



# ANA OF CALIFORNIA

## Book Club Kit

[www.anditeran.com](http://www.anditeran.com) | [@andi\\_teran](https://twitter.com/andi_teran) | [f](https://www.facebook.com/AndiTeran.Author) AndiTeran.Author

# Map of Hadley, California



# A Conversation with Andi Teran

For discussion questions and much more from *Ana of California*, check out the [full Reader's Guide](#) on Penguin Random House's website.



You are obviously a fan of L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. What made you want to reimagine that story in a modern way?

I loved *Anne of Green Gables* growing up. To use Anne's words, it felt like I'd found a kindred spirit in L.M. Montgomery's books. I think so many of us fans find something in Anne that we can relate to—from her dreamy imagination and unbridled chattiness to her staunch conviction and propensity for feeling different from others. It was the first time I remember recognizing strength of character coming from just being who you are. Also, for a talkative child such as myself, it was encouraging to read that this could be an asset rather than something worthy of punishment.

I wanted to reimagine the story in a modern way because a character similar to Anne felt like something we needed more of in our current culture. I'm a huge fan of outspoken heroines who aren't born with the greatest of luck in life but choose to find a way to better their situations for themselves. I always want to root for the go-getters and self-starters; those who are told no but choose to live their lives as a gigantic yes.

When I sat down with what I envisioned to be today's Anne—aka Ana—she immediately spoke to me on the page. She was older than the precocious, 11-year-old Anne, and she had languished within the foster system longer. I immediately related to her spirit, which was much different from the original Anne. She was more street savvy and subdued, as if her imagination and outspokenness had been progressively silenced and driven deeper into her over time.

The characters of Abbie and Emmett, the counterparts to Marilla and Matthew, came out much differently than I expected too. They were much more self-aware about their situation on the farm and truly struggling—like many small farmers today. It was important to me to highlight that while also creating a nontraditional family unit. The rest of the characters just appeared, quite naturally, and sometimes shared attributes with the originals, but were mostly born from my own imagination. To be honest, I couldn't stop writing. It was so much fun to enter this whole new world that came from a place that felt so beloved and familiar even if it was often at the back of my mind.

***Ana of California* is your first novel, but you've had a robust career as a nonfiction writer and performer. Have you wanted to write fiction for a long time? Do you have plans to write more novels?**

I've always wanted to write fiction. I've been writing it in secret for most of my life! I wrote short stories and plays growing up but wanted to be an actor, so I concentrated on that. Any time I played a character, though, I'd write vast background histories about them or keep a journal. I eventually moved to New York City and sort of fell into magazine writing while also working as a hotel concierge and performing in plays at night. The office of a local culture magazine was next door to the hotel, and I got to know the publisher. He was the first person to ever give me an assignment, which led to more regular reporting. It was tough juggling it all, but I wanted to do and learn as much as possible.

As I got better at writing small pieces, I reached out to other publications. Even though I had no formal training as a writer, I learned so much from editors who were willing to take a chance on me. The feedback was often brutal, but my many failures wound up giving me some success too. I discovered my strengths, specifically interviewing people and writing first-person essays, both of which have to do with embodying real-life characters. I was able to quit my job and write full time, all in the hopes of one day writing a book.

Interestingly, I've found that fiction writing is a lot like theatre. You get to play all the characters while also writing and directing them, which is thrilling to me. Thus, to answer your question, yes I have plans to write more novels... many more hopefully!

**The location of the novel is so important – Ana goes from inner-city Los Angeles to a community farm near the ocean, and you evoke the change in landscape so well. What inspired you to set the novel in California?**

I'm a recent transplant to California. Much like Ana, I was familiar with parts of Los Angeles, but had never explored the beaches or remote forests in the most northern part of the state. I grew up in Texas, and spent over a decade in New York, but the West Coast always intrigued me. My mother's side of the family is originally from the Bay Area, so I've traveled there and to the southern part of the state throughout my life. Coming here has always been a joy. I'm still enchanted by the diversity of people and terrain. It's a wildly spectacular part of the country.

The city of Los Angeles called to me initially. It's such a vibrant metropolis interwoven with nature. I find it crazy that I can encounter a coyote on a mountain hike, have coffee in a forest café afterwards, and then go for ramen downtown in Little Tokyo or for tacos like my grandma used to make out in Boyle Heights. Both downtown and the communities in East L.A. appeal to me particularly. You can always find pockets of magic if you're willing to look for them. I knew immediately that this is where Ana was from.

