

DONNA JONES ALWARD

A NOVEL OF THE
1917 HALIFAX
EXPLOSION

WHEN THE
WORLD
FELL
SILENT

"An impressive and assured historical fiction debut."

JENNIFER ROBSON, internationally bestselling author of *The Gown*



Thank you so much for choosing **WHEN THE WORLD FELL SILENT** for your book club! I'm truly honoured and hope you all enjoy the book.

In this little guide, you'll find some suggestions for what to serve at your event, a few recipes to get you started, an extra copy of reading guide questions (also found at the back of the book), and a quick sheet of Halifax Explosion facts. I've also added a short reading list of books you might want to explore if I've piqued your interest in this little city with the big port that played such a crucial role in the war.

I would love to see any pictures you have of the event, and you can forward them to me at donna@donnaalward.com. I'd love to hear about your get together.

If you would like signed bookplates for your books, please email me - I'm happy to send some along to your group.

Happy reading!

Donna



BOOK CLUB MENU



TEA

Choose your favourite tea or create a special blend! A bracing cuppa can turn a grey day sunny again.



WAR CAKE

A gorgeous, moist, raisin spice cake that was made when items were rationed. Perfect with tea. (Recipe included in this packet!)



SCONES

Fluffy, light, and versatile. Serve with jam or preserves and clotted cream - or whipped cream if you can't find clotted.

RECIPE: WAR CAKE



2 cups sugar
2 cups boiling water
1 lb raisins (sultana or Thompson)
3/4 cup shortening
3 1/2 cups flour
2 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp cream of tartar
1 tsp each: ginger, cinnamon, allspice
1 tsp vanilla
1 tsp salt

Boil the first four ingredients for 3 minutes, then let cool.

Add the remaining ingredients to the wet mixture and stir well to combine. Pour into a greased and floured Bundt pan, and bake at 350 for 45 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean.

Let cool for 5 minutes and turn out onto a rack. Slice when cool.

RECIPE: SCONES



3 cups flour
1 1/2 tsp baking soda
3 tsp cream of tartar
1 tsp salt
1 tsp baking powder
1/2 cup cold butter
1 cup milk

Mix together dry ingredients in a large bowl. Grate cold butter into the flour and mix together, then add milk. Work with your hands until the dough holds together - do not overmix.

On a floured board, shape dough into a shape 3/4 to 1 inch thick and cut into circles with a round cutter or the top of a small water glass. Place scones on a cookie sheet and bake at 425 for 12-15 minutes, until tops are golden.

Note: In the Maritimes, we almost always call these simply “biscuits”. We also use them to make Strawberry Shortcake, so a great tip is to add a few tablespoons of sugar to the dry ingredients if you are using them as a shortcake base.

HALIFAX EXPLOSION QUICK FACTS



·Occurred December 6, 1917, 9:04 a.m.

·Halifax was a major wartime port, with the Bedford Basin providing shelter for convoys heading overseas and soldiers waiting to be deployed to the front.

·Ships Involved: Belgian Relief Ship, the Imo, and the Mont Blanc, a munitions ship. The two collided in The Narrows, the tightest part of the harbour channel, and the Mont Blanc caught fire.

·The highly volatile munitions on board ignited and created the largest manmade explosion in history until the detonation of the atom bomb in 1945.

·There were over 1700 deaths with 9000 injured and 25000 left without adequate shelter in a population of approx. 50,000.

·The north end, working-class community of Richmond took the brunt of the blast, with most of it completely leveled.

·Camp Hill Hospital had newly opened as a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers. Max capacity was under 300; on the day of the explosion, it received over 1300 wounded.

·There was a staggering number of eye injuries as many stood at windows to see the “ship on fire”, and received injuries from the glass when the explosion blew out windows.

·Relief efforts from afar were quick to be deployed—from nearby cities in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada, but also from Boston, who sent a ship of relief items as well as a full medical unit from Harvard.

·This gesture is still rewarded today as Halifax sends the city of Boston a Christmas tree each year.

For more information, visit

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/halifax-explosion>

READING GUIDE QUESTIONS



- 1) At various points in the book, different characters express attitudes about serving at home vs. serving at the front. Do you think one is more valid than the other?
- 2) Nora and Charlotte have different upbringings and live very different lives, yet both are tragically affected by the explosion. Did you relate to one character more than the other, and why?
- 3) We know much more about trauma responses and PTSD today than was known in 1917. How did you feel about the actions of the characters as they processed their grief and trauma? Were the soldiers' responses different from, for example, Nora's and Charlotte's?
- 4) How did you feel about Alley's role in the story?
- 5) The story recounts a pivotal event in Canada's history – the largest man-made explosion until 1945's bombing of Japan and a mass casualty event. Had you heard of this event before? How did it change your view of Canada in wartime?
- 6) In the beginning of the story, we see Nora as an independent woman—or, as she says, as independent as a woman can be in 1917—who bucks tradition in favour of a career. Her choices—and the explosion—lead to some big life changes. Charlotte, on the other hand, begins the story entrenched in domestic life and then must find work. How did you feel about the changes in their circumstances? Is one life better than the other?
- 7) What role does community play in the story?
- 8) Do you see any parallels in the themes in the book with our lives today? What do you think is the most important message from the story?
- 9) Did you know about the “sister city” relationship between Halifax and Boston that stemmed from this event?
- 10) Did you find the ending of the book surprising? Satisfying?

READING AND RESOURCE GUIDE



These are books I found particularly interesting as I researched and explored this event:

Fiction:

Shattered by Jennie Marsland

Barometer Rising by Hugh MacLennan

Non Fiction:

Shattered City: Janet F. Kitz

Explosion in the Halifax Harbour: Dan Soucoup

Breaking Disaster: Katie Ingram

In addition, the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax, NS has a comprehensive exhibit that was invaluable. You can get a glimpse at: <https://maritimemuseum.novascotia.ca/what-see-do/halifax-explosion>

