

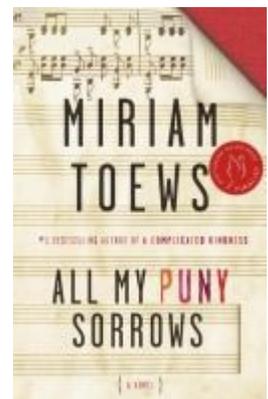


All My Puny Sorrows

Miriam Toews

Discussion Questions

1. Throughout *All My Puny Sorrows* Yoli makes impassioned pleas to Elf to continue life. Yoli refers to her "house-of-cards plan to make her want to live" (p.62) Can you identify Yoli's different pleas? How does Elf's respond?
2. *All My Puny Sorrows* is written from Yoli's perspective. How does this perspective affect your view of Elf?
3. Miriam Toews presents Elf as a brilliant and immensely talented musician. Do you think Toews is playing into a stereotype of people with depression? If so, in what way?
4. Are we offered any insight into Elf's depression? Its causes? Or is a reason for depression needed?
5. What is the significance of the glass piano for Elf? Does the glass piano help us to understand Elf?
6. The author presents the mental health care system in a negative light. Is she being fair?
7. The author presents a view of the Mennonite community in particular and religion in general. What is the author implying about the relationship between the Von Riesens and their religious community and, by extension, the health care system?
8. Elf's situation affects their mother, Lottie, differently. Why is that so? What perspective does their mother offer?
9. What picture of family caregiving emerges? What would you do to help this family?
10. Why do you think Yoli didn't decide to help Elf to Switzerland? What kept Yoli from doing so?
11. At the end of the book, Yoli imagines a different outcome. Why do you think Yoli does this?
12. Toews book, published in 2014 and widely read, arrived at a time of massive change in Canadian law on assisted suicide. How does this book contribute to the narrative surrounding mental health and assisted suicide? Does Toews' book offer a particular view on assisted suicide?





All My Puny Sorrows

Miriam Toews

About the Author

Miriam Toews is a Canadian writer of Mennonite descent. She grew up in Steinbach, Manitoba and has lived in Montreal and London, before settling in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Toews studied at the University of Manitoba and the University of King's College in Halifax, and has also worked as a freelance newspaper and radio journalist. Her non-fiction book "Swing Low: A Life" was a memoir of her father, a victim of lifelong depression. Her 2004 novel "A Complicated Kindness" was her breakthrough work, spending over a year on the Canadian bestseller lists and winning the Governor General's Award for English Fiction. The novel, about a teenage girl who longs to escape her small Russian Mennonite town and hang out with Lou Reed in the slums of New York City, was also nominated for the Giller Prize and was the winning title in the 2006 edition of Canada Reads.

This book is available for download as an eBook or an eAudiobook. For more information, please visit lpl.overdrive.com or call 519-661-4600.

Source: <https://www.covenanthealth.ca/media/122290/questions-for-all-my-puny-sorrows.pdf>