

Good Joy, Bad Joy

Discussion Questions

1. How did it feel to read about an active, curious eighty-nine-year-old protagonist waking up to her true self and getting a second chance at living more authentically? Consider the correlation between a person's age and their spirit, as depicted in *Good Joy, Bad Joy*.
2. "[I]f you do something deemed 'bad' but with 'good' intentions, where does that place you on the spectrum" (page 201)? In your opinion, how much are good intentions actually worth? What do you think the novel suggests about recognizing gray areas, rather than thinking purely in black and white?
3. "I don't believe we're born good or bad. I think we have the capacity for both, and it just depends which side we choose to nurture" (page 200). Joy spends most of her life resisting her mischievous side, "being a 'good' person in society's eyes, and in [her] father's, in particular" (page 200). How does this shape her character, and what lasting effects does it have on her?
4. How does Joy's self-image evolve after she begins breaking more rules? Why do you think she is often consumed with considering what kind of legacy she will leave behind? After reading her story, what do you think it really means to leave a legacy? Consider Chuck as you respond.
5. Joy often compares her quieter contributions to the world to Hazel's louder, more flashy ones. Considering how we're all part of an ecosystem, how did this novel shift your perspective on the significance of authentic, small acts of kindness, if at all?
6. Why do you think Joy and Hazel are such good friends for so long, despite their differing personalities? What are the pros and cons of their respective lifestyles, and what do they learn from each other? Which of them, if any, do you most easily relate to?
7. What do you think it takes to have a decades-long friendship?
8. When Joy finds herself avoiding conflict and making herself small, what does this cost her? How does this affect the depth of her relationships? What does this novel nod to about the importance, and potential rewards, of enduring discomfort and difficult conversations?

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- 9.** Hazel states that “[o]ur patriarchal society has convinced us that a nurturing instinct exists solely to be channeled into motherhood,” but that she disagrees with this assumption. She has “known many women with that same inclination who have used it in other ways—to help build strong communities, to pursue social justice, to care for injured wildlife. And our society is better for it” (page 170). How did it make you feel to read this point of view?
- 10.** “Who am I if I’m not defined by being someone’s wife, someone’s daughter?” (page 284). Have you ever asked yourself a similar question, about who you are aside from the labels that have been assigned to you? How might it feel to ponder this?
- 11.** Considering Joy’s unlikely friendship with Rowan, why might it be valuable to get to know someone before forming an opinion of them? Have you ever discovered that someone’s reputation was unfair or inaccurate after meeting them? How might this tie in with two of the novel’s prominent threads of gossip and second chances?
- 12.** Toward the end of the story, Hazel proclaims that Joy has been the love of her life: “Who says your greatest love has to be a romantic one?” (page 280). Another major theme woven throughout the narrative is the significance of platonic love when compared to romantic love. Can friends feel like family? What are some unique aspects of platonic love that are explored in this novel?
- 13.** Joy often finds herself wondering why she was granted more time to live than some of her late loved ones. How does she reframe this haunting question and choose to maximize this gift of time?
- 14.** “If I’d asked myself in my twenties what a fulfilled life would be, I’d have said having a husband and child. But looking back, as my final sunset draws nearer, I’m not sure that’s all there is to it” (page 50). After reading *Good Joy, Bad Joy*, what do you think it takes to live a fulfilled life?

