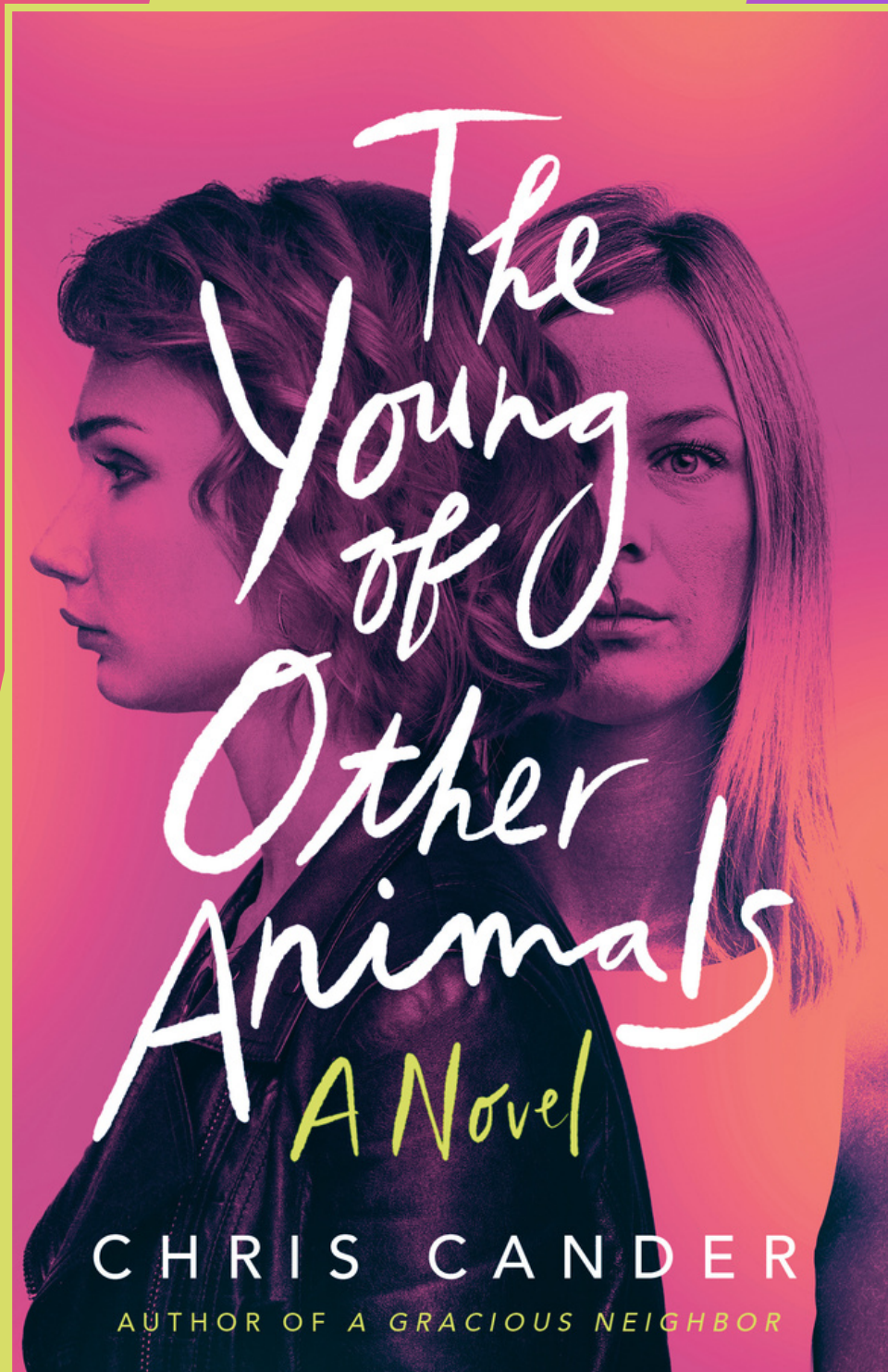


Book Club Kit



The Young of Other Animals

A Novel

CHRIS CANDER

AUTHOR OF A GRACIOUS NEIGHBOR

Dear Reader,

This novel was inspired by a violent attack I endured when I was nineteen. For many years, I refused to talk or even think about what had happened to me. But trauma stays with us, whether we acknowledge it or not. Gradually, I began to use that story as a scaffolding for the women's self-defense courses I teach, and got to the point where I could talk about it almost casually, as if it had happened to someone else. Then, in May 2021, when my daughter was the exact same age I was back then, I decided I was ready to fully externalize the awful memory I'd been carrying around for three decades. In that moment, Paula Baker was born. She and I share a birthday, a home state, and one really terrible night in 1989. The rest of the novel is pure fiction.

