

One Book One Aurora invites you on virtual trip to Burma



By Brock Weir

Last year, people across Aurora delved into one resident's harrowing tale of imprisonment in revolution-ravaged Tehran and her life thereafter through the Aurora Public Library's 'One Book One Aurora' campaign. In the second annual program, Aurorans are invited to indulge in 'Burmese Lessons.'

Beginning next month, portable libraries will be set up at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, Aurora Town Hall, the Aurora Cultural Centre, and at the Library itself, each brimming with copies of Toronto author Karen Connelly's acclaimed memoir, 'Burmese Lessons.'

Books from these libraries will be available free of charge for residents to pick up, enjoy, and either return or pass along to new readers, in an effort to get all of Aurora on the same page in a Town-wide dialogue on passions, travel, and upheaval.

Don't be put off by recent events in the South Asian nation; 'Burmese Lessons' bills itself as a love story. An unconventional one, perhaps, but a love story nonetheless of a Canadian woman finding herself in Burma. Its beauty, and the generosity of its citizens, coupled with the political turmoil engulfing the country, was a potent mix, but love blossoms between Connelly and a man dedicated to fostering political change.

Selecting this year's book to build on the success of last year's program was almost too easy for Reccia Mandelcorn and the rest of the Aurora Public Library team. Having worked with Ms. Connelly on other projects, Ms. Mandelcorn said she had read the book three times, before she suggested it as the centrepiece for this year's celebration of the written word.

'We wanted something that was a good piece of literature, that had the depth of programming around that, and we wanted it to be Canadian,' she explains. 'We wanted to have something with which we could make connections within the community. Having studied under Karen, I know how engaging she is. She is one of my favourite Canadian authors and I knew we could have something pretty momentous for the community.'

With elections coming up this fall in Canada as well as Burma, 'Burmese Lessons' is a book that can go a long way in stimulating an important community-wide conversation about freedom, fighting for democracy, and a number of particularly timely topics.

Having done a quiet soft-launch of the book earlier this year to various local book clubs, that potential to generate that conversation has already become evident, says the Library's Cindy Shaver.

“People are really enjoying it,” says Ms. Shaver. “Some people have said it is a little bit more risqué than maybe they thought it would be, but once you're into it, you're absorbed. You're right in there and sense that passion Karen has in the moment and how it becomes her life. She doesn't necessarily feel like she is Canadian anymore. She is in there and she is just as invested as everyone else.”

As part of the One Book One Aurora Campaign, Ms. Mandelcorn and Ms. Shaver have built a series of events developed around the themes of the book.

Once the books have three months to circulate around Aurora, discussion begins in earnest with a special screening of the documentary *Burma VJ* on September 17, hosted by Burmese activist Zaw Wai Kyaw. *Burma VJ*, nominated for Best Documentary at the 2009 Academy Awards, follows Burmese video journalists caught in the mist of the 2007 so-called Saffron Revolution.

Burmese Lessons will also be the centrepiece of talks hosted by the Library's Tuesday Philosophy Club on October 6. Here, participants will have an enlightening discussion on important philosophical questions raised by the book, including what justifies “state”, when civil disobedience is justified, and whether civil disobedience is even a “responsibility” against state oppression and control.

If the written word of Karen Connelly wasn't enough, the Colleen Abbott Gallery will be turned over to an exhibition of her photography from October 7 to October 24, before the program culminates with Ms. Connelly herself on Saturday, October 24 when the author presents her novel and engages in a question and answer session with the audience at the Aurora Public Library.

“She is really excited about it,” says Ms. Mandelcorn of Ms. Connelly's participation. “She generally doesn't do book talks anymore, but she wanted to bring forth social issues. She herself is an activist and right now she is doing a lot of work on missing and murdered aboriginal women. She saw this as a way not only of promoting the book she wrote, but taking something that is very important and bringing it to the community.”

For more on One Book One Aurora 2015, and to keep up-to-date on a growing list of activities surrounding *Burmese Lessons* or even to suggest an event yourself visit www.onebookoneaurora.com.