

Parkdale Book Club

January 2018 - Being Mortal

Wishing you another year of good books

Schedule

Date (10 am on 2nd Saturday)

Feb. 10	<i>Fifteen Dogs</i> by Andre Alexis – all of us
Mar. 10	<i>My Grandmother Sends Her Regards and Apologises</i> by Fredrik Backman -- Beth
Apr. 14	<i>The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness</i> by Karen Armstrong -- Lee
May 12	<i>The Humans</i> , by Matt Haig -- Lynn
June 9	<i>One Brother Shy</i> , by Terry Fallis -- Joan

Holiday reading

I was pulled into another book that demanded a solid day of reading over the holiday: ***The Salt Line***, by Holly Goddard Jones. I read a lot of blogs about books; I look at a lot of lists of recommended books. From many lists, I pick out one or a couple that sound like my kind of book, and put them on hold at the library. Weeks or months later, they show up on my hold shelf (thank you, Calgary Public

Library for this magical service), and by then I've completely forgotten the book. It was in this context that I pulled *The Salt Line* off my library shelf at home, to keep me company for a few minutes in between tasks. And that was it for my list of things to accomplish around the house! The post-apocalyptic story was gripping from the beginning. I knew it was one of the really good ones when I began to slow down reading as the remaining unread pages dwindled. When I closed the book, I felt that grief of wishing it was not finished.

On a completely different note, there is apparently a whole genre of story about widowed men. We've read two of them already (Ove and Arthur Pepper), and I realized quickly when I started *The Story of Arthur Truluv* that I'd found another. (Encountering a second 'Arthur' was a clue, too.) Curious - how many other 'widower - fiction' books are there? CPL pulls up over 400 titles! But on brief examination, I think the criteria are applied quite loosely. This superficial research, though, led me to realize I'd already read and enjoyed another of the ilk: *The Storied Life of AJ Fikry*. I wonder, where are the stories of women who have lost their partners? Although the library search yielded almost 1400 titles (again, parameter applied very loosely, it seems), the first page or so of titles included mostly 3 stars ratings. *When the Moon Is Low* by Nadia Hashimi sounds good, though, and a Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*.

I could go on and on (Louise Penny's *The Brutal Telling*, Dana Stabenow's *Bad Blood*, Hope Jaeren's *Lab Girl*, Karin Slaughter's *The good daughter...*), but how about you? What did you read over the holidays? Send me an email so we can plump up others' reading lists.

And then, *The Snowman* by Jo Nesbø! I stayed up way too late last night, caught in this book. Wonderful, and best of all, it is the first I've read in a series that has TEN more. So I'll work my way through that series in parallel with the Dana Stabenow Kate Shugak series and Louise Penny's Inspector Gamache...

Being Mortal

Ten of us gathered on Saturday to talk about Atul Gawande's *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*.

Unfortunately, Lindsay was fighting off a cold and unable to join us. We had a lot to say about this book and the issues raised; a good, deep sharing.

- ∞ See also Bob Hatfield and Bruce Hatfield's *Matters of Life and Death (1985)*; several people who were familiar with this book reread it after finishing *Being Mortal* - there are a couple of copies in the Parkdale United Church library
- ∞ See also *What dying people want* by David Kuhl; *How we die* and *How we live by* Sherwin Nuland, mentioned in the On Being podcast in which Atul Gawande was interviewed - who else listened to this?
- ∞ Pie story from *Life Lessons: Two Experts on Death and Dying Teach Us About the Mysteries of Life and Living* by Elisabeth Kübler Ross, David Kessler
- ∞ "We're always trotting out some story of a ninety-seven-year-old who runs marathons, as if such cases were not miracles of biological luck but reasonable expectations for all. Then, when our bodies fail to live up to this fantasy, we feel as if we somehow have something to apologize for."
- ∞ I liked the beginning of the book about what happens as we age
- ∞ Longevity not hereditary but heart disease, stroke, cancer vulnerability are? From WebMD: Feb. 12, 2004 - "Your parents may largely dictate how long you're going to live. And your mom appears to have most of the control over your "aging gene." Previous research has linked the length of telomeres -- the tips of chromosomes -- to disease and

