

# Digging to america book written by anne tyler

Countries



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Pulitzer Prize winner, Anne Tyler has brought a fictional group of characters to real life in her 17th novel, *Digging to America*. Bonding two vastly different families on a chance meeting at an airport, one all-American the other Iranian immigrants, she assimilates present US culture with a strong emphasis on friendship, parenting, traditions and accents it with a tender romance. I would consider Maryam Yazdan to be Tyler's, central character, who after being in America for almost 40 years, still feels like a foreigner.

During the six-year period that these families' lives intertwine, Maryam's view of this plight resonates throughout inflicting bits of conflict and resentment.

Friday, August 15, 1997, at Baltimore airport, two separate groups anxiously gathered, unknowingly, for the same plane to arrive, for the same reason; to pick up their baby girls adopted from the same country, Korea.. Observing their ethnic differences, we see an American family entourage equipped with buttons that read " MOM," " DAD. " " GANDMA," and " GRANDPA" (" twice over"); silvery balloons printed with " IT'S A GIRL!"; half a dozen video cameras, car seat, skirted bassinet and enough bubbling enthusiasm to be on the borderline of obnoxiousness.

The other family, in a single line of three; a young couple, " foreign-looking, olive-skinned," (7) and an older woman, quietly awaited, no adoption flair, focused solely on the arrival of their new baby. First to depart from the plane an Asian woman calling for the Donaldsons. She introduces the family to Jin-Ho; flashbulbs, cameras, a crowd of people to welcome the newborn.. Another Asian woman steps off, calling for the Yazdan's; " Congratulations, this is Sooki," she said.

(7) As the women were completing the transfers, someone asked “ Is yours from Korea too? ” (8) That answer started a lasting friendship and an improbable journey for two mismatched families. Bitsy and Brad Donaldson were a typical American family. I know these sounds like a 50’s sitcom, but that was my impression. They lived in white clapboard Colonial on a narrow street in Mount Washington. Bitsy was plain, extroverted and very opinionated, especially when it came to child rearing. She was adamant about her way being the right way.

Brad was a good provider, his mild temperament made him the perfect peacekeeper, smoothing out impending disagreements when their large family visited. Having a baby would complete the picture, and Jin Ho did just that along with mixing up the way an all-American family looks. It was curious to me that this “ typical American,” family insisted on not changing the baby’s name, keeping her squared off haircut and dressing her in Korean costumes. I can understand them wanting her to know about her birth country and its culture, but I felt it was to an extreme.

My conclusion was relevant, Jin Ho did resent not feeling as American as her friends when she got older. Maybe, Bitsy’s way was not always the right way, after all. Ziba and Sami Yazdan was Iranian-American. They met in college where Sami studied to be a teacher like his father, who died when he was 14 years old. After they were married, Sami started to work for a real estate developer, in spite of his mother, Maryam’s silent disapproval, and made it his career. The couple moved into his company’s newest development , a large, beautiful home in a Hunt Valley.

Ziba was glamorous, bordering on more of a flashy appearance, she enjoyed her job as an interior decorator. Sami was a serious type and had indifference toward Iran and America. He would go into a litany of “ these Americans.... ,” (80) when his relatives would visit. The list covered such issues as American’s obsession with logic and that it’s the reason “ they’re always suing each other,” (81) America’s belief that they’re an interest to the whole world, they’re immediate directness to open up to people, and my personal favorite, they’re “ do-your-own-thing kind of culture.”(82)

Even with this attitude, Sami refused to speak Farsi, as his relatives did frequently, and conversed only in English. During these tirades , Maryam, would be outraged, at Sami, reminding him sternly “ American born, American raised, never been anywhere else: how can you say these things? You’re American yourself! ” (82) She would continue with the constraints of living in Iran having to be cautious of every word you spoke, having to keep every opinion to yourself and the need to always be aware of who may be listening. Maryam would end with the always-useful adage, “ You take it for granted, is the problem.” (83)

In complete contrast to Sami’s anti-American comments, he and Ziba were determined to have the American dream realized for Sooki. , and unlike the Donaldson’s, they immediately changed her name to Susan. The Yazdan-Donaldson’s relationship began with Bitsy and one of many family gatherings. She phoned the only “ Yazdan’s” in the phone book, to invite them to a “ leaf raking party. ” Bitsy told Maryam, who was babysitting Susan, that she wanted the girls to know each other, she felt it was important for them to maintain their cultural heritage.

They accepted the invitation, which included Maryam, since both sets of Jin Ho's grandparents, would also be there. Ziba was a little insecure, besides the babies, she didn't have much in common since the Donaldson's were much older, Maryam going would lighten the event, and give her support. Leaf raking party was just that, everyone raked leaves. The usual "my baby this and my baby that" banter commenced and at times made Ziba questioned her mothering capabilities. Was she doing everything wrong?

