

# *Knish: In Search of the Jewish Soul Food* by Laura Silver

## Questions for Discussion

1. What foods or recipes hold resonance for you? What makes them special? Discuss the foods, ingredients and the memories they evoke. How far would you go to get a food that matters to you?
2. Discuss your own quest(s) – for food, family, history, belonging or something else entirely. What did you set out in search of — and what did you uncover? Of the journeys chronicled in this book, which ones stood out for you?
3. One rallying cry the author encounters over and over again in her search is, “You can’t get a good knish anymore.” When people say that, what else are they talking about? What does the knish encompass — for the author, for others and for you?
4. What reasons did Les Green, the last owner of Mrs. Stahl’s, give for the closing of the knish shop? What would you have done in his place? What’s the longest-standing neighborhood business you know of? Talk about mom and pop shops that you know and have known.
5. The author writes that some of the American relatives she meets up with in Bialystok have not seen each other in thirty years — because some live in New York and others live in New Jersey. What are the sentiments behind the humor? To what extent, if at all, do you identify with the author’s quip?
6. When the author calls up former knish makers to interview them, she sometimes finds herself on the receiving end of questions about herself. Would this happen with any food investigation?
7. To whom does the knish belong? Is it possible to link a food to a single place, time or ethnic identity? Give examples of other foods from your past or present.
8. What makes the author go to Knyszyn, Poland? Why does she hope to discover there? Discuss the role of the town of Knyszyn in the narrative of the story and in the history of the knish. What does the author learn about the past – and the present — from her this visit?
9. Material culture is a growing field and one based on objects that tell stories, evoke memories of time and place and often become the stuff of exhibitions at museums and beyond. Of the items mentioned or alluded to in the book, which would you like to see or interact with? What objects are important in your own family and circle of friends? And which of them are related to food and cooking?
10. Have you ever tried to trace your own family history? If so, what were you looking for and what did you find? Do any secrets remain unanswered? How do you feel about them?
11. Which individuals from the books stand out for you? Why?
12. The author states that a knish renaissance is imminent. What evidence does she have? Do you agree or disagree and why? What do you think is the future of the knish – and how does it relate to the future of the Jewish people?
13. Early in her research the author received a grant from the Hadassah Brandeis Institute, a feminist think tank. Which stories in the book evoke women’s power and prowess for you? To what extent, if at all, is the knish a feminist or woman-positive foodstuff?
14. What questions do you have for the author? Feel free to email her at [laura@knish.me](mailto:laura@knish.me). She’d love to speak to your book group, live or via Skype.