

Discussion questions

Erythra Thalassa: Brain Disrupted

The author explains that she never contemplated how “The Red Sea” would become the signal image changing her son’s life and that of her family forever. Is there an image that you can identify that points to a seminal event or turning point in your own life?

Is a mother’s impulse for caregiving (to an adult offspring) instinctive, learned, or mediated by societal expectations?

Does the gender of the parent impact the role they may take in caregiving? If so, in what ways?

Do you think there might be potential areas of conflict between the women who love the stroke victim in this poem style memoir: his wife and his mother and perhaps, in the future, his daughters? How might these be avoided or mitigated?

How might the situation have been different if Jeremy could move and do things for himself (with some assistance) but if his memory— short and long term— were severely impaired?

How is the balance of family relationships altered by a major medical disaster that happens to one family member? How might the family dynamic differ if the injury befell the wife or a child?

How could one try to lessen the trauma for minor children who suddenly see a vital parent become completely dependent?

What are some possible ways of responding to medical professionals who exhibit little enthusiasm in pursuing novel or more aggressive treatments?

What can family members, friends or neighbors do to alleviate the loneliness and sense of isolation felt by a victim of a severe medical condition without treading on the individual’s already tenuous sense of self?

What level of support— financial and emotional— does a parent owe a suddenly disabled adult child? Does it depend on their previous relationship?

Does the choice of a child’s name affect their future? How?

At some point, the mother - comforted by an outpouring of concern - becomes the one who feels obliged to comfort others. Likewise, she must put on an optimistic face for her son. What effect do you think this balancing act and the need to present a brave face to others, might have on the mother’s psyche?