The Young of Other Animals follows the lives of Mayree and Paula, a mother and daughter drifting apart, separated by grief and more, after the death of Mayree's husband. Mayree faces a future with no income, career, or social life. Paula, feeling abandoned by the father she loved, is left with only a bitter mother. When Paula reveals that she narrowly escaped a violent assault, Mayree's initial reaction is dismissal and disbelief. But as details unfold, it's clear that it was real and not just one random night gone horribly wrong—someone is out to destroy their lives. With each new threat from Paula's assailant, harrowing family secrets reemerge that force the mother and daughter to confront the shared traumas of their pasts. Drawing on courage and hope, they must save the relationship they never realized they'd lost. Though this family drama explores some dark themes, it's ultimately a story about the redemptive power of women's relationships.

There are so many wonderful books from which to choose, so I thank you for selecting mine to spend time with. I hope you love it and enjoy discussing it with your book club.

Love, Chris



Discussion Questions

1. Did the title, *THE YOUNG OF OTHER ANIMALS*, prepare you for what the story was about? What does the book's title mean to you?
2. The novel has a binary structure, alternating between Mayree and Paula. Did you identify more with one point of view or the other? If so, why?
3. In the acknowledgements, the author mentions that this novel was inspired by a real-life attack that she suffered at age 19, in 1989. In it, she talks about the fallibility of her own memory in the years following that event. How does Paula's memory of her attack affect her in the aftermath?
4. How does the trauma that Mayree experienced at age 16 inform how she interacts with the world, including her marriage to Frank, her friendship with Sissy, and how she parents Paula?
5. Discuss the role of Felicia in the lives of the Baker family and how it compares and contrasts with her own family, especially her nephew, Curtis.
6. What did you think about the interstitial anonymous letters that punctuated the plot? Did they give you insight into the perpetrator's motives or identity?
7. Throughout the story, the women often assume responsibility for their own misfortunes, blaming themselves for their husbands' infidelity or emotional absence, their parents' neglect, or acts of violence or sexual abuse. Do you feel that this phenomenon has evolved in recent history, or does it remain part of the female psyche? Why do you think that is?
8. How did Kelly's betrayal impact Paula's experience of her attack? What should a friend have done in Kelly's position? Do you empathize with Paula's reaction when Kelly revealed how her actions may have contributed to the events of that fateful night?
9. Michael was clearly a villain in this story, but he was also a victim. What do you think should happen to him?
10. The characters in this book are flawed, some more than others. Do you consider them multi-dimensional or merely "unlikeable" and why?

Sissy's King Ranch Casserole

This Lone Star State dish is the epitome of Southern comfort food. Rumor has it the casserole was named after the largest ranch in the USA, the King Ranch, whose 825,000 acres sprawl across South Texas. However, it also owes a debt to its Mexican casserole counterpart, chilaquiles. Most recipes call for a can of mushroom soup, but Sissy's has been modified to satisfy Mayree's palate. Feel free to add fresh mushrooms or substitute cream of mushroom soup if you prefer.

Ingredients

1 green bell pepper, diced

1 onion, diced

1 green onion, diced (green part only)

