

“Promise Me” Book Club Questions

1. How would you describe the relationship between Nancy and Suzy? Did the relationship between the sisters resonate for you? Did it remind you of your own relationship with a sister or close friend? Why or why not?
2. How were Nancy and Suzy shaped by the legacies of cancer in their family? Which messages from their many role models—including their parents—proved to be the most lasting?
3. What explains the differences between Suzy’s and Nancy’s responses to their own cancer diagnoses? What can we learn from the knowledge that women respond to illness in many different ways? How would you describe your approach to doctors and caring for yourself?
4. What did Suzy and Nancy learn about themselves on their memorable tour of Europe? What enabled them to be so adventurous yet so mature?
5. A key component to Nancy’s work is public awareness and education. What surprising truths did you learn about breast cancer by reading this book? As Nancy shared inspiring stories of survivors from all walks of life, how did these experiences compare to those of women you have known who confronted a cancer diagnosis?
6. Discuss the medical history presented in *Promise Me*. What recurring themes did you notice in the interactions between male doctors and female patients? What does it take to become an empowered patient, whether you’re a man or a woman?
7. What was the effect of the time line Nancy used in recounting the chapters of her life? How does it mirror memory to weave the past and the present together? How did her newfound hometown—Dallas—compare to Illinois in reflecting her personality? What locale represents “home” to you?
8. From Stanley Marcus to Norman Brinker, Nancy learned marketing from some of the most successful American businessmen. Should the principles change when they’re applied to the nonprofit world? What unique traits did Nancy bring to the table, enabling her to surpass her mentors’ success in philanthropy?
9. Nancy and Suzy had different expectations of marriage, yet they both experienced first marriages that weren’t meant to be. As Nancy describes the men she has loved at various points in her life, how does she convey her own stages of personal growth? What relationships have defined you?
10. As a couple, Nancy and Norman Brinker seemed to have it all: Passion, companionship, shared interests and values, and a deep commitment to giving back. Yet eventually, their marriage ended. Did you find their love story believable? Inspiring? Why do you think they got divorced? Do you think the marriage could have been saved?
11. Suzy’s surgeon was confident that his approach would be sufficient in treating her cancer and never discussed any further treatment with her. In contrast, Nancy’s physicians urged caution, concerned that scar tissue from another biopsy would cloud results of future mammograms, but ultimately respected her decisions and formed a treatment plan in partnership with her. What did you discover about doctors’ perspectives by reading *Promise Me*? Do you have open communication and a healthy partnership with your physician? How will improved technology, including more predictive mammograms, affect the doctor-patient dialogue in the future?
12. What aspects of caregiving are presented in *Promise Me*? What lessons about being a caregiver and being a patient did Nancy learn from her sister’s illness and her own? How did the experience compare to Norman’s long road to recovery after his accident?
13. Which conversations with your physician make you the most uncomfortable? Did the book change the way you will discuss health-care topics? Why did American society previously keep explicit cancer information out of the media, and sometimes even out of the doctor’s examining room?

14. What aspects of motherhood are presented in *Promise Me*? Is there a difference between the healing provided by mothers and fathers?

15. *Promise Me* brims with history. How were the Goodman sisters influenced by the headlines of their youth? What did their identity as Jewish women in postwar America mean to them?

16. Discuss the concept of physical beauty as it plays out in Nancy's memoir. She describes feeling awkward about her appearance as a child, though she and her sister were both beautiful women. Does a woman derive power or lose power when she invests in her physical appearance? When a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer, what questions of conventional beauty does she have to face?

17. Which of the resources included at the back of the book are you most interested in exploring? Which Susan G. Komen for the Cure events and programs have you supported, or considered supporting, in the past? What successes do you predict in breast-cancer research for the next generation of women worldwide?