

This monograph (BCQ-12) is part of a series of sequels to the book: *Yorkville Twins: Hilarious Adventures Growing Up in New York City, 1944-1962*. www.YorkvilleTwinsBook.com

Book Club Discussion Questions

- 1. Themes:** Identify prominent themes in this book. List them in order of importance. Which themes do you align with and why?
- 2. Childhood Memories:** What memories, that you had forgotten, did you re-discover in reading this book? How did you feel about them? Were they similar or dissimilar to the memories Joe and John described? How? Which of your memories are you fondest of and why? Do you have any memories about growing up that you would rather not have remembered? What were they? Describe instances of Joe and John's innocence, naïveté and discovery in growing up. Compare them to your experiences growing up. Describe the value system and culture Joe and John experienced 60-70 years ago to (a) the value system and culture that you grew up in and (b) the value system and culture today's youth find themselves in.
- 3. Engagement:** Were you drawn into the book and kept engaged? If so, how? Were your life experiences or situation similar or different from the authors? Explain. Were the stories credible and believable? Which stories were your favorite and least favorite? Why? Which stories could have been omitted and which ones would you have wanted more information on? Did the authors make you feel that you were in the same time and place depicted in the book? Explain. Does the location and era of the book come to life? Cite some examples.
- 4. Inspiration:** What do you think inspired the authors to write and share their story? What was their overall message? What part of the book did you find most inspiring? Did the book induce any major emotions from you? In what way, if any, has your interest in the subject increased after reading this book? Did you gain useful information, perspectives, or benefits from the book? If so, what were they? Long after you finished reading this book, what do you think will be its lasting effect on you?
- 5. Characters:** Were the characters and their stories credible? Were their actions believable? Do any of these characters remind you of someone you know? What character(s) from the book did you like most? Why? Would you like to meet any of them? If so, who and why? Which character did you least like? Explain. Which of the characters would you like more information about? Describe important relationships of the characters on Joe and John and their development. Do you have any "black sheep" in your family or know other families that have? If so, why are they considered "black sheep?"
- 6. Yorkville Era:** Did you live through any of the 1940s, 50s and 60s? Was it in a large city or small town, on the East or West Coast or somewhere in mid-America? How were the culture or experiences similar or different between the authors' upbringings in Yorkville and your

upbringing and life in your hometown? If you had the power to change your life, would you want to grow up in an ethnic neighborhood like Yorkville those many decades ago? Why? What would you have gained and/or lost, compared to the way you lived your life? Have you ever met celebrities and other famous people? Who? Under what circumstances? What were your feelings?

7. Tragedies/Crime/Scams/Discrimination/Danger: Have you or anyone you know ever been the victim of a crime, a scam, or discrimination? Explain. Have you or someone you know experienced tragedy or danger? If so, describe. Discuss some of the crimes, scams, discrimination, and danger described in the book and how it impacted the authors and their family. Which of the book's tragedies, crimes, scams, discrimination, and dangers affected you the most? Why?

8. Survival: What coping and survival skills did Joe and John use to survive their first 18-24 years? How did they "think and work out of the box?" In what ways did this help them to survive? In what ways were Joe and John's early work experiences (in grades 6-12) beneficial or not beneficial to their education, growth, and development? What did they gain by working? What did they lose? How might their lives have been different today had they not held jobs after school during those years but used that time instead to study longer and harder? Did they make the right decision to work at that time? Did their parents also make the right decision in allowing them to work? What would you have done as a young person in this situation? As a parent, what decision would you make for your children regarding this issue? What coping and survival techniques did Joe and John's parents use to survive and raise their family? In growing up, what experiences did Joe and John have that helped them later in their professional careers?

9. Schooling: What differences and similarities were there between Joe and John's K-12 educational experiences and yours? What are the most revealing or profound differences and similarities?

10. Fears and Anxiety: What fears and anxiety did Joe and John have growing up? How were they similar or different than yours? How did they manage their fears and anxiety?

11. Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship: Give examples of the authors' competitiveness and entrepreneurship. Did you experience similar traits when you grew up? Explain. How has their competitiveness affected their growth and development? How has their entrepreneurship affected their growth and development?

12. Twins: (The word "twin" is used here in the broadest sense; it encompasses other multiples—triplets, quadruplets, etc.) Are you a twin? If *not*, would you have liked to be one? Why? If you *are* a twin, do you prefer not to be? Why or why not? Do you have twins in your family or know of twins in other families? How are they the same and/or different? What benefits or problems do twins have being twins? What benefits or problems are associated with raising twins? Discuss the pros and cons of being a twin. Do you think twins should be treated the same or differently at home or in school? Why? Should they be kept separated as possible in K-12 school? Should they be treated as unique individuals or as much the same as possible?

