



Meath County Council Library Service



## Meath County Council Library Service Book Club Kit

Dear  
Edward



Ann Napolitano



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meath county council





# Notes To Readers

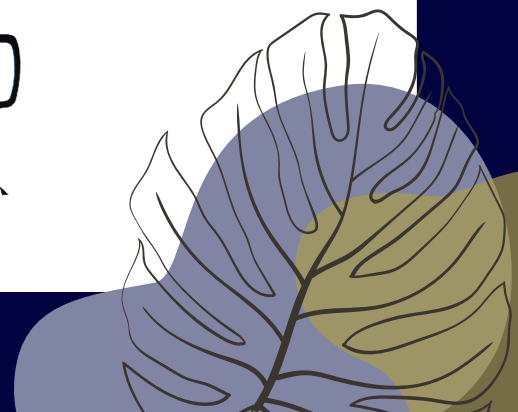


This kit was created for book clubs to use in their discussions of *Dear Edward* and contains spoilers

## Contents Warnings

Please be aware that *Dear Edward* contains content that may be triggering including depictions of death and emotional trauma

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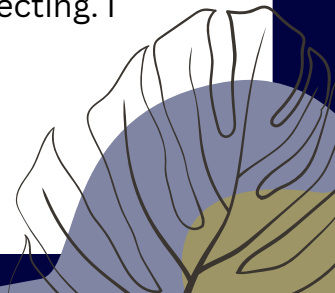


# LETTER FROM ANN NAPOLITANO

Dear Readers,

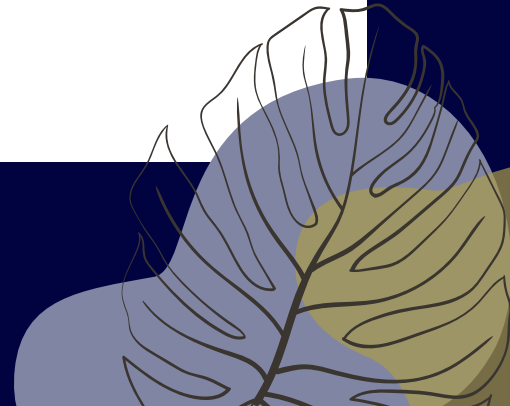
I never know what my books will be about while I'm writing them. There is a story inside me that wants to be told, and I endeavor to tell it as faithfully and truthfully as possible. I loved writing *Dear Edward* for the eight years I spent working on the book. I loved the characters and I loved the kindness the characters pointed at the little boy in their midst who had survived the unsurvivable. I had no idea that when the book was published, people would write to share their own stories of survival and grief with me. That they would hand me their life's secrets, and tell me that *Dear Edward* helped them reconcile their own broken hearts. Shortly after *Dear Edward*'s publication, a 73-year-old woman wrote to tell me that when she was five, her six-year-old sister fell off a swing and died. They were very close—inseparable up until her older sister's death. The woman cited a scene in *Dear Edward*, when Edward's therapist tells him, "What happened is baked into your bones, Edward. It lives under your skin. It's part of you and will be part of you every moment until you die. What we've been working on, since the first time I met you, is learning to live with that." The woman said those words touched her deeply, because she knew them to be true. She felt, 68 years after her sister's death, that her sister was always with her. She said that the warmth she feels when she thinks of her sister is warmer than any sun. Another woman wrote to tell me that her father had killed himself when she was a child, and that she had been beating herself up for years, for not being "over" the loss. *Dear Edward* helped her realize that that her response to her father's death wasn't lacking; what had happened to her father was simply part of her now. It wasn't something to recover from. His death had shaped her. I spoke to a book club—how I love book clubs full of smart, connected women—and was startled when they told me there were parallels in *Dear Edward* to Jews who had survived the Holocaust. I've received numerous emails from parents who had lost a child, telling me that—like Edward—he or she carries that child, and that loss, every day of their lives. In this pandemic year, these messages and book clubs have been a gift. The emails thank me for writing *Dear Edward*, and tell me how the novel met them in the deepest part of their own grief, and allowed light in. I am humbled by each message. All I can write in return, is thank you. Thank you for sharing your story with me. Thank you for reading my book, when there are so many other wonderful books to read. Thank you for reaching out, and connecting. I needed that, and I know you needed that, too.

