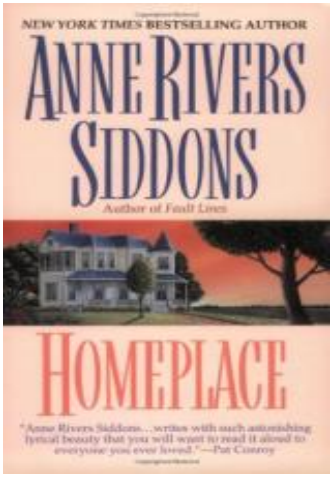
# Homeplace

by Anne Rivers Siddons




## About the Book

After twenty-one years of complete isolation from her family, Micah (Mike) is at long last going home for a visit. She hasn't been back to the small town of Lytton, Georgia since 1963, when her father, John, kicked her out for her involvement in the nascent Civil Rights Movement. Since then, she has gone on to a successful journalism career, and survived a bitter divorce and a string of short-lived affairs. Now, Mike's spoiled daughter, Rachel, has run away to her ex-husband, her Lower East Side rent has leaped out of her budget range, and her current affair has come to a disastrous end. In the wake of these losses, her estranged sister, DeeDee has telephoned with the news that their father is dying of cancer and that he has asked for Mike. Heading home, Mike is unprepared for a past that has lain in wait for her, all but forgotten over the years. She discovers that sparks still fly between her and Bayard Sewell, the high school sweetheart Mike was supposed to marry, who has stayed in Lytton and is now a fast-rising politician. And the old animosities between Mike and her father seem to have only been exacerbated by his illness; she can't imagine why he ever asked her to come home. But nothing is as it seems in Lytton. As she begins to unravel a plot to seize her family's lands, all the love and desire she thought she had buried long ago is reawakened. In trying to understand her long-forgotten self, Mike finally discovers who it is she wishes to become and what it means to have a place called home.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** What role does the Civil Rights Movement play in the course of Mike's life? What lessons does she learn about the struggle when she returns to Lytton two decades later? How has Mike's relationship with J.W. changed since they were both children? How do you explain her father's acts of kindness to J.W. and Rusky, given his virulent animosity towards the Civil Rights Movement in general? Is J.W. saved or imprisoned by John Winship's employment?

**2.** Mike's old teacher and confidant, Priss Comfort, tells her, "love is a policy, Mike, not a feeling. Time you learned that." What does she mean? Which characters treat love as a policy, and which base their love on feeling? Which do you

think is a better way to operate? Does Mike learn to value Priss' advice concerning love?

**3.** Sam tells Mike, "when you came down here, you were nothing but a child. All we saw of you for the longest kind of time was children. The 'good' child, the rebellious child, the little nymphet . . . But you were nowhere near being a whole woman." What was it about her visit to Lytton that enabled her to become "whole?" What role did the other people in her life play in her eventual growth? She sees very little of her father even during her stay, and yet he plays a tremendous role in Mike's transformation to wholeness. How calculating is John Winship in his behavior toward his daughters? How do you feel about him as a husband, as a father, and as a human being?

**4.** What does Siddons mean when she refers to "the bell jar" surrounding Mike? Do you find it an effective metaphor? Why, or why not? Can you personally relate to the feeling of living life through a bell jar? What does it block out, and what does it let in? How does the bell jar protect Mike, and how does it cripple her? Why might she have developed it in the course of her life?

## Author Bio

THE GIRLS OF AUGUST is Anne Rivers Siddons's 19th novel. Her previous bestselling novels include BURNT MOUNTAIN, OFF SEASON, SWEETWATER CREEK, ISLANDS, NORA NORA, LOW COUNTRY, UP ISLAND, FAULT LINES, DOWNTOWN, HILL TOWNS, COLONY, OUTER BANKS, KING'S OAK, PEACHTREE ROAD, HOMEPLACE, FOX'S EARTH, THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR and HEARTBREAK HOTEL. She is also the author of a work of nonfiction, JOHN CHANCELLOR MAKES ME CRY. She and her husband, Heyward, split their time between their home in Charleston, SC and Brooklin, ME.

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