Within the first few months of living here, I was eager to explore other parts of the state. My husband, sister-in-law, and I decided to take a road trip from L.A. all the way up to the dense forests surrounding California's Lost Coast, which is a remote stretch of coastline that borders the mountains and lush forests surrounding Humboldt County. We were blown away by what we found. Aside from the quaint towns dotted with Victorian houses, there was this uninhabited coast with jagged cliffs as far as you could see. It was lonely, beautiful, and felt like a forgotten part of the world. We got lost amongst the towering redwoods and ate meals made from fresh, local

produce along the way. Interesting characters populated every place we visited. With Ana already in my mind, I knew this is where she needed to go.

**Your main character, Ana, joins the ranks of Famous Literary Orphans. In her short life, Ana has faced gang violence, emotional abuse, and racism. Did you want to draw attention to these larger social issues with your novel, or were you thinking more of creating a realistic, complex character?**

The answer is a bit of both. It was impossible not to write someone who was realistic and complex when I wanted her to be directly impacted by current social issues. We're living in a changing time that I can't believe is still rife with racism, sexism, and emotional abuse. We hear about it in the news or on the Internet daily, whether we're the recipients or witnesses thereof. Gang violence is still very real in this country too, not to mention rampant south of the border. It's part of Los Angeles's history.

It was important that not only Ana, but also all of the characters be people readers can relate to in a realistic way. Ana was the emotional core, so everything sprang from her, including the shadows of her past and how she chose to deal with them. I worked with at-risk children and runaways when I lived in Texas, and I encountered a few who came from gang or drug connected families. Though I never knew their stories, I was deeply affected by the destruction it seemed to cause in such young, undeveloped hearts and minds. Their situations seemed hopeless, even more so when few adults seemed to truly care. I always wondered what became of them. Ana was a way for me to imagine their collective strength in a single soul, and that maybe with a strong spirit and bit of hope, there could eventually be a way out.

**The modern farming movement, especially small, organic farms, is highlighted in *Ana of California*. What made you want to include this in your novel? How did you research the industry?**

Moving to California drastically changed my diet. There's such an abundance of fresh fruit and vegetables grown mindfully and locally here. I started going to farmer's markets on weekends and wanted to learn more about where my food came from. What struck me most was the friendliness of the farmers. They'd often talk to their customers, educate them, and keep them coming back whether they were local chefs buying in bulk or the average home cook. I liked that part of their job included engaging with their local community.

When thinking about Abbie and Emmett, it was clear to me that they were these types of farmers. I read everything I could about California organic farms and the increasing takeover of the little guy by corporate behemoths that favor genetically modified seeds and crops. I enjoyed learning about people who were going back to the land to make a difference for their families and communities in the healthiest way possible. I think we need so much more of this.

I also researched migrant farm workers and the difficulties they face. Manny was one of the first characters that jumped onto the page. He told me to dig deeper, so I did, and I was horrified by much of what I found. These are people doing tremendously difficult work for very little money, housing, or hope of escape. They are the backbone of our food industry and are often treated unfairly and inhumanely. It's not always the case, of course, but a quick Google search will unearth endless articles about their plight. Honestly, I wish I could have written more about Manny and the other workers on Garber Farm. This is a subject worthy of more widespread attention.

I visited a few organic farms and even worked at one picking and harvesting a variety of crops. I was humbled by the hard work—always beginning at the crack of dawn—and by the people I met whose devotion to the earth was beyond inspiring. There's nothing like putting your hands into the ground and pulling out something that has been carefully grown and looked after solely for the purpose of nourishing you. I met other volunteer farm hands who live simply but mindfully. We all ate lunch together made from the farm's offerings and listened to stories told by the head farmer. Creating the world of Garber Farm was a way of extending this somewhat utopian experience and, hopefully, making others aware of how important it is that we support these types of farms and their workers.

Readers will recognize characters from *Anne of Green Gables* transposed into your story. Emmett and Abbie, for example, are *Ana of California's* versions of Matthew and Marilla. Were you daunted in tackling these classic characters? Was it fun thinking about where they would be in a modern setting?

I was extremely daunted about tackling these characters. There's no way I can come even close to the magic wrought by L.M. Montgomery, but I wanted this to be a standalone book separate from that legacy. I wanted to honor the original in the best ways that I could while also following my own instincts and imagination to create something wholly new. Ultimately, I want readers to enjoy the twists on the original but also see *Ana of California* as its own story.

