

Reader's Guide

Ian's Ride: A Long Distance Journey to Joy

By Karen Polinsky

1. In the opening pages, Ian Mackay, age 26, is preparing for his risky ride. What do we learn about his character and his values?
2. In the first several chapters, what do we learn about Ian's family? How do Teena and Zeke, and then later Teena and Russ, raise their boys? What are the strengths and challenges in this extremely honest extended family unit?
3. The moment Teena enters the rehab hospital, she feels "like a space traveler floating in a vast unexplored universe." In a health crisis, what are the immediate stresses for both the patient and the family and friends supporting them? In your own experience, what has helped you or your family most in a medical crisis?
4. "Prayer. Ceremony. A song. Whatever you want to call it, that energy, that love, it completely transcends linear time and space," remarked Stan Rushworth, Ian's former professor of Native American literature. What is Ian's approach to spirituality before the accident, and then later in his recovery? What are spiritual practices that have helped you to maintain or restore your health?
5. Once Ian is relocated to his new home on the Olympic Peninsula, he enters his darkest period. Which moments did you find most affecting? What forces inside or outside help rescue Ian from absolute despair?
6. In Ian's first year at home, all of those in his immediate family confront challenges of their own. Discuss how he or she responds: Teena, Zeke, his stepdad Russ, his younger brother Adam, and his grandmother Beverly. What valuable lesson or lessons does each one of them eventually learn?
7. Discuss the critical role of caregivers in Ian's new life. Why is it often so difficult to ask for help? Mention someone in your life who provided you with just the right level of help when you most needed it.
8. About a year after his accident, three things happen that lift Ian up: Ian rediscovers the outdoors, learns to breathe without a ventilator during his daylight hours, and meets Todd K. Stabelfeldt, a fellow high quad. Why do these developments matter so much?

9. What is the role of the Here and Now Project in Ian's emerging sense of self, independence, and burgeoning leadership? What does Ian learn from his mentors Todd Stabelfeldt, Marsha Cutting, and Kenny Salvini? Why is community so central to well-being, for Ian and everyone?
10. What is the role of technology in Ian's recovery, and how do he and his friends contribute? According to Ian, technology is "not just a hammer in the hand, but over time becomes a part of us, extending the human experience." What does this mean, for Ian and others with mobility challenges? For all modern humans?
11. Two of his Ian's guiding principles come together in the long rides: *get outdoors* and *push your limits*. What does Ian achieve in the long rides, and why is he so eager to share these rewards with others, for example, in his flagship event Sea to Sound? Has this story inspired you to set a new goal?
12. Ian's altered body causes him to alter his notions about romantic love and sex. What was most surprising to you about his unusually open account? What was most curious, delightful and/or inspiring?
13. What is universal design, and why does it matter? How does Ian's new house contribute to his independence and sense of well-being? How does your own living space contribute to your contentment, or how might it be improved?
14. "It was there in the garden that I found my solace." Teena describes her time spent cultivating vegetables and flowers. What are the exceptional experiences of nature in this book, for Ian and those close to him? How have experiences in the outdoors enhanced your own life?
15. What is your most significant takeaway from Ian's journey to joy? Ian's clearly the hero of this story, yet there are so many others who emerge along the way. Besides Ian, who is your favorite character, and why?