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The Chocolate Diaries



Secrets
for a Sweeter Journey
on the Rocky Road of Life



The Chocolate Diaries by Karen Linamen

Discussion Questions

Food for Thought – Chapter 1

1. Which reality TV show best portrays your life, and why?
2. What are some unpleasant ingredients that you have had to fold into the batter of your life?
3. Are you in danger of letting the bitterness of certain experiences overpower and define your life? If so, what are your other options?
4. Has a friend ever shared something she learned from traveling her own rocky road that helped you get through a rough stretch? What did she share, and how did it help? Have you ever had that kind of impact on someone else?
5. How did Ronlyn make her rocky journey a little sweeter? If you tried something similar, how might it help make your journey sweeter?

Food for Thought – Chapter 2

1. If healing is a dance, where will you take your first steps? In a belly-dance studio? On a scenic trail? Toward an old friend in Starbucks? When you think of things that represent your first steps toward healing—recently or years ago—what comes to mind?

2. Whether we're talking about making an exotic meal from scratch, redecorating a room, writing a book, crafting a sculpture, or even raising a kid, the creative process often feels overwhelming or ruined or even futile. In fact, it almost always feels that way right before a major breakthrough or flash of genius. But just because something *feels* overwhelming or hopeless doesn't mean it really is. Can you think of any times this has been true in your life?

3. Have you ever crashed and burned? What was it like, and what is your life like today?

4. If someone you loved admitted to you, "I feel like I'm broken and I'll never be whole again," what would you say?

Food for Thought – Chapter 3

1. Relationships can be messy. How do you know when a relationship is worth holding on to despite the effort required?

2. How can you tell the difference between a healthy relationship and one that's toxic and that you need to remove from your life?

3. We've all heard the saying "A little forgiveness goes a long way." How easy is it for you to forgive? to ask for forgiveness?

4. How have you worked through conflicts in some of your most important relationships? What was successful? What didn't work?

Food for Thought – Chapter 4

1. When you need an emotional pick-me-up, what works for you?
2. Name one random act of kindness you could do today.
3. Identify one thing you could do that would reduce the environmental toxins in your life. What about your diet, your chaotic schedule, your thoughts?
4. If there's an unfinished project you've been meaning to get to, what has been stopping you? What do unfinished projects do to you emotionally? Are they energizing or draining? What impact would it have on your life if you devoted one day to wrapping up a lingering project?

Food for Thought – Chapter 5

According to Kris Harty, discerning the right people to lean on when there's something you can't do on your own takes time and practice. She said, "If you make a mistake, don't beat yourself up. Just learn from the experience. Ask yourself, 'Was that the best person to lean on, and, if not, how can I make a better choice in the future?'"

1. Do you think it's possible to lean too heavily on someone? If so, what are some signs of that? How do you keep "helping relationships" healthy?
2. If you're traveling a bumpy road and there's not a friend in sight, how can you cope in the meantime?
3. Think about a time when the right person or people showed up just when you needed them most. Have you ever been that person for someone else?
4. When someone you know is traveling a rocky road and you have the opportunity to help or encourage that person, do you know when to stop helping? Are you as passionate about recognizing and celebrating your friends' strengths and victories as you are about compensating for their weaknesses?

Food for Thought – Chapter 6

1. Try James Pennebaker's assignment for three days. How did it make you feel? Did you share your writing with someone else or choose to keep it private?

2. What types of writing have you tried? Journaling, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, songwriting—something else? If you have not given it a try, what do you think is keeping you from putting pen to paper (or fingertips to keyboard)?

3. Journaling can help to anchor the trauma in your life, to help you feel more in control of life's messiness, and to help you see your story—your life—in context. If you have begun journaling your thoughts, has doing so helped you to release your emotional pain?

4. In order to survive her traumatic childhood, Emily said, "Journaling gave me a voice." Has writing given a voice to your pain—enabling you to finally feel that you are being heard?

Food for Thought – Chapter 7

1. What can you learn from your inner child? Name one or two things that come to mind.

2. What do you do to stay young in spirit or young at heart?

3. What have you seen in the lives of others that helps keep them in a joyful or playful mood?

4. What is the difference between being childish and childlike?

Food for Thought – Chapter 8

1. Is there something or some things you're afraid of losing? If so, what?
2. We rarely have to start from scratch in every area of our lives. Even as my daughters and I got ready to evacuate our home, we knew that we still had one another—even if we were to return to a pile of ashes. I still had my job. And my friends. And more than enough Dubble Bubble. Even if you lost the thing(s) you identified in the previous question, what would you still have in your life?
3. Have you ever had to reinvent a portion of your life? What helped you do that?
4. A newspaper columnist by the name of Mad Dog wrote, "People reinvent themselves for different reasons.... You'd figure reinvention might have to do with lack of success, but that just isn't true." He believes that people should reinvent themselves at least once during their lifetimes. What are your thoughts?
5. What does failure look like to you? Do you consider that having to go to Plan B is a sign of failure, or of tenacity and courage? What about Plan W?

