't as wealthy?
2. Motherhood is a reoccurring theme throughout the book. Was there a relationship you particularly related to: Maddy/her mother? Eve/Maddy? Rory/Linda? Meg/Lucy? Kara/Mrs. Anderson?
3. Brady had grown up in a religious household but, over time, lost touch with those roots. Have you carried forward childhood religious traditions? Why or why not?
4. Paige was Maddy's closest friend. How do you think the decade age difference between them impacted their relationship? Do you think Paige and Brady were eventually able to get to a place of friendship without Maddy?
5. Eve finds herself mourning at a tender, uncertain time of life. As part of that process, she no longer feels connected to her group of friends, or even her age group more broadly. How does her inner dialogue compare to where you were emotionally at sixteen or seventeen?
6. Eve and Brady have a contentious relationship at the beginning of the novel. What is the turning point where they soften



- toward each other? Does it happen at the same time for both of them?
7. Brady asserts that Maddy was the “liaison” between him and Eve. Do you feel that’s a common role mothers play between daughters and fathers? How does that compare to your childhood?
 8. Do you feel the book would have worked if Maddy had died at the hands of a more common tragedy, like cancer or a car accident? Why or why not?
 9. Many themes are touched on in this novel: motherhood, family roles, marriage, mourning. Which most resonated with you?
 10. In the end, Brady does not end up with Rory. How did you feel about that?
 11. Brady and Eve grieved differently. How much do you think one’s age impacts how one mourns? Gender?
 12. The story ends with a snippet into Eve’s life at twenty-seven. Was she where you would have imagined her?
 13. Both Eve and Brady go to a therapist. Do you think that helped? How and when do you see therapy as a positive tool?

*Keep On
Reading*