**Reader's Guide and Discussion Questions**

This literary memoir explores sex work, artistic expression, and personal survival in New York City and San Francisco in the 1990s. Author Shelley Stoehr navigates the complex intersection of economic precarity, creative ambition, and bodily autonomy while providing a counternarrative to common portrayals of sex workers, challenging readers to examine their preconceptions about sex work while offering insights into broader themes of economic inequality, gender-based violence, and artistic identity.

Stoehr's background as both novelist and dancer informs her layered approach to storytelling, examining how creative expression functions as a survival mechanism. The narrative's geographical movement between New York and San Francisco creates opportunities to explore how urban environments shape personal experience and community formation.

This text pairs effectively with theoretical frameworks around feminist labor theory, trauma studies, and literary studies. Its exploration of stigma, agency, and self-protection offers a deeply human perspective on issues often approached through abstract academic discourse.

**Key Themes for Discussion**

The Politics of Storytelling and Memory

* How does the author navigate the tension between personal truth and protective self-deception?
* In what ways does the memoir challenge traditional narratives about sex work and sex workers?
* How does the author's background as a novelist and dancer inform her storytelling approach?

Art and Survival

* Examine the parallel narratives of artistic ambition and economic necessity throughout the memoir.
* How does the author's dance background influence her perspective on performance in both artistic and sex work contexts?
* Discuss the relationship between creative expression and trauma processing in the narrative.

Power Dynamics and Agency

* + Analyze the various forms of power dynamics presented in the memoir: between dancers and clients, workers and management, intimate partners.
  + How does economic precarity influence the author's choices and agency?
  + Discuss the intersection of gender, labor, and bodily autonomy in the context of both sex work and abusive relationships.

Space and Identity

* + Compare and contrast the author's experiences in different urban environments (Brooklyn, Manhattan, San Francisco).
  + How do different physical spaces (strip clubs, dance studios, dangerous neighborhoods) shape the narrative?
  + Examine the role of geographical movement in the author's journey of self-discovery.

**Questions for Further Discussion**

1. Throughout the memoir, the author moves between roles as dancer, stripper, massage therapist, and writer. How do these different identities interact and inform each other?

2. How does the author's relationship with Frank serve as a lens for examining broader societal power dynamics?

3. What role does community play in the narrative, particularly the relationships formed at the Crazy Horse?

4. How does the author's portrayal of sex work challenge or reinforce existing cultural narratives?

5. The memoir explores themes of shame throughout the narrative. How does shame function as both a protective mechanism and a barrier to healing? Analyze specific moments where shame influences the author's decisions or self-perception.

6. Examine the author's relationship with her body throughout the memoir. How does her background as a dancer inform her experience of embodiment in sex work? Consider the ways her body serves as both a creative instrument and a source of income.

7. The memoir details multiple instances of sexual assault and abuse. How does the author navigate the complex intersection of consensual sex work and non-consensual sexual violence?

8. Analyze the role of economic necessity in the author's decision-making. How does financial precarity shape her choices about work, relationships, and personal safety?

9. Throughout the narrative, the author grapples with questions of artistic authenticity and commercial necessity. How do these tensions reflect broader questions about creative labor in a capitalist economy?