



Last Chance Cafe

Liz Byrski

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Margot detests shopping malls. Any distraction is welcome, and the woman who has chained herself to the escalator, shouting about the perils of consumerism, is certainly that. She recognises Dot immediately - from their time campaigning for women's rights, and further back still, to the heyday of the Sydney Push when Margot married Laurence. Dot is in despair at the abandonment of the sisterhood, at the idea of pole dancing as empowerment and the sight of five year-olds with false eyelashes and padded bras. She's still a fierce campaigner, but these days she isn't sure where to direct her rage. Margot's despair is quieter; a haunting resentment that her youthful ambitions have always been shelved to attend to the needs of others. And as the two women turn to the past for solutions for the future, Margot's family is in crisis. Laurence sets off on a journey in a bid to repress his grief, daughter Lexie loses the job that has been her life for twenty years, and her younger sister Emma hides her pain with shopping binges that plunge her into debt. Liz Byrski assembles a fallible cast of characters who are asking the questions we ask ourselves. What does it mean to grow older? Are we brave enough to free ourselves from the pressure to stay young? And is there ever a stage in life when we can just be ourselves?

Last Chance Cafe Details

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From Reader Review Last Chance Cafe for online ebook

Helen McKenna says

Margot and Dot were once active members of a women's rights group back in the 1960s, but gradually lost touch after Margot got married and settled into family life. Their friendship is renewed after Margot sees a (still protesting) Dot staging a one woman demonstration at a shopping mall in Sydney. Age has apparently done little to dampen Dot's passion for life and standing up for what she believes in, which causes Margot to examine her own suburban life and leaves her wondering if life has passed her by in regard to her own ambitions.

There are many other dramas going on in this delightful story - Margot's ex-husband Laurence is struggling to come to terms with a life changing event, her sister Phylidia learns a painful truth about her husband and both her daughters are caught up in their own crises. Amidst all this, Margot cannot quell her long buried desire to be a writer.

It is refreshing to read a story that not only has older women as the main characters but that portrays them in an interesting and positive way. Margot and Dot are strong, well-rounded characters with a lot of depth, highlighting the fact that people do not become boring or lose passion for life just because they get older.

There are plenty of elements to keep the story moving in Last Chance Cafe. Well written in an easy and engaging style, it kept me interested right until the last page.

A really enjoyable read for any age group, although older women may relate to it more strongly.

Janet Narrier says

A good read, I've read a lot of Liz Byrski's books and have enjoyed them all. although I found this one was not one of her better ones.

Marianne says

“...from childhood to our dotage is there ever a time in a woman's life when it's okay for her to look the age she is?”

Last Chance Café is the sixth book by Australian author, Liz Byrski. At almost seventy, Margot is sure it is too late to return to her youthful dream of becoming a writer, a dream derailed by pregnancy, marriage, children and divorce. But encountering Dot, a fierce campaigner for women's rights and a friend from those youthful days, and getting involved in a new campaign, reignites the passion to write.

Margot's ex-husband, Laurence temporarily escapes to Spain to avoid dealing with a major upheaval in his life; Margot's sister, Phyllida is faced with a major change in her own life, and some shocking revelations about the husband she thought she knew; Margot's daughters, Lexie and Emma both have their own challenges to overcome. But this extended family and their close friends manage to (eventually) pull together and accept each other's support and love, while becoming an integral part of a worthwhile cause.

Byrski gives the reader characters of the type we encounter every day, a setting that feels familiar, natural dialogue and a realistic plot. Perhaps what Byrski writes is chic lit for the mature woman (some have cleverly coined the term “hen lit”), but she always touches on interesting and relevant issues. In this novel, as well as ageing, she touches on the sexualisation of young girls, and the power of market forces on female image. She also takes the reader back to Sydney in the fifties and sixties, the era of the Push. She even manages to include a bit of intrigue: just who is the father of the boy adopted long ago? This is another excellent offering from Liz Byrski and readers will look forward to *In The Company of Strangers*.

Brenda says

Margot was at the shopping centre with the dreaded task of finding herself an outfit to wear to her sister Phyllida’s golden wedding anniversary. Being a Saturday morning, the place teemed with people, something she didn’t enjoy at all. When she heard a commotion coming from the direction of the escalators, she hurried over to see what was going on. She was horrified to see someone she recognised from the days back in the 1960s, when a group of them would campaign for women’s rights. Dot was chained to the escalator, shouting about consumerism and making a nuisance of herself. With security guards heading her way, Margot knew she needed to act, fast!

