

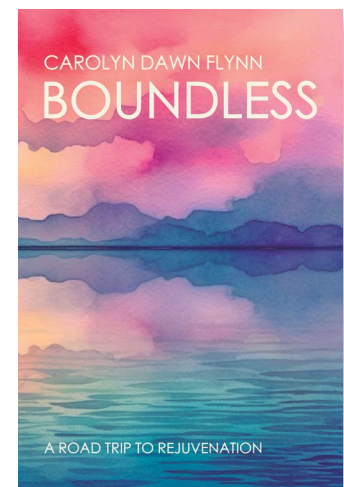
WHEN YOU HAVE BECOME NO ONE
HOW DO YOU BECOME SOMEONE AGAIN?

BOUNDLESS

A BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. **When you have become no one, how do you become someone again?** That's the question at the heart of BOUNDLESS. As Carolyn faces the impending emptying of the nest, she states that as a single mother of twins, "two-thirds of my family will leave at once." BOUNDLESS asks you to notice when you have become an empty shell and determine for yourself what you would do to become someone again. **What does that question awaken in you?**

2. BOUNDLESS opens with Carolyn holding her two babies in her arms as an ambulance races them to the hospital to save their lives. From the very first sentence, BOUNDLESS announces it is concerned with **the fragility of life**. How does holding this awareness inform how we live our lives in full vibrance?

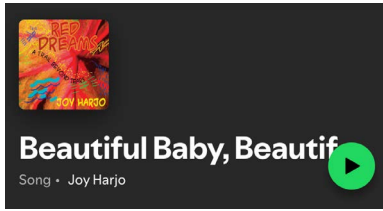


RESURRECTION

An essay about Carolyn's baby twins' near-brush with death appeared in Fourth Genre in Spring 2015. [DOWNLOAD a PDF here.](#)



LISTEN ON SPOTIFY



Former U.S. poet laureate Joy Harjo performs this song, "Beautiful Baby, Beautiful Child," which sets the backdrop for the chapter, "Desert Vision Quest," in which Carolyn laments that young men do not have a rite of passage in mainstream American culture.



Brick by brick, the house of innocence falls to ruins, Adult belonging is never as natural, innocent, or playful. Adult belonging has to be chosen, received, or renewed. It is a lifetime's work."

IRISH POET
JOHN O'DONOHUE

3. In two places, Carolyn laments the dearth of life passages, one for the empty-nested single woman ("there is no life passage for someone like me") and the other for a young man about to launch his adulthood ("In any other culture, any other time, my son would experience a rite of passage, a series of tests of his character, a wise elder to instruct him, and a ceremony with fire and sage to make it so...") **What is the significance of life passages in moving us out of old, stuck lives and into new chapters of life?**
4. BOUNDLESS jump-cuts from the moment when Carolyn's two babies are losing their light and hovering at the edge of death to—suddenly they are 17 and on the brink of choosing a college. **What does this say about the fleeting nature of childhood?**
5. There are a lot of road trips in BOUNDLESS—after all, the subtitle is "a road trip to rejuvenation." From the very first trip—one last spring break to keep trying to be a family—to the reverse-Manifest Destiny trek heading back east across the country to the forced re-migration to Albuquerque, the road trip is a motif. There is the line, in Chapter 3, "clearly, it was time for a road trip," which hints that the road trip provides solutions. **In what ways does the road trip act as a change agent on Carolyn's life? In our lives?**
6. Grace fills this story with music, from the joyfully strummed Vance Joy song to the redemptive "Song for Zula" she plays to cool down her twin brother's teenage backtalk. **How does music connect us? Change us? Clarify things for us?**



7. When Carolyn talks about the future with her twins, she observes their exhilaration as well as the fright that can shut down conversations in seconds, She refers to them as “scorched earth” moments. **What does this tell you about what all three main characters—mom and twins—have on the line?**
8. With the pressure mounting for the twins' to choose their future, Carolyn refers to her home as **the “Be Who You Are” house. Why?**
9. At the outset of BOUNDLESS, Carolyn has hit the glass ceiling in the media industry. That she may never achieve that goal in her field, because print media is in a death spiral, is a profound disillusionment. **Should she just accept this? What happens that finally allows her to accept this?**
10. Carolyn makes a lot of mistakes in BOUNDLESS. **What is her first mistake? What is her worst mistake?**
11. Carolyn says we're not empty-nesters—we are the wisdom teachers. **Why does the world need this now?**
12. From the opening, when Carolyn's babies almost die in her arms, to the end, Carolyn has started a conversation with God that she may not want to have. How does this conversation change over the course of the book? **In what ways does her relationship with God become less problematic? What role does forgiveness play? Surrender?**

LISTEN ON SPOTIFY



“Song for Zula” by Phosphorescent is the song Grace is rehearsing as her cover song for her musical school application. It becomes the theme song for the empty nest, with its soaring wing-beat track and pulling-back reverb.



When we lament, we are finally honest. We are, at last, vulnerable. ...

Lamentations are expressions of hope because they are vows that the way things are cannot remain. It must change.

Lamentation is grief work, but it's also change work.

