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## **The Time Traveler's Wife** by Audrey Niffenegger

NoveList Book Discussion Guide  
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Henry and Clare's love story was inspired by the marriage of Audrey Niffenegger's grandparents, Elizabeth and Norbert Tamandl, to whom *The Time Traveler's Wife* is dedicated. The Tamandls' happy marriage was cut short when Norbert died tragically young of a brain tumor. "One day he had a headache and three days later he was dead," says Niffenegger. "So it was this idea that you can't depend on people to be there, that you can't predict anything" ([http://www.bookslut.com/features/2003\\_12\\_001158.php](http://www.bookslut.com/features/2003_12_001158.php)). Niffenegger never met her grandfather, but she wanted to write about the kind of relationship she imagined her grandparents must have had, "a perfect marriage that is tested by something outside the control of the couple" (<http://www.bookbrowse.com/index.cfm?page=author&authorID=928>). If Clare's waiting for Henry resembles Elizabeth Tamandl's patient endurance, Clare also waits in the much more prosaic fashion that Niffenegger's mother did, running the household while her husband, a civil engineer, traveled as much as four days a week for his work.

Audrey Niffenegger grew up in Evanston, Illinois, a suburb just north of Chicago; she has lived in or near Chicago her entire life. Her love for the city and its environs is evident in the carefully described settings of her novel, which she used, she has said, to give the novel a "documentary" tone in an effort to balance the "fantastical" premise of the story she is telling ([http://www.bookslut.com/features/2003\\_12\\_001158.php](http://www.bookslut.com/features/2003_12_001158.php)). Most of the places described in *The Time Traveler's Wife* actually exist and can be visited, including the Newberry Library, the Aragon Ballroom, Bookman's Alley, Vintage Vinyl, and, of course, the Field Museum.

Niffenegger is also a visual artist; examples of her haunting work, some of which evokes themes that will be familiar to readers of *The Time Traveler's Wife*, can be viewed online at <http://www.printworkschiago.com/artists/niffen/niffen.htm>. She earned a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1985 and an MFA from Northwestern University in 1991. She is currently a professor of Book Arts at the Columbia College Chicago Center for Book and Paper Arts, which she helped found, teaching graduate courses in fine edition book production and letterpress printing.

### **About the author**

Audrey Niffenegger is a writer and visual artist who lives in Chicago. She is a full time professor in the Interdisciplinary Book Arts MFA Program at the Columbia College Chicago Center for Book and Paper Arts, where she teaches writing, letterpress printing, and fine edition book production. Her amusements include collecting taxidermy and reading comic books. Miss Niffenegger spent her youth hiding in her bedroom and painting her fingernails black while listening to Patti Smith and Gang of Four, but she is feeling better now, thanks.

*The Time Traveler's Wife* is her first novel.



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### **In her own words:**

"I'm 39 years old, and I grew up in Evanston, Illinois, which is the first suburb north of Chicago. I'm a spinster (albeit a spinster with a permanent boyfriend) and I live in a white stucco bungalow with my cats, Muybridge and Claudine. I've been writing since I was a tiny child, and I always made pictures to go with the words.

I have received lots of help from Ragdale Foundation; I have been a Ragdale Fellow nine times. The Time Traveler's Wife was also supported by the Illinois Arts Council, which gave me a Fellowship in Prose in 2000. I got my MFA from Northwestern University in 1991, and my BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1985."

My writing has been published in Bust, The Magnetic Poetry Book of Poetry, and Electronic Book Review. My art is in the collections of the Newberry Library, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the Library of Congress, the Houghton Library at Harvard University, and Temple University, among others.

I wanted to write a book about waiting.

The Time Traveler's Wife is dedicated to my maternal grandparents, Elizabeth and Norbert Tamandl. My grandfather died very young, and very suddenly, of a brain tumor. I never met him. My grandmother never remarried. By all accounts, my grandparents were very happy together. My grandmother outlived her husband by almost thirty years.

I wanted to write about a perfect marriage that is tested by something outside the control of the couple. The title came to me out of the blue, and from the title sprang the characters, and from the characters came the story.

### **Previous Publications and Awards**

#### Visual Books

- The Adventuress and The Three Incestuous Sisters: novel-length visual books
- The Spinster, The Murderer, Spring, and The Aberrant Abecedarium

#### Short Stories / Illustrations

- Prudence: A Cautionary Tale for Picky Eaters (Sherwin Beach Press)



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Honors, Citations and Prizes

- Illinois Arts Council Fellowship in Prose, 2000
- Artist's Grant, 1991, Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation, Brooklyn, NY
- Union League Art Scholarship, 1991
- Union League Civic and Arts Foundation, Chicago, IL
- George D. and Isabella A. Brown Traveling Fellowship, 1985
- Artist's Grant, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

This biography was last updated on 09/01/2003. Unless otherwise stated, it was provided by the author's publisher or publicist.