Food for Thought – Chapter 9

1. Are you an all-or-nothing sort of girl? If so, how has this helped you or hurt you in the past?
2. When you're bumping along on a rocky stretch of life, what do you do to appreciate the beauty of your surroundings, even if you wish you were in a better place?
3. Even if something is imperfect, can it still have a place of value in your life?
4. How do you make peace with the paradoxes in your life?

Food for Thought – Chapter 10

1. Do you believe in God? If so, what do you believe about him? Would you say you are acquainted with God or have a daily, ongoing relationship with him?
2. How would your life be different if you were, indeed, the daughter of an earthly king (or even a president)? What benefits, blessings, or authority might you have that you don't have now?
3. Pat and Shirley Boone have said that discovering a relationship with God through Jesus Christ helped save their marriage. Reread the list of benefits that are ours when we belong to God. Looking at that list, do you see anything that could help two people have a stronger marriage? If so, how?
4. If you already have a relationship with God through Christ, are you fully enjoying all the privileges and responsibilities that God has for you as a daughter of the King? Or are you still living like a spiritual orphan?

5. If you don't already have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, would you like to? If so, here's the prayer that Rachel prayed when she decided she wanted to belong to God. Find a quiet place and pray this simple prayer: *Jesus, I trust that through your death and resurrection you provided the way for me to become a child of God. I accept all that you've done to give this incredible gift to me. I not only believe in you, but I also have faith in your ability to save me from everything—including sin, shame, fear, isolation, and issues of worth—that has been a part of my life apart from you. Now I'm not apart from you anymore. I'm a princess. I belong to you, now and for eternity. Now begin to show me, every day, what it means to be in an intimate relationship with you. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Food for Thought – Chapter 11

1. Becky's recipe for healing from a tough season in life is prayer, friends, laughter, and tears. What are your thoughts on her recipe? What ingredients would you add, if any?

2. Crying is cathartic. It releases sadness, lifts your mood, and gets rid of unhealthy toxins. Are you okay with having a good cry? Does it come easily, or do tears come hard for you? Why?

3. Laughter is healing. What is one thing you can do today to bring more humor into your hard times?

4. Research says that prayer makes a measurable difference in the health and well-being of people who pray. Do you agree? How has prayer helped you in your life, in your pain, in your hardest times?

5. Do you currently have close friends to share prayers, laughter, and tears on life's rocky road? If not, what are some ways to cultivate likeminded friends?

Food for Thought – Chapter 12

1. Are you a list maker? What's at the top of your list today? What's not on your list that could give you inspiration or direction to help you get unstuck?

2. Lists can help you beat depression. Make a list of things that make you feel better when you find yourself stressed or sliding emotionally downward. Your list might include talking to a friend, journaling, gardening, making an appointment to see a doctor, and so on. What item from your list can you employ today to start feeling better now?

3. Knowledge is power; perspective is power harnessed. When you are overwhelmed by your feelings, what is one way to change your perspective?

4. When you're having a hard time, are you able to let someone who loves you know it? What would change if you did?

Food for Thought – Chapter 13

1. Is there a heritage of hurt in your life? What steps are you willing to take to break the chain of pain?
2. Do you feel like your pain determines your identity? If so, what are you ready to do about it?
3. Are you a person who tends to hang on to hurt? What are some reasons people have a hard time letting go of hurt and anger?
4. When we're overwhelmed by problems, we tend to shut down or feel emotionally dead. What is one thing you can do to feel more alive—to wake up your brain?

Food for Thought – Chapter 14

1. Like Jan Dravecky experienced, are there things you've been doing to try to manage your pain that aren't working? If so, what are some better options?

2. Have you doubted God? been angry with him? experienced depression? Are you confident that God wants you to pour your heart out to him, no matter how severe your emotions?

3. How much time have you spent this week reading the Bible? Do you think it would be worth spending more time in God's Word to see how your life might be affected?

4. Jan Dravecky set out to learn everything she could about the good things God has promised to give those who follow him and then to hold him to his promises! What might happen if you did the same thing?

5. Do you think God's words really are sweeter than honey and are perfect, life giving, and enduring? If you believe this, why? If not, why not?

Food for Thought – Chapter 15

1. When you're traveling a rocky, dimly lit road, do you tend to look so far ahead that you feel overwhelmed? What difference might it make if, instead, you focused on simply identifying the next step and then taking it?

2. Kris Harty suggests getting started, then trusting that you'll find the resources you need to keep taking the steps that will eventually get you where you want to be. Whom do you trust? Yourself? God? The process? What has the most meaning for you?

3. Do you believe that you have insights and wisdom that can benefit others on their rocky journeys?

4. What's your secret for finding the beauty that's present in every landscape of your life, even when that landscape feels harsh and punishing?