Jin Ho was already eating food, Susan was still on the bottle. Should she be wearing more black and white clothes like Bitsy, because babies didn't see in color? Moreover, the biggest controversy should she be a stay at home mom. Maryam interrupted, seeing Ziba's frustration, saying how much she looked forward to her couple of days watching Susan, but Bitsy's disapproval still showed.. Bitsy and Brad's parents arrived and then the "grandparent baby banter" began.

After the raking, supper was served. Bitsy said "We certainly love your cuisine," this opened a conversation about Iran. Pat, Brad's mother asked if they had any trouble during the Iranian hostage crisis, Ziba said she was already in America then everyone glanced at Maryam, "Oh, perhaps a little," (29) she reluctantly said, steering the talk back to a safe subject, "the girls." After that night, the two families got together often, although Maryam politely declined, when invited. Ziba and Sami celebrated the Iranian New Year with her parents, so Maryam stopped having a formal celebration, except for this spring.

Ziba wanted the Donaldson's to be a part of their tradition so she persuaded Maryam to have the celebration at her house Normally Maryam

would be willing, but her thoughts were rattling with “ Why should they have to put on these ethnic demonstrations? Let the Donaldson’s go to the Smithsonian for that! ” “ Let them read the National Geographic! ” Just thoughts, she never would say them aloud, and agreed to the party. A few weeks before the party, Sami took Maryam to Rockville for exotic ingredients to make the traditional Iranian dishes.

She told him “ When I first came to this country, your grandmother had to mail most of my spices from Iran. ”(37) Maryam was 19 years old going to America for an arranged marriage to Kiyan. She had met him in Iran, but he went to America earlier to start his job as a teacher, they married via telephone and grew to love each other very much. In those days, all their couple friends were Iranian, in the same situation. She wondered where all those people were now, moved to other cities, political differences separated them, “ Who supported the Shah? Who did not?” (37) and since Kiyan’s death she felt she didn’t belong “ in that two-by-two circle. ”(37)

Maryam, perhaps because she was widowed for so long, became more critical, having to pay close attention to her mannerisms around people. She tended to come off as refined and unapproachable, when she was really kind and loving. Working in an office at a the day care center, Susan would eventually attend, she had many single friends, both Iranian and American, She had an active social life, but she built the toughest invisible wall around her heart, never letting any man go beyond it. At least not until, Bitsy’s father, Dave.

On the one-year anniversary of the day the girls arrived, Bitsy wanted to have an “ Arrival Party,”(56) she named it to celebrate the event. Similar to

a birthday party, with a Korean desert, cake and candles, and the showing of the video taken at the airport. Brad was concerned it would be too much for Bitsy, since her mother had a set back with her cancer but this was just the diversion she needed. The day quickly came and the first to arrive were Ziba's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hakimi, very exotic, they entered in a very respectful manner. Next to arrive Bitsy and Brad's family, then the Yardans.

Susan was in a pretty party dress and Jin Ho in a full Korean costume. The girls played together unaware of any differences between them or their families. Childhoodsimplicity, if we all could remain in that frame of mind, how pleasant the world would be. Bitsy had a specific line up starting with a theme song, She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain , sung by the guests, as the girls blew out the candles, on their Stars and Stripes cake, then the video Bitsy apologized that it was just of Jin Ho and if they had known Susan would be coming they would have taped her too. " Oh, that's okay," Ziba said. " I have the memory my head. " (67)

As the video went on and on and on...Bitsy suddenly cried " We did get her in! We did! " (73) Susan was there. The Arrival Party would be an annual event, alternating houses. This celebration would be the foundation of the Zardan and Donaldson's relationship and the development of Jin Ho and Susan's friendship. It would also bring two lonely people, both mourning the loss of they're true loves, Maryam and Dave, together. The following year the Yazdan's threw the bash, with a few extra people, Ziba had relatives visiting from Iran and Bitsy's two brothers and they're families attended.

The only missing people were Brad's parents, who went on a cruise and Connie, Bitsy's mom who passed away. Maryam gave Dave some advice on

coping with his loss and fears that accompany the sadness. Arrival Party number two was underway; song, cake and video to mark another year. Brad and Bitsy also announced they would be adopting another baby girl from China . It was the Donaldson's turn the 3rd year and it was starting to be a competition, at least for Bitsy, who felt the Yazdan's had " changed the rules," (111) by serving a full dinner instead of just deserts. In full project mode, she planned her diner, canapés and all.

The Arrival Party came fast and went smoothly, Maryam and Dave's small talk was lighter, most of the time, and a bit flirty. Dave did talk about how hard it was watching Connie die, he felt guilty at times that he didn't have more patience with her towards the end. Maryam understood, as no one could, she watched her husband die the same way. Their friendship deepened. Song time came, cake and video. Sami and Ziba bought a larger home, just three blocks from the Donaldsons. Maryam was watching Susan when Dave called and asked if he could bring Jin Ho over to play. She agreed.

He wanted to stay, instead of just dropping her off. He had a cup of coffee and Maryam continued her cooking, suddenly insisting he didn't have to stay, she would bring Jin Ho home. He left bewildered. Maryam felt him getting through her invisible wall and sealed it quickly. She went to Vermont to visit a friend, avoiding Dave or probably avoiding having feelings for him. When she returned home she visited Bitsy to thank her for taking care of Susan while she was away. Bitsy chose this time to champion on her fathers behalf, " My father thinks you're wonderful, she said.



Would you go out to dinner with him? ” (151) Maryam subconsciously knew he felt this way but, she kept telling herself her he was just a widower needing company. She diverted the subject, which she has a knack of doing. Arrival Party time again, Yazdan’s turn and there thinking of serving “ a whole roast lamb. ”(153) The celebration was starting to be more like “ I can do better than you,” than about the girls. Maryam was helping with the arrangements and Ziba babbled about Dave, this time Maryam spoke up, “ I’m Iranian; he’s American . . .”(154) “ What difference does that make? ”(154) Ziba asked.

Maryam talked about her friend Farah and what a point her American husband makes about her foreignness. “ It seems she’s not really Farah at all; she’s Madame Iran. ”(154) Ziba insisted Dave wasn’t like that, but Maryam still felt like a foreigner after over 40 years and to be with an American would make her feel it even stronger. The Arrival Party came, same chitchat, festivities and a farewell for Bitsy and Brad heading off to China. Dave took every opportunity, while watching Jin Ho to visit Maryam.

And by the time the Donaldson’s came home with Xiu Mei, Dave had sneaked inside Maryam’s protective shield and they were dating. The Yazdan’s threw the next Arrival Party because Xiu Mei had been sickly, in and out of hospitals. The event was slightly different; the girls joined in the singing and the video went basically unobserved. The next event was more energetic, the annual leaf-raking party. Dave had Maryam sit in a chair and instructed the girls to sprinkle sugar on her head, “ Maryam, Dave said. “ Will you marry me? ”(208) Instead of answering, she looked at the girls to see what they put on her head.

It should have been cone-shaped to go with the Iranian custom and it should have been grown women holding the sugar to symbolize their happy marriages. He probably thought he was doing something good, but she felt it should of been done exactly as it's suppose to be done, or not at all. As these thoughts filled her head she said, " Yes. " (208) Everyone cheered. The next day Maryam went to Sami and Ziba's and told them she only said yes because she was embarrassed not too. " He is so American," (213) " I don't have my own separate self." (213)

She felt bad and hoped it wouldn't affect they're friendship with the Donaldson's. A year went by before she bumped into Dave again, he was picking up Jin Ho the same time she was picking up Susan at dancing school. They did they're little small talk dance, except he told her Bitsy had cancer. She felt his pain and knew all thememoriesof Connie must have come rushing back. When she returned home, she wrote Bitsy a note and offered asked if she could be of any help. Maryam was now noticing how lonely she was the past year. How alive she felt with Dave, doing couple things.

Maybe the feelings she had were stronger than she realized and the ones about feeling like a foreigner were not as important. One morning, Bitsy called to thank her for the note, they got caught up and both said how much they missed each other. Bitsy asked if she would attend the Arrival Party coming up. Maryam said she would think about it, but didn't want anyone to feel awkward. Pondering to go or not, Maryam something Kiyan once said came to mind, " I don't know why truly good people always make me sad. " (263) She decided she would go and helped Ziba with the details. The party started and everyone was there, except for Maryam.

When Ziba looked in the dinning room all the Donaldson's had left, she was devastated so Sami called his mother. She answered, not understanding Sami's tone, but said she fully intended on going she just overslept. He told her the Donaldson's left and it was safe for her to go over. She insisted she had all intentions of being there. Maryam then heard Bitsy outside her window, people kept yelling and knocking, she didn't answer. Finally, she looked out the window and saw all the Donaldson's walking toward their cars. Maryam called, " Wait for me! " (277) The two families would celebrate, yet another Arrival Party!

The imprint of these families, meeting by chance; growing in love and friendship by choice, depicts that no matter what culture or mixture of cultures, come together; what really constitutes a bond is the right choice. In making that choice taking into consideration the respect of others beliefs, opinions, insecurities and strengthens. The Donaldson's and Yordan's, American and Iranian families brought two other cultures into their circle; two little girls from Korea and one from China. When you put all these pieces together, what would they're families culture be? I say they're culture is acceptance.