



« *“I wanted to understand what it’s like to have a treasure that’s both a burden and a source of joyful memories.”* —CHRIS CANDER »

Clara (whose father gave her the same piano just before he died). Here, Cander shares her journey.

Compare the two stories told in the book. The novel explores our relationship to our things and what happens when we let them go. For Katya, a Russian concert pianist, the Blüthner represented home, childhood and love. When she fled religious persecution in Leningrad, she reluctantly left behind her family and the piano. But Clara, as an adult, felt encumbered by her unplayed piano and impulsively decided to sell it. **What typically drives your work?** Characters. My characters live with me, like tenants in my mind. Clara and Katya came to me unbidden and directed me. **Have you ever pined for a piano?** I’ve never had a piano, but I understand how it feels to be exiled from your family and everything that’s familiar. I was born and raised in Houston, but I married my first husband after a rash courtship and moved to Venezuela. So far from everything I knew, I felt incredibly out of place. **Did Hurricane Harvey’s devastation influence your opus?** I’d already written the book, but it was timely. Clara’s house burns down when she’s 12 and at a sleepover. She loses her parents and all their belongings—except the piano, which was at the tuner. I’ve always pondered the shock, grief and necessity of starting over after a fire. My curiosity and compassion informed my writing of Clara. **Did you feel guilty putting Clara through that loss?** In fiction, you have to do awful things to people to dig out emotions. **Is it hard to leave your characters behind?** Gosh, yes. I miss them. I dream about them. And [I welcome] any chance to revisit them. That’s why I love going to book clubs, where readers have just met them and want to learn more. **How do your characters reflect you?** I don’t talk or think about my first marriage often. By exposing it in fiction, I took away its pain and power. You can choose to rid yourself of a piano or a memory and take a different path. **What do you hope your readers take away from the book?** I’d be honored if they feel they’ve taken an emotional journey and discovered something about themselves.

LOST AND FOUND

Houston-based author Chris Cander dishes on how she fine-tuned her latest book, *The Weight of a Piano: A Novel*.

By Michele Meyer

Random words struck a chord in Houston author Chris Cander, sparking her just-released book, *The Weight of a Piano: A Novel* (\$27, Penguin Random House). While at a book club, she heard a woman mention finding a “good home” for a neglected piano her late father had bought her. “She spoke with reverence and relief in the same breath,” Cander says. “I wanted to understand what it’s like to have a treasure that’s both a burden and a source of joyful memories.” Her curiosity led to a tale of a Blüthner upright piano and two owners 50 years apart: Soviet Jewish immigrant Katya (bequeathed the piano at age 8 in 1962) and American auto mechanic