

The Four Winds by Kristin Hannah

Book club Wednesday 1/31/24 at 5:30 at Comstock Township Library

Discussion questions

1) Did you finish the book? What was your overall opinion?

2) Did you have an interest in this time period? Have you read other books that took place during this time and setting?

3) “For the thousandth time, Elsa wondered why her parents hadn’t loved her, or why their version of love had been so cold and conditional. How did such a thing happen? Elsa had learned to love deeply on the day of Loreda’s birth,” (198). Why did Elsa’s parents and sisters mistreat her? What kind of family does she find with Rose and Tony Martinelli and with her own kids?

4) “This generosity was nothing short of stunning, coming as it did from one with so little,” (240). Elsa thinks about this when Jean gives her shoes for Ant. In the novel, often the most destitute people demonstrate incredible generosity. What possesses someone to do that? What does it feel like for someone with so little to share what they do have?

5) “ ‘That card, though, that’s the real gift. It can take you anywhere, Loreda.’ Loreda’s fingers traced the card reverently. Elsa knew that a library card—a thing they’d taken for granted all of their lives—meant there was still a future. A world beyond this struggle,” (283). Between reading alone in her bedroom as a young woman, to reading to her children, to writing in her journal, what roles do reading and writing play in Elsa’s life? What do those things mean to Loreda?

6) “The newspapers were full of outrage and despair on the part of the citizens, who worried that their tax dollars were being spent to help nonresidents. The schools and hospitals were overrun, they said, unable to survive the demands of so many outsiders. They worried about bankruptcy and losing their way of life and being made unsafe by the wave of crime and disease they blamed on migrants,” (263).

How do negative attitudes towards immigrants and/or migrants repeat over time? What makes people demonize outsiders during times of trouble? Why do some people, like the hair dresser and her husband (272), show compassion while other people completely lack it?

7) “For the rest of the summer, they joined the horde of migrants who moved from field to field, crop to crop, and learned to pick whatever was in season and be unseen by the good folks who needed their crops picked but didn’t want to see the people who did the picking and expected them to move on when the season ended,” (264). Can you think of other jobs or industries that are crucial, but that are either invisible to the folks not involved in them, or purposely overlooked? Did the pandemic change the way that “essential workers” are viewed and treated?

8) Out of all the hardships that the Martinellis survived, why was Jean’s death the tipping point for Elsa to speak out against the way workers were being treated?

9) “ ‘All my life I’ve been told to make no noise, don’t want too much, be grateful for any scrap that came my way. And I’ve done that. I thought if I just did what women are supposed to do and played by the rules, it would...I don’t know...change. But the way we’re treated...’ ‘It’s unfair,” he said, (402). Elsa thought she needed to be quiet and grateful to be a respectable woman. How did she change from when she was a young woman to how she was before she died?

10) In Elsa’s speech to the other workers, she recognizes the toil and struggle of the women (431). What was the role of women during this time? What were the expectations placed upon them? Why were their contributions overlooked?

11) Loreda becomes the first Martinelli to go to college. What do you imagine her life will be like? How would growing up during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression shape her as an adult?

12) Would you recommend this book to other readers? Why or why not? Would you like to read more books by Kristin Hannah?

Interview with Kristin Hannah

AZ Family. Arizona News. (2021). Olivia's Book Club: Kristin Hannah, "The Four Winds".
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJW8Dg1qdDs>

Washington Post book review

Charles, Ron. (2021). 'The Four Winds' is Kristin Hannah's next inevitable bestseller. Don't forget the tissues. *The Washington Post*.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/four-winds-book-review/2021/01/28/6c3afed8-6165-11eb-9061-07abcc1f9229_story.html