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Before you know kindness by Chris Bohjalian

Discussion questions used at SPL April 2014

1. How would you describe Nan... was she a bit of a prude? What could you tell about her in those first few chapters? Did she change over the course of the book?
2. What could you tell about the family's dynamics from the early part of the book? Did they like each other?
3. What did you think of the granddaughters, Willow and Charlotte? How well did the author do in drawing them for the reader in those first pages?
4. Spencer – the son-in-law- had a very odd life as a child... how do you think it influenced his character?
5. Why do you think he had such an epiphany about eating meat as a young man? Was such a sudden shift believable? What did it tell you about Spencer? Was he a likable character? What do you think drew Catherine towards him? Why do you think Nan still made him call her Mrs. Seton?
6. Do you agree with Catherine that some marriages just run out of steam? That it is easier, sometimes, just to do something rather than bicker?
7. Are you from a hunting family? Did the author give convincing reasons why people hunt? Did you see any beauty in it?
8. Why was the garden so important to everyone? P 74... disappointed that the vegetables wouldn't come from their own bit of earth
9. Did Spencer care what people thought of him? Did he see himself as others did? Does anybody?
10. Would you call Spencer extreme? How hard is it for a person to truly live out his beliefs?
11. The book was written with a type of Third person omniscient is a method of storytelling in which the narrator knows the thoughts and feelings of all of the [characters](#) in the story, as opposed to [third person limited](#), which adheres closely to one character's perspective. Did you like the way it was written.. what advantages are there when you know everyone's inner thoughts and emotions? What are the disadvantages?
12. Was the author trying to equate John's interest in hunting to Spencer's passion for animal rights?
13. Could fault be assigned in the shooting of Spencer? Who would you blame
14. Did those kids, especially Willow, seem older than their years to you? Or was it just me!
15. How would a kid know what a safety button was on a rifle? Would you? P 135
16. How did you react to the reaction from the directors at FERAL? Did it seem like they were more concerned with their reputation than with Spencer's well being?
17. John had a lot of what-ifs running through his mind.. p 143...
18. What did you think of Catherine's secret affair with meat? Eating a hamburger at the hospital, stashing away slim jims... what did that tell you about her life?
19. Do you think this was a book about issues – gun control or animal rights – or just about the way a family works?
20. Charlotte's "promises" to herself to atone for the shooting... how typical is that for people to do? Why do you think she was going to cut herself? Would that help her feelings of guilt?
21. Feral's lawsuit.. p 167 ... what does that tell you about the organization? Do you think it is likely a company would do something like that for their own profit? Did they even care about Spencer?

22. Were you surprised by Catherine's seemingly easy acceptance of forgetting about ending her marriage?
23. Were you a bit more sympathetic towards Spencer after he was shot? How long did that last?
24. Did you feel as though the family were taking care of John and Charlotte? If they were yours, what would you have done to help them through this tragedy?
25. What did you think of the chapter where Spencer first tried to go to work, getting dressed on his own.... What did you learn about him?
26. What did you think of the relationship between John and Spencer after the accident? Did you think there would ever be forgiveness on Spencer's part? Should there have been?
27. What did you think of the lawyers throughout the book? Do you think the author portrayed them honestly? Did it seem like he had some sort of agenda against them? Or was he just trying to show the cynicism he sees in the world?
28. Charlotte and Willow's discussion on the depositions and telling the truth. P 267... is telling the truth worse than lying, sometimes? Ever?
29. P289.. what made Catherine confess to her meat eating? Were you surprised she did so? Was it in place of a nother confession?
30. Did you understand John's depression? Why wasn't anyone paying attention to him??
31. How important was it to John to show that he wasn't "an idiot" who didn't know how to get that chamber cleared? What did he think when one of the reasons the gun was jammed was due to a few grains of sand? P 333
32. What did you think of the way the lawyers treated Spencer towards the end of the book? What was his value to them?
33. P 337 Were you surprised by Spencers sudden switch... what snapped him back to being invested in his job, his family, life in general?
34. Do you think Charlotte really wanted to talk about the accident? Are kids defined by who their parents are? P 343 what did you think of that therapy session?
35. What did you think was going to happen when Spencer decided to bring the dog home?
36. When John and Spencer finally met, Spencer felt John was bringing the guilt and the hurt all back on himself... that he thought he was a victim, too. Would you agree with Spencer's view?
37. What did you think was going to happen at the press conference p 371? Were you surprised that Spencer cancelled it?
38. Did this family ever really talk? Or did they all think they could "fix " things on their own fWere you surprised at that enormous meltdown in the kitchen?
39. Did you think the two sets of parents were taking their daughters for granted?
40. Were you surprised that Spencer truly forgave John? Why do you think he did such a turnaround?
41. What did you think of Nan dying at the end? Too much?
42. Was the ending satisfying for you? Did this book deserve a bit of happiness?

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General discussion questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author’s writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?

- How effective is the author's use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

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Title

*Discussion questions taken from a website
website address*