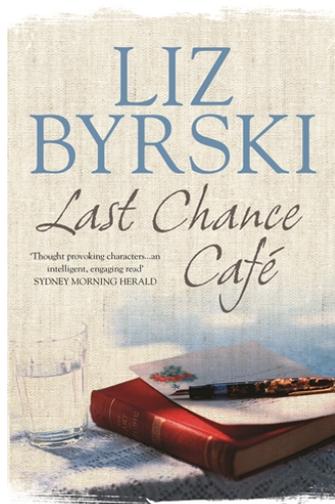


BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION POINTS



Thank you for choosing *Last Chance Café* for your book club. Here are some discussion points you may like to use.

'...I'm so over myself you wouldn't believe it and I couldn't even get away from me at the top of some Indian mountain. I stayed a full year so you can't say I didn't try.' (pp 6–7) Dot's attempt to 'find herself' in India proved fruitless. Are such activities really driven by a desire to escape reality rather than to embrace one's inner spirit? Do you believe that one can ever discover a new self? Discuss.

'...no one seems to care about sisterhood anymore.' She leans forward, grasping Margot's hand in her own. 'Remember the women's movement, working together! Remember marching for childcare centres, and equal pay, and breast cancer testing? It's not the same now. It's all about the individual and bugger everyone else. Pole dancing as liberation, what a travesty!' (p 8) 'So much for free love and promiscuity in the sixties – it was still the men calling the tune and disappearing out the back door if the women got pregnant.' (p 56) Was feminism such a disappointment in terms of relationships? Is feminism dead? Or is this novel indicating that the fight needs to be taken up again with a vengeance?

'Motherhood totally freaked her out' (p 9). Emma is a career woman who found that mothering didn't suit her. How easy is it for a woman to make this decision today, even with a supportive partner or ex-partner?

'How important we thought we were, back then,' she remembers saying, 'so entirely up ourselves. We thought we were shaping a new world.' (p 20) Unfortunately, protest movements don't always result in long-term change. For example, one of the great ironies for women of the liberation era is that they see women today blithely accepting the conditions they fought for, and also returning to the same stereotypes they fought so hard to reject. Discuss.

'Margot has always struggled with the idea of uncertainty. When they were younger Laurence often talked about its creative advantages, but Margot craved certainty, preferring to live with its illusion.' (p 50) Is 'certainty' a possible or impossible concept?

'Transformation! It is always the bag, the one she has always wanted, always needed, the bag to end all bags.' (p 68) Is fashion a form of escapism; a way in which

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women contrive to avoid the reality of life? Does it serve women or are we too willing to accept the dictates of a market dominated by men?

The question of growing older and the need for aged care is raised by Vinka's visit to the nursing home (p 168) and by Laurence talking to Dot about elder care (pp 251–252). Is our society too prone to consign people to aged care, when they are still perfectly capable of looking after themselves?

'We were intellectual anarchists and that's a very attractive thing to be when you're young. It means you don't have to be responsible for anything.' (p 83) Discuss this statement with reference to similar such movements today.

Is the sexualisation of childhood a real problem in our society? A group called Collective Shout (www.collectiveshout.org) is campaigning against the objectification of women and the sexualisation of girls in media, advertising and popular culture. How important is this kind of grassroots movement?

'It is easier for her now to remember the seedier side of the sexual life of the Push, the arrogance, the intellectual bullying and the frustration of so much talk and so little action.' (p 80) Activism often results in widespread positive change, but it can also mask the failure of the activists themselves to apply their politics to their own behaviour. Discuss.

'Life is always full of risks but we don't even think about them, and at our age every day is a bonus. So – we must make the most we can of it, even if it increases the risk.' (p 257) Is risk-taking a dangerous way to live your life, or a healthy one?

'Perhaps, she thinks now, she is not so different after all. Perhaps the world is full of women dancing as fast as they can to simply keep their heads above water and a smile on their faces, attempting to mask the chaos within.' (p 264) Are women generally living in a state of inner crisis today, in your opinion?

Consider these quotes: 'There are times when I've felt haunted by it and, yes, occasionally I regret it. But they're the regrets of age, part of getting old and living in the last chance café, looking back and seeing how I could have done it differently.' (p 195) and 'I kept thinking about how easily we are separated from the past, and how extraordinary it feels when we bump into it.' (p 326) Is this novel about regret or hope? Is the past 'another country', or is it possible to go back and right some of its mistakes?

I do hope you enjoy your discussion.