



FRIENDS

OF THE PALM SPRINGS LIBRARY

BOOK CLUB

FOPSL Book Club: May 20, 2022

Book: ***The Four Winds***

Author: Kristin Hannah

Discussion leader: Mary Marks

Discussion summary: Lisa Walters



Mary Marks

The discussion began with Mary giving information on the author, Kristin Hannah, who was previously an attorney. We found it interesting that Hannah said that she had originally intended that Loreda be the main character, but the voice of Elsa “took over.” Mary then talked about how the book was broken into three main parts: Elsa’s childhood, her marriage to Rafe and life with his parents, and then her time in California. We talked about her decision to leave Texas with her children, the Martinellis’ decision to stay behind, and why each chose what they did.

We noted a number of parallels between this story and the current immigration situation, which we could all relate to:

people’s fear of newcomers, calling them names, the belief that poor people are inherently lazy and stupid, earlier settlers wanting to keep them out, and so on. We also found it interesting that one person who treated the family well and believed in their worth was the Welty librarian. The library was a refuge for Loreda, who ultimately goes to college, at least in part because of her mother’s strong belief in the importance of education.

We also discussed the character Jack, the union organizer and “communist,” and the actual meaning of communism. Many thought that Jack, not Elsa, would be killed during the course of the story. We were of course sad about Elsa’s death but happy that she had persevered, come into her own, had experienced love, and had earned her daughter’s respect and admiration. We also agreed that had Elsa and Rafe met up again, it would have been meaningless, as she had changed and grown so much since their life together.

As always, group members shared their personal or family experiences: being prejudged by strangers, coming to the US or CA for a better life, having positive relationships with librarians and teachers, and even picking fruit.

Most of us loved this book and agreed that Hannah’s descriptions were vivid and compelling. While we were certainly aware of the historical events that took place at the time in which the novel was set, this work of fiction brought it home to us as mere history lessons had not. It is more accessible to high school students than “The Grapes of Wrath,” in part because it has a believable teen-age character. Many of us agreed it should be required reading because of its descriptions of events of such historical importance as the Dust Bowl and the creation of workers’ unions.

—Lisa Walters

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