Though I knew who Ana was from the start, it took me a while to bring her to life. I didn't know her full story until I finished my first draft, and she ended up being much different from what I'd initially imagined. It was hard not to think about Anne while I was writing and whether or not I was doing her memory justice. I had to remind myself that Ana was a completely different person shaped by her own unique experience.

Abbie ended up being my momentum throughout that first draft. She was nothing like Marilla, and this felt so right. I realized quickly that Abbie was much more like Matthew, and Emmett was more of a Marilla, so flipping these personalities became a joy to write. I purposefully made Abbie and Emmett younger than their counterparts too. It humored me to think that Marilla Cuthbert might have had a scandalous streak during her teenage years, and that idea worked so well for Abbie. As for Emmett Garber and his relation to Matthew Cuthbert—easily one of my favorite characters in the original—I just couldn't see them as being remotely the same. Emmett was curmudgeonly from the start and wary of Ana, but that also made him subject to great change simply through her presence on the farm.

Creating Cole Brannan was probably the closest I came to there being a direct correlation to an original character, namely Gilbert Blythe. It was important for Ana and Cole, like Anne and Gilbert, to spar with each other intellectually and be equals. I wanted them to challenge each other. I loved Gilbert's self-confidence and daring, so I translated that physically for Cole through his love of motocross. Fans of the original will note that there is not a "breaking the slate" scene, but I do hope they find other less obvious similarities.

As for Rye Moon, all I can say is I love her. She, like Emmett, was such a surprise and, other than her loyalty, was the complete opposite of her original counterpart, Diana Barry. I wanted her to be more aloof at first, and someone eager to get out of her small town and see the wider world. Just as Ana and Cole were equals, I wanted the same for Ana and Rye too. In deference to the breaking the slate omission, I hope readers will enjoy a more subtle translation of "bosom friends." I couldn't leave out that reference.

**Literature, particularly for young adults and children, has a dearth of non-white main characters. What are your thoughts on this issue? Is that something you consciously wanted to address with *Ana Cortez*?**

Absolutely. I think we need more diversity across all artistic mediums, period. We are a diverse culture, after all, and it's odd to me that more of us aren't presented with subject matter than we can relate to. I also think it's important to be interested in and exposed to cultures that are different from our own.

I grew up in a mixed race, Mexican-American family. People rarely thought I was "traditionally Mexican," whatever that means. I grew up in El Paso, Texas, on the border of Mexico, and I had friends and family from both sides of the bridge. This was normal to all of us. I spent a good portion of my childhood with my Mexican grandma who cooked traditional meals, told stories about our ancestors, and often took us grandchildren across the border. That heritage was ingrained in me from an early age. Thus, it was important to infuse that into Ana too, as she, like me, would understand the same tastes, smells, and heritage that I grew up with. I hope others can relate to or be interested in it too.

I think it's imperative that we have more sexual, racial, and cultural diversity in art and literature. How else will we truthfully chronicle modern life?

**Music plays an important role in *Ana of California*. Your characters listen to bands from The Hex to Neil Young to 80s heavy metal to points in between. Where do your musical tastes intersect with those of your characters?**

Music is a huge part of my life and creativity. When I first started out as a writer, I interviewed bands. I can't write without some sort of music as inspiration guiding me in the background either. Like most young people, it was integral to discovering who I was. Now that I'm a little older, it's also a nostalgic way to connect to the ghosts of the past.

I'm proud of The Hex, which is a fictional band in the book. They're the amalgamation of so many of my favorite female punk rock groups from the past up until now. I listened to a lot of local L.A. girl bands while I was writing *Ana*, specifically L.A. Witch, Bleached, Cherry Glazerr, and Deap Vally, as well as girl bands from Mexico, like Lorelle Meets the Obsolete and Le Butcherettes. I'd like to think that *Ana* and Rye would probably introduce me to a bunch of other ferocious girl bands, and we'd all agree that music is better played with actual instruments.

As for Neil Young, well, he's the soundtrack of California. He's Canadian, so he's also my very cheeky nod to the original setting of *Anne of Green Gables*. His voice seems to float in the golden ether out west begging you to slow down and just listen. He's always on the car radio for road trips but he's usually on the grocery store radio, too. Each of my characters had a soundtrack. Emmett's was Neil from the start, but also classic American rock bands from the late sixties and seventies that I loved growing up. Abbie was always going to be a Stevie Nicks fan. Stevie could very well be her spirit animal. (Isn't she that to so many of us?) Abbie also favors the female singers of her generation much like *Ana*'s love of modern girl bands. Hair metal was something I was fascinated by as a child, and its heyday is when Abbie came of age, so it was important to include it. I keep hoping for a metal revival. So does Abbie's friend, Will Carson.