Sincerely,  
Ann Napolitano



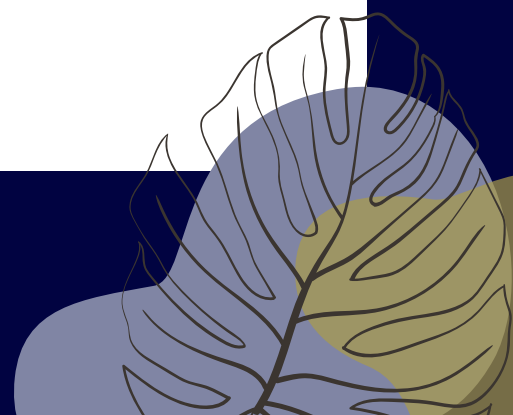


# Reading Group Discussion Questions

1. Which character's story on the flight list did you enjoy the most? Who did you relate to the most?
  2. Why did people write letters to Edward? What purpose does it have for the people left behind? Which letter did you like the most?
  3. Edward said that he would not commit suicide. He said that he would not do that to the people he loves because he knows what it feels to be left behind. This part was emotionally charged and moving. What part in the book affected you strongly?
  4. What do you think about Edward's idea to do something with the money that was given to him? What motivated him to do that? Was it a way for him to recover?
  5. Shay and Edward's relationship got stronger as the book progressed. From the moment they met Shay was Edward's friend. How did Shay help Edward get better? Why did Shay become Edward's friend?
  6. Edward spent a lot of time in Shay's room and was very close to her. He slept in her room until she becomes a woman (has her period). Do you think that it was inevitable that Edward falls in love with Shay?
  7. What is Edward's relationship like with his aunt Lacey at the beginning of the book and how did it change by the end of the book?
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8. How is Edward's relationship with his uncle John?
9. What do you think about the payout in damages by the airline? Edward gets \$5 million as the sole survivor of the crash and the surviving families get \$1 million. How do you put a price on a life?
10. Do you think Shay was envious of Edward's money? She mentions it a lot.
11. When Edward turns 15 years old, he decides he will do things like his dead brother Jordan. He wears Jordan's clothes and becomes a vegan. How does this help him get better and recover?
12. Are you surprised that Edward wants to become a teacher?
13. This book has many diverse characters. How do you feel about the portrayal of the numerous characters? Were there too many to follow?
14. What message did you take away from reading the book?
15. After reading Dear Edward, who would you recommend it to?







# Who Else Writes Like...?

A readers' guide to fiction authors



## DID YOU KNOW?

You can use the library's Reading Recommendation Website "Who Else Writes Like?" to find new books to read!

Who Else Writes Like...? will help you to find something to read by uncovering new authors based on ones you already like.

And there are lots of other ways to search Who Else...?, such as genre, character and series. There are also featured links to book award winners, useful websites and editor's choice of top titles.

Some titles included in the site may be suitable for young adult readers, who are in the process of 'crossing-over' to adult novels.

### How to Log In

To use this great resource just visit the Who Else Writes Like Website and Log in with your Library Card. Then select Meath County Libraries from the drop down menu of accounts and click on continue. And you're on your way to finding your next read.

And remember, you can also search our [online catalogue](#) and reserve the titles recommended.

[www.meath.ie/council/council-services/libraries/what-to-read-next](http://www.meath.ie/council/council-services/libraries/what-to-read-next)



# About Ann Napolitano



Ann Napolitano's novel, *Dear Edward*, was published by Dial Press in January 2020 and was an instant New York Times bestseller, a Read with Jenna selection, and will be released on February 3rd as an Apple TV+ series starring Connie Britton. She is also the author of the novels *A Good Hard Look* and *Within Arm's Reach*. She was the Associate Editor of *One Story* literary magazine from 2014-2020. She received an MFA from New York University; she has taught fiction writing for Brooklyn College's MFA program, New York University's School of Continuing and Professional Studies and for Gotham Writers' Workshop. In November 2019, Ann was long-listed for the Simpson/Joyce Carol Oates Literary Prize.

