

THE DISORGANISATION OF CELIA STONE

EMMA YOUNG

ABOUT THE BOOK

Every fan of Bridget Jones should have this book on their TBR list.

Meet Celia Stone, the ultimate hyper-organised, journal-obsessed thirty-something with a life that is perfectly planned out and running like clockwork. From her promising writing career to her devoted partner and rigorous fitness routine, Celia has it all – and she's right on track with her early retirement plan. But when her husband puts an important question to her, the perfectly organised Celia finds her life thrown into disarray.

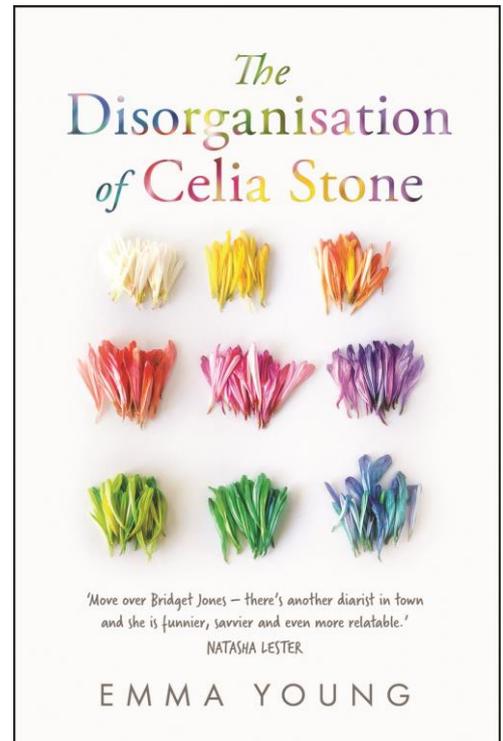
Join Celia on a year-long journey of spiralling schedules and the ups and downs of trying to have it all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After five years in bookselling, Emma retrained as a journalist and has been reporting since 2011: first for community papers, then as a statewide digital journalist for *WAtoday*. Her work also regularly appears in sister publications the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. *The Last Bookshop* was shortlisted for the inaugural Fogarty Literary Award in 2019.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is this novel called *The Disorganisation of Celia Stone*?
2. Have you ever met anyone like Celia or were there aspects of Celia's story that you found relatable?
3. What difference do you think that it makes to the reading experience that Celia's story is written as a diary?
4. Do you think it's possible to control all aspects of your life through organisation? What methods do you use for keeping organised (e.g. diary, calendars, to-do lists)?
5. What do you see as the line between being in control and out of control? How do you know when somebody has crossed it?
6. Do you think that neurodivergence or lifestyle practices only need to be pathologised when things go wrong?
7. What does the Celia of 1 January 2019 have to learn from the Celia of 31 December? To what extent has she changed?
8. Celia faces many pressures of the modern world and the 'hustle' culture. To what extent do you think it is possible for people to resist the culture in which they live?
9. What do each of Celia and Jes bring to their partnership? Is it a balanced one?
10. How do you think Celia's journey might look through Jes's eyes?
11. What difference does professional help make to Celia?
12. Do you think it is possible to be well in the present if you haven't solved your issues from the past?
13. Discuss the positive and negative impacts of living a life within this type of culture.
14. What can we learn from a character like Celia?



INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Where did the inspiration for Celia's character come from? Is there any part of you in her character?

I wrote this book after my own journey of self-discovery. I began writing fiction after my father's death from cancer when I was 25. This impacted me deeply and I decided I could not wait until I was retirement age to tackle my ambitions to be a novelist. My issues surrounding that loss and my personality type perhaps (for want of a better phrase) ensured I got a bit carried away. For these years I was also specialising in environmental journalism and to some degree social justice journalism, and every day in my inbox was a tide of urgent need and problems that were far too many in number for me to tackle, but I felt a terrible responsibility to every sender anyway. Being a journalist and constantly immersed in the news made me hyperconscious of the world's injustices. I was always pretty firmly anti-children but began wavering at 34, then finally decided I would have one, then found out I had HA.

Celia's journey in all this more or less exactly mirrors my own. While recovering I reflected at length on what had led me to that situation – how a person can so single-mindedly pursue health and achievement that they actually go beyond ensuring wellbeing and start endangering it – and in pulling those threads, I thought, jeez, that could be the plot of a novel.

Much of the book's draft material came directly from my own diaries. I wanted to write something true. Something that was pacy and funny, but also rugby-tackled these questions that keep me awake at night. About how we can cope with all the big ugly things happening in the world, and about how people can manage this crushing load of pressure and do good.

The book is written like a diary, including dates and journal spreads. What were the challenges and rewards in structuring the book like this?

It helped a lot with the initial momentum to transcribe chunks from diaries and also to take the dates of my health journey and fertility as they happened in real life. It gave me stars to steer by, if you like, and some raw material to take away some of the scariness of the blank page. So this was among the rewards. Later, I found it a challenge when cutting away a lot of the front half of the book, as it was very top heavy and I wanted an even spread of material across the months. And there was a lot of character development in the first half, that I didn't want to sacrifice as I wanted the reader to understand Celia, but I also didn't want the reader to get bogged down with nothing much happening. So there was a lot of careful work on plot and sub-plot lines, and teasers of future issues, to maintain momentum, that got retrofitted into those immovable given dates of the health journey. Hard slog but also, looking back on it, fun!

What advice do you have for readers who might be struggling with some of the challenges that Celia faces in your book?

Oh gosh, if only I had the answers. If you notice someone's social media feed always makes you feel bad, then unfollow them. Try to maintain a few close friendships in which you can be yourself, and try not to worry too much about the rest. Ask for help from your loved ones when you need it. When in doubt, show your vulnerability. Be reassured by the fact that at least you are a thinking person who is being conscious about some of the challenges in the world, and not just drifting through life. Keep trying to think of ways to act big – me donating 50% of the royalties from this book to Beyond Zero Emissions is me attempting to do something positive instead of just feeling powerless (I've also thrown off the journalistic caution in attending my first environmental protest) ... also, read. I know I present it as a bit of a crutch for Celia and you must be conscious of that, but also books like *Stolen Focus* by Johann Hari and *This One Wild and Precious Life* by Sarah Wilson are so inspiring and help keep me motivated to not curl up and weep, but keep trying and fighting for a better world.

Now, if you can make sure I take my own advice, that would be great.

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