



Book Club Set #73

Chai Tea Sunday

By Heather A. Clark

About the Author

Since learning how to read her favourite 'Little Miss' series as a child, Heather always dreamed of writing her own book. That dream came true in March 2012 when her first novel, *Chai Tea Sunday*, was released in Canada and the US.

Heather began writing the book as a creative outlet while on maternity leave with her second child. After she and her husband would tuck their kids into bed for the night, Heather would cozy up to her laptop and focus her attention on the journey of Nicky Fowler, the strong and inspirational woman who finds hope in a world fraught with adversity through unfaltering courage and never-ending determination.

Chosen by Chapters and Indigo as a "new and hot in fiction" book pick, Heather's debut novel has been praised by both the media and readers across the country. Proceeds from each book sold will go to help Artbound, a non-profit volunteer initiative that harnesses the power of the arts in support of Free The Children.

Heather is currently at work on her second book, which will be released in April 2014. When not writing, Heather enjoys travelling, drinking red wine with her girlfriends and spending time with her husband and three children.

Retrieved from: <http://www.heatheraclark.com/x2-author.php>

About the Book

Thirty-three year old Nicky Fowler thought she had a perfect life - a great job as a third-grade teacher, a loving husband, and a suburban dream home. The only thing missing was a child of her own. When complicated fertility issues lead to heartbreaking tragedy, Nicky's marriage rapidly crumbles, and she struggles to cope with the harsh realities of her new life. Emotionally lost, Nicky accepts a volunteer teaching position at an orphanage in Kenya. Yet she soon finds that life in Africa is harder than expected; drought has forced the country into famine, the air is filled with the never-ending stench of burned garbage smoke, and violence is everywhere. Worst of all, Nicky learns that Jebet, the jaded orphanage director who never married and lost her family in the post-election violence of 2007, takes her hatred for the world out on the orphans. Throughout her tumultuous stay in Kenya, Nicky finds strength in her host mother, Mama Bu, who listens to her worries and provides wise advice over cups of chai, Kenya's signature drink. With Mama Bu's guidance, Nicky realizes what she must do to help the endangered orphans she's grown to love and, within that journey, she also begins to heal.

Chai Tea Sunday celebrates the resilience of the heart and the power of hope in the face of adversity.

Discussion Questions

1. How did you feel while reading about Eric and Nicky trying to get pregnant and then preparing for the baby? What did you think of their experience?
2. Reading Nicky's portrayal of her ideal marriage and their efforts to get pregnant, did you anticipate what would happen? What about during their planning and excitement? If not, what did you feel might happen?
3. What did you think of Eric's reaction to Ella's condition and his refusal to ride in the ambulance with Nicky?
4. Once Nicky is in Africa, she's exposed to a very different set of standards than her own. Violence in particular is a normal way of life and in some cases is even justified by the locals. Considering Jebet's violent past, do you think her disciplinary actions while running the orphanage are understandable?
5. When Mama Bu and Nicky are discussing Nicky's past, Mama Bu offers perspective on how men and women handle issues differently, particularly loss. Do you agree or disagree with what she says?
6. Do you agree with the way Nicky, Mama Bu, Barika and Johanna handled Jebet as director of the orphanage? If so, why? If not, what do you think might have been a better course of action?
7. What do you think of the ending of Nicky's story in Africa, of Eric coming and reconciling with him and deciding to go back to Canada to start a foundation, and of Lucy taking over as teacher and Mama Bu as director?
8. Why do you think no one in Jebet's circles did anything before now?
9. Did reading about the Kenyan poverty or the lack of sufficient care for orphan children, or about any of the other African experiences make you feel any inclination to look into a trip to help? Or did you feel spurred to action in any other way?

Retrieved from:

http://www.ecwpress.com/sites/default/files/discussion_questions_for_chai_tea_sunday.pdf

Author Interview

Q. Heather Clark began writing her debut novel *Chai Tea on Sunday* while on maternity leave with her second child. She is a mother of three with a successful career in marketing and, yes, she also wrote a book (don't hate her). Where did the inspiration for the book come from?

A. My cousin, Rachel, went to Kenya to volunteer at an orphanage. When she returned, I couldn't get enough of her stories, particularly the ones about the children at the orphanage. It wasn't the sad stories that we hear so often or her chronicles of the devastation that exists there ... but what connected all of these stories together: hope. It was her tales of the children at the orphanage who have nothing – less than nothing, actually – and still have so much unconditional love to give. I remember calling my husband a few days later and choking back sobs because I still felt the power of Rachel's stories. I knew then that I needed to write about her journey in Africa.

Q. Why did you choose Kenya, and how did you research it?

A. I chose Kenya because it was the place Rachel had travelled to, and her stories were so inspirational. However, after deciding to write a book about Rachel's journey there, I was faced with one not-so-little problem: I've never actually been there myself. Knowing I couldn't write about it without a lot of help, I approached Rachel with my idea for the book. She immediately (and excitedly!) agreed, and I interviewed her at length about her experiences in Kenya. I videotaped our conversations, scoured her journal, and spent hours watching her videos and looking at her photos.

But it was when she returned to volunteer in Kenya for the second time that I was really able to get the granular details I needed to make the story come alive. I would send her emails with a question (something like 'what do the walls in the homes look like?' or 'how long does it take to walk to church?') and she would shoot me back emails with the answer. It was a bit like a blind person whose other senses are heightened as I was forced to really experience Africa through Rachel.

I then added to her stories with a lot of my own research on both Africa, as well as infertility treatments in North America. I also drew on experts for their guidance, including a renowned fertility physician, an Ontario court judge and Swahili translators.

Q. You deal with difficult subjects in the book, such as struggling to conceive and the death of a child. How hard were they to write about?