- life span.... These structures become ... shorter each time the cell divides, and it is thought that this shortening is one of the critical features of cellular aging and illness. ... And while twin studies have indicated that telomere length -- and possibly life span -- is inherited, it's unclear how this is passed from one generation to the next."
- ∞ Doreen gave us a homework sheet re: documenting our age-related changes and possible denial
 - ∞ I found the book depressing initially, but like the idea of being clear with others about what you want in the end
 - ∞ I like the change toward greater autonomy
 - ∞ Idea of mortality is uncomfortable for me
 - ∞ I read it twice
 - ∞ I almost stopped reading
 - ∞ Ridiculous diagnostic tests ordered for people who are probably going to die tomorrow
 - ∞ My favourite story was the one of the ER doc who went to work in a nursing home and brought in all the animals whose presence had such a positive effect on the residents
 - ∞ How much planning gets thrown out at time of crisis?
 - ∞ The challenge of preparing is that how one feels when not facing mortality tomorrow is different from when one is facing mortality tomorrow
 - ∞ "Courage is strength in the face of knowledge of what is to be feared or hoped. Wisdom is prudent strength. At least two kinds of courage are required in aging and sickness. The first is the courage to confront the reality of mortality—the courage to seek out the truth of what is to be feared and what is to be hoped. Such courage is difficult enough. We have many reasons to shrink from it. But even more daunting is the second kind of courage—the courage to act on the truth we find."
 - ∞ "... well-being is about the reasons one wishes to be alive. Those reasons matter not just at the end of life, or when debility comes, but all along the way. Whenever serious sickness or injury strikes and your body or mind breaks down, the vital questions are the same: What is your understanding of the situation and its potential outcomes? What are your fears and what are your hopes? What are the trade-offs you are willing to make and not willing to make? And what is the course of action that best serves this understanding?
 - ∞ The questions: What do you understand your diagnosis to be? What are your concerns about what lies ahead? If time becomes short, what is most important to you? How do you want to spend your time if your health declines? What are you willing to trade off to stay alive? Who do you want to make decisions if you cannot?
 - ∞ Very very good book
 - ∞ A neighbour started falling down - brain tumor - eyesight deteriorating - "If I can't read, I'm out of here"
 - ∞ "Our most cruel failure is in how we treat the sick and the aged is the failure to recognize that they have priorities beyond merely being safe and living longer; that the chance to shape one's story is essential to sustaining meaning in life."
 - ∞ I feel resigned - it doesn't matter what I want. If I go to heaven tonight, fine. If I have to wait a week, that's fine too.
 - ∞ We've gone through a couple of deaths recently, and had to work through this
 - ∞ Dulcina Hospice is a 26 bed residential hospice located within St. Marguerite where

- compassionate care is provided at end of life by an inter-disciplinary team of health care providers in collaboration with the resident and family at end of life. Address: 110 Evanspark Manor NW Calgary
- ∞ Hospice care is not covered in nursing curriculum
- ∞ Friends more comfortable to visit in hospice than in home
- ∞ The change (and need for planning) could happen any time - reaction to medication, hit by bus...
- ∞ Loss of independence and decision-making
- ∞ Could we be charged with neglect if we leave mother in her own home because that is her preference?
- ∞ My mother said how lucky her parents were to die quickly
- ∞ This book landed in my life at a time when there has been a death in my family
- ∞ Health crisis in past was a gift because I came to terms with mortality: Get up, live, and be grateful
- ∞ What information do you want from doctor?
- ∞ Dermatologist asked me what surgery I preferred for cancer on nose - isn't that your job?
- ∞ Warehousing elders
- ∞ **Where do we get the courage to allow people to have good days for as long as possible?**
- ∞ Green sleeve: see <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/advance-care-planning-green-sleeve.aspx>
- ∞ A Green Sleeve is a plastic pocket that holds your advance care planning forms. Think of it like a medical passport. It holds important legal forms that go with you through the healthcare system. In an emergency, Alberta Health Services medical providers can look at your Green Sleeve and know your healthcare wishes. You can get a Green Sleeve from any Alberta Health Services provider. You can ask your family doctor for one or a nurse might suggest you get one. If you're having trouble getting a Green Sleeve, e-mail conversationsmatter@ahs.ca with your name and address. Albertans can have up to 4 Green Sleeves mailed to their home. The Green Sleeve belongs to you and should only have the most up to date forms inside. The Green Sleeve holds a copy of your personal directive, your goals of care designation, and a tracking record.
- ∞ Instructions to executor: see <https://www.coxandpalmerlaw.com/site/media/coxandpalmer/NL%20Executor%20Checklist.pdf> as an example of a framework

February's book:

Fifteen Dogs by Andre Alexis

The 2015 Giller jury citation: 'What does it mean to be alive? To think, to feel, to love and to envy? Andre Alexis explores all of this and more in the extraordinary *Fifteen Dogs*, an insightful and philosophical meditation on the nature of consciousness. It's a novel filled with balancing acts: humour juxtaposed with savagery, solitude with the desperate need to be part of a pack, perceptive prose interspersed with playful poetry. A wonderful and original piece of writing that challenges the reader to examine their own existence and recall the age old question, what's the meaning of life?' 'But what am I without those that understand me?' See you February 10 for this discussion.

March's book:

Another Fredrick Backman romp –

My Grandmother Sends Her Regards and Apologizes

(from Goodreads) Elsa is seven years old and different. Her grandmother is seventy-seven years old and crazy, standing-on-the-balcony-firing-paintball-guns-at-men-who-want-to-talk-about-Jesus-crazy. She is also Elsa's best, and only, friend. At night Elsa takes refuge in her grandmother's stories, in the Land of Almost-Awake and the Kingdom of Miamas where everybody is different and nobody needs to be normal. When Elsa's grandmother dies and leaves behind a series of letters apologizing to people she has wronged, Elsa's greatest adventure begins. Her grandmother's letters lead her to an apartment building full of drunks, monsters, attack dogs, and totally ordinary old crones, but also to the truth about fairytales and kingdoms and a grandmother like no other.