

Readers Group Guide for MY GLORY WAS I HAD SUCH FRIENDS  
by Amy Silverstein

1. What is different—medically, emotionally, interpersonally—about Silverstein’s second heart transplant experience? Why does she hesitate to go through with it, and what is involved in her decision to agree to it?
2. What in particular does each of Silverstein’s dedicated friends—Joy, Jill, Leja, Jody, Lauren, Val, Robin, Ann, and Jane—provide her with during the challenging and difficult wait for a new heart?
3. Silverstein admits that for her first transplant, when she and her friends were in their 20s, their “empathy had not ripened.” What does she mean? What does it take for empathy to form? How does empathy change an experience of suffering?
4. Silverstein often must “collapse into ritual” in response to the precarious and at times “horrifying” truths of her illness. What does she do in those moments? How does such behavior help?
5. Consider the many literary allusions Silverstein makes, and the poetry she recites from memory in particular times of suffering. Which seem most poignant and powerful? What is it about the nature of poetry that is helpful?
6. Silverstein suggests that the failure of her transplant heart may have been in part due to her son Casey’s leaving for college. What does she mean? How might the emotional demands, responsibilities, and motivations of our daily lives potentially affect our bodies?
7. A “well-worn fuse of frustration” for Silverstein is that, despite the efforts of her loving friends, “no one understands” her experience as a sick person. What are the limits of understanding another’s illness or suffering? How does Silverstein try to help her friends understand – and does she succeed?
8. What are the complicated factors involved in assisted dying? How is it different from a DNR? What is Silverstein’s position on these options when faced with unavoidable suffering and illness?
9. Consider Silverstein’s decision to protect Casey from much of the serious pain and trauma of her transplant condition over the years. How should one negotiate sharing difficult truths with children or adolescents?
10. In what ways is the image of the hummingbird important to Leja and Silverstein?
11. What qualities and characteristics does Dr. Kobashigawa possess that Silverstein finds refreshing and valuable?
12. Leja argues vehemently that “hope is not stupid!” Why is Silverstein wary of it? What is the potential value of hope?
13. Initially, Jody is “a situational friend,” but by the time of the book she and Silverstein “relate in a way that eludes even the closest of friends.” What specific experiences have brought them so close? What other than suffering might create such profound intimacy?
14. Scott consistently reminds Silverstein to take great care with how she treats those trying to help her, “to be loving” and not “bitter and angry.” What does it take to be kind despite great pain and suffering? What does it take to be patient despite not being understood?
15. Refusing Versed and other sedatives, Silverstein argues that “there is a cost to not being able to access and process our own pain and suffering.” What does she mean? How can one tell when suffering is legitimate and necessary? And what are the potential “dangers of compromising one’s awareness in a medical setting”?
16. Despite the wonderful attention from her friends, Silverstein admits that “serious illness reveals the infinite depth of solitude.” What does she mean by this?
17. Why is Silverstein angered by poorly thought-out language like “heart failure clinic” and “fall-risk socks”? How does our nomenclature affect us?

18. Lauren finds a particular way to help Silverstein understand that she is not a “drain” on her friends. How does she do this?
19. After a dynamic transformation of the decor of the hospital room, Silverstein admits that “Joy’s intentions wield power.” What effects do the various changes have? What are important components for a healthy or positive physical environment?
20. What value resulted from Silverstein’s “phone friendship” with Val over the years? How does this prove challenging and helpful when they are together in the hospital?
21. Talking to Silverstein about her treatment of Scott, Val says, “patience for a child is unlimited...but for a spouse, it’s just not.” What does she mean? How does this influence Silverstein?
22. Silverstein realizes that “near-death...provides a ripe background for great life lessons.” What lessons do you think she learns? How else might we be able to learn such things in life?
23. After a long time “hungry to take in empathy,” Silverstein becomes “just as eager to give it.” What causes such a profound shift? How does it change her relationships with her friends and her husband?
24. Silverstein knows deeply that “organ donation is one hundred percent beneficence and altruistic perfection.” Why is such a pure and powerful act still difficult for many people? What can be done to encourage and support it?
25. The thought of all of the wonderful women who helped her through her second transplant feels to Silverstein like “some kind of magic.” What particular moments of their many interactions seem so transcendent?