

Q&A with Amy Axelrod! *author of Your Friend in Fashion, Abby Shapiro*

Q: What was it like growing up in Massachusetts before JFK ran for president? Tell us about the attention Jackie Kennedy received that inspired you to set your book in this time.



Uncle Charlie, right, with
Endicott "Chub" Peabody, left

A: I remember Kennedy placards on lawns and political pins on lapels. There was tremendous excitement in Brockton, Massachusetts, my hometown, especially in the large Irish Catholic community. I know that my family supported Kennedy, because my uncle was a friend of Endicott "Chub" Peabody, who was one of the coordinators of Kennedy's campaign and who later became governor of Massachusetts. He visited our store campaigning for Kennedy and an assistant took a photograph.

Jackie Kennedy was an object of curiosity, fascination, and admiration. Women everywhere, not just in Massachusetts, admired her style and fashion sense. She was the epitome of good taste and the magazines of the time, *Look* and *Life*, covered her extensively. My aunt and I would pore over these magazines for hours, discussing and dissecting her wardrobe. I remember feeling proud that Jackie Kennedy purchased shoes from our store. I'm sure I bragged to the entire world!

Q: Did you ever think about writing to her; and if so, what would you have said?

A: I was quite shy as a girl, the complete opposite of Abby. I never would have had the guts to have written to Jackie reporting that I created paper dolls in her likeness or that I felt qualified to be her personal fashion designer. I do remember that many girls my age often wrote to movie stars, such as Hayley Mills, to request an autograph or a publicity photograph, but never to a politician's wife, even though Jackie Kennedy was every bit as famous as any movie star of the day.



Jackie Kennedy

Q: The Abby Shapiro website has so much information about dolls from around the world. When did you first become interested in paper dolls? Do you have a doll collection or a favorite doll?

A: I created paper dolls from 1959-1962. Most of my friends loved to make and play with paper dolls. If your mother sewed, there were always patterns to copy or models to cut out of magazines. We would sit for hours around a kitchen table with tablets of white paper, colored pencils, and, if you were lucky, that extra-big box of Crayola crayons with the really exotic colors, like turquoise, gold, and silver.

I have always loved dolls and have been collecting forever. My aunt (Auntie Ida, as I called her) started the collection, thinking that it would be a good hobby for me. Customers from our shoe store who took vacations abroad were given a few dollars to bring back a "foreign" doll.



paper dolls by Amy Axelrod



Amy with her Auntie Ida

Whether they were typical souvenir dolls or handcrafted beauties, they were all very special to me. Each time I received a new doll, I would take her to the public library and request a book about that country. That way I could read all about children from that country and learn about their customs and traditions.

I saved all of my childhood dolls, including many Madame Alexander dolls and the original Eloise doll. The only doll missing from my collection is the original Barbie in the black-and-white striped bathing suit. She was destroyed in an effort to transform her into Jackie Kennedy. I still collect, but now exclusively dolls from around the world in national costumes. The internet has been terrific for networking with doll collectors around the world. In fact, I usually have one or two dolls on my desk to keep me company when I write.

Q: What did you study at Brandeis? What did you get your master's degree in at Columbia?

A: I studied sociology and German as an undergraduate at Brandeis, and went on to earn a master of linguistics from Columbia. I originally thought I'd like to be an interpreter or a college professor, but my life turned in a completely different direction, many times over.

Q: What inspired you to start writing? Why did you decide to write a novel?

A: I began writing in earnest after my second child was born. It was a time in my life when I was developing a home library filled with children's literature as well as returning to college to become an accredited elementary school teacher. I enrolled in many children's lit course and became completely hooked! I wrote for several years, accumulating hundreds of rejections, until I sold my first picture book manuscript. The desire to write a novel came after publishing eleven picture books. Initially I wasn't sure about what to write or even how to begin. I'd never taken a formal writing class, and my strategy with picture books was just to dive in headfirst. So I thought about what I'd been telling kids on school visits for years . . . write about what you know best. Since I'd always received enthusiastic feedback from students about my childhood adventures, I thought that this was the route to go. Once I spread those paper dolls out in front of me, Abby's story began to percolate.

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