

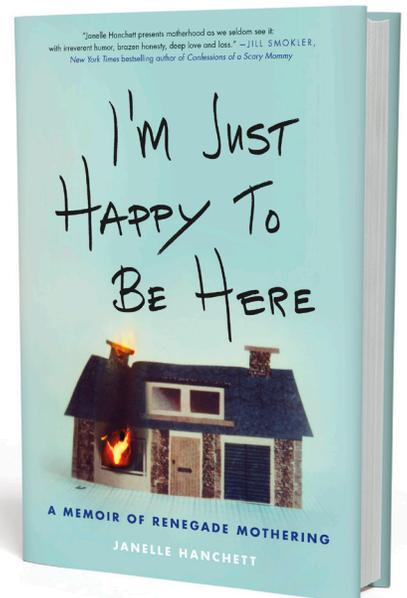
1. Before you read *I'm Just Happy To Be Here*, what was your understanding of the causes and nature of addiction? What specifics in Hanchett's complex and harrowing story changed or furthered that understanding?
2. What defines when a recreational or medical use of drugs or alcohol becomes an addiction?
3. From a very young age and throughout her life, Hanchett is powerfully troubled by boredom. What is boredom? Why is it so disturbing to her? What are the best ways to respond to boredom?
4. Beyond boredom, what might explain why, as a girl, Hanchett wanted to "break into the house down the road . . . and spray paint the stucco," or borrow her friend's grandmother's Cadillac?
5. Hanchett explains that she "was never the kind of person who wanted company in moments of vulnerability." Why might this be so? How did her need for isolation affect her struggles with drugs and alcohol?
6. Hanchett eventually comes to believe that "motherhood is a lot of knowing without knowing." What does she mean? What's the difference between acting out of ignorance and acting out of instinct?
7. Hanchett often wondered if her mother's "perpetual optimism" was "some sort of sociopathic love cloud." In what ways might optimism be unhealthy? What's the difference between fantasy and hope?
8. Pregnant with Ava, her first child, having "joined the women in the kitchen for good," Hanchett strongly declares that she "is different" and will "demand freedom." In what ways was she different or not? What were the various ways she pursued or demanded freedom? What might be healthy limits to a person's freedom?
9. Consider the free spirit, intellectual Bonny Jean. In what ways was she different from typical or mainstream women? What did she do or say that was particularly important for Hanchett?
10. Hanchett claims that what she "really wanted" was "relief," to be "unafraid. And whole." What does she mean by each of these? What might it mean to feel wholeness?
11. Consider Hanchett's bold admission that after Ava's birth, despite feeling an immense love she had never known, she felt grief, and that she'd made a "horrible error." Why was a certain loss of freedom so threatening to her? In what ways is the biological freedom men retain during and after childbirth socially or culturally problematic? How might Mac, as a man and father, served counter to this?
12. What might explain Mac's consistent inability to respond in conversation, to talk with his wife? How did this complicate Hanchett's struggles? Was such silence ever in any way a help?
13. What might Hanchett have meant when she said she "had been erased" by having a child, that she "wasn't a person at all"?
14. Hanchett "had been running to paper for safety since [she] was a little girl." What's the value of writing for her? Why did writing initially cause her to feel worse after Ava's birth? What changed years later to allow writing the blog, *Renegade Mothering*, to become so helpful and effective?
15. Hanchett admits to having had "a tiny lying problem." Where might she have developed this willingness to lie? What usually prevents people from lying? Were lying and deceit simply an integral part of her life as an addict or did it serve Hanchett in other ways?

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JANELLE HANCHETT



16. After delivering Mac “sick and twisted and lonely” to a school outing of his, Hanchett concludes that she “must have been born without a moral compass.” Where does a person’s morality come from? What forces challenged Hanchett’s ability to be good to others?
17. Why might Hanchett have mistaken Mac’s love, his “beautiful generosity of spirit” toward her, as “weak and frail”?
18. Examine Hanchett’s thoughts and reactions during her first attempt at rehab? How does she think about herself and the others in group? What do her perceptions reveal about her? How would this change in future rehab experiences?
19. What explains why rehab members might try to be “the sickest person in the room”?
20. Hanchett finally controls her addictive behavior by admitting herself powerless, by accepting “total defeat.” How is it that admitting weakness becomes such a strength?
21. What does it mean that Hanchett had “an unreliable brain”?
22. What’s the importance of a sponsor in Hanchett’s recovery? What in particular about Good News Jack is so helpful and effective for her?
23. What are “nightmare memories”? How does Hanchett respond to them?
24. In what ways does Hanchett want to redefine an understanding of motherhood?
25. Still angry and in pain years after her mother’s threatened suicide at the Mendocino coast, Good News Jack says to Hanchett: “Alright. But do you want to be right or do you want to be free?” What does he mean? Why must there be a choice between her feelings that her mother had been wrong and her own health?
26. What does the Norfolk pine tree, Norfy, represent for Hanchett?
27. How is it that “love isn’t enough to make us good”? In what ways has love, nonetheless, been powerful and essential for Hanchett’s health?

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