

# *Zoya's Gift: Building a Bridge to a Global Family*

By Gail McCormick

## Suggestions for Book Club Conversations

1. In *Zoya's Gift*, author Gail McCormick describes herself as a child who “longed for a world attuned to love instead of fear.” (Page 7) *How did her relationship with the twins help her to achieve her goals? What longings contributed to charting your life course?*
2. When McCormick receives a figurine reflecting a powerful maternal image from Zoya, the author states “I felt my understanding of fertility shifting. . .” (Page 118) *How would you describe McCormick's emerging views of fertility and family? What experiences have shaped your picture of family?*
3. McCormick believes, “...we can create a more empathic world with fewer walls, a world attuned to curiosity and care instead of fear and violence,” by contributing to a “...ripple effect of healing energy creating a shift in the world's collective unconscious.” (Page 306) *What were some of the ripple effects of her relationship with the twins? Do you agree with these ideas? Why or why not?*
4. What were Zoya's gifts?
5. *What part of Zoya's Gift did you particularly enjoy? Did reading this story inspire any change in your views or interactions with people from different cultures? What memories from your own life does it evoke?*
6. Creating relationships across cultural divides doesn't have to entail international travel. One example in *Zoya's Gift* is McCormick's deep and longstanding friendship with Alex and Ella, Ukrainian immigrants who live in her city. *What divides have they bridged in their relationship? What experiences have you had in your community that involved intentional interaction with people whose culture, socioeconomic status, and/or racial background differed from yours?*
7. During McCormick's childhood, the Soviet Union was “The Other,” the part of the world that was seen as the enemy of her home country. As she prepared to travel to Belarus, “ghosts of the Cold War haunted me night and day.” (Page 163). *Why was it so important to her to immerse herself in the culture of the other despite her fears? What culture, race, or part of the world did your family view as the other? How have those perceptions shifted or persisted over time?*

8. McCormick expressed concern regarding the potential unintended consequences of immersing the twins in a privileged culture dominated by consumerism. *What potential consequences do you think she was concerned about?* She and her husband disagreed on how to handle the twins' request for Walkmans. (Page 125-7) *What factors influenced the position she took on this issue? How would you have responded to the twins' request?*
  
9. Feminine-based spirituality is a recurring theme in *Zoya's Gift*. Describing her visit to the Isle of Tears in Minsk, McCormick states, "There, in the city where I had seen remnants of the Iron Curtain, I knew I was looking at the feminine face of God." (Page 236) *How would you describe the author's feminine-based spirituality? Where else did she glimpse the divine feminine on her trip to Ukraine and Belarus? How is her view of spirituality similar to or different from yours?*
  
10. One of McCormick's motivations for writing *Zoya's Gift* was to contribute to dismantling stereotypes sometimes associated with women who aren't mothers. *What are some of those stereotypes? Do you think the book was successful in dismantling stereotypes about women without children?*
  
11. In the Baba Yaga chapter (Page 62), the author discovers that, like her, the Children of Chernobyl chaperone, Victor, also suffers from MCS, an environmental illness. *How have chemicals in our air, food, water, and commonly used products impacted you and others you know? Do you think people are becoming more conscious of the environmental health impact of chemicals and scents?*
  
12. In *Zoya's Gift*, McCormick writes about visiting memorials dedicated to mass executions in Belarus and Ukraine. (Khatyn chapter Page 237 and Zhmerynka chapter Page 258) *How did her visits to Khatyn and the New Jewish Cemetery of Brailov expand her understanding of Belarusian and Ukrainian culture? How did it expand her awareness of her own culture? What led the author to believe her friend Ella might be experiencing multigenerational trauma?*
  
13. *Zoya's Gift* is laced with humor. *What humorous incident did you enjoy most? Can you relate to the self-deprecating humor the author uses to illustrate what she perceives as her faux pas in Belarus and Ukraine?*