

Finding Chika: A Memoir that Changed My Life

Based on what I learned from books, movies, articles, and real-life in general, I have a distinct definition of what “true love” is. To me, true love is raw and beautiful; it is unconditional and pure. It is a force that can move the most stubborn people and can be found anywhere, in anyone. And that’s what the memoir ‘Finding Chika’ by Mitch Albom depicts: true love.

This heartwarming memoir is the story of Chika, a lovely Haitian orphan. After a devastating earthquake hit her hometown, Chika fell under the care of an orphanage in Haiti that was taken over by the author. At the tender age of five, she was diagnosed with a brain tumour and was brought to America to get treatment, which was when she fell under the care of the author and his wife.

What’s interesting is that this story is told as though Mitch Albom was telling little Chika a story—the story of her life. He wrote about her life’s journey, the various lessons that she had taught him in his life, and how much joy, happiness, love, despair, and loss she had brought into his life. Mitch and his wife, Janine, truly cherished Chika as though she was their own—arguably even more. It was so raw, so pure, so wholesome and so beautifully touching that I found myself reduced to tears far too many times.

“The most precious thing you can give someone is your time, Chika, because you can never get it back. When you don’t think about getting it back, you’ve given it in love. I learned that from you.” (p.78)

“Mister Mitch, why are you looking at me?” Chika finally asked. I couldn’t say the truth: that I was trying to memorize her. That I was thinking we’d been blessed with the best possible child under the worst possible circumstances. Instead, I shrugged and mumbled, “Sorry.” She shook her head with her lips pursed, as if tasting those invisible lemons. “It’s OK,” she decided. “You can look.” (p.105)

One of the most entertaining and moving things about this memoir is the way he describes her with such love, adoration, and amusement. Those intricate details that he did not fail to leave out, those little things we wouldn't normally notice in daily life. The way he would marvel at the things we would consider small and insignificant, and then portray them in a way that the reader can hardly help but marvel at those things as well.

I want to hear about your voice, Chika, because I think about it often, and I hear it all the time. It was a chameleon, ever-changing. High-pitched and booming during the day. Lilting and tender at night. A sweet sandpaper in the mornings, so scratchy that Miss Janine and I would privately joke, "She hasn't been smoking, has she?" (p.99)

The character that moved me the most was the author himself. I could feel his love, his joy, his pain and his sorrow. I could feel how he cherished this young child so much that he would do anything to make her happy and to keep her safe. I could feel his disparity as he watched her struggle with her illness, unable to eradicate the pain she felt. In hindsight, I realise that it was the thing I longed for as a child—a loving father.

Being abused sexually and emotionally as a child, I never knew what it was like to have a caring father. My idea of a father was so distorted and confusing that it would hurt to think about it. But seeing how much the author loved, cared for, and protected little Chika; seeing how much she looked up to him and loved him—things changed. I realised that there are good people out there, good fathers. There are fathers who wake up every morning and say, "Good morning, beautiful," to their daughters, grateful for their presence. There are fathers who love their daughters unconditionally and appropriately. It gave me hope.

When I reached the end of the book, I was sobbing profusely. By the end, I had learned so much about her—her struggle, all the love and care that she not only received but also gave to everyone she interacted with. She was a bundle of joy

with so much spirit, so much strength, and so much love that it tore me to pieces to read about the last moments of her life. It felt so unfair—why did such a lovable, innocent young girl have to live so little and struggle so much? Why did the author and his wife have to have such little time with this wonderful young child? Through the book, I could feel the desperation, the love, and the loss. And despite the intense sadness it brought me, I never regretted reading it. Finding Chika was more than just a beautifully written memoir that I had read; it was the best piece of art I had ever experienced.

Reference

Albom, M. (2019). Finding Chika. HarperCollins Publishers.