Should they be dressed alike or not? Discuss. What are the differences and similarities between Joe and John? Which of Joe and John's adventures most interested and/or surprised you? Did you learn anything new about twins? If so, what did you learn?

13. Psychic Experiences: Are you aware that many twins have psychic experiences or abilities? Do you personally know twins who have these traits? If so, what were these experiences or abilities and were they credible? What do you think of Joe and John's psychic experiences? Are they believable? Did they cause ill on anyone? Explain. Is having psychic experiences or abilities a good or bad thing? Did you ever experience it yourself? Would you want to? Why?

14. Community Support: What outside support was there for Joe and John, their family and others, in growing up and trying to assimilate into American society? Give examples. Why was this support necessary, who supplied it, and what did it accomplish? What do we mean when we say, "It takes a village to raise a child?" Do you believe in this maxim? Why or why not? Was it easier to implement this type of support years ago than the present time? If we tried to re-implement this type of program now, could we succeed? What obstacles might we face?

15. Immigration: Are you an immigrant, or do you have friends or members of your family who are recent or not-so-recent immigrants? What obstacles do/did immigrants face in coming to America? Are these different today than 50 or 100 years ago? What survival skills did they use to blend in as Americans? Why is immigration bothersome to many people today? How has immigration been vital to our country and how has it helped our nation to grow? If you could write immigration policy for our government, what would that policy be? What would you allow and disallow? How would it be different than what we have now and what we had 100+ years ago? What hardships did Joe and John's parents and their relatives and friends have in coming to America, and once here, what difficulties did they continue to face? How did they overcome these difficulties and become "Americans"? Could you have handled being an immigrant having similar experiences and difficulties in that time and place? By reading this book, did you increase your understanding about ethnicity and immigration in America? If so, in what ways?

16. Being an American: How did Joe and John and their parents succeed and live the American dream? What was their American dream? What obstacles did they face growing up and living in America? How did Joe and John's parents' sacrifice to achieve the American dream for their children? How would you feel if you were an immigrant from a foreign land, who became an American but found yourself in a position of possibly having to fight your own people in a war in their (your old) country, like the authors' dad might have had to do? Could you do it? How has patriotism in America changed in the past 75 years? Is this good or bad? The Pledge of Allegiance used to be recited ubiquitously in K-12 American classrooms decades ago but has slowly faded away. How do you feel about this? How has it affected your schools and community? Should this be changed? If so, what would you do to change it? What is it to be an American?

17. Likes/Dislikes: What was your favorite and least favorite thing about the book? What could have been improved? As you began to read, at what point did you decide whether or not you liked the book? What helped you make this decision? What did you like or dislike about the

author's style of writing? What concerns, if any, do you have about the book? Were the stories presented in an interesting way? If so, how did the authors accomplish this? Were your expectations about the book fulfilled or were you disappointed? Why? What was the number one passage or story in the book that impressed you as being insightful, remarkable, intense, silly or emotional, informative, or beyond understanding? Why?

18. Lessons Learned: What did you learn that you didn't already know before reading the memoir? Did any of your views change after reading the book? If so, how? What is the most important thing or lesson you learned from reading this book? What facts, situations, or characters surprised you? In what way? Did you discover any useful or valuable information that changed your life after reading this book? If so, what was it?

19. Book Structure: Discuss the authors' writing style and use of language. Discuss their use of Testimonials, Photos, Poem, Illustrations, Foreword, and Bonus section ("Undergraduate Work in Minnesota" and "It's a Twin Thing."). Should they all have been included? If not, what would you have omitted? Which parts were the most important to you to keep? Discuss their use of Appendices: (1) Family tree of relatives, friends and neighbors, (2) List of radio and television shows, actors and actresses, (3) Annotated Resources (including Internet search terms and websites, Organizations, and Bibliography), and (4) Glossary. What effect did they have on the story? Was the book an easy, quick read? In what way? If you could re-write the book, what changes would you make and why? If you wanted to re-write the main title and sub-title, what title and sub-title would you use?

20. Marketing: What groups and ages of people would be interested in reading this book? How would geographic locations of these people affect this? List key words or phrases to describe and search for this book on the Internet. How would you market the book? What other ways could this book be marketed by "thinking out of the box?"

21. General: To the book selector: Why was this book chosen for your Book Club? What made it appealing? Members: Was this a correct decision? Would you want to read a sequel to this book, spanning the next 46 years? Why? If so, what would you be looking for? How does this memoir compare to others that you have read? Would you recommend this memoir to others?

22. Other: What other questions do you have about the book that might be puzzling you or that you might not yet have an answer to? What other Book Club discussion questions would you have liked to see listed here?

23. Compare/Contrast: Compare and contrast two memoirs written about growing up in Yorkville: The Gindeles' book, *Yorkville Twins*, and Kevin Boland's book, *One Day as I stood Lonely (A Memoir)*.