

LIKE A WAVE WE BREAK

JANE MARIE CHEN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

IDENTITY, FAMILY & CULTURE

1. Jane writes about her parents' experiences as immigrants: They "had crossed the world to pursue a bigger life. Instead, it felt like they were growing smaller and smaller with each interaction." How do you imagine this felt for her parents? What obstacles have you faced in the dreams you've pursued?
2. How do Jane's Asian American, immigrant, and gender identities intersect and influence her personal and professional path?
3. Have you ever felt responsible for fulfilling someone else's dreams or expectations? How has that influenced your choices?
4. How does Jane navigate cultural silence, shame, and duty? Where have you encountered similar dynamics? How have cultural norms around emotional expression shaped your own relationship with mental health?
5. When Jane loses Embrace, she experiences a profound loss of identity. How does that moment unravel her sense of self, and what does it reveal about how closely we tie our worth to our work? To what (or to whom) have you tied your identity? Have you ever faced a loss—professional or personal—that forced you to reevaluate who you are?

WORK, PURPOSE, LEADERSHIP & BURNOUT

1. Jane experiences imposter syndrome and self-doubt, especially as a first-time founder and CEO. Have you ever struggled with imposter syndrome? How did it affect the way you showed up in your work or life?
2. What strengths does Jane draw upon to lead Embrace? How do these strengths help—and hinder—her in other areas of her life? What are your greatest strengths in work, or in your day-to-day life? Do any of these strengths have downsides?
3. How does Jane's early adversity fuel her mission, her success, and her suffering? How has your own history shaped your ambition or leadership style?
4. Jane discovers burnout wasn't just about her purpose or workload, but also about unhealed trauma. How do you recognize when drive and exhaustion signal something deeper? How can you lead effectively without compromising your well-being?

WORK, PURPOSE, LEADERSHIP & BURNOUT (CONT.)

5. Jane learns vulnerability is important for authentic leadership. In your experience, what role does vulnerability play in building trust and authentic leadership?
6. Jane's experience of Embrace's collapse is not just a professional failure, but a deeply personal one. How does her greatest challenge ultimately become her greatest opportunity for personal growth? Have you ever faced a failure that cracked you open in unexpected ways? When have your biggest challenges become your biggest allies?
7. Jane's story challenges the idea that purpose or outward success equals inner fulfillment. What does success mean to you? Has that definition changed? What do you value most in your life or work?

HEALING & SELF-COMPASSION

1. How does the abuse Jane suffers influence who she was as a child, and then as an adult?
2. Jane travels the world in search of healing, desperate for a miracle cure. Why is Jane—and why are we, as a culture—so desperate for quick fixes? When in your life have you wanted to take a shortcut to healing? What are the limits of that mindset?
3. What is the difference between “fixing” and “healing”? Where have you tried to fix something in yourself that really needed gentleness?
4. How does Jane’s approach to healing evolve over the book? What does she ultimately learn about trauma and how does this shift her approach?
5. Which healing modality in the book appealed most to you? Would you try it? Why or why not?
6. How does Jane learn to confront her pain and cultivate self-compassion throughout her journey? Are there places in your own life where you’ve been avoiding pain? Where in your life can you have more self-compassion? What would that look like?

PERSONAL GROWTH & RESILIENCE

1. Throughout the book, Jane shares deeply personal moments, including her own breaking points. What have been your biggest challenges or breaking points? What did you learn from those experiences and how have they shaped you?
2. Jane’s journey evolves from grit and powering through to tenderness and emotional truth—showing that real resilience isn’t about pushing harder, but about softening into self-awareness, compassion, and the courage to feel. How do you define resilience? Are there places in your life where “powering through” is no longer serving you?

PERSONAL GROWTH & RESILIENCE (CONT.)

3. One of Jane's biggest learnings is that she doesn't have to prove her worth—that she is enough, even without external achievement or validation. Where in your life are you afraid of not being enough? Can you imagine meeting that part of yourself with love?
4. Jane's ultimate transformation comes not from embracing others, but embracing herself. What does it mean to embrace yourself or to come home to yourself? What might that look like in your life?

SURFING, SURRENDER & SELF-DISCOVERY

1. How does surfing influence Jane's life? Do you have a hobby or passion that has reoriented and re-wired your life in the same way? Discuss.
2. Jane's relationship with surfing becomes a metaphor for letting go. What does the ocean come to symbolize in her journey?
3. What are your "waves"—the forces in your life that have knocked you down or taught you to surrender?

