

Suggested Interview Questions

- 1. This is a stunning, fast-moving, heart-wrenching story. You wrote with articulate passion and piercing reflection. I think your story telling is powerful, but there is something else that makes this memoir a little different. Can you put your finger on it?**
- 2. Some news coverage talked about your memoir as “wrestling with God.” Do you think that is an apt description?**
- 3. Why, in your mind, is it OK to wrestle with God?**
- 4. Your relationship with your father is like a steady support to you. You seem to be able to appreciate his love for you. Yet he fails you in some big ways, wouldn't you agree?**
- 5. When reading your story I got the feeling that you hated Ron but also felt compassion for him. Would you comment on your feelings for Ron?**
- 6. How could you feel fear and be in danger for so long and still function? What did that experience cost you? Do you still pay a price for it?**
- 7. You frequently come back to some social issues – not to explain them – but they emerge in the context of your story telling. Was there something you wanted us to know about poverty, single mothering, or domestic violence?**
- 8. I would call this a courageous work in part because of the open way you address the problem areas in your life. What is that openness about for you?**
- 9. Did you ponder killing your abuser when you were still with him? After you escaped?**
- 10. What in your life prepared you to face what you did at age sixteen?**
- 11. Other than your seminary boyfriend and then husband, did people try to talk you out of your stand against God?**
- 12. It seems like you had secrets for a long time. Even when you confessed your “sins,” you were not really confessing. Is that right? What did that mean to carry secrets?**
- 13. Do you have regrets about the things you did in those critical years?**
- 14. Given the difficult topics your story uncovers and reinvigorates, it's easy to forget how much humor is there also. I found myself smiling many times when reading your memoir. Would you like to read some segments of the story that might make us smile?**
- 15. I also want to ask you to juxtapose two different segments of your story. One, the early chapter on what it was like to grow up Mennonite; and the other is the story of a public shaming after you became pregnant. Would you read those segments?**
- 16. Could you talk about the experiences of shame that you addressed in the book and what you think about shame now?**
- 17. It sounds like shame has many dimensions and you feel it is linked to our evolution as a social species. Can you say more about that?**
- 18. You think about the big questions in life, and in the book you observe how these big questions tend to shape our thinking and what we pay attention to. Can you talk about that?**
- 19. What do you mean when you say walk close to reality? What does that mean?**

20. What is the best way for people to connect with you? I'm sure others have questions I did not ask.

Interview Sketch

- 1. This is an action-packed memoir. It reads like a suspense novel. How did that happen?**
 - a. They say truth is often stranger than fiction, and I guess it is also often more thrilling. It probably means something that the reader knows this really happened. Against the backdrop of truth, events have a more profound impact.
- 2. In the early part of the book you write about growing up Mennonite. How do you think that childhood affected you?**
 - a. I think it had a profound effect. My ex-husband used to say that you couldn't wash the Mennonite out of me. He was right. Though I don't have all the same beliefs that I was brought up with, many of my current values reflect the Mennonite way of living. I love simplicity. I appreciate non-violence. I'm a quiet kind of person. I've lived my life being a hard worker. I loved the kind of camaraderie we had on the farm, separate from whatever the world might have thought of us. I've never been sophisticated, never truly a woman of the world.
- 3. So, what does it mean to be Mennonite – like the way you grew up?**
 - a. While we had many of the same beliefs as the Amish – to live a simple life, to help each other and be a positive influence on the world, to believe wholeheartedly in God and to work consistently to see God's expectations and blessings in our everyday life, to harm no one – not even enemies – to live within the confines of non-violence, to see one's whole world through the lens of faith, and to not participate in worldly ways that lead to cruelty or distraction from God's ways. We believed all of that, but we didn't enact the kind of strict separation from the world. We had our own community, but we drove cars, had electricity, wore modest clothes but basically looked like everyone else.
- 4. How did you take to your faith as a child? Were you happy in it or did you feel it was too much or too hard to deal with?**
 - a. I loved Jesus and Sunday School and the feeling of being among some of Jesus' special people, because we really did try to do what was right – what Jesus wanted us to do. I esteemed what it meant to be a Mennonite and was proud that my family on my mother's and dad's sides had been Mennonite for as long as anyone knew. It was all I knew. When I was four years old, I told my grandma that I wanted to become a missionary when I grew up. It made her very happy and that idea stuck in my mind for a number of years.
- 5. You became a minister. Isn't that like a fulfillment of your desire as a four year old?**
 - a. There was no such thing as a straight line in my faith journey. I entered seminary more because I hated God than because I wanted to follow His ways.
- 6. That's a pretty strong statement – you hated God. Do you want to tell us what that was about?**

