

APL picks debut novel for One Book One Aurora 2022



Reading can help us learn about ourselves.

So says author Linda Rui Feng, whose debut novel, *Swimming Back to Trout River*, has been selected by the Aurora Public Library for its 2022 One Book One Aurora campaign.

One Book One Aurora (OBOA) is an initiative spearheaded by the Aurora Public Library (APL) to get the community all reading collectively from the same page.

In the coming weeks and months, free copies of *Swimming Back to Trout River* will be available in small lending libraries around Town to read, return, or pass along to other readers.

A full year of programming centred on the themes of the book will be rolled out over the next 10 months, culminating in an author talk at APL this fall.

Swimming Back to Trout River, which was critically acclaimed upon its release, begins in a small Chinese village the summer of 1986, centred on Junie, whose emigree parents to North America promise to collect her by her 12th birthday. Four interwoven stories come together to share a slice of the immigrant experience and secrets we keep from ourselves and others.

"I am very excited to be connecting with readers at a very ground-up level and to be able to be involved with the reading process," Rui Feng tells *The Auroran*. "It always feels like a privilege and it really brings home why we write."

With *Swimming Back to Trout River* being her first book, Rui Feng says she is still learning "all the ways a book goes out to the world" without her, and all the different ways her novel resonates with readers.

What strikes a chord with one reader might be very different from what hits close to home for another, a phenomenon she describes as 'wonderful.'

'The way they are feeling the world of my characters makes me feel happy ' they can live in basically a collaborative world and that is always really exciting.'

When she sat down to write the book, she wanted to tell a story about immigration ' both the experience of leaving a home country and planting roots in another.

'I wanted to think about the tension between wanting to go to an 'elsewhere' and a very powerful urge to stay put on the other hand. It was an idea I had been thinking about for a long time. Because this is my first novel, I didn't really have a feel for the scale of the project. I started off imagining two characters most visibly ' Momo, the father in the story, and Junie, who starts off as a ten-year-old child. At some point, the story grew to encompass other people's lives and other temporalities, other distant memories. That is when I thought a short story probably wasn't going to cut it!'

It's a good thing Linda Rui Feng expanded her vision for the story as the novel was shortlisted for the prestigious Giller Prize. She says it is 'humbling' for her name to be placed alongside authors like Miriam Toews and she still feels like 'pinching herself.'

'When readers tell me something in the story makes sense to them ' and one reader told me she was very moved by the story and couldn't quite articulate how ' makes my writing worthwhile and really makes my day,' she says. 'A couple of themes that always animate me is the theme of secrets ' secrets we keep from our families, keep from ourselves, the secrets that just cannot be allowed ' and how they resonate across time, whether these secrets are sometimes necessary or whether they are sometimes detrimental; and that is an open question, of course.

'Another thing I am interested in is working at the 'macro' ' history that gets buffeted by large-scale gigantic forces in society ' as well as the 'microhistory' of people's lives. In my book, I deal with some large historical sources, such as the Chinese Cultural Revolution, but I am interested in how those forces come to fruition within individual lives and often unremarkable lives. I love that reading something that is really outside our own experiences and can help us learn about ourselves. Really participating with lives that are removed from ours, even through a book, is something that is very valuable for anyone at any point in time ' particularly during the pandemic when our world is, by necessity, shrunken smaller and smaller. Even today, we are shrinking back to a smaller radius and I would encourage readers to fight that shrinking world by picking up my book!'

To find out where you can pick up a copy of *Swimming Back to Trout River*, take part in myriad activities throughout 2022 related to the book, and to learn more about One Book One Aurora, visit onebookoneaurora.com.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter