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*Healing Words
That Change Lives*

***The Burning Light of Two Stars* Discussion Questions**

1. Laura chooses to open her memoir with an account of her birth. She introduces the character of Vicki, her dead twin sister. Why do you think she made this choice? What significance does Vicki's presence—and absence—have in Laura's life?

2. In chapter 2, Laura shows ambivalence toward her mother's announcement that she's moving to California. At that point in the story, did you think her hesitation was justified? At what point did you realize just how fraught their relationship was?



3. Do you consider the conflict between Temme and Laura to be a typical mother-daughter conflict? Why or why not? How does Laura's relationship with her mother compare with your relationship with your mother—or your daughter?

4. What function do the letters between mother and daughter play in the story? Why were Laura and her mother able to express things in letters that they couldn't communicate in person? Have you ever expressed different parts of yourself through different modes of communication?

5. In her letter "After Mom's Death: Memory" Laura says her "head is spinning" because the correspondence with her mother contradicts her own beliefs about the past. How do you think you'd respond if you made the same discovery? Have you ever found something in your family's archives that disrupted your perspective on the past?

6. Laura says, "A truth teller can only tell as much of the truth as she can face at a given time." What do you think this means? What application does it have in your own life?

7. How do you think the tenor of the times Laura grew up in influenced her and the relationships within her family? How do you think the circumstances of Temme's growing up, as a poor child of immigrant parents during the Depression, influenced her choices, her perspective, and her mothering?

8. In the dinner-party scene, Laura describes being gaslighted by her mother—being told that what she felt and perceived weren't real. Has this ever happened to you? How did it impact your life and your self-confidence?
9. In chapter 23, Temme shrugs off Laura's attempt to hug her because she believes Laura is "faking it." What is the role of touch in the evolution of their relationship?
10. In chapter 38, Laura confronts her propensity to "build a case against Mom." Why do you think she does this? Have you ever been in a relationship where you gathered evidence against someone else? Or where another person gathered evidence against you?
11. When Laura describes her reconciliation with her mother, she says they were able to make peace, in part, because they "agreed to disagree." What is the difference between "agreeing to disagree" and caving in?
12. Laura quotes the author Debra Fruchey, who says, "Every time I look in the rearview mirror, the past has changed." How has this been true in your life?
13. Geography plays a crucial role in the estrangement and eventual healing between Laura and her mother. How did geographical proximity and distance impact their relationship? Do you agree with Temme's statement "We'll never reconcile if we only see each other once a year"? In your relationships with others, what role has geography played?
14. Laura says, "I'd always assumed that reconciliation required a big come-to-Jesus conversation about everything that had happened in the past. But for us, reweaving our relationship was about the little things." Do you think that healing a major rift requires that everything be put on the table? Or are there indirect ways to heal an estranged relationship?
15. Laura knows her mother isn't a safe driver, but it takes her a long time to intervene. What gets in her way? Have you ever been in the position of having to limit the freedom and independence of a parent? How did you handle that responsibility?
16. After Laura confronts her mother regarding her racist comments about Jews being superior, Laura still finds a way to end up on Temme's side. What does this scene show about Laura's growth as a daughter?
17. Laura expresses mixed emotions about her choice to take her mother to get tested for Alzheimer's disease. Do you think Laura's guilt was justified? Was it necessary for Temme to get tested? Why or why not?

18. During their confrontation on West Cliff, what drives Laura to lose control? Are her actions understandable? When Laura says, “The woman who’d screamed at Mom had been waiting a lifetime to come out,” what does she mean? Have you ever “lost it” as a parent or a caregiver?
19. Laura describes the way Temme’s final doctor streamlined her medical care and reduced her medications. She also describes the alternative—multiple doctors for every part of the body and repetitive trips to the hospital. What do you believe are the best health-care choices for elderly patients?
20. Laura describes her mother as courageous. What evidence do you see of this over the course of the story? What did you admire most about Temme?
21. Which events during the trip to Florida demonstrate Laura’s growth in her quest to love her mother? Have you ever had a similar breakthrough in a caregiving relationship?
22. When her mother is about to be kicked out of rehab and Laura has to find the next place for her to live, Laura asks, “What makes a meaningful life?” As caregiver or next of kin, how would you answer that question?
23. In the final scene in the book, Laura and her brother participate in a forgiveness practice. Can you imagine anyone in your life you’d like to do a “forgiveness practice” with? What would you say to them? What do you wish they’d say to you?
24. What are your three biggest takeaways from reading *The Burning Light of Two Stars*?