Why Fish Don’t Exist

By Lulu Miller

1. When you first heard the title (Why Fish Don’t Exist: A Story of Loss, Love, and the Hidden Order of Life) what was your reaction?
2. Did you enjoy her writing style and if so, what made it appealing?
3. The book is part biography (David Start Jordan), part memoir, and part moral instruction/philosophy. Did you like that these three disparate elements were combined? Which of these three elements was your favorite?
4. What was most surprising about the book? (Eugenics in US?, Possible Murder?, Fish don’t exist?)
5. When thinking about the meaning of life, toward the end of the book she offers the metaphor of the dandelion…”a weed to gardener, but to an herbalist valuable (aides digestion) and to a painter it might be pigment.” She suggests that nothing has intrinsic value, value is something that we assign. Do you agree? How have you seen this in your own life?
6. In a sense this book is about chaos and resilience? After an earthquake practically ruins the life work of David Starr Jones Lulu writes: “Does he hear what seems to be the obvious message of the earthquake? That entropy is the way of the world and no human can ever stop it? Nope. This is when the bastard, the wonderful bastard, takes out his sewing needle and plunges it straight into our ruler’s throat.”
7. The book is weirdly resonant with this moment in time. What chaos/issues/conflicts are we all struggling with right now?
8. What strategies are you using to move forward from chaos/issues/conflicts? Lulu said in an interview that one strategy she uses is to let go of the specificity of her goals. “That in some ways my goals were smaller and more short sighted than what the universe might have in store.” Do you have other strategies that might work?
9. One of the motifs of the book is that even scientists and atheists like ritual. Why do you think she included that? (Is she saying that science is important, but scientists are humans too; humans that need meaning, ritual, spirituality? That we should move slowly and carefully when considering/accepting science especially as it impacts questions of morality/ethics?)
10. Lulu talks about the pitfalls of positivity in the book: too much positivity and we don’t have a grasp on life…not enough and we can’t overcome barriers. How do you balance positivity for yourself?