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## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### God Said "Ha!" by Julia Sweeney

#### Summary

1995 was, for Julia Sweeney, a truly horrible year. She got a divorce (amicable), bought a small bungalow in Hollywood, and looked forward to a life that said, "Here dwells a happily single young woman!" But then the ax fell. Her younger brother Mike was diagnosed with terminal cancer and moved in with her. Her parents came to be with Mike -- and moved in with her. Suddenly her tiny bungalow for one was filled to the rafters with Sweeneys. Here she was sleeping on her pull-out sofa bed while her father walked around, his Walkman on all day and her mother marveled at Julia's lack of such staples as stroganoff mixes. Every day was spent bringing Mike to and from chemotherapy, every evening watching "Chicago Hope" or "E.R." Julia was now on seriously intimate terms with the people she had spent half a lifetime growing up away from. Just weeks before Mike died, Julia was diagnosed with a rare form of cervical cancer -- what Mike called her "sympathy cancer" -- and within days of burying her brother, she underwent a radical hysterectomy, beginning her own journey through "the International House of Cancer." From these Job-like travails, Julia has written a remarkably funny and touching memoir about a family in extremis that manages to persevere with humor, grace, and love.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Julia Sweeney created a stand-up routine about her truly awful year. Then she wrote the book. Then she made the movie. Have you heard or seen Julia's stand-up routine or watched the movie? If so, how do they compare to the book?
2. Talk about a time in your life when you had to laugh to keep from crying.
3. How would you cope if your family moved in with you? Do you see your family often or only a couple of times a year (as Julia did before the events of the book)?
4. Did this book inspire you to read other books by this author?
5. What is the significance of the title? Discuss the role of religion or faith in the Sweeney family.
6. Talk about your favorite character in the story – Julia, her parents, her brother, or the cats.
7. Will you remember this book a year from now? If so, what about it will you remember?