



# This Is Your Life, Harriet Chance!

*Jonathan Evison*

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## **This Is Your Life, Harriet Chance!** Jonathan Evison

With her husband Bernard now in the grave, seventy-nine-year-old Harriet Chance sets sail on an ill-conceived Alaskan cruise only to discover through a series of revelations that she's been living the past sixty years of her life under entirely false pretenses. There, amid the buffets and lounge singers, between the imagined appearance of her late husband and the very real arrival of her estranged daughter midway through the cruise, Harriet is forced to take a long look back, confronting the truth about pivotal events that changed the course of her life.

Jonathan Evison—bestselling author of *West of Here*, *The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving*, and *All About Lulu*—has crafted a bighearted novel with a supremely endearing heroine at its center. Through Harriet, he paints a bittersweet portrait of a postmodern everywoman with great warmth, humanity, and humor. Part dysfunctional love story, part poignant exploration of the mother/daughter relationship, nothing is what it seems in this tale of acceptance, reexamination, forgiveness, and, ultimately, healing. It is sure to appeal to admirers of Evison's previous work, as well as fans of such writers as Meg Wolitzer, Junot Diaz, and Karen Joy Fowler.

## **This Is Your Life, Harriet Chance! Details**

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Author : Jonathan Evison

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# **From Reader Review This Is Your Life, Harriet Chance! for online ebook**

## **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

I bought this when it was \$1.20 for Kindle, because Harriet goes on an Alaskan cruise. (I am going on one this summer.)

It was okay, a quick read, non-linear with each chapter told in a "this is your life!" tone. Family secrets, money grubbing children, and one dead but not gone spouse. It didn't have too much of what I usually hate about older characters, but I wanted to care about all of them more.

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## **Angela M says**

It's one of those books where I knew from the first page it was going to be a good one because there was just something about the writing and something about Harriet Chance that drew me in . Moving back and forth from the present to various times in her 79 years , part of the book is narrated by someone we never know who speaks directly to Harriet. I know I'm dating myself but I do remember watching the TV show This is Your Life. I may have been around ten years old, but I can still see the show's host , with a book in his hands, reading directly to the person whose life was on display as we learned about events and people from their past . This is exactly how it felt . This narration alternates with one by a straight third person narrator , but it is this outside look into Harriet's life - her thoughts, heart and soul , the good , the bad and absolutely the ugly things that happened . The development of this character was really amazing . Even though it is not in chronological order , by the end of the novel we have a complete portrait of Harriet - the main events and the trivial details of the life that didn't turn out exactly as she hoped it would.

She's a widow of two years , still exhausted from caring for her husband who had Alzheimer's, doesn't have the best relationship with her son and daughter and her dead husband , Bernard visits her frequently. These conversations are sweet and sad and not realistic unless you believe in ghosts , but I didn't mind. They were part of the revelation of Harriet's life.

While on an Alaskan cruise, that her husband won, a lifetime of deception surfaces. While you can't help but have your sympathies lie with Harriet , the events of the past reflect that no one is perfect here , including Harriet. It's funny at times and heartbreaking at other times , but maybe that sums up most people's lives .

Thanks to Algonquin Books and Edelweiss.

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## **Shelby \*trains flying monkeys\* says**

I've read one book of Jonathan Evison's previously The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving and I loved it. So I hit that request button in a hurry when I saw this one come up on Netgalley.

This is the story of Harriet Chance. Told almost like a talk show host is hosting it for our viewing

pleasure/displeasure. (There actually was a show like this on a hundred years ago-I barely remember it and I'm ancient)

Harriet's story is told through flash backs and present time. Her present time is shortly after her husband Bernard has died and she found out that he purchased the both of them tickets for an Alaskan cruise. Harriet's children don't want her to go because they think she is not in the best of health. Maybe, because she is suddenly seeing and talking to her dead husband.

But those children are not completely innocent in their looking after their aging mother. Assholes. (I didn't like either of them)

After realizing that she hasn't done much for herself in her entire lifetime Harriet decides to take the trip anyways. You do have to live sometime.

She plans on going with her best friend Mildred, but at the last minute Mildred backs out of the trip. She sends a letter with Harriet to be read after she starts the cruise. (You know that shit is not going to end well.)

Harriet's life showcase shows that she made some choices that changed her life..sometimes for the good and sometimes not. Some of the things that happened to her were just not her fault. But no one is completely innocent in a life.

**Yes, all in all, things could be a lot worse. You could be divorced. You could be a widow. Gallo could stop selling wine by the jug. And where would that leave you, Harriet? Bored and sober.**

Mine probably goes about like this....

This book did make me wonder through my memories at my life though and it frigging scared the shit out of me and made me want to give this book a one star.

**You can't remember getting old. You can't remember when exactly you started carrying umbrellas just in case, when you started scheduling your weekly hair washings, oversalting your food, or reusing zipper-lock bags. It happened gradually.**

PS..there is a habit of Harriet's that grated on my nerves through the whole book. She calls every dang body "dear"...

*Booksource: Netgalley in exchange for review.*

Now for the fun part!

I'm spotlighting a reviewer that my friend Kelly ~~made~~ told me to start following. He reviews awesomely so I did as I was told. For once.

Here is Larry's review. He uses words to review instead of cuss words and gifs like I do..but he still is pretty cool.

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## Julie Christine says

As a kid, I could see the Sherwood Arms (aka Sherwood Village) from our kitchen window. No, not in the Sarah Palin sense of seeing it from the kitchen window. I mean, literally. The retirement community sat on the other side of abandoned cow pastures and the ruin of an old dairy barn. Right there on 5th avenue, in the village of Sequim (pronounced Skwim, in case you're wondering), tucked in the rain shadow of the Olympic Peninsula. It's still there, you know. So is my childhood home. But that empty pasture is now a ruin of hastily-built subdivisions and Sequim is a disaster of big box stores and highway overpasses.

