



Tin House FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tin House Books is an offshoot of the award-winning literary magazine *Tin House*.
The editorial staff of Tin House Books is located in Portland, Oregon. W. W. Norton distributes its titles.

WONDERING WHO YOU ARE

a memoir by Sonya Lea

READER'S GUIDE

1. The book begins with a quote from Margaret Atwood: "I'm working on my own life story. I don't mean I'm putting it together; no, I'm taking it apart." How does this correspond to Sonya's tale and its theme of identity?
2. *Wondering Who You Are* is divided into two parts. In Part One, Sonya alternates between her recalled past with her husband, and the observations of Richard's memory loss. Part Two is set in the present as they cope with the "new normal." Why is this structure meaningful? How does it correspond to some of the major subjects and themes of the book? How does this structure affect our comprehension of the work or our emotional experience of it as readers?
3. Imagine the person you're closest to suddenly loses all recollection of your shared past. What would you focus on first in moving forward with him or her?
4. Consider and discuss the various reactions to Richard's brain injury as chronicled in the book. Are they expected or unexpected? What about Richard's acceptance of his identity changes despite what he endures? What do these reveal about our responses to losing control? To forming our personalities from our history?
5. As Sonya goes from partner, to caregiver, and back to partner again, what are the most dramatic changes for her, and which would be the hardest shifts to make in your life?
6. How do you think Richard's family handles acclimating to his new self? Is there anything you would do differently if your loved one's identity was altered?
7. Did you find Sonya's desire to fall back in love with this new version of her husband relatable? How did wonder and curiosity play out in the reforming of their marriage? What role does it play in your relationships?
8. What about Sonya's own sense of identity changes throughout this book? Sonya writes "one brain change causing another..." If you were free to change any aspect of a long-term relationship, what might that be?
9. Sonya writes in Chapter II: "Memory is a servant, faithful not only to the believed past but also to the imagined future." How does loss of memory have an impact upon the imagined self? Does this create any loss of potential, love, generosity?
10. What are the biggest challenges for Sonya and Richard in piecing their marriage and sexual history back together after Richard is declared "fully" healed?
11. As Sonya writes: "I've come to see him not as mine but as something altogether curious and wonderful. Sometimes it's sweet. Sometimes it's sexy. Other times, it's just damn hard work. In this way, as it turns out, ours is not much different from any other marriage." Do you think this is true? What lessons about love and marriage did you learn from Sonya's experience?

WONDERING WHO YOU ARE

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ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. How forthright could you be in telling your love story? Have you thought about the consequences in your own life for being this revealing? What could you risk being honest about? What's necessary to stay private? Is this due to fear or preference? Write a personal piece that is at the very edge of what you'd like to be intimate about with others, and never risked.
2. Read and discuss other works about difficulties in forming and holding onto memory, especially in memoir. Christa Parravani's telling of reporting her twin sister's trauma in *Her*, Meaghan Daum's essay, "Diary of a Coma" in her collection *Unspeakable*, and Susannah Cahalan's *Brain On Fire*. How do such works lead us to an understanding of what memory can and cannot achieve in forming our narrative of our life?
3. Watch a lecture of Michael Gazzaniga, about the left-brain interpreter, including the series from the University of Edinburgh here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJKloz2vwlc. (Alternatively, read one of his works on the interpreter function, such as *The Ethical Brain*.) If you are not the boss of your brain, what is? How does understanding how our brain is tweaking the past, spinning the story change your relationship with your own narrative? With the ways family and communal histories are told? If your conscious life is an afterthought, constructed by the interpreter, where does this leave free will and the notion of personal responsibility?
4. Host a film night on the theme of brain injury and memory loss. Show *The Crash Reel*, *Head Games*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, or *Away From Her*. What connections can you draw between these stories and *Wondering Who You Are*?
5. Whether secret or overt, women have been showing their subversive works in art as a way to propose new ideas. Look at Cindy Sherman's "Untitled Film Stills" or Francesca Woodman's haunting photographs for a sense of how women reimagine their identity(s) over and over. If you were to tell the story of your changing identity, how would you show yourself photographically?