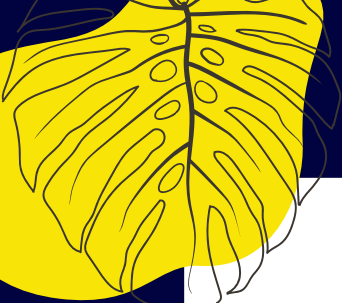
*Dear Edward* has been published by Dial Press in the United States, and by Viking Penguin in the United Kingdom. The novel currently has twenty-seven international publishers. It was named one of the best books of 2020 by The Washington Post, The Boston Globe, Real Simple, Fast Company, Women's World, Parade, LibraryReads and Amazon.

*A Good Hard Look* was published in the United States by Penguin Press. The novel appeared on the Southern Independent bestseller list, on one of NPR's Best of 2011 lists, and was also an Indie Next Pick and an Okra Pick.

Her first novel, *Within Arm's Reach*, was published in the United States by Crown Publishing, in the United Kingdom by Time Warner Books/Virago, in Spain by Ediciones Salamandra, and in Germany by Verlagsgruppe Droemer Weltbild. The novel was adapted and staged as a theatrical production in New York City in 2014.

Ann lives in Brooklyn with her husband and two children.

<https://annnapolitano.com/author/>



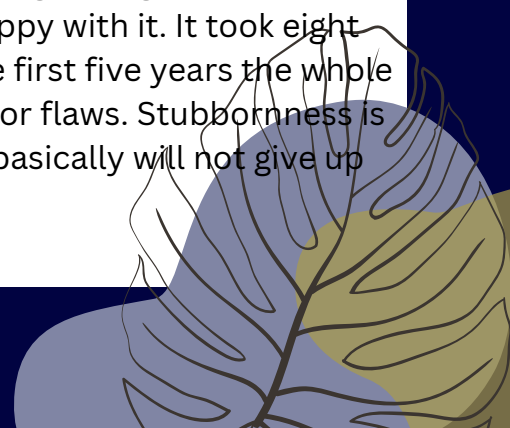
## Interview with Ann Napolitano by Caroline Levittville

**I always want to know what is haunting someone into writing a book. I think I know some of the answer from your glorious authors note in the book, but I still would love you to talk more about it.**


There was a real plane crash in 2010, that I became obsessed with. The flight originated in South Africa and crashed in Libya—most of the passengers were Dutch, and on their way home from vacation. Only one passenger survived, a nine-year-old boy named Ruben van Assouw. The boy was found still strapped into his seat about a half mile from the wreckage—the speculation was that he'd been sitting near the fuselage and had been basically ejected from the plane. He had a badly broken leg and a punctured lung but was otherwise fine. Everyone else, including his parents and brother, had died immediately. I couldn't read enough about this story, and the obsession was such that I knew I was going to have to write about it. I needed to write my way into understanding how this young boy could walk away from this wreckage, from the loss of his family, and not only survive, but to find a way to live his life.

**Would you say that your previous novels have taught you skills in terms of craft, or do you, like me, alas—have writers' amnesia, where every book is a new book and everything you think you know about writing flies out the window?**

I have the same experience as you, sadly—every book is a new book, with its own challenges and its own hard problems. Structure is always a headache, though an interesting one. I like to think, however, that my sentence-by-sentence writing improves somewhat with each book, and that I get a little better at accessing the emotional grid of the story. That might be wishful thinking, though. It takes me a long time to muscle a novel into a place where I'm happy with it. It took eight years to write *Dear Edward*, and I would say that for the first five years the whole thing was at best mediocre, with a lot of major and minor flaws. Stubbornness is perhaps my most defining trait as a writer, though—I basically will not give up until the novel works.







**I love the way the book is structured in alternating chapters, with some chapters set right in the plane before it goes down, so we can know the lives of the people it is carrying, and the other chapters set in present day, showing how Edward is grappling with the loss. Was this always the plan?**

Yes, it was always the plan. When I conceived of the story (based on the idea of the real crash) I knew the story would start with the plane taking off and end with it crashing. I wanted the story of the flight and Edward's story afterward to sit side by side, in part because I knew the flight and the crash were a weight Edward would have to carry with him every day of his life. He would never be able to set it down; at best, he'd learn how to bear it.


