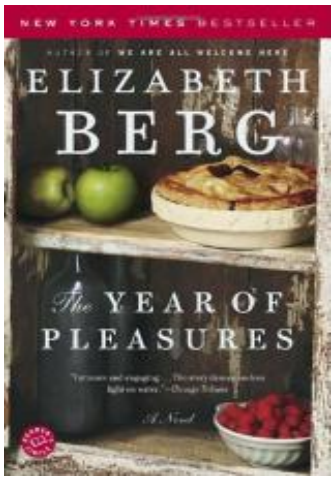
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Year of Pleasures

by Elizabeth Berg



About the Book

In this rich and deeply satisfying novel by the beloved author of **The Art of Mending**, and **Open House**, a resilient woman embarks upon an unforgettable journey of adventure, self-discovery, and renewal.

Betta Nolan moves to a small town after the death of her husband to try to begin anew. Pursuing a dream of a different kind of life, she is determined to find pleasure in her simply daily routines. Among those who help her in both expected and unexpected ways are the ten-year-old boy next door, three wild women friends from her college days, a twenty-year-old who is struggling to find his place in the world, and a handsome man who is ready for love.

Elizabeth Berg's **The Year of Pleasures** is about acknowledging the solace found in ordinary things: a warm bath, good food, the beauty of nature, music, friends, and art. "Berg writes with humor and a big heart about resilience, loneliness, love, and hope. And the transcendence that redeems," said Andre Dubus about Durable Goods. And the same could be said about **The Year of Pleasures**.

Discussion Guide

1. Betta's departure from Boston at the beginning of the book is abrupt, even rushed. Is her choice to move so quickly a good one? What is she running away from, and what is she running toward?

2. In the early pages of the book, while driving to the Midwest with all her belongings in tow, Betta finds a kind of freedom and relaxation on the road. What does moving, or even driving, have to do with this release Betta feels?

3. Betta refers to a belief that one is sometimes closer to someone after death than before. What does she mean when she says this? Have you experienced this, in your own life?

4. Moving to a new place fulfills a promise Betta had with John, but she makes the move alone. Discuss the ways that Betta finds strength and independence in her new life. In the moments when that strength falters, how does she cope?

5. Betta hopes to love John and to be loved by him after his death. Does she succeed? Do you think love can transcend death?

6. Do you agree with the philosopher Kierkegaard's suggestion that no matter how many years have passed, when good friends meet again, they will simply pick up where they left off? How does this play out in the novel? In your own life?

7. Is Betta's relationship with Tom doomed from the start? Why or why not?

8. Why do Betta and Matthew become friends? Do they want the same things from the friendship? Do you agree with the decision Betta makes, to rent the room in his apartment?

9. Betta says there are times when food is not just food. She uses food to heal, to comfort, and to seduce. Are there other ways in which food is important in this novel? In your own life, what roles do food and cooking play?

10. Finding joy in small things is important to Betta, and she uses joy as a vehicle for change. Do you agree with her philosophy? If so, what small things bring you great happiness? If not, why not?

11. What does Betta's store symbolize? How does opening the store change her personality, and emotions? What is the importance of risk, and taking chances, in creating a new life? Have you ever undertaken a similar project?

12. A major theme of the novel is the transformation from tragedy to joy. Could Betta have found this certain kind of joy without the tragedy of losing John? How does the relationship between tragedy and joy operate, in the book and in your own life?

Author Bio

Elizabeth Berg is the *New York Times* bestselling author of many novels, including THE STORY OF ARTHUR TRULUV, OPEN HOUSE (an Oprah?s Book Club selection), TALK BEFORE SLEEP and THE YEAR OF PLEASURES, as well as the short story collection THE DAY I ATE WHATEVER I WANTED. DURABLE GOODS and JOY SCHOOL were selected as ALA Best Books of the Year. She adapted THE PULL OF THE MOON into a play that enjoyed sold-out performances in Chicago and Indianapolis.

Berg?s work has been published in 31 countries, and three of her novels have been turned into television movies. She is the founder of Writing Matters, a quality reading series dedicated to serving author, audience and community. She teaches one-day writing workshops and is a popular speaker at venues around the country. Some of her most popular Facebook postings have been collected in MAKE SOMEONE HAPPY, STILL HAPPY and HAPPY TO BE HERE. She lives outside Chicago.

Critical Praise

"Elizabeth Berg is one of those rare souls who can play with truths as if swinging across the void from one trapeze to another."

The Year of Pleasures

by Elizabeth Berg

Publication Date: March 28, 2006
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 240 pages
Publisher: Ballantine Books
ISBN-10: 0812970993
ISBN-13: 9780812970999