



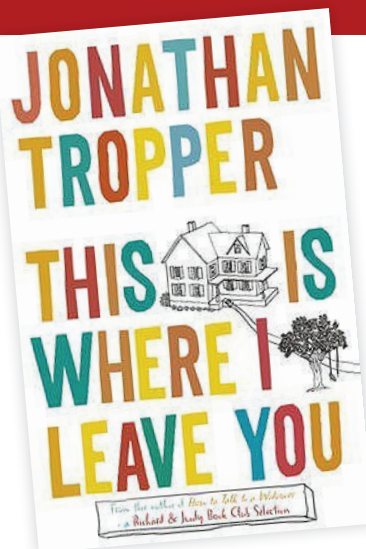
A KELOWNA BOOK CLUB WITH A DIFFERENCE

BY: SHANNON LINDEN

Spectacular lake and sun-kissed mountains, crimson-coloured trees and fruit-laden orchards, when Autumn rushed in and the wine fest began, the Ladies on Literature reveled in this most delightful season.

Eager to reunite, we toasted the start of our fifth year as a bookclub. On the first Wednesday of every month, copious amounts of wine, food, and endless discussions unite fifteen friends who love to read.

As you cozy up with our wonderful Winter issue, here's a look back at what the LOL read this fall.



THIS IS WHERE I LEAVE YOU

BY JONATHAN TROPPER

This novel was a departure from what is often a rather literary lineup. A romp of a read, *This is Where I Leave You* left me wanting more from this hysterical author.

When Judd Foxman's father dies, he leaves this earth with a departing wish: that his wife and four children sit Shiva (the week-long mourning period in Judaism) together. The family hasn't gathered in years, let alone shared close space—for seven, long, days.

They're a riotously dysfunctional group, led by our protagonist, Judd, who is reeling from the demise of his marriage after he discovers his spectacularly beautiful wife is having an affair with his radio shock-jock boss.

Warning: the opening scene is graphic, in the most hilarious way. Judd, a lit birthday cake in hand, climbs the stairs to surprise his wife on her special

day, only to find her in full affair mode. I dare you not to split a gut when Judd takes revenge (recall the prop he is carrying). Let's just say it involves his boss's naked bottom and other bits, poised, full view, above his wife.

Tropper does a brilliant job of describing this

(and many scenes) from Judd's very masculine perspective. It's as though he is an observer in his own life, watching the horror unfold, relaying the intimate details through ego-driven commentary. Yet this is a man so devotedly in love with his college sweetheart—and the mother of the baby they lost—that the episode is utterly heart breaking. In fact it sets the tone of the novel; outrageous, raw humor with plenty of sex, disharmoniously mixed with sadness.

Each family member has a story. As the week unfolds (and Judd's mother's blouse falls open revealing her ample implants), long held grievances arise (as does the mother's miniskirt), and plenty of secrets slip from everyone's well-stocked closets.

Criticisms of the book include shallow or undeveloped characters that engage in witty but unrealistic banter (whose siblings talk to each other like that?), as well as lack of authentic grieving. I don't disagree, but then I don't think that's why you pick up this book. It's loaded with some of the greatest lines ever, very real insight to the way a man thinks, as well as resonating remarks about relationships and the realization that we are all just a little dysfunctional.

Some readers can't decide if this book is mostly funny or sad as Judd discovers his cheating wife is pregnant and then spends Shiva figuring out his own life as well as mourning his father's. I applaud the author for his skill, crafting a story that dances so delicately somewhere between.

5/5 Cheers!

OLIVE KITTERIDGE

BY ELIZABETH STROUT

On a completely different note, we have a literary novel told in short stories. I have to admit, I wasn't overly intrigued by the premise of this book: a retired teacher deplores the changes in her little town of Crosby, Maine yet fails to recognize changes in the people around her, including her husband and only child. Then there are her fellow townspeople, all of them ordinary folks—like Olive—leading gloriously imperfect lives.

It's about the passage of time, including dreams that die, relationships that fail, and bodies that

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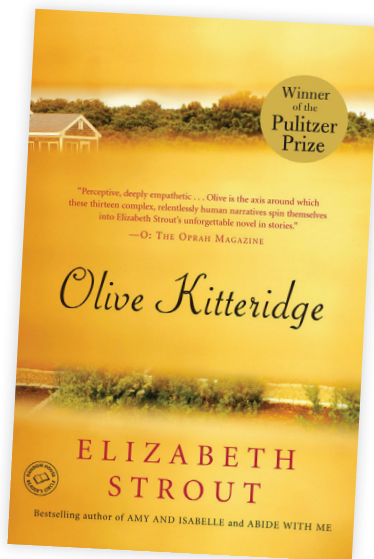
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betray. Yet there are snippets of joy and endless pearls of wisdom interwoven with unforgettable moments of sorrow. As Oprah magazine so aptly said, "Olive is the axis around which thirteen complex, relentlessly human narratives spin themselves."

She's a most unassuming protagonist. Often I wasn't sure whether I loved her, with her witty, unflinching honesty and no apologies approach to life, or hated her, with her downright mean temperament, egocentric view of the world, and unappealing inability to apologize to the people she routinely wounds. She is fully aware what they think of her, outrageously critical of them, entirely perceptive about life, and very often beyond redemption as the controlling, cranky, old lady, yet...there is something about her that you can't help but applaud. She's sassy and smart as hell and even though she is infuriating, I found myself rooting for her.

Perhaps because Olive is so unsentimental about life, I didn't find this novel depressing.



Sad, yes—depressing, not really—because love is still the most powerful emotion conveyed in the book.

Love makes Henry, Olive's kind husband, loyal; it stops a man from killing himself; it removes a daughter from her dysfunctional home; it even opens Olive's eyes to something more, later in life.

Ironically, while Olive is without empathy, this book absolutely inspires that emotion in the reader. Every character has a worthy story, often including life not quite meeting expectations. It's all rather ordinary. Yet the characters are so incredibly well drawn, the author's insight and spectacular writing so meaningful, this book just might change readers. It certainly made me want to live life to the fullest, avoiding the apathy, insecurity, and failure to fulfill self that so many of Strout's characters endured.

The author has the uncanny ability to get into character the way a brilliant actor does on screen and I will certainly look for more from this gifted writer.

4.5/5 Cheers!



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NEW YEAR MAKEOVER CONTEST

In 150 words or less, let us know why you or someone you know needs a makeover. Send us a photo of you or your nominee! Email your info, including your name, phone number, address, photo and a reason you deserve a makeover to: editor@okanaganwoman.com

The makeover includes a stylish new hair-do, make-up and consult, PLUS A BRAND NEW OUTFIT, and a full page feature in the spring issue of Okanagan Woman Magazine.

CONTEST CLOSES MIDNIGHT DECEMBER 31ST, 2015. Winners will be contacted by January 6th and makeover must take place before January 26th. Complete details at okanaganwoman.com



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