

Discussion Questions for *Bettyville* by George Hodgman

1. Where, or what, is “Bettyville?” Describe your equivalent of Bettyville.
2. “The highway between Madison and Moberly will always be one of the places where I will see my mother, hair wrapped in rollers under a scarf, wearing a pair of sunglasses, taking me off into the big wide world.” Why do you think this image resonated so much with George? Do you have a favorite memory of your parents from childhood?
3. Have you ever assumed the role of caregiver for someone in your life? How did your experience compare to George’s? Should he have coerced Betty into assisted living? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think George decided to stay in Paris? What would you have done?
5. What lessons does George learn while taking care of Betty? Does Betty learn any lessons as well?
6. How does George’s relationship with his parents change throughout his life?
7. “By the time my mother realized that she was smart or saw she had the kind of looks that open doors, she had already closed too many to go back.” How do you think this affected Betty’s disposition? Do you think a lot of women of her generation shared this experience?
8. Betty once took care of her own mother after she broke her hip: “I do not know if Betty’s sorrow stemmed from her mother’s loss of independence or her own.” How do you think Betty’s earlier training as a caregiver might affect her feelings now that she is the care-receiver?
9. How does our sense of “home” change with time, as we leave the place we are born? What does it feel like to return?
10. “If I were starting a Betty Museum, I would make an exhibit out of the sandals with their worn, thin straps and soles indented with my mother’s dark footprints.” What exhibits would be in your parents’ museum?
11. George describes how his hometown is “vanishing,” with small businesses boarded up to make way for big box stores. How has your town changed over the years? Are we better or worse for these changes? What is lost or gained?

