



Finding My Father

DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS

HIS CENTURY-LONG JOURNEY
FROM WORLD WAR I WARSAW AND
MY QUEST TO FOLLOW

Deborah Tannen

AUTHOR OF THE #1 NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLER *YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND*

FINDING MY FATHER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Deborah had many conversations and interviews with her father in order to write this book. Did reading it inspire you to have similar conversations with your own parents or family members? What questions would you ask? How do you think they would respond?
2. Deborah's father's life reads like a walking tour through history. How does his life intertwine with some of the biggest historical events of the Twentieth Century?
3. How does Eli's immigrant story mirror stories about immigrants in America today or stories of immigration from your own family? How does it differ?
4. Deborah Tannen is a world-renowned linguist whose previous books have focused on language and how we converse with one another (including *You Just Don't Understand*, *That's Not What I Meant*, *You're Wearing THAT?* and many others). How does Deborah's linguistic expertise help her gain insight into her father's life? What role does language and the written word play in this memoir?
5. Eli had a relationship with a woman, Helen, who he didn't end up marrying. Deborah imagines an alternative life for him in which he marries Helen and not Deborah's mother. Why does Deborah think he married her mother instead of Helen? Could there be another explanation? Have you ever thought about the life your parents might have led if they had made different choices?
6. Deborah says she isn't passing on stories of her mother's life because her mother hasn't told her any. Why do you think Deborah's mother and father have such different relationships to the past? Why do you think some people remember their pasts better than others? Why do you think people differ in how eager they are to talk about their pasts? What role has memory and storytelling played in your own life?
7. Deborah and her father had a special bond, and their closeness blossomed as they both grew older. Do you feel a special bond with a parent or other family member? Have your relationships with them changed over the years?
8. Deborah spent a lot of time trying to understand her father's past. As young children, we don't think of our parents, or any adults, as having lives that took place before we were born. At what age did you start to think about the early lives of your parents or other adults who helped raise you? Have you ever made a discovery that changed your view of them or your relationship to them?

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9. Deborah's father says, "To me, it's not real unless it's in the past." What do you think he meant by this? Why do you think he felt that way? Do you agree?
 10. What can learning about our family history teach us about ourselves and how we understand our place in the world?
 11. Deborah's father was raised in an orthodox, strictly observant community—but rejected religion. Yet Deborah concludes that the influence of that religion remained throughout his life. Have you or anyone close to you rejected or distanced from a religious or cultural background? Are there ways that influence remained nonetheless?
 12. Of Deborah Tannen's many charming stories about her dad, which ones are your favorites?
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