**I also loved (without giving anything away), how we got to live some of Edward's life post-plane with him, and experience his changes along with him. There was so much grace there, so much beauty. Can you talk about how life can be both unutterably sad and compellingly gorgeous?**

I would love more than anything to talk about that! But I don't know how, and I think that's a large part of why I write novels. I can try to say something over eight years and several hundred pages that I could never express in clear speech out of my mouth. But perhaps it is in moments of great sadness that we as humans are the most beautiful? I think of being in New York for 9/11, and how hundreds of people rushed to hospitals to donate blood, and how firefighters and emergency personnel from all over the country got in their cars and trucks when they heard the news and drove to New York to help. Others lined the West Side highway to applaud those emergency workers as they arrived. When we show up for one another—and I believe we are hardwired to do so—it is heartbreakingly beautiful.

**What's obsessing you now and why?**

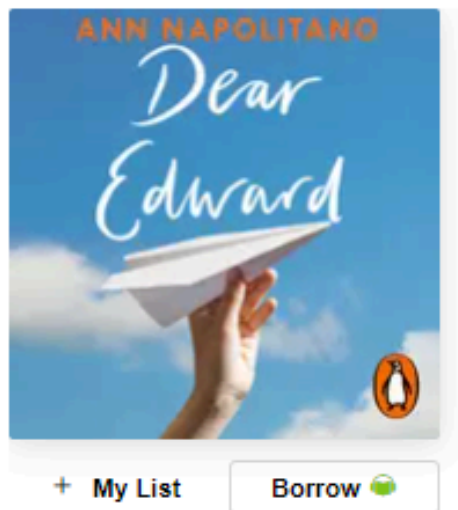
The history of basketball, and the history of racism within basketball. I've been obsessed, and reading everything I can on the subject, for about two years. It's amusing to me, because I had no interest in basketball up until that point, but it's also exciting, because I know it's a push toward the story I will tell next. I know the obsession will inform the novel I'm taking notes on now, but I don't know exactly why or how yet.

<https://carolineleavittville.blogspot.com/2020/01/a-boy-sole-survivor-of-plane-crash.html>

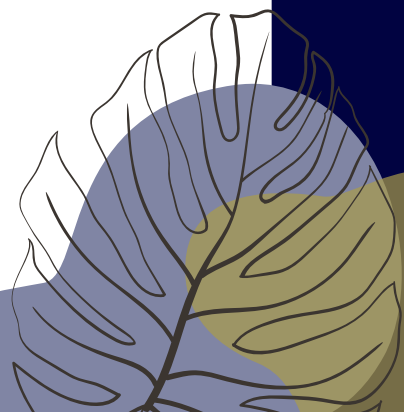




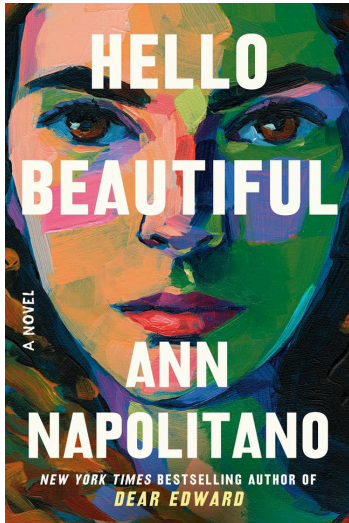
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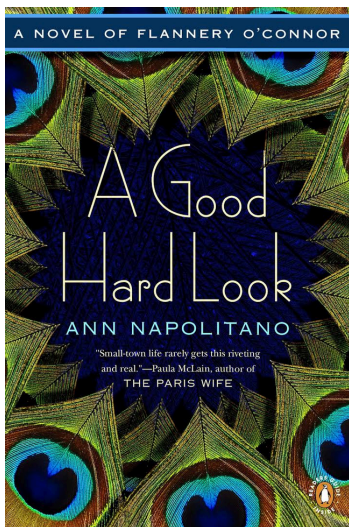
Dear Edward  
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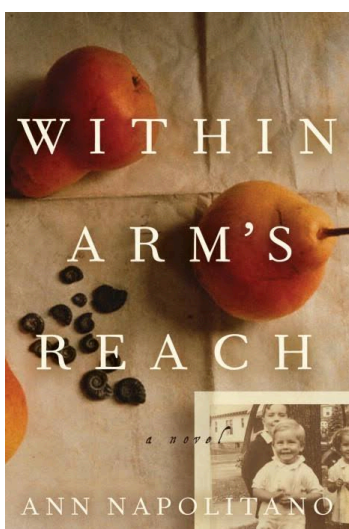
# More from Ann Napolitano