2 Tbsp butter + more for dish

3 C cooked chicken, chopped

1-1/2 cans (15-3/4 oz) cream of chicken soup

*1 can (10 oz) RO*TEL original diced tomatoes and green chilies (with liquid)*

1 tsp chili powder

1 tsp ground cumin

1 tsp salt

1/2 tsp black pepper

2 C (or more) tortilla chips, crushed

2 C grated Cheddar cheese

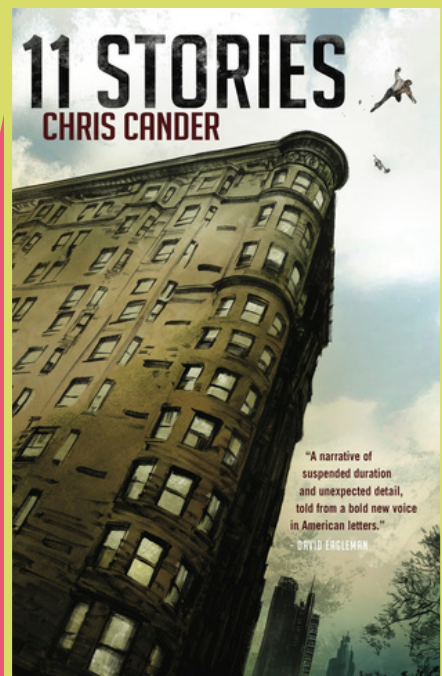
Directions

Preheat oven to 325o. In a cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat, sauté bell pepper and onion 5 minutes or until tender. Stir in chicken and next 6 ingredients; cook, stirring occasionally for 2 minutes. Layer half the crushed tortilla chips in bottom of a lightly buttered 13- x 9-inch baking dish. Layer with half each of the chicken mixture and shredded cheese. Repeat the layers, ending with cheese. Top with chopped green onion. Bake, uncovered, at 325°F for 45 minutes, or until thoroughly heated. (Prep: 25 min., cook: 10 min., bake: 45 min.)

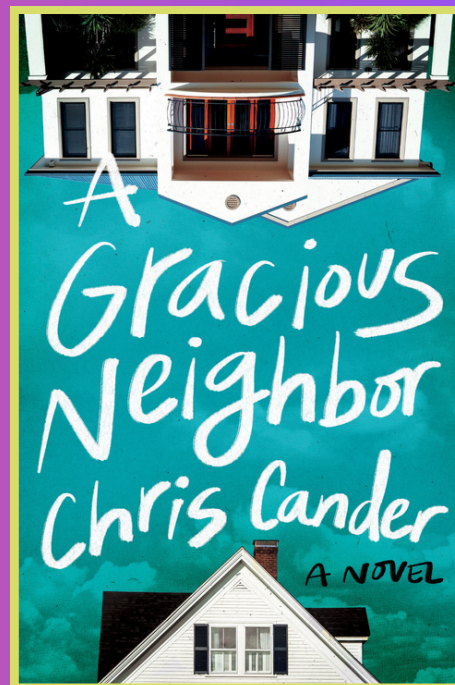
Also by Chris Cander



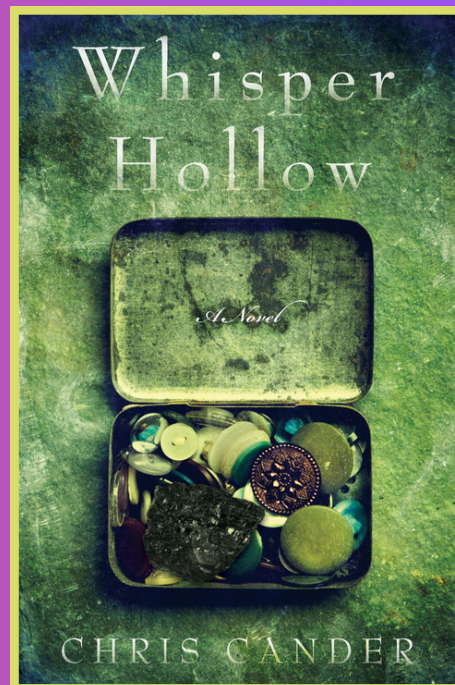
“Immense, intense and imaginative....The Weight of a Piano is about memory and identity....Cander is a smart, deft storyteller [and] understands how something as beloved as a piano can actually be a burden.”
—The New York Times Book Review



“Her conclusion provides grounds for belief in the possibility of redemption; her sensitivity ensures that this novel will appeal to anyone with a story to tell, a group that includes us all.”
—Publishers Weekly ([STARRED REVIEW](#))



Cander cleverly combines sharply observed satire, a keen sense of place, and a feminist sensibility.
—Publishers Weekly



“Cander divinely delves into multiple points of view, crafting a collage of vibrant, layered characters while charting six decades of poignant, precise moments. A distinctive novel that sublimely measures the distressed though determined heartbeat of a small mountain community.”
—Kirkus Reviews ([STARRED REVIEW](#))