

**LORNA LANDVIK**

*Author of Patty Jane's House of Curl*

**BEST**  
**TO**  
**LAUGH**



**A NOVEL**

# A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *Best to Laugh* by Lorna Landvik



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota, **Lorna Landvik** wanted to be a writer from the time she learned how to read. The summer after high school graduation, she worked in a plastic spoon and fork factory to pay for a trip to Europe with her best friend. For nearly a year, they hitchhiked through the continent, supplementing their income by working as chambermaids in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. Upon her return to the US, she briefly attended the University of Minnesota before departing for San Francisco, where she performed stand-up comedy.

She continued to perform improvisational and stand-up comedy in Los Angeles at The Comedy Store, The Improv, and many other clubs. To earn the living that performance wasn't yet providing, she waitressed and temped, working at movie studios and record companies, and, for several very interesting months, at the Playboy Mansion. (It was strictly a clerical position.)

In Los Angeles, she and her husband had their first daughter and her birth inspired them to become members of 'The Great Peace March for Global Nuclear Disarmament.' One thousand people began the march, but after funding fell through, more than half of the marchers left, leaving 450 people to walk across the country in a grass roots movement. She considers the nine months she spent living in a tent a boot camp of sorts, although she was dazzled by the physical beauty of this country and the warmth of its people. She is also thrilled there has been no nuclear war.

After a move back to Minneapolis, where her second daughter was born, she became a cast member of Dudley Riggs Brave New Workshop. She is the best-selling author of many novels, including *Patty Jane's House of Curl*, *Angry Housewives Eating Bon-Bons*, *Oh My Stars*, and *Mayor of the Universe* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014). She continues to perform in Minneapolis and every January does a one-woman, all-improvised show, *Party in the Rec Room*.

## PRAISE FOR *BEST TO LAUGH*

“*Best to Laugh* is cheerfully outlandish, filled with ambition, love, adventure, kindness, swimming pools, nightclubs, and baked goods. Best of all, it’s laugh-out-loud hilarious.”

—**JULIE SCHUMACHER**, author of *The Unbearable Book Club for Unsinkable Girls*

“Both funny and tender, and filled with memorable characters. Lorna Landvik has written a charming novel with real heart.”

—**SHANNON OLSON**, author of *Welcome to My Planet*

“One of the things that accounts for Lorna Landvik’s immense popularity is the essential good-heartedness she brings to her work. But as much as this is a celebration of a very special time and place, it is even more a celebration of character, desire, friendship, perseverance, and love—oh, and hamburger hot dish.”

—**ELIZABETH BERG**, author of *Tapestry of Fortunes* and *The Day I Ate Whatever I Wanted*

“GREAT NOVEL!!! *Best to Laugh*, although fiction, is one of the truest accounts of a Hollywood life one can read.”

—**MO COLLINS**, actress/comedian

“Landvik’s novel is happily filled with a double dose of nostalgia—the protagonist’s for the golden age of Hollywood and the author’s for a lovably gritty 1970s Los Angeles.”

—**KIRKUS REVIEWS**

“Filled with historical lore about Hollywood’s glory days, inside observations about the chauvinism that pervades the comedy boys’ club, and a bevy of secondary characters straight out of central casting, Landvik’s homage to funny ladies everywhere is a joyful, breezy trip down memory lane.”

—**BOOKLIST**

“*Best to Laugh* recounts real—poignant and laugh-out-loud funny—experience.”

—**STAR TRIBUNE**

## **BEST TO LAUGH DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Candy Pekkala had an early childhood dream of parlaying her love of making people laugh into a comedy career. As a child, did you have a special talent you hoped could turn into a career?
2. After Candy's mother dies, her grandmother steps up to assume the maternal role in her life. Why do you think it was so hard for Candy's dad to offer the love and support she desperately wanted from him?
3. When Candy moves into Peyton Hall in the late 1970s, her block of Hollywood Boulevard still has a few single homes as well as a vacant lot on it. The Brown Derby restaurant was on Vine and Hollywood, as well as the Broadway department store. These—and many more—Hollywood landmarks are now long gone. Is there a restaurant/store/building in your town or city that's no longer there and whose presence you miss?
4. Candy's fellow tenants at Peyton Hall include a female body builder, an old animator, a former night club impresariom, and a Romanian fortune teller. Which is your favorite tenant? Who is the most colorful character that has shared a living space with you?
5. Like most performers, Candy has to find temp work to support herself. What is the most interesting temp job you've ever had?
6. Have you ever been to an Amateur Night at a comedy club? If so, how did your experience compare to Candy's? Were the majority of performances funny . . . or not?
7. The Romanian seer Madame Pepper, who has a thriving Hollywood clientele, becomes a pivotal character in Candy's life. Do you believe there are people who can see into the future? Why do you think she had such a loyal following?
8. Candy has a fractious relationship with her cousin Charlotte. How were their values similar? Different?

- 9.** What do you think Candy would have become if she had not taken up her cousin's offer to sublet the Hollywood apartment?
- 10.** Candy's mother had a specific philosophy her daughter took to heart. If you had to give your child or a young person words to live by – in one sentence – what would that sentence be?
- 11.** Candy values her ability to make people laugh – and her ability to laugh – as her most essential and important quality. What do you consider yours? If you're in a group discussing these questions, what do you think this quality is of the person sitting on your right?
- 12.** Many people believe that comedians begin using humor to combat troubled or lonely childhoods. Do you think a good comedian can come out of a happy childhood and if so, do you believe people are born with (or without) senses of humor?
- 13.** Christopher Hitchens once wrote a column for 'Vanity Fair' about women not being funny. Why do you think there's such resistance – and sometimes outright hostility -- toward women in comedy? Do you feel women can be as funny as men?

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## MORE INFO:

[www.upress.umn.edu](http://www.upress.umn.edu)



## SEE ALSO:

*Mayor of the Universe*  
by Lorna Landvik  
published Sept. 2014  
by University  
of Minnesota Press