

Finding Chika

Harper Perennial

By Mitch Albom

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Introduction

"Mitch Albom has done it again with this moving memoir of love and loss. You can't help but fall for Chika. A page-turner that will no doubt become a classic." --Mary Karr, author of *The Liars' Club* and *The Art of Memoir*

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Tuesdays With Morrie* comes Mitch Albom's most personal story to date: an intimate and heartwarming memoir about what it means to be a family and the young Haitian orphan whose short life would forever change his heart.

Chika Jeune was born three days before the devastating earthquake that decimated Haiti in 2010. She spent her infancy in a landscape of extreme poverty, and when her mother died giving birth to a baby brother, Chika was brought to The Have Faith Haiti Orphanage that Albom operates in Port Au Prince.

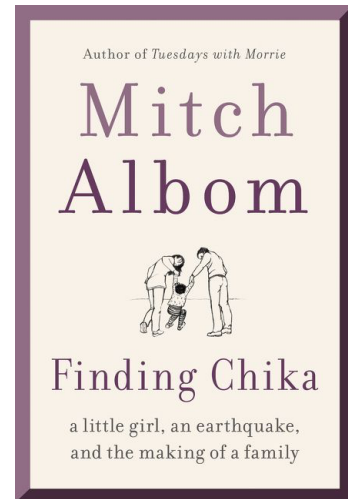
With no children of their own, the forty-plus children who live, play, and go to school at the orphanage have become family to Mitch and his wife, Janine. Chika's arrival makes a quick impression. Brave and self-assured, even as a three-year-old, she delights the other kids and teachers. But at age five, Chika is suddenly diagnosed with something a doctor there says, "No one in Haiti can help you with."

Mitch and Janine bring Chika to Detroit, hopeful that American medical care can soon return her to her homeland. Instead, Chika becomes a permanent part of their household, and their lives, as they embark on a two-year, around-the-world journey to find a cure. As Chika's boundless optimism and humor teach Mitch the joys of caring for a child, he learns that a relationship built on love, no matter what blows it takes, can never be lost.

Told in hindsight, and through illuminating conversations with Chika herself, this is Albom at his most poignant and vulnerable. *Finding Chika* is a celebration of a girl, her adoptive guardians, and the incredible bond they formed—a devastatingly beautiful portrait of what it means to be a family, regardless of how it is made.

Questions for Discussion

1. After her death, Chika first appears to Albom the morning of his father's funeral. Why do you think the author chose to use these "dialogues" to help tell the story?
2. Why is it particularly difficult for Albom to write about Chika at first?



3. Chika suggests to Algom that one can indeed forget a loved one. What might she mean? What kinds of things might cause the fading of such important memories and feelings?
4. What are healthy ways to maintain powerful connections to lost loved ones? In what ways might such attachment become unhealthy?
5. Consider the various allusions to stories (The House at Pooh Corner, The Chronicles of Narnia, etc.) throughout the book. What is so important about stories for children? What role should narrative play in a healthy adult life?
6. What does Algom mean when he says that “hoarding time” is the most selfish of acts?
7. What is the epiphany Algom has when watching the children sing and dance beneath sprays of water? How does this powerful experience change him?
8. What does Algom mean when he admits that his “sense of control was obliterated” by Chika’s illness? Why was this valuable for him? What’s a healthy balance of control and acceptance in one’s life?
9. What does Algom mean when he says that awful news is “literally a bend in your life”? Why is how you decide to frame and respond to such a challenge so important?
10. How is Algom’s profound experience with Morrie Schwartz relevant to that with Chika?
11. What might it mean that “you can have more than one journey of your life”?
12. How is “a child...both an anchor and a set of wings”?
13. Algom confesses to Chika that he was “a foolish man in many ways.” What does he mean? How does he explain his unwise behavior and decisions? How did Chika help change this?
14. Algom explains that as adults, we “don’t really look,” but merely “look over...glance...[and then] move on.” What does he mean? Why might we so casually neglect such a powerful ability? How does Chika remind him to really look at things?
15. What role does hope play on Algom’s journey with Chika? What does he mean when he says that hopelessness can be contagious?
16. Upon a return to Haiti, Chika runs and twirls and dances with joy in a way that “proves she is home.” What defines home? In what ways can home be something other than a particular place?
17. Consider the Haitian proverb, “Misfortune doesn’t have a horn.” What does it mean? How is it relevant to Chika’s story?
18. What is the complex nature of the Algom’s role as parents to Chika? Beyond biology, what might establish a person as a parent?
19. What is joy? How is it that Algom found joy in such profound loss? What are some ways to stay aware of joy in our daily experience?
20. Do you agree with the Algom’s decision not to discuss Chika’s illness with her?

21. What might explain Chika's vibrant courage in the face of such challenges?
22. What does Albom mean when he says, "What we carry defines who we are"?
23. What is the nature of grief? How do the Albom's respond to theirs? What are healthy, effective ways to endure such feelings of loss?
24. Albom likens families to "pieces of art." What does he mean? What are the essential elements of a powerful, loving family? How did Chika "make a family" for the Alboms?
25. What is Chika's legacy?