- a. Not really. I think that would give away too much of the story. But I would like to read a small segment of the book that talks about an experience of shame, which perhaps played into my negative feelings. I should warn your listeners though that this was only one small part that played into my feelings – not anything close to the many reasons I felt so much rage at God.
7. **Now you are talking about rage. Do you really think you hated God or was it more that you were enraged?**
- a. I think that as humans we experience hatred as the deepest kind of abiding rage that we are capable of feeling. Those two are not independent feelings, but one is taking the other to the extreme.
8. **OK, so what segment did you want to read? Does it need an introduction?**
- a. Probably not. I'll just say that at this point in my life I had not left the farm, and though I had come to hate God, I was still very much in His world. (Read pages 96 -99.)
9. **Oh my...That was a powerful piece, and I must say that I experienced your whole book that way – going from one powerful segment to another. Sometimes I felt like I couldn't catch my breath, and yet I had to keep reading. It was riveting.**
- a. Thank you for talking about your experience of reading. I hear that often. The reader couldn't get enough and had to keep reading even when it was difficult to absorb what was happening. For a thoughtful book, it goes really fast.
10. **I would totally agree with that assessment. You just can't put the book down. But I want to ask you about the shame experience you just revealed to us. Do you still feel it pretty much the way you did then?**
- a. No. I can still feel what I felt then, and get a sick feeling in my stomach, but that is not my way of seeing it now. Then, it was my whole world. I had no way to counter the shame. I knew I was bad. I saw myself through the eyes of my community, and I had committed some atrocious sins. Now I see that kind of shame as a religious and cultural imposition on the human psyche, sometimes an undeserved and cruel but masterful way of keeping people in line with the powers that be.
11. **Could you explain yourself more or give us an example, so we'd know what you're talking about?**
- a. Shame, as we all know, is a horrible internal experience. We hate ourselves when we feel shame. We hang our head so we don't look into anyone's eyes. We want to sink through the floor so no one can see us. We feel often like we want to die in those moments or hours or days or months. We feel unworthy and like we should hide ourselves forever.
- b. But shame didn't just suddenly emerge within our internal world. It came as one aspect of our species growing societally, what scientists call human sociality. It evolved as a quintessential way to control humanity when no one was looking. We have to function in human groups, and much of the time people in authority cannot be watching us. What is to stop us from disobeying? The threat of having this horrible, aversive experience of being shamed.
12. **So you think shame evolved from our human experience of living in groups as social creatures?**

- a. Yes, I do. And because culture didn't have the authority to fully enforce it, religion was born as the human relational experience that could more completely rule societies through the use of shame, because religion could appeal to a galvanizing, recognized authority that culture could not claim on its own.
 - b. Probably the fear of shame helps us control our behavior more than any other single factor.
13. **So are you saying that we need shame just to be able to live together as groups of people? It seem like you are also complaining about how bad shame is for people.**
- a. Yes, I see it as a both/and situation, not either/or. I guess that shame exists because we as humans could not live up to some social standards without it. At the same time, it has been twisted by the powers that be to use shame to impair some people more than others. I think, for example, that shame has been dumped disproportionately onto women and has been used to keep power out of women's hands. It gives men an unfair advantage. Religion has been used that way for thousands of years.
14. **I'd like to go further with that discussion, but it seems that we are getting away from the memoir you wrote. You don't go into esoteric discussions in your book.**
- a. No, I don't. Although I do discuss, via several different characters, the various reasons to believe or not believe in God, wouldn't you say?
15. **Yes, you do, and you have a way of bringing up issues into our minds but without actually discussing them directly. Like I felt I had a much better understanding of poverty after I read your memoir, but you didn't really directly discuss it. I also felt like I had a sense of what it meant to be a disadvantaged, abused woman, though you didn't say it in so many words.**
- a. I'm glad those subject areas came through to you without me having to do a lot of explaining or discussing from a more intellectual standpoint. I wanted to tell a true story straight through and let people draw their own conclusions.
16. **Speaking of that, why did you write this particular book this way? You have a doctorate degree. You are well educated and clearly are a thinker in your own right. Why not write a self-help book or a treatise on religion or psychotherapy?**
- a. I guess the truth is that I didn't know how to do it any other way. I've tried many different ways to say what people often don't say, even if they know it, consciously or not. Christopher Bollas calls it the "unthought known." I needed to speak out loud some unthought knowns that we don't often acknowledge because we don't have the occasion to think that hard about it. We go through life, often, not knowing what we know.
17. **Can you give us an example or explain this more?**
- a. We often hear people say, when they observe an abusive relationship, why doesn't she just leave him? I could give you ten reasons why and that would dissipate in your mind in minutes. But in my story, you live inside the experience of a trapped woman, and you see through her eyes the choices she must make, and you know something that you wouldn't have understood before.
18. **So you're saying that you wrote the book to help us understand things that maybe we know but are not cognizant of?**
- a. If that is what I'm saying, I'm giving you a limited impression. I wrote the memoir because I had to. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't do it. I've tried my

whole life to explain some things to people, and I've been so inadequate. I finally realized that people can't hear and I can't explain without having people walk a mile in my shoes. Then at least a few of them will get it.

- b. I did not want to die knowing what I know without sharing it in an effective way. Perhaps what I did will not get the message across, but I think it is closer than anything I've tried before.
19. **What is the message you have so deeply needed to speak? What are we supposed to learn?**
- a. This may sound like a copout but it's not. If I could simply explain the message and that would communicate the meaning, I would not have written the story. In my experience, the story and the message are one. Perhaps as you read the story it won't all become clear to you. And we can flesh it out more from the story itself or you can go to my interactive blog at www.TheFogofFaith.com and ask direct questions. I'll just say that part of the compelling nature of the book is that in thunderous ways, though my story may be peculiar and more extreme, I'm telling your story too. I'm showing the way we live our lives, and the more you read and fully absorb the story, the more you know that. The more you know you. The story invites you to think about your own unthought knows.
20. **We've got to wrap it up here. We could keep going for a long, long time. We opened up many subjects that we've barely grazed the top of. I also have a sense that we have communicated something of the essence of this remarkable work. The book itself is so unusual in its straightforward honesty and in its daring. You were courageous to write it, and I dare say that readers may actually be courageous to read it.**
- a. Thank you. There are many courageous readers out there and I respect them all, whether or not they would agree with any of my conclusions. I want to open up a conversation. That's really all this is about. Thanks for having me on your program and for your thoughtful questions.