William Waters grew up in a house silenced by tragedy, where his parents could hardly bear to look at him, much less love him—so when he meets the spirited and ambitious Julia Padavano in his freshman year of college, it's as if the world has lit up around him. With Julia comes her family, as she and her three sisters are inseparable: Sylvie, the family's dreamer, is happiest with her nose in a book; Cecelia is a free-spirited artist; and Emeline patiently takes care of them all. With the Padavanos, William experiences a newfound contentment; every moment in their house is filled with loving chaos.



Crippled by lupus at twenty-five, celebrated author Flannery O'Connor was forced to leave New York City and return home to Andalusia, her family farm in Milledgeville, Georgia. Years later, as Flannery is finishing a novel and tending to her menagerie of peacocks, her mother drags her to the wedding of a family friend.



Within Arm's Reach follows three generations of an Irish-American Catholic family who are jarred into crisis by an unexpected pregnancy. This lyrical first novel is told through six different points of view, including those of the unmarried, pregnant Gracie, a local advice columnist; and her grandmother, the matriarch, who is struggling with her commitments to both the living and the dead. Within Arm's Reach is a poignant reminder of how interconnected our lives are with those we love, how much more we inherit than wills decree, and how the ghosts of our ancestors walk by our sides every day.

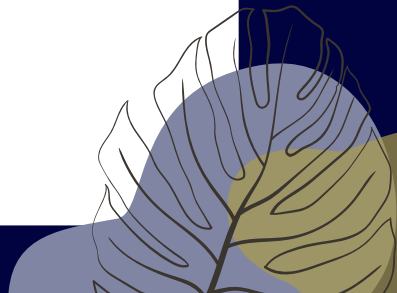


# VEGAN CALIFORNIA NACHOS

*“Why the dietary change?” John says. Edward tells the truth, because that’s what Jordan would have done. “I’m doing it for my brother.” He pauses, and it occurs to him that his aunt and uncle probably hadn’t been up to date on his brother’s eating habits. He says, “Jordan became vegan a few months before he died.”*

## **Ingredients**

1 large bag tortilla chips  
1 (15-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
8 ounces ground seitan  
1 tablespoon taco seasoning  
½ teaspoon smoked paprika  
½ teaspoon chipotle powder  
Sea salt  
1 avocado, diced  
2 teaspoons lime juice  
Cashew Queso (see below)  
Optional Toppings  
½ cup fresh tomato salsa  
Lime Sour Cream (as seen in the Chloe Flavor cookbook)  
Finely chopped red cabbage  
Thinly sliced jalapeño  
Chopped fresh cilantro  
Pickled Red Onion





### **For the Cashew Queso**

MAKES 2½ CUPS

1 cup water

1 cup raw cashews

2 tablespoons nutritional yeast flakes

4 ounces canned tomato sauce (about ⅓ cup)

1 teaspoon sea salt

½ teaspoon chili powder

¼ teaspoon ground turmeric

¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

2 teaspoons agave nectar

### **For the California Nachos**

Preheat the oven to 425°F.

Pile the chips into a 9 x 13-inch baking dish. Add the black beans. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes, until the beans are warmed through.

Meanwhile, in a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. When it shimmers, add the seitan, taco seasoning, smoked paprika, and chipotle powder and cook for about 5 minutes, until the seitan is heated through. Add water as needed if the skillet seems dry. Season with salt.

Remove the skillet from the heat.

In a small bowl, mash together the avocado and lime juice. Season with salt.

Remove the baking dish from the oven and add the Cashew Queso. Scatter over the seitan.

Top off the nachos with the mashed avocado and any additional toppings you desire. Serve immediately