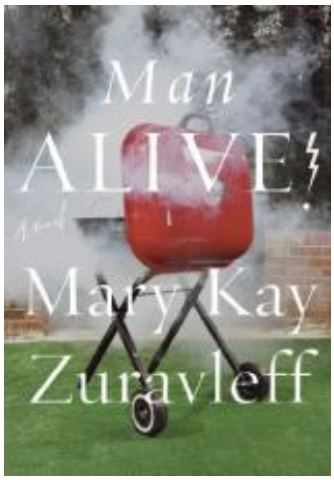
Man Alive!

by Mary Kay Zuravleff



About the Book

A warm, funny, and profoundly original novel about a family dealing with disaster, from a rising literary star

All it takes is a quarter to change pediatric psychiatrist Dr. Owen Lerner?s life. When the coin he?s feeding into a parking meter is struck by lightning, Lerner survives, except that now all he wants to do is barbecue. What will happen to his patients, who rely on him to make sense of their world? More important, what will happen to his family?

The bolt of lightning that lifts Lerner into the air sends the entire Lerner clan into free fall. Mary Kay Zuravleff depicts family-on-family pain with generosity and devastating humor as she explores how much we are each allowed to change within a family?and without. MAN ALIVE! captures Owen and Toni Lerner and their nearly grown children so vividly you?ll be looking over your shoulder to make sure the author hasn?t been watching your own family in action.

Discussion Guide

1. Throughout Owen?s recovery, what positive and negative effects does his family experience? How would your family react to a situation like Owen?s?

2. Discuss the way Mary Kay Zuravleff uses the theme of twins throughout the novel. How are Will and Ricky alike? What accounts for their personality differences? Which brother did you identify with the most?

3. What sort of caregiver does Toni aspire to be? What sort of caregiver does Owen need her to be? How did you react to their friends? reactions, from Pete and Marisol?s absence to Charlotte and Ken?s gift giving?

4. How does Owen?s perception of his life change after the accident? What are his greatest concerns in the moments before he is struck by lightning? What are his sources of joy and comfort afterward?

5. Discuss Kyra and Will?s relationship. What do they gain from each other, physically and emotionally? Do they remind you of your first experiences with dating?

6. In **Man Alive!** how is the human body presented? What marvelous capabilities does it have? What frailties does Owen encounter?

7. Was Owen well suited to his career as a pediatric psychiatrist? Do his injuries make him a more effective doctor?

8. Besides satisfying physical hunger, what forms of nourishment does Owen?s barbecuing provide?

9. How does Brooke?s experience as the youngest child, and the only daughter, differ from her brothers? sense of place and home within the Lerner family? How does she handle being one of her father?s saviors? Is Natalio a good match for her?

10. When Will responds violently to the destruction of the LeJeune, his beloved bicycle, what other sources of rage does he confront? Is his reaction unhealthy? How would you have responded in his situation?

11. Discuss electricity as a symbol for the forces at work in this novel. In what ways is it destructive yet necessary for fueling life? What does Owen learn about his fear and pain through the electric art of Spaz?s tattoo parlor?

12. In the end, why does Ricky decide to team up with Kyra to help his brother? What does he gain from his chats with Dr. Clifton? What does she provide that Toni cannot, despite her career in academia?

13. Discuss the novel?s title. In your mind, what does it mean to be truly alive in this world?

14. How does the depiction of family life in MAN ALIVE compare to the way relationships were portrayed in previous Zuravleff novels you have read? What is unique about her characters? search for meaning and fulfillment?

Author Bio

Mary Kay Zuravleff is the author of the novel MAN ALIVE! as well as THE BOWL IS ALREADY BROKEN and THE FREQUENCY OF SOULS*,* all published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. Her work has won the American Academy's Rosenthal Award, the James Jones First Novel Award, and was nominated for the Women's Prize for Fiction. She is a five-time winner of a D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities Artist Fellowship.

Born in 1960 in Syracuse, New York, Mary Kay grew up in Oklahoma City. She has a degree in English and mathematics from Rice University and in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University. Mary Kay has taught writing at American University, Johns Hopkins University, and George Mason University. She has written and edited museum

exhibitions, books, and magazines, especially for the Smithsonian Institution, including nine years as senior editor at the Freer and Sackler Galleries.

Mary Kay serves on the board of the PEN/Faulkner Foundation, where she curates the PEN/Faulkner Reading Series. She is cofounder of D.C. Women Writers.

She and her husband, Gary Zizka, have two children, Theo and Eliza, both formidable writers in their own right. Also, should it be necessary, she can play a few chords on the ukulele.

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