A. They were extremely difficult to write about. From a fertility perspective, my husband and I went through our own fertility issues. Although they were quite different (from a technical/scientific perspective) from the issues Nicky and her husband go through, it was still difficult to write about as the heart-wrenching emotions that accompany any fertility treatments were certainly there. Thankfully, my husband and I were ultimately blessed with three beautiful children, however the time when we went through fertility

treatments was a very painful and complicated time for us – and when I was researching and writing about it, the painful emotions quickly came back.

Writing about the death of a child was nothing short of heartbreaking and, to be honest, I didn't know if I could do it. In fact, I wrote the entire book except for that part, and then went back and wrote it because I was really nervous to do it. But I knew that Nicky and Eric needed to have experienced an extremely complicated and devastating tragedy for their marriage to crumble. Plus, I wanted to push Nicky from the world she was used to living in to the world of Africa so I could juxtapose the two, and she needed to have gone through something overwhelmingly heartbreaking for someone as strong as her to quit her life and move there.

However, even with all of this said, for me the true transcendent theme of the novel is hope. The tragedy Nicky suffers early in the book causes her to lose her way and it's only when she finds love and understanding in her host mother, Mama Bu, as well as from the children at the orphanage, that she is able to regain the hope she lost. It's the portrayal of the power of the human spirit, and the true resilience of the heart. Despite the unimaginable pain and personal tragedy Nicky had previously gone through, her tenacity, determination and courage ultimately ensured that she could once again find hope.

Q. Have you learned insights over chai?

A. I've never been to Kenya, so I haven't had the true chai experience, but I'm very keen to go and know I will love my time there. However, if Chai Tea Lattes from Starbucks count, I've learned a ton. Three of my very best girlfriends and I frequently sneak out of the house after our kids go to bed, and we have (long!) and wonderful conversations over Chai Tea Lattes. We're always the last to leave - we actually have to get kicked out every time we go!

Q. How do you balance full-time work with writing and releasing a book while on mat leave?

A. It isn't easy, as every mother knows. We're all so busy, and making sure there is time for everything is tough. I'm fortunate to have a great support system – an amazing husband, fantastic parents/in-laws and a strong nanny. It allows me to be able to focus on my work when needed, and also spend quality time with my family.

In the case of Chai Tea Sunday, I actually wrote it while on maternity leave with my second child. And it was actually because I was busy taking care of a newborn and a toddler that I started writing the book. I love my children to pieces but, after changing diapers and feeding kids all day, I really needed a creative outlet and passion project that was just for me. Since I had always wanted to write a book, I decided to start writing to see where it would take me. After my husband and I would tuck our kids into bed for the night, I would cozy up to my laptop and continue on Nicky's journey. I

absolutely loved writing and, before I knew it, the pages had turned into chapters and I eventually had a completed manuscript.

Q. How do you regularly find the inspiration and time to write? Do you write daily?

A. Admittedly, finding the inspiration and time to write on a regular basis is hard at times. There are many nights when I would prefer to watch a movie with my husband or go for some (much loved!) red wine with a few of my girlfriends than write yet another page in my manuscript.

My best trick is to make the deal with myself that I need to write just two more pages of the manuscript before I can give in to whatever is calling my name. If, at the end of those two pages, I still want to do something else, I am able to close my laptop and not feel guilty about it. However, I don't know that I've actually ever abandoned my book for something else given that the two pages always seems to draw me into the story and, before I know it, the next chapter is written.

Q. A portion of the proceeds of your novel are going to a charity called Artbound. What can you tell us about this initiative, and why is it so close to your heart?

A. Artbound is an amazing charity that harnesses the power of the arts in support of Free The Children. In addition to providing clean water, medical care and food to children who need it, they raise funds to build schools in developing nations so they can provide children with a full education, including art. Their programs are designed to teach children skills that will improve their living conditions and generate sustainable income to help break the cycle of poverty. So, for example, the children might learn how to bead in school, and then sell that bead work in a market.

When I found out Chai Tea Sunday would be published, it became very important for me to give back as I had fallen in love with the kids from the Kenyan orphanage that I had written about, and knew I needed to help. I wanted to find the right charity, and was thrilled to partner with Artbound as I believe wholeheartedly in everything they stand for and all of the work they do around the world. I believe it is important to teach children, particularly in developing nations, the skills they need to generate income so they can ultimately provide for themselves and their families – and Artbound does exactly that.

Q. What do you want to write about next?

A. I'm working on my second novel, which is due out in April 2014. To be honest, I've gotten as far as knowing when it will be released, and will be using the next few months to figure out what to write about. Most importantly, I'm focused on my family and being a mom. I have a four-year-old daughter, a two-year-old son and a newborn baby girl. Life right now is extremely busy and very fun.

Retrieved from: <http://www.ivillage.ca/living/women-we-love/meet-heather-clark-author-of-chai-tea-sunday-and-woman-we-love>

Other Links and Resources

How to Make Kenyan Chai Tea:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVwL_Qpq2m4

Volunteering in Kenya:

<https://govolunteerafrica.org/kenya-orphanage-volunteer-project/#:~:text=The%20orphanage%20volunteer%20project%20in,to%20play%20and%20live%20in.>

Voluntourism and its Colonial Roots:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jun/10/voluntourism-new-book-explores-how-volunteer-trips-harm-rather-than-help>

Info about the True Story the Novel Is Based On:

<https://www.cityline.tv/2012/05/02/heather-a-clark-uncovers-stories-of-hope-in-africa-in-chai-tea-sunday/>

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DATE: _____

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As a group we rated this book:

1	2	3	4	5
Ugh!		It was OK...		Loved it!

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes No Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: