

# Parkdale Book Club

January 2021 – Finding Chika

## Schedule

Date (10 am on 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday)

February 13	<b>No Time to Spare</b> by Ursula K. Le Guin	Lindsay
March 13	<b>A Gentleman in Moscow</b> by Amor Towles	Beth
April 10	<b>The Nightingale</b> by Kristin Hannah	Sheila
May 8	<b>One Drum: Stories and Ceremonies for a Planet</b> by Richard Wagamese	Doreen
June 12	<b>The Secret Orphan</b> by Glynis Peters	Sue

## Finding Chika

by Mitch Albom

Fourteen people met on Zoom to discuss our January book selection, led by Sue. We can fill a whole meeting with the starter question, “What did you think of the book?”

A number of people had listened to the audio book, which included clips of Chika talking and the family playing together. That helped to make her a real person. Those who had read the book and had also listened to the audio version said that the audio book was more engaging. Here were some responses to Chika:

- I fell in love with Chika and had to keep reading.
- She was the leader. Her lectures were excellent. She was wise and seemed to understand Mitch.
- She had an enormous personality for a tiny person.

Many people had previously read *Tuesdays with Morrie*, also by Albom. For some, that made them want to read more of his writing and for some, it created a negative bias against reading anything else by him. There were mixed responses to *Finding Chika*, ranging from “I did not like this book” to “It was inspiring and gave me a chance to remember what’s really important.” There were also mixed feelings expressed about the author. Some experienced him as emotionally manipulative, patronizing to the reader and disingenuous. Others thought he was very respectful, honest about his own shortcomings, genuine, well-intentioned, passionate and humble. Mitch and Janine genuinely loved Chika and

had good intentions; they ignored the statistics and hoped that Chika would be the exception.

The discussion evoked strong emotions, especially for people who had lived through losing a loved one or who had been in situations where they had to make difficult decisions about medical interventions for a child or parent. As some said, “It was too close to home” and “it brought back so many memories.”

We discussed the difficult ethical dilemma of deciding whether to continue painful medical interventions or accept that death is imminent and focus on comfort care. It is one thing to talk about it in abstract form; it is quite another thing when faced with these decisions ourselves. When we are making treatment decisions on behalf of another person, is that for their benefit or for ourselves? We can endure temporary pain if the outcome is eventually positive. What if the intervention is extremely painful with very little expectation of survival? When do compassion and persistence become cruelty? Each situation is different and we can experience judgement from others, regardless of the decisions we make. Chika lived for 23 months following her diagnosis – 4 times longer than expected. The main criticism of this story has been that Mitch and Janine subjected Chika to extensive experimental treatment, including a final trip to Germany when she was unable to walk.

Another point we discussed was the use of writing as a way of processing grief. Mitch Albom shares his journey of hope and loss with us in *Finding Chika*. It may be helpful for others who have had their own experiences with loss and grief to read his story.

We discussed the issue of our role in helping people in developing countries or helping marginalized people in our own country. The Caring and Sharing Mission was established in Haiti in the 1980s by a Detroit pastor. After the devastating earthquake in 2010, it fell on hard times and became Have Faith Haiti Mission, an orphanage managed by Mitch Albom. Some members of our group told of their first-hand experiences working in similar missions and described how profoundly they have been affected. Here were some comments about this very complex social justice issue:

- We are all poor, just in different ways. The poor have much to teach us.
- Are we doing the right thing when first world countries impose ourselves on developing countries?
- If we don't do this work, those kids would have nothing. What do we do about it?
- Mitch's work in Haiti was respectful and needed.
- You can't help everybody. So many children don't have food or a place to sleep. You can only do so much. But it's better to do something than nothing.
- When people [living at missions] touch your heart, you are never the same. That's a good thing. You can go back to your own world and share with other people.
- The publication of the book might influence people to support his charity. [Note: *Since Chika's death, the Have Faith Haiti Mission established The Chika Fund. Donations to this fund are used "to cover life-saving medical costs and health care including inoculations, nutrition, regular doctor checkups, medical tests and, if needed, hospitalization."*]
- Church groups used to take young people to visit third world orphanages; it has a lasting impact on them.

