



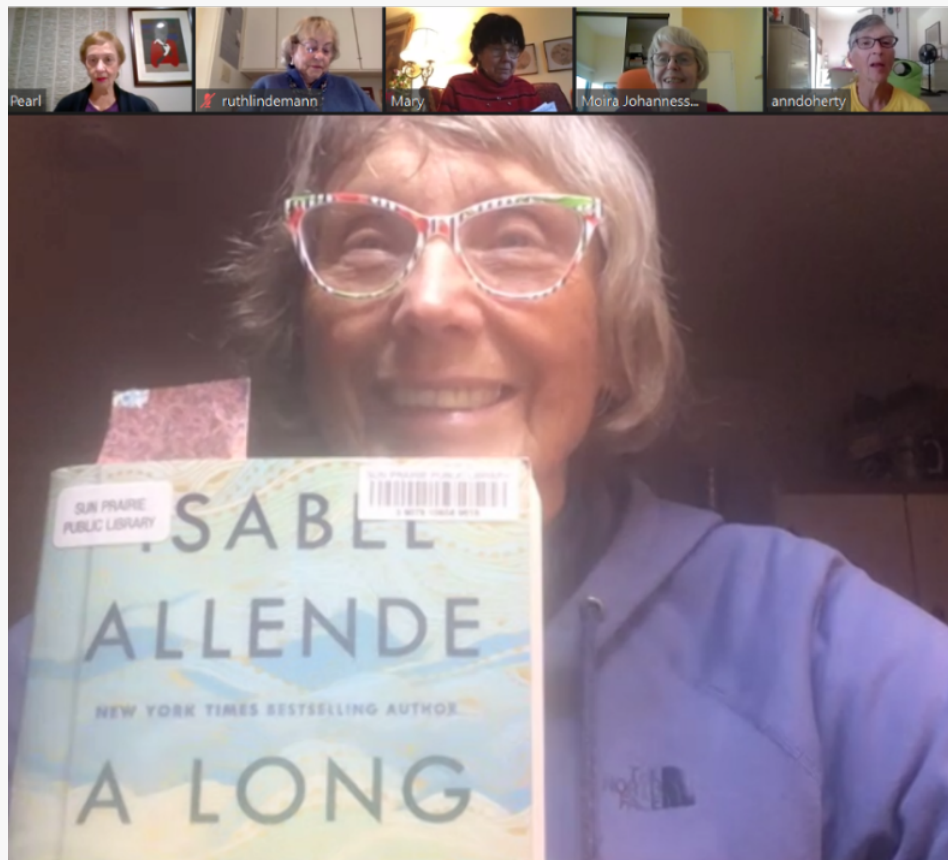
FOPSL Book Club: December 18, 2020

Book: *A Long Petal of the Sea*

Author: Isabel Allende

Discussion leader: Evelyn Kain

Evelyn Kain leads discussion of *A Long Petal of the Sea*



Evelyn Kain led the book club discussion of Isabel Allende's novel, ***A Long Petal of the Sea*** (2019) for our last meeting of 2020. This historical fiction spans the era of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) to the Pinochet coup in 1973 that overthrew the Chilean democratically-elected presidency of the author's first cousin once removed, Salvador Allende. Born in Lima, Peru in 1942 and abandoned by her father at the age of three, she moved around Chile, Bolivia and Lebanon with her mother and stepfather, a Chilean diplomat, during her youth (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/02/isabel-allende-interview-marriage-breakup-the-japanese-lover>).

Married in 1962 and giving birth to her daughter in 1963, Allende fled Chile to Venezuela following the coup and assisted in the safe transport of many refugees including her parents. She wrote her first novel, ***The House of the Spirits*** (1982) while in Venezuela. It became an instant-bestseller, was critically acclaimed, and catapulted Allende to literary stardom. It is said this novel was heavily influenced by Gabriel Garcia's ***One Hundred Years of Solitude***. Admittedly, the success of ***House*** likely inspired the selection of ***A Long Petal of the Sea*** by the book club. Unfortunately for those who read both, the latter did not live up to the former.

Isabel Allende, now 78 and living in San Francisco, has written 24 books which have been translated into 42 languages, selling more than 74 million copies and garnering more than 60 awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

"Less interested in scene than its sweep, Allende nonetheless describes her characters' emotions [in ***A Long Petal of the Sea***] with great detail, writing in third person with an omniscience that drains any wonder from their choices and interactions," an opinion shared by several book club members (https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/in-a-long-petal-of-the-sea-isabel-allende-delivers-another-sentimental-epic-set-in-troubled-times/2020/01/22/004f5b54-3c6f-11ea-b90d-5652806c3b3a_story.html).

It should be noted Allende starts each chapter with a poem by Nobel Laureate poet and former Chilean politician, Pablo Neruda. For first-hand insight on the connection between the two authors watch this brief video of Isabel Allende: <https://youtu.be/r0zQhf7rCtw>. In it she relates the first time she met Neruda, his advice to her about writing, and a memory after his passing. She notes she begins the process of writing her novels only after immersing herself in the Spanish language of Neruda's work.

Many book club members connected to descriptive passages of Catalonia, Chile and Venezuela based on their own travels and experiences. Passages about Pinochet seemed to correlate with memories of nationalistic impulses of our current president. Some thought a narrative spanning 60 years was overly ambitious. Others pointed out the narrative of the Spanish civil war was Allende at her best.

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Friends of the Palm Springs Library Book Club meets online

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