

MISCONDUCT OF THE HEART

discussion questions

1 Strube's characters in this novel are all damaged in some way, physically or mentally, yet they are all remarkably resilient. In many ways, *Misconduct of the Heart* is a hymn to the strength of the ordinary person. Who are your favourite characters, and what speaks to you most about the difficulties they are trying to overcome?

2 The novel treats us to a wide cast of eccentric characters, each with unforgettable quirks and issues. How do you think Strube manages to straddle satire and generosity in her portrayal of her characters? She makes you laugh while she's tearing at your heart. Think about her parents in their dementia, Esther the dog's flight to freedom, and the antics of the Chappy's staff. Do you think humour is a good way to take the sting out of serious social commentary? What did you think were the funniest moments in the book?

3 *Misconduct of the Heart* is a novel that examines many of society's problems through the lens of its characters, including PTSD, aging, dementia and eldercare, corporate profit agendas set against employees' needs and welfare, the breakdown of families, and the frequent failure of the country's social safety net. It's a reflection, Strube would say, of the toll taken by our corporate age. Do you agree with her? Which of the issues she raises seem most critical to you, most in need of immediate attention by our society and its institutions?

4 Stevie has an acerbic take on everything but she is hardest on herself. We, the readers, can see her strength and her desire to protect everyone who depends on her, but she sees only where she fails. Where does this begin to change? What are the moments you felt were the biggest turning points in her path to self-forgiveness?

5 The novel's action takes place in medias res, literary speak for in the middle of things. It doesn't start at the beginning of this stage of Stevie's life, nor does it end there. We never find out what happens to Stevie's and Gyorgi's relationship, whether her son recovers up north, how long her parents hold on, or if she will decide to continue her work at Chappy's. But we do learn all kinds of things about what kind of person she is and we get to witness the sequence of events that allow her to begin to let go of her demons. Do you like this novelistic device? Are there other novels you've read that have used this device?

6 Strube has created a universe out of a small group of people inhabiting the forgotten inner suburbs of a major city. How do you think she accomplishes this? What were your favourite parts of this book?

