

"Strangers with the Same Dream" selected for One Book One Aurora 2018



By Brock Weir

The selection has been in the works for some months, but a recent move by U.S. President Donald Trump to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has lent both a sense of urgency and timeliness ? and certainly no shortage of discussion points ? for 2018's One Book One Aurora campaign.

'Strangers with the Same Dream', the acclaimed 2017 novel by Toronto-based author Alison Pick, will form the centrepiece of this book's One Book One Aurora, an annual initiative of the Aurora Public Library to get all of Aurora reading on the same page.

Later this year, small lending libraries will be popping up across Aurora brimming with paperback copies of the novel, which is set in 1921 Palestine, intended to allow all Aurorans to pick up and enjoy the book, bring it back, and keep the books circulating. As Aurora reads, the Library will host a series of events and discussions around the various themes of the book, culminating in a talk at the Library with Ms. Pick set for this November.

'It is so exciting and it is very meaningful,' Ms. Pick tells The Auroran of her novel being selected for the seventh annual One Book One Aurora (OBOA) program. 'Writing is so kind of isolating, which suits me because I am very introverted and like being at my desk for long periods of time by myself, but I always think of it as the circle being completed when [the book] goes out to reach readers and you get feedback, have conversations and it feels satisfying. I am really grateful.'

The Man Booker Prize-shortlisted author's book centres on a band of young Jewish pioneers, some facing violence in their homelands, founding a kibbutz which will one day become a part of modern-day Israel.

Featuring a cast of characters ranging from two young single women, a charismatic leader, and a tapestry of true-to-life, flawed individuals, it is a study of 'how idealism quickly turns into pragmatism, and how the utopian dream is punctured by messy human entanglements.'

'August is when I start to focus all of my reading on Canadian authors I think could be my next One Book One Aurora,' says Reccia Mandelcorn of the Aurora Public Library (APL). 'I read nothing beyond that, go through the Writers' Union of Canada, all the publishers at Word on the Street, and I couldn't find anything that intrigued me. Then I picked up 'Strangers with the Same Dream' on a Saturday and I read it through Sunday morning, basically reading it within a 24 hour period with a four hour nap in between. I couldn't put it down and I just knew it had to be that book.'

Books for OBOA not only have to be 'beautiful from a literary perspective' but also have to provide various themes around which a whole season of programming can be based. With themes ranging from faith, to politics, idealism to the very essence of community, 'Strangers with the Same Dream' does not disappoint.

And it generated no shortage of important conversations while Ms. Pick toured with the book throughout 2017.

'After being on tour all fall, I have a sense of the themes that rise out of the conversations, some of which are maybe more obvious than others,' says Ms. Pick. 'There is early Zionism, the creation of Israel, and there is often a piece around feminism and mothering and the female pioneers' experience.

'There is something mysterious about the creative process, and it is not as calculated as wanting [a specific character to represent a

specific theme]. As I play with them on the page, they begin to come alive and I feel like I am kind of listening; that it is a collaborative process between me and the other characters. When I was in Israel for the second time on a Kibbutz I looked in an archive and the archivist was hugely helpful in my process introducing me to some diaries and letters.

I hadn't heard these stories before so I knew early on I wanted issues of gender and parenting, and the collective versus the individual to come into it. I

Knowing that themes surrounding the foundation of Israel are often polarizing and political, Ms. Pick says she tried not to think about the politics as she collaborated with her characters on the story. She pondered what story I had the right to tell and what story I would be able to tell well. I

I felt I couldn't tell the story without including Palestinian or Arab characters and they would have to be secondary characters because it wasn't my lived experience, says Ms. Pick.

Next week, The Auroran will continue its look at Strangers with the Same Dream, the 2018 selection for One Book One Aurora with Ms. Pick's own lived experience and how these experiences impacted the story.