

'Here, brilliantly distilled, is a searching account of a friendship and a tragedy. A mesmerising gem of a novel.' Michelle de Kretser

A profound and beautiful masterpiece about a lifelong friendship between two writers.

In this shimmering mosaic of a novel, a writer reflects on the final days of her friend's life. In the decades after they met at school, they shared a passion for books and words, took care of each other's children, received acclaim as authors, and endured failure and disappointment. Yet during these last days together, as she and her friend go on walks through their neighbourhood, she discovers that their paths may have been more different than she realised – and bridging the gulf becomes more vital than ever.

Based on Debra Adelaide's friendship with Gabrielle Carey, *When I Am Sixty-Four* is a work of extraordinary depth and grace. Tender and moving, yet infused throughout with unexpected humour, it captures the human condition in all its complexity: the small but momentous events that can transform a life; the way cherished memories can be rewritten or expunged; the limitations of love, but also its necessity; and the exhilarating, unpredictable world of the creative imagination.

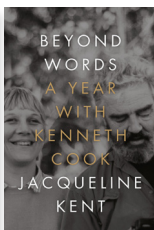
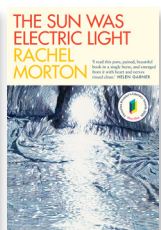
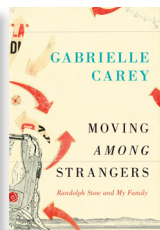
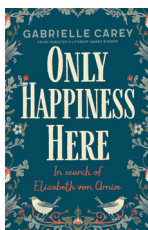


### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Debra Adelaide is the author or editor of eighteen books, including fiction, non-fiction and reference works. Her 2008 novel, *The Household Guide to Dying*, was published to acclaim in Australia and around the world, and was short- and long-listed for several literary awards,

including the international Orange Prize (now the Women's Prize) for Fiction. Her most recent books include *Zebra*, which won the short story category in the 2019 Queensland Literary Awards, and *The Innocent Reader: Reflections on reading and writing*. She taught creative writing for twenty years and is now an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Technology Sydney. She lives and writes on Bidjigal Country in Sydney's inner west.

FURTHER  
READING



## When I Am Sixty-Four Debra Adelaide

# When I Am Sixty-Four



## DEBRA ADELAIDE

Bestselling author of *The Household Guide to Dying*

### BOOK DETAILS

B-format hardback | 978 0 7022 7116 8  
\$34.99

'*When I Am Sixty-Four* is a miracle of a book. It's about grief, but it's also a love letter to writing, and to friendship. It's a gift for every one of us who have ever lost someone we love. This is Adelaide's masterwork, a jewel of rare generosity and compassion.'

**Toni Jordan**

'This is a loving and exquisitely written homage by one writer friend to another, who has left for a place words can't reach. Debra Adelaide knew her friend deeply: from childhood, through their essential teen years, and as adults – women, writers, lovers and mothers ... What I am most struck by is Adelaide's fineness of tone. Whether admiring or delighted, terrified or devastated, Adelaide represents the creative intimacy of a lifetime's relationship in a way that respects the essential mystery of another person.'

**Anna Funder**

QUESTIONS OVER PAGE

## Questions

1. The novella is described by the author as 'autofiction'. What do you understand by this term and do you think it was the right way to tell the story?
2. The underlying subject matter of the novella is sad and confronting, however was reading it more uplifting than you imagined it was going to be? If so, why is that?
3. What are some of the repeated motifs of the book and how do they contribute to the story overall?
4. No personal names are used in the book - why do you think the author chose this approach?
5. The long friendship described in the book changes over time, and the author and her friend spent a lot of time apart. If you still have friends from school, in what ways have these relationships changed or deepened over the years?
6. The book's title is taken from the famous Beatles song. What is its significance, and why do you think it's been changed from 'I'm' to 'I Am'?
7. This is a story based on the friendship between two writers. What insights does it offer into the life of a creative writer?
8. The novella's setting is not specified but hints suggest it is inner-suburban Sydney. How is place important to the themes or the structure of the story?
9. What is the significance of the ibis depicted on the book's cover?
10. Did reading this novel make you re-evaluate how you would approach either your own death or that of someone close to you?