### The Starfish Story

An old man had a habit of early morning walks on the beach. One day, after a storm, he saw a human figure in the distance, moving like a dancer. As he came closer, he saw that it was a young woman. She was not dancing but reaching down to the sand, picking up a starfish and throwing it into the ocean.

"Why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?"

"The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they will die."

"But, do you not realize there are miles and miles of beach with starfish all along it? You cannot possibly make a difference."

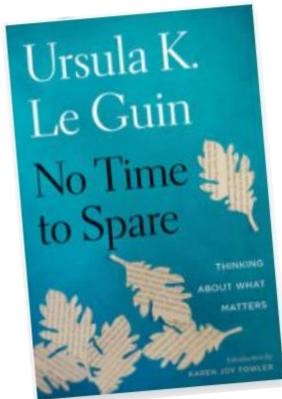
The young woman paused and then bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it into the sea. "I made a difference to that one."

## The top 10 bestselling Canadian books of 2020

Thanks to Jean's daughter, Bev, for sending this list. CBC Books identified the top 10 bestselling Canadian titles of 2020, using data from close to 300 independent Canadian bookstores.

10. *How to Pronounce Knife* by Souvankham Thammavongsa is a collection of diverse stories of immigrants that captures their hopes, disappointments, trauma and acts of defiance.
9. *Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club* by Megan Gail Coles revolves around a cast of flawed characters as they try to survive harsh economic times in the province.
8. *The Pull of the Stars* by Emma Donoghue is set in Ireland during the 1918 Spanish flu outbreak. It tells the story of three women working on the front lines of the pandemic in an understaffed maternity ward.
7. In *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline, climate change has ravaged the Earth and a continent-wide hunt and slaughter of Indigenous people is underway.
6. *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act* by Bob Joseph is a guide to understanding the 1876 Indian Act and its ongoing impact on Indigenous people in Canada.
5. *Son of a Trickster* by Eden Robinson is a novel about Jared, a compassionate 16-year-old, maker of famous weed cookies, the caretaker of his elderly neighbours, the son of an unreliable father and unhinged mother.
4. *All the Devils are Here* by Louise Penny is the latest Inspector Armand Gamache novel. Gamache is in Paris, enjoying a family trip, when his elderly godfather is attacked on the street.
3. *The Glass Hotel* by Emily St. John Mandel weaves several narratives together as it tells a story of financial corruption, greed and a massive Ponzi scheme.
2. *From the Ashes* by Jesse Thistle. Thistle is a Métis-Cree academic. His memoir details how his issues with abandonment and addiction led to homelessness, incarceration and eventual redemption through higher education.
1. *The Skin We're In*, by Desmond Cole, chronicles the author's personal journalism, activism and experiences alongside stories that made the headlines across the country. Read more here: <https://www.cbc.ca/books/the-top-10-best-selling-canadian-books-of-2020-1.5848908>

## February Book



Our next meeting is February 13<sup>th</sup>, and will once again be on Zoom. February's book is *No Time to Spare* by Ursula K. Le Guin. Goodreads says, "Ursula K. Le Guin has taken readers to imaginary worlds for decades. Now she's in the last great frontier of life, old age, and exploring new literary territory: the blog, a forum where her voice —sharp,

witty, as compassionate as it is critical —shines. *No Time to Spare* collects the best of Ursula's blog, presenting perfectly crystallized dispatches on what matters to her now, her concerns with this world, and her wonder at it."

Here is the login information for our next Book Club meeting:

Time: Feb 13, 2021 10:00 AM Calgary

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89167423587?pwd=dTdUWkp2TFIrUWZrMGYreFA0VEtWUT09>

Meeting ID: 891 6742 3587 Passcode: 108554

**Ursula Kroeber Le Guin** (October 21, 1929 – January 22, 2018) was an American author best known for her works of speculative fiction, including science fiction works set in her Hainish universe, and the *Earthsea* fantasy series. She was first published in 1959, and her literary career spanned nearly sixty years, yielding more than twenty novels and over a hundred short stories, in addition to poetry, literary criticism, translations, and children's books. Frequently described as an author of science fiction, Le Guin has also been called a "major voice in American Letters." Le Guin herself said she would prefer to be known as an "American novelist".

