



A KELOWNA BOOK CLUB WITH A DIFFERENCE

BY: SHANNON LINDEN

Join us here in Okanagan Woman and online, at shannonlinden.ca, for recipes and reviews.

The songs of spring are a distant, faint sound as I pen this piece in frigid January; but for you, dear reader, spring has sprung. How marvelous!

The non-fiction book the LOL recently read resulted in some serious discussions while sipping Shiraz; the epic novel gave us reason to laugh-out-loud...while sipping Shiraz.

Join us here in Okanagan Woman and visit my newly launched blog, Books, Blood, and Baking at shannonlinden.ca for recipes and reviews.

As always, our hostess selected the book and charity of the month. The Kelowna CMHA and Room to Read received donations.

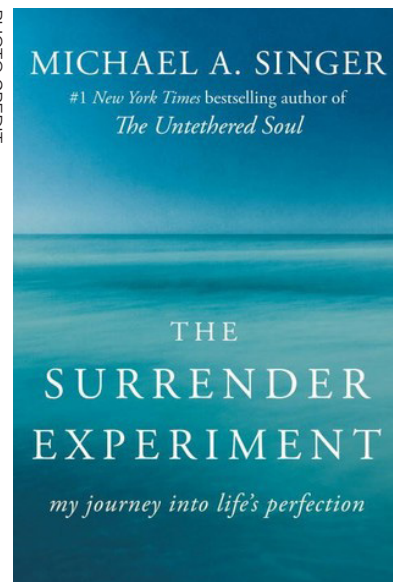
THE SURRENDER EXPERIMENT

BY MICHAEL A. SINGER

Michael (Mickey) Singer says if we silence the relentless chatter of our monkey minds—just cut those pervasive primates at their ever-swinging arms—we'd free ourselves from judgment, better equipping us to accept our current circumstances and simply surrender to what life has in store. In other words: tell that roommate in our head to shut the bleep up and just go with the flow.

Something many of us are working on; something I yearn to embrace and thus I so wanted to like this book. Sadly, I didn't.

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The story starts out strong as Singer abandons a promising academic career to seek solace in the woods, rejecting the company of others in search of solitude and silence. While that is unrealistic (never mind unappealing) for most of us, I was still with him as he encouraged me to live in the moment and surrender to what life presented, trusting in the great compass of God (or whatever you might choose to call the omniscient; the book is non-denominational) to guide me to good.

"Every day we give precedence to our mind's thoughts over the reality unfolding before us," he explains. "We regularly say things like, 'I better not

rain today because I'm going camping' or 'I better get that raise because I really need the money'...it's as though we actually believe the world around us is supposed to manifest according to our likes and dislikes. If it doesn't, surely something is very wrong...it is the reason we feel that we are always struggling with life."

So far so good. When Singer discovers Zen Buddhism he finally feels understood and begins studying meditation in earnest. When he goes on a camping trip with his wife and friends and disappears to meditate for hours at a time, he learns to "go beyond" and thus begins his spiritual birthing—and the death of his marriage.

I rode with him in his VW Van as he journeyed the backroads of California and the unexplored paths of his soul; I did yoga with him (hail the power of the mat); I clapped when life presented unsolicited opportunities and he heeded the call, despite initial misgivings.

Yet he ultimately lost me when he admitted to teaching university without lesson plans, writing (and acing) economics exams without studying, and starting a construction company followed by a medical software empire, all by seemingly surrendering to the will of the world.

I wholeheartedly believe in channeling positive energy in the direction of our dreams to attract favourable outcomes, but Singer made it all seem so simple, the book came across as trite and self-indulgent—wrapped up in mediocre writing.

He makes momentary mention of his second wife (they lived in separate houses) and the birth of his beautiful daughter, but much time is spent bowing at the knees of spiritual masters and name-dropping prestigious business associates.

I applaud the monetary contributions he's made to charity and his quest to enlighten minds with his Temple of the Universe, a commune where people of any belief come together to practice yoga and inner peace. But when his software company was investigated by the FBI for fraud, I couldn't help but wonder if this guy was a shyster.

The book brought about a great discussion at Cara's home, with Cindy W. remarking she "found it conflicting that such a meditative, back to the woods, spiritual guy would embark on a career in the corporate world...however,

his path was fascinating." The word 'surrender' resonated with her. "It felt like a release to accept things and give into the flow of life."

Cindy G., who listened to it on audiobook, said Singer's voice soothed her (and seemed to lead her to the perfect parking spots). A sizeable number of Goodreads participants loved the book, so others might get more from it, but I'll be donating mine to the thrift store.

2.5/5 Cheers!

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

BY JANE AUSTEN

At the other end of the spectrum, our resident physician, Gail, decided it was time we read an epic novel. When asked why she selected *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, she said, "I thought any book still considered to be a top 100 read—200 years later—must be worthwhile." Then she added, "I think occasionally turning it up and reading a classic is good for us, a bit like cod liver oil."

The other writer in our group, Laura (lauragosset.com), did some research and found that Austen's book was originally titled *First Impressions*. Submitted to a publisher in 1797 by her father, it was rejected, probably because it was written by a woman. It wasn't until 1813 the book hit the shelves—with an anonymous byline. Sadly, Austen never lived to see fame from her novels but one hopes she's never stopped beaming down from the Heavens, all these years since.

"The story, an entertaining study of manners and misconceptions set against the back-drop of a class-conscious 18th century England, is about the pride of a man and the prejudice of a woman," Laura said. "Based upon the classic girl meets boy; girl loses boy; girl gets boy back; it has become one of the most famous love stories of all times." It's never been out of print and has sold more than 20 million copies.

Gail said, "Although there were no explicit sex scenes (sorry, Laura), 'there was the story of romantic love... As I got into it, it occurred to me that we, as women, have such different roles in life now. Imagine being born 200 years ago! Most of us would have much narrower

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-Kathy

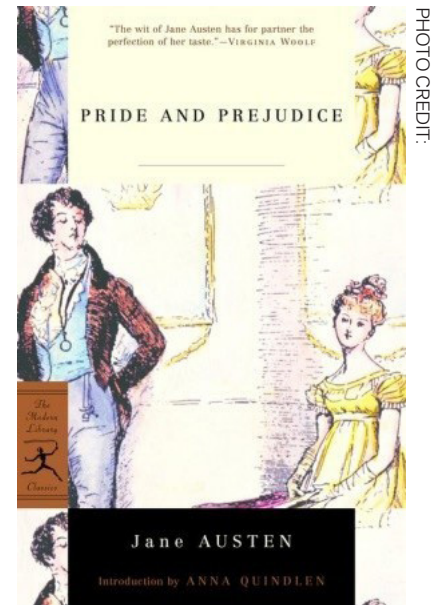


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roles with sharp boundaries of acceptable behaviour. I would have hated that life."

Gail noted the opening line: It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be want of a wife.

"Yikes!" she said. "What pressure for both parties and so much for the LGBTQ community!"

"Love is always complex," Gail said, "but in this setting, the parameters of correct behaviour and the influence of family and friends, make the development of a relationship and expression of love even more challenging."

Kathy concurred. "The quest for the perfect mate has always been a complicated one and we love a complicated, emotionally true story."

Bonnie, who is the Education Coordinator at Project Literacy Kelowna, found the language "that doubled back on itself" a tough slog at first, but "after about 70 pages it stopped feeling like homework."

Language changes, gender roles change (thank God) and yet a good story with good-hearted people (Elizabeth) and colossal asses (Collins) ...all getting their just desserts...well, that was satisfying!"

4/5 Cheers!