CAROLYN DAWN FLYNN





LITERATURE TALKS TO ART, AND ART TALKS TO LITERATURE

Months after completing *BOUNDLESS*, Carolyn found—and bought—this artwork by New Mexico artist Amy M. Ditto from her “After Oz” series. That Dorothy has kicked off her shoes and broken off the yellow brick road—the assured path—puts her on the road to nowhere. The art is titled, “No-where to Go But Anywhere.” [CLICK on the art to order, if you like!]

13. A lot of things get shed—or vanish—from Carolyn’s life. Early on, not knowing what to do with her about-to-be-emptied self, she wonders where to go to get out of the house. “Not Walmart, with its plenitude of useless things.” **How does this show us how Carolyn is viewing herself?**

14. Several moments of despair and suicide ideation are depicted in *BOUNDLESS*—Grace pounds nails in the wall that say “Try dying” and Carolyn whisks her to another school. After being fired, Carolyn has a panic attack and prays to die in her sleep. The thought takes hold in her, and it occurs to her there could be a method for ending her life. When she reaches out for help, she calls her sisters and childhood friend. “I need someone to lay eyes on me,” she tells them. Her sister April knows this territory well, and bravely guides Carolyn out after the panic attack and suicide ideation. *BOUNDLESS* depicts situational depression and sympathizes with those who suffer from severe clinical depression and suicide ideation. **Why is it so hard to talk with those we love about this kind of despair? How can we shed the stigma and invite others to be vulnerable and find support? To be brave, be light, be you?**

15. On the brink of leaving Saratoga, destination unknown, Carolyn realizes that none of the possible places has to be the place. Her friend Peg says, “You’ve gone too far.” Carolyn realizes, “Slivers of me are everywhere, but I was nowhere.” **What if the road to nowhere goes everywhere?**



16. After a summer without a coffee maker, after giving up her house and her car, after a truckload of her furniture returns damaged, she has gotten used to living without material things and found something beyond that. In the chapter, "Useless Things," she says "there was nothing here I needed. This store was filled with useless things." She resists the on-ramp to consumerism, to be an endless self-improvement project and instead live in the rarefied space of an authentic identity not defined by roles or things. She comes to a moment when she stops being all the people her friends and the world see her to be. "All of life seemed to reverberate from this center, this place that greeted me every morning, where the dead and the living seemed to find me but not one of them knew my name. I was reduced to this: ink and paper," she writes. **How does this illuminate what Thomas Merton calls the True Self?**

TELL A BETTER STORY, LIVE A BETTER LIFE

In her TEDx Women talk, "Tell a Better Story, Live a Better Life," she has inspired countless others to live their sacred yes—even in a world that may split open, as the writer Muriel Rukeyser once famously said, if one woman spoke the truth.

[LINK TO YOUTUBE](#)



17. Near the ending, with her twins settled in college, we have a scene with her son that takes us full circle from the conversation in Chapter 3 about becoming an adult self, inspired by Paul's favorite author, cognitive scientist and artificial intelligence pioneer Douglas Hofstadter. Perhaps the conversation all along in BOUNDLESS is about what makes a self be a self and why we have a self. "The essence of a soul can live on," Carolyn says to Paul, thinking of how the sheet music of a Bach fugue is an annotation of his immortality. Paul observes that it is more than that and mentions the Hofstadter book, *I Am a Strange Loop*. After we are gone, fragments of our souls live on in others' consciousness, lives we have touched, he says. **How does this answer the great question of the book?**

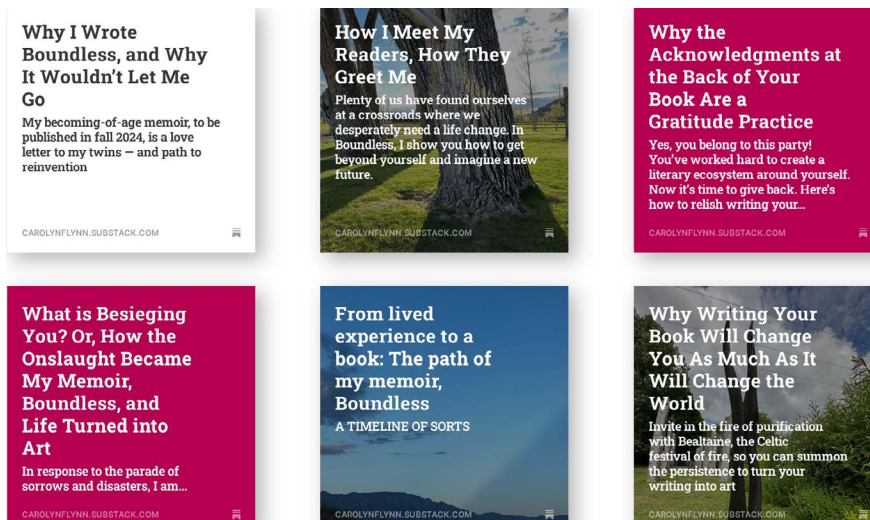
18. The title is BOUNDLESS, and you'll see hashtags on social media for #BoundlessAreOurDreams and #BoundlessIsOurLove. **What does the title mean to you?**



Just beyond yourself.
It's where you need to be.
Half a step into self-forgetting and the rest restored by what you'll meet.
There is a road always beckoning..

DAVID WHYTE

READ ABOUT THE MAKING OF BOUNDLESS ON [SUBSTACK](#)



BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR BOUNDLESS