Margot had problems of her own...her ex-husband Laurence was on a sabbatical to try to come to terms with a life-shattering event he’d told no-one about; her daughters Emma and Lexie both had dramas in their lives which they were trying to deal with, and Phyllida, well she was about to go through a major upheaval which would rock her to the core. All through this, Margot was feeling resentful about everyone coming to her with their problems, and her not being appreciated for who she was...she’d had enough, she had had to put her thoughts of becoming a writer on hold when the family was young...it was her turn now!

Dot and Margot, along with Phyllida and a whole cast of characters make this delightful book a thoroughly enjoyable experience. There is much more to this story than first meets the eye, and with mystery, intrigue and a little suspense thrown in for good measure, I found it a really great read.

Bronwyn Rykiert says

It took me a long time to read this book, not because it was not interesting but I didn't have much time to read. It was good to read about Margot and her family and meeting up again with Dot, a close friend from her younger years.

Maree Kimberley says

As part of my reading for Australian Women Writers Challenge I try to read books I wouldn't usually pick up. Sometimes this works out and sometimes this doesn't.

There are several reviews of this book where the readers absolutely love it. Personally, I found it flat. The characters were cardboard cutouts, the plot pedestrian and some of the dialogue was so inane I literally closed the book and put it down for a while.

But there is a place for this type of book. Some books are great holiday reading, for relaxing on the beach or by the river, for when you're recuperating from illness, or just when you wake up at night and need something to pass the time until you fall asleep again. This, for me, is that type of book.

B the BookAddict says

Liz Byrski is not a bad writer. She does good detail and good dialogue. My only criticism is her plots; if you've read one of her books, then you've kind of read them all. She doesn't vary much in her storylines.

But I do reserve her books for my holiday reading. They are what I read when I'm having a good relax on the beach because I find there is not a lot of effort required to read them. 3★

Jen says

A steady sort of read which waned a bit halfway through but picked up in the last 50 pages. I particularly enjoy that Byrski writes mature aged characters.

Sue Trippas says

This book is a nice read with family relationships and positive messages.

Sharon says

The last thing Margot wanted to be doing on a Saturday morning was dragging herself around the shopping center, but seeing as she needed an outfit for her sister's golden anniversary she didn't have much option. Whilst attempting to weave her way through all the other shoppers, Margot hears quite a bit of yelling going on. She soon finds out where all the noise is coming from and makes her way over to the escalators. Once Margot reaches the escalators, she recognizes a woman named Dot who she knew back in the 1960's. Dot has chained herself to the escalators and Margot knows she needs to get Dot out of there before all hell breaks loose.

Margot felt all she ever did was listen to everyone else's problems and try and help them, but Margot had her own problems and she was tired of putting herself last. From when her kids were young all Margot ever wanted to do was to work towards becoming a writer, but something always got in the way and her dream was put on hold. It was now time for Margot put herself first and make a dream come true, but will Margot's dream of being a writer finally come true?

Last Chance Cafe was a really enjoyable and entertaining read. Recommended.

Helen Merrick says

Give this book to the older woman in your life, whether your mum, grandma, or yourself :-) wonderful story about sisterhood across generations, feminism, activism, and enjoying getting older!

Jenny says

I enjoyed this novel, it grew on me and quite literally I warmed to it - particularly as the characters unraveled their secrets. Each character went through a transition, from 'what has always been' to 'what may life hold now' Loved this aspect of it as it was a positive voice for healthy ageing - whether that be physically, mentally or emotionally. It was also an opportunity to highlight the negative impact of media, advertising and community perceptions can have on young adults body image and self esteem. A nice little package of friendship, enduring relationships, social change with a strong message of not letting life slip by without ensuring that we end up who we want to be.

Clare Sullivan says

I really enjoyed this. A story about a group of connected friends as they age. I've also read Gang of four by the same author - will look out for others.

Corinne Johnston says

It is seven years since I first read this book, and the themes of ageing, women and their friends and family, and the sexualisation by media of young girls are just as relevant.

KylieAtkinson says

Thank fuck that's finished. What a tedious read that was. I almost didn't finish it but I kept hoping it would get better. It didn't.

There are several stories all connected into one via family and friends but there was only one interesting storyline (Donald's) - and that was only after he died! The characters seemed flat, two-dimensional and just not interesting. I really didn't care for any of them and just wished something, anything would happen. I found myself skimming over pages of rehashed waffle. JUST GET ON WITH THE FREAKING STORY! If I wanted a boring snippet of everyday family life, I wouldn't need to read. This is supposed to be escapism to something other than what you already have.

Not highly recommended which is unfortunate for an Australian author.
