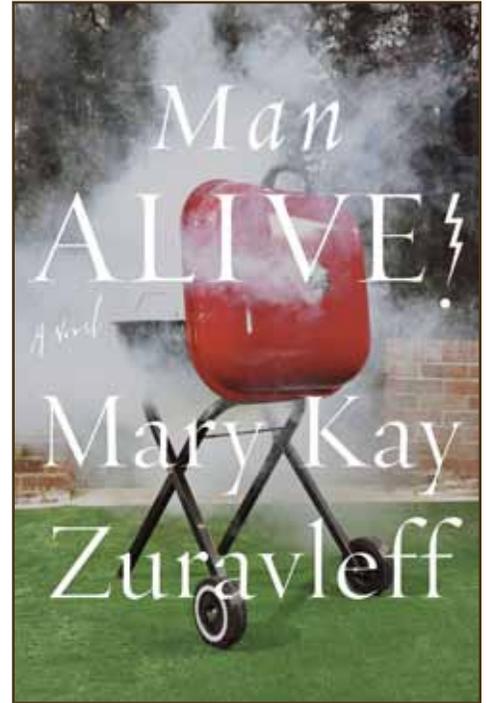


# Reading Group Gold

## *Man Alive!*

by Mary Kay Zuravleff



ISBN: 978-0-374-20231-6 / 304 pages

In Mary Kay Zuravleff's rousing novel of life and renewal, the pediatric psychiatrist Owen Lerner finds his world transformed after he is struck by lightning. He was simply feeding a parking meter, but in a split second he became a survivor—with an array of bizarre side effects. He is now impulsive, physically debilitated, and obsessed with barbecuing. His wife, Toni, struggles to care for him while she manages a stressful career. Their three children, all at an age of discovery about dating, competition, and other adult woes, go into free fall as they take on the role of their parents' rescue team. And Owen's young patients, who have relied on him to make sense of their world, find themselves in the hands of a doctor with a daring new outlook. With humor and a keen eye, Zuravleff captures the challenges of growing up, growing old, and feeling truly alive no matter what fate delivers.

This guide is designed to enrich your discussion of *Man Alive!* We hope that the following questions will enhance your reading group's experience of this wise and witty novel.

### QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

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?

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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?

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## PRAISE FOR *MAN ALIVE!*

“A lightning bolt to a parking meter certainly packs a punch, but so does every sentence and scene of this exuberant novel. Mary Kay Zuravleff writes so well—with such wit and compassion and wry intelligence—that she can make the daily domestic life that follows Owen Lerner’s encounter with the transcendent as electrifying as the lightning strike itself. A suburban marriage, a young romance, gymnastics, brain chemistry, backyard barbecue—wherever Zuravleff aims her keen eye, something transformative happens, the way a thunderbolt turns sand to glass. *Man Alive!* is vividly alive and breathing. A sparkling book.” —Alice McDermott, National Book Award–winning author of *Charming Billy*

“Random happens, as Mary Kay Zuravleff ably demonstrates in this witty and engaging novel about a psychiatrist struck by lightning. *Man Alive!* chronicles the tensions and resentments that pull a family apart in the wake of a freak accident, and the lingering affections and connections that ultimately keep them together.” —Tom Perrotta, author of *The Leftovers* and *Little Children*

“*Man Alive!* is all pleasure, even as the Lerner family suffers acutely. Mary Kay Zuravleff’s novel delivers the particular pleasure of the thing perfectly described. This is a book to share, reading sentences aloud to marvel at—How’d she come up with that? How does she know so much? How can she be so funny, and then so poignant: a one-two punch? The Lerner family is a family to remember—and to raise a glass to every time you grill outdoors. Cheers to the amazing and fabulous Owen Lerner, and to his creator.” —Jane Hamilton, author of *A Map of the World*

“*Man Alive!* is a vibrant book, and complex, buzzing with the rhythm of life the way we live it. Mary Kay Zuravleff is masterful as she dissects the collective consciousness of a family, with all its tangled bonds and arbitrary isolation.” —Carolyn Parkhurst, author of *The Dogs of Babel*

“I really like these people and I want to go to a barbecue at their house. This is a novel of equal parts wit and heart, edge and deep warmth, hands open with hope for humanity and a firm foot still in reality. A terrific treat.” —Aimee Bender, author of *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*

“An exuberant writer with a sharp sense of humor . . . [Zuravleff’s] satiric jabs . . . and joyful word-play offer plenty to savor.” —*Booklist*

“The opening of Zuravleff’s second novel reads like a case history straight out of the annals of Oliver Sacks.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“To call *Man Alive!* a great summer read is a start, but it’s more than just charming, well paced, and often funny. Beyond those basics of a good read, there’s a deeper exploration of what holds families together, plus enough barbecue to make you want to start summer all over again.” —Pete Mulvihill, Green Apple Books (San Francisco, CA)

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“*Man Alive!* is warm, funny, and intelligent, yet far from frivolous. When Owen Lerner survives a lightning strike, he and his family have to deal with a big personality change that threatens to tear the family apart. I laughed out loud but was also intrigued by Zuravleff’s use of scientific knowledge and cultural references to advance the plot.” —Mary Robideaux, Full Circle Bookstore (Oklahoma City, OK)

“Lots of fun and extremely insightful about a modern family’s struggles.” —Gayle Shanks, Changing Hands Bookstore (Tempe, AZ)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Mary Kay Zuravleff** is the author of *The Bowl Is Already Broken*, which *The New York Times* praised as “a tart, affectionate satire of the museum world’s bickering and scheming,” and *The Frequency of Souls*, which the *Chicago Tribune* deemed a “beguiling and wildly inventive debut novel.” Honors for her work include the American Academy of Arts and Letters Rosenthal Family Foundation Award for Fiction and the James Jones First Novel Fellowship Award, and she has been nominated for the United Kingdom’s Women’s Prize for Fiction. She lives in Washington, D.C., where she serves on the board of the PEN/Faulkner Foundation and is a cofounder of the D.C. Women Writers Group. For more information, visit her website at [www.marykayzuravleff.com](http://www.marykayzuravleff.com).

Guide written by Amy Clements