Book Club Questions – WHEN YOU WERE OLDER

1. In what ways do you think the death of Russell’s father, along with his brother's subsequent brain damage, impacts Russell’s survivor’s guilt after 9/11? How do each of these tragedies affect his perception of home?

2. As a child, Russell's mother calls him her "sensitive guy." He empathizes with bugs hitting the windshield and fish that were caught. How does this sensitivity drive Russell through the story? When is it a positive trait? When is it a hindrance?

3. Why do you think the author chose the title, *When You Were Older*?

4. How does the setting of Norville affect the novel? Would the story be different if Ben and their mother had lived in Manhattan? Do you think it is the right choice for them to move back to Manhattan in the end?

5. Anat asks, "Have you ever met an evil baby?" According to Anat's theory, Ben's brain damage brought him back to his essence—the love underlying his resentful facade. Do you agree with her?

6. The reason Russell is not at work during the attack on the Twin Towers is because he gets the call that his mother died and that makes him late for work. Anat suggests that his mother’s last gift is to save her son’s life. Do you think Anat is right? Or is it fate, or chance?

7. How much of a part does the boy’s father play in the conflict between Ben and Russell when they are little? Discuss Ben's quality of life before and after the accident. What might his life have been like if his brain had remained undamaged? Is the accident a tragedy or a blessing of sorts?

8. When Russell gets home to take care of Ben, he wishes his mother had left him an instruction manual, but feels he'll have to end up writing his own from scratch. If Russell could write a manual at the end of the book, what would be the three most important things he would include?

9. When Russell meets Anat he says, “He fell, not quite in love because that takes more time. But he fell into something and hard.” What do you think that something is?

10. After the fire in Anat’s bakery, Nazir asks Russell, “Who does such a thing, and why?” Russell answers, “People get scared and it brings out the worst in them.” How does this contrast with people’s reactions following the 9/11 attack, and how it brought out the best in them?

11. At the end of the book, Russell contemplates all the possible outcomes of reuniting with Anat and tells himself to hold onto the idea that it’s possible for everything to work out. What do you think will be their biggest challenge and greatest reward?