



## ***The Boston Girl by Anita Diamant***

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### **About the author:**

Diamant was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1951, grew up in Newark, New Jersey until she was twelve years old when her family moved to Denver, Colorado. She graduated from Washington University in St. Louis with a degree in comparative literature and earned a Master's in American literature from Binghamton University in upstate New York.

In 1975, she moved to Boston and began a career in journalism. Her feature stories and columns covered a wide variety of topics, from profiles of prominent people and stories about medical ethics, to first-person essays about everything from politics to popular culture to pet ownership to food.

Diamant also wrote about contemporary Jewish practice for Reform Judaism Magazine, Hadassah Magazine, and jewishfamily.com. Her first book, published in 1985, was *The New Jewish Wedding*, a handbook that combines a contemporary sensibility, respect for tradition and a welcoming prose style. Five other guidebooks to Jewish life and lifecycle events followed: *The New Jewish Baby Book*; *Living a Jewish Life: Jewish Traditions, Customs and Values for Today's Families*; *Choosing a Jewish Life: A Handbook for People Converting to Judaism and for Their Family and Friends*; *Saying Kaddish: How To Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead and Mourn as a Jew*, and *How to Raise a Jewish Child*.

In 1997, Diamant published her first work of fiction. Inspired by a few lines from Genesis, *The Red Tent* tells the story an obscure and overlooked character named Dinah, the only daughter of Jacob and Leah. Diamant's second novel, *Good Harbor*, is a contemporary story that explores the importance of women's friendships as a source of strength and support through the worst of times: a

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diagnosis of breast cancer and a foundering marriage. *The Last Days of Dogtown* is set on Cape Ann in the early 1800s and describes life in a poor, rural community inhabited by widows and spinsters who were suspected as witches, and by freed Africans and orphan children. *Day After Night* recounts the stories of women who lived through the Holocaust and await the future in a British internment camp in Palestine, before the founding of the state of Israel.

Anita Diamant is the founding president Mayyim Hayyim, Living Waters Community Mikveh and Education Center in Newton Massachusetts — a reinvention of the ancient Jewish tradition of mikveh, ritual immersion in water.

Source: Author's website (<http://anitadiamant.com/>)

### **About this book:**

Addie Baum is that Boston girl, born in 1900 to immigrant parents who were unprepared for and suspicious of America and its effect on their three daughters. Addie's intelligence and curiosity take her to a world her parents can't imagine—a world of short skirts, movies, celebrity culture, and new opportunities for women; a world where women finish high school, go to college, have a career, and find true love. The Boston Girl begins when Addie's twenty-two year old granddaughter asks, "How did you get to be the woman you are today?"

Source: Author's website (<http://anitadiamant.com/>)

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Early on it is clear that Addie has a rebellious streak, joining the library group and running away to Rockport Lodge. Is Addie right to disobey her parents? Where does she get her courage?



2. Addie's mother refuses to see Celia's death as anything but an accident, and Addie comments that "whenever I heard my mother's version of what happened, I felt sick to my stomach" (page 94). Did Celia commit suicide? How might the guilt that Addie feels differ from the guilt her mother feels?

3. When Addie tries on pants for the first time, she feels emotionally as well as physically liberated, and confesses that she would like to go to college (page 108). How does the social significance of clothing and hairstyle differ for Addie, Gussie, and Filomena in the book?

4. Diamant fills her narrative with a number of historical events and figures, from the psychological effects of World War I and the pandemic outbreak of influenza in 1918 to child labor laws to the cultural impact of Betty Friedan. How do real-life people and events affect how we read Addie's fictional story?

5. Gussie is one of the most forward-thinking characters in the novel; however, despite her law degree she has trouble finding a job as an attorney because "no one would hire a lady lawyer" (page 145). What other limitations do Addie and her friends face in the work force? What limitations do women and/or minorities face today?

6. After distancing herself from Ernie when he suffers a nervous episode brought on by combat stress, Addie sees a community of war veterans come forward to assist him (page 155). What does the remorse that Addie later feels suggest about the challenges American soldiers face as they reintegrate into society? Do you think soldiers today face similar challenges?

7. Addie notices that the Rockport locals seem related to one another, and the cook Mrs. Morse confides in her sister that, although she is usually suspicious of immigrant boarders, "some of them are nicer than Americans" (page 167). How



does tolerance of the immigrant population vary between city and town in the novel? For whom might Mrs. Morse reserve the term “Americans”?

8. Addie is initially drawn to Tessa Thorndike because she is a Boston Brahmin who isn't afraid to poke fun at her own class on the women's page of the newspaper. What strengths and weaknesses does Tessa's character represent for educated women of the time? How does Addie's description of Tessa bring her reliability into question?

9. Addie's parents frequently admonish her for being ungrateful, but Addie feels she has earned her freedom to move into a boarding house when her parents move to Roxbury, in part because she contributed to the family income (page 185). How does the Baum family move to Roxbury show the ways Betty and Addie think differently than their parents about household roles? Why does their father take such offense at Harold Levine's offer to house the family?

10. The last meaningful conversation between Addie and her mother turns out to be an apology her mother meant for Celia, and for a moment during her mother's funeral Addie thinks, “She won't be able to make me feel like there's something wrong with me anymore” (page 276). Does Addie find any closure from her mother's death?

11. Filomena draws a distinction between love and marriage when she spends time catching up with Addie before her wedding, but Addie disagrees with the assertion that “you only get one great love in a lifetime” (page 289). In what ways do the different romantic experiences of each woman inform the ideas each has about love?

12. Filomena and Addie share a deep friendship. Addie tells Ada that “sometimes friends grow apart...But sometimes, it doesn't matter how far apart you live or



how little you talk—it's still there" (page 283). What qualities do you think friends must share in order to have that kind of connection? Discuss your relationship with a best friend.

Source: Simon & Schuster Canada (<http://www.simonandschuster.ca/>)

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