Ultimately, I wanted music to be a connector between all of my characters, the common language they could all speak to each other when they were unable to find the right words. Sometimes a song just says it better.

# Recipes

## ABUELA'S GUACAMOLE—ABBIE'S WAY

### INGREDIENTS

3 ripe Haas avocados, peeled and seeded  
½ medium red onion, finely diced  
1 jalapeño or serrano pepper, seeded and finely diced  
1 clove garlic, minced  
1 lime cut in half  
½ teaspoon kosher salt, or to taste  
½ teaspoon cumin  
1 tablespoon chopped, fresh cilantro

### DIRECTIONS

In a large bowl, add the peeled and seeded avocado and the juice of half a lime to lightly coat. Add the salt, cumin, and mash. Fold in the red onion, jalapeño or serrano pepper, garlic, and cilantro. Squeeze the remaining half of the lime, stir, and taste. Add more salt if necessary.

Serve with sturdy tortilla chips to dip (Abuela's way) or smeared on homemade toasted bread topped with slices of farmer's market heirloom tomatoes drizzled with a touch of olive oil and crunch of cracked pepper (Abbie's way).



## HIBISCUS AGUA FRESCA

*You can often find dried hibiscus flowers in the Latin section of the supermarket. They are also readily available for sale online.*

### INGREDIENTS

6 cups water  
1 ¼ cup sugar  
2 cups dried Jamaica (hibiscus or flor de Jamaica) flowers  
1 (1-inch) piece of fresh, peeled ginger  
1 lime

### DIRECTIONS

To make the concentrate, bring water and sugar to a boil. Add Jamaica flowers, ginger, and stir. Simmer until sugar is dissolved. Turn off heat and steep for one hour. Strain the mixture into another pot and let cool. While cooling, add the juice of one lime.

Add 3 cups of water and more sugar, if you'd like, to your taste. Serve over ice.

## HIBISCUS SANGRIA

### INGREDIENTS

Jamaica concentrate (recipe above)  
1 bottle of red wine, preferably Spanish Rioja  
¼ cup brandy  
¼ cup Grand Marnier  
1 bottle soda water  
Chopped fresh fruit of choice (raspberries, strawberries, apple, orange slices)

### DIRECTIONS

Make the Jamaica concentrate as directed above. In a large serving bowl or pitcher, combine one cup of the cooled Jamaica concentrate with red wine, brandy, Grand Marnier, and chopped fruit of your choice. Let chill for one to two hours. When ready to serve, add bottle of sparkling water and serve over ice.





# Playlist and Author's Note

Music played an important role in the creation of *Ana of California*. Before I even began writing, I put together a playlist of songs for each of my characters—soundtracks to their pasts, present, and future that often unlocked the secrets to their histories. I immersed myself in Mexican folk songs, classic American rock from the 1960s and 1970s, hair metal from the 1980s, and further explored my current obsession with modern California girl punk bands. The songs often spoke for my characters when they couldn't express themselves in words, and the collective sound from the combined lists created the sound of Hadley, California. With these character maps, I was able to find my way home—if I ever got lost—to the place where all of these people lived.

I've created a playlist that is a sampling of what I listened to while writing. I only wish I could have included a song from the Hex, the only fictional band in the book who were an amalgamation of all of my favorite female-fronted bands from the past to the present. If you substitute your own favorites, you'll still be able to hear their unique sound. I'm sure you'll recognize a few familiar songs on this list, but I hope to introduce you to artists you may not have heard before, too. Happy listening...

## **LINK TO SPOTIFY PLAYLIST:**

<https://open.spotify.com/user/anditeran/playlist/5JDUalfXRpGcknbWEI78Ok>

# Further Reading

## **The Right Way Foundation**

<http://www.therightwayfoundation.org/>

## **Humboldt Farm Bureau**

<http://www.humboldtfarmbureau.org/>

## **Fern Canyon, Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park**

<http://www.redwoods.info/showrecord.asp?id=476>

## **Wiyot Tribe**

<http://www.wiyot.us/>

## **Rancho Del Pueblo Farm in Ojai, California**

<http://www.farmerandcook.com/#!farm--volunteering/c1umg>

## **All Good Things Organic Seeds**

<http://www.plantgoodseed.com/>

## **101 Cookbooks**

<http://www.101cookbooks.com/index.html>

## **From Scratch Magazine**

<http://www.fromscratchmag.com/>