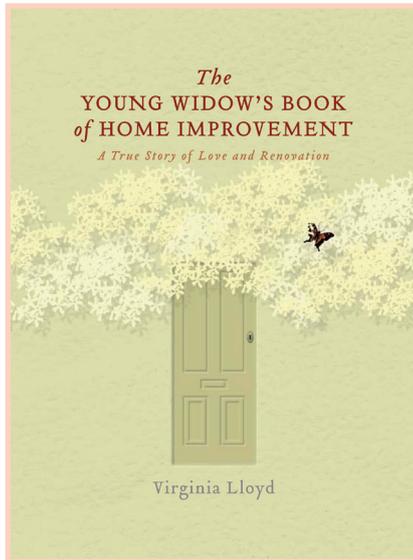


# BOOK CLUB NOTES

## THE YOUNG WIDOW'S BOOK OF HOME IMPROVEMENT

### Virginia Lloyd



April 2008 | 978 0 7022 3681 5 | Non-fiction/memoir  
181 x 135 hardback | 272pp | AU\$32.95

**Virginia Lloyd was single at 32, married at 33, and widowed at 34.**

A young professional woman finally meets the man she wants to spend the rest of her life with, only to discover that he is terminally ill. After her beloved John's death from cancer, Virginia was faced with addressing the chronic rising damp problem in the house they had shared and, over her first year as a young widow, her house had to dry from the inside out – and so did Virginia.

*The Young Widow's Book of Home Improvement* is a wry and touching love story that plays with the parallels between our homes and ourselves.

1. Virginia Lloyd's use of humour throughout the book is perhaps surprising given its subject matter. What impact does the use of humour have on Virginia's story? Why do we as a society tend to use humour as a coping mechanism in awkward, emotional situations?
2. Virginia has chosen not to tell her story chronologically, but as a series of flashbacks that take the reader on an emotional rollercoaster similar to the one she herself experienced. Why do you think she has chosen this structure for the book? How does it influence your reading of the story?
3. How relevant do you find the metaphor of the rising damp and the subsequent house renovations to Virginia's story and to the process of grieving generally?
4. Even though Virginia knew that John had cancer, and therefore had some understanding of what lay before them, she still chose to be with him. Some people may have made a different choice. What choices have you made where love took precedence over the practicalities?
5. Virginia and John adopt the motto, *As normal as possible for as long as possible*. What then is the significance of Virginia's father offering to lay temporary, inexpensive flooring to increase John's mobility around the house?
6. What is the significance of the butterfly that lands on Virginia's pillow after John's death (Chapter 21)?
7. Why is buying the single bed such a significant event for Virginia (Chapter 20)?

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8. What is the significance and impact of Virginia's trip to New York to finalise the details for her green card (Chapter 18)?
9. Virginia is always taken aback by well meaning comments, such as *I don't know if I could do what you do* or *You're very brave*. She writes:

*The time I longed to receive flowers was three, four, six months after John's death. That was the acrid moment when I realized that everyone else had, in one way or another, moved on with their lives.*  
(p13)

*Several people had made the effort to come to the funeral in the teeming rain, when a single phone call or an email while John was alive had somehow proven too difficult.* (p84)

In what ways do outsiders react to illness and death differently from those directly involved in the situation?

10. John's constant belief was that he and Virginia were in fact lucky. Is it better to have loved and been loved than not to have experienced this sort of love at all?
11. Wittgenstein, the philosopher, states that *nothing is outside or beyond language*. Yet Virginia herself writes *in attempting to write about grief, and about love, I suspect some experiences are beyond language*.  
(p191)

Which do you feel to be the more accurate statement?

12. The writer Lilly Brett has said, *This tender, funny and sometimes achingly painful book is not a book about death. It is a book about life. And above all, a book about love*.  
Virginia's book is about a number of important themes in life. What will you take away from reading this memoir?

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