Sequim is still a retirement Mecca, however; the physical beauty of its surroundings is irresistible, as are the low cost of living, the peaceful country roads, and yes, the convenience of a Costco. This stretch of the Peninsula (which includes my current home, about 30 miles to the east) boasts a mere 17-20" of annual rainfall, a meteorological anomaly in its situation on the edge of the rainiest spot in the continental United States—the Olympic National Forest. No wonder Harriet and Bernard Chance left their crowded, gray, over-priced North Seattle neighborhood to spend their golden years in a cedar-shingled, slate-tiled open floor plan dream.

Yep, Sequim is a real place. And Harriet Chance is every elderly woman you stand behind at the checkout counter, trying to keep your patience and good humor as she sorts out her coupons or painstakingly writes a check. She shops alone, because her spouse of fifty-five years is imprisoned by a decaying brain, held captive for his own safety in the Sherwood Arms, just a couple miles away, over there on 5th Avenue.

You don't really see all the Harriet Chances who cross your path on a daily basis, do you? Little old women are virtually invisible. Pretty much past their sell-by date, they're too slow, too dull, to merit much more than a pitying glance. Easy targets for a bit of behind-the-hand snickering or a roll of the eyes.

And yet, in the care of Jonathan Evison's ever-gracious, humane and tender wit, one little old woman assumes a gravitas of Tolstian proportions. And is as tragic a figure. Harriet Chance, *This Is Your Life*, indeed.

I wasn't sure how I'd settle into the structure of alternating chapters told in 2nd-person POV by a game show host persona who spools out the knotted mess of Harriet's past in a spirited play-by-play, with a traditional 3rd person POV recounting Harriet's present existence as a widow embarking alone on a cruise to Alaska. Would it be too schtick-y? Too meta? Is this that 21st century White Male Author Too Clever By Half thing that turns me away from other writers whose first names also happen to be Jonathan?

Well, I settled in just fine. Because this particular Jonathan combines a huge heart with deft writing with humor with empathy with unforgettable characters with superb storytelling. Yep, he's all that, and a bag of chips.

The breezy style of *This Is Your Life, Harriet Chance* belies the profundity of its themes and the dark, dark secrets of Harriet's past. It's not so much the revelation of these secrets—you figure out pretty quickly what's gone down across the decades of one misbegotten life—it's that you end up nodding your head knowingly; these are people in *your* life, and you get so darn attached to the outcomes.

Funny, I hadn't intended to read another book that featured Alzheimer's; I'm a bit played out on that theme, personally. And yet I found more soul, more of a connection to the raging fury and heartbreak of dementia in the few pages it is revealed here than I did in a recently-read epic where the disease played out over hundreds

of pages. It has something to do with the power of humor: in the right hands, humor becomes a release, a relief, a mirror we can bear to look into.

Evison fully inhabits his elderly heroine. It takes considerable skill not to let a carefully-designed novel take over the narrative, so that all the reader sees is the clever framework. No, what we see is Harriet. Finally, the invisible old woman takes her well-deserved place in our imaginations. Maybe now we'll look more closely at the souls who cross our paths in the real world.

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### **Amber says**

Harriet Chance is 78 years old and has been taking care of her husband Bernard and her children for a very long time. Now her children are doing their own thing and her husband has passed away. When she receives a prize her late husband won in a raffle to go on an Alaskan cruise, Harriet Chance takes the opportunity not knowing what will happen next will send her on a topsy-turvy adventure. Want to know more? Read this book for yourself and find out.

This was a pretty good read. I enjoy reading stories about cruises and families. If you do too, then check this book out for yourself at your local library and wherever books are sold.

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### **Diane S ? says**

This is your review, Harriet Chance. No, way too corny but this book is written in that kind of style. An unknown narrator taking us back and forth and through the present of Harriet's life. Like the TV show that I kind of remember my mom watching. This book is laugh out loud funny at time and incredibly sad at others. Don't think I will ever forget Harriet and the lobster. You have too read this to understand and experience.

Kept asking myself what I would do if I found out the things Harriet did at the age of seventy eight? Memories, memories that make up a life, things we remember and regret, things we remember and cherish. How to understand how her life got here from there, but she does have some help from her two year dead husband. Some of that part is pretty amusing too. The cruise to Alaska will prove memorable in more ways than one, but it gives her a chance to reflect, realize her mistakes and make at least one thing better.

Seems there is a spate of elderly women novels, this year. I have read a few and this is one of my favorites. So easy to identify with, except the dead husband part maybe, though I did appreciate that little insertion of whimsy. We all have regrets of some sort or another, things we would like to go back and change but of course this is impossible. We all do, the best we can and so did Harriet.

ARC from publisher.

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### **Larry H says**

I'd rate this 3.5 stars.

Full disclosure: I received an advance copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an unbiased review.

At 79 years old, perhaps Harriet Chance hasn't quite lived the life she imagined. Her husband Bernard has been dead nearly two years but he has recently been showing up again (and not just when she's alone), and their encounters seem very real, despite the fact that everyone else thinks she's losing her marbles. When she finds out that just before his death, Bernard entered a drawing for an Alaskan cruise—and one—Harriet sees this as a chance to scatter his ashes and perhaps move on into her twilight years.

Convincing her children (who are doting on her for the wrong reasons) that she's perfectly capable of going on a cruise by herself is one thing; actually managing the cruise at her age is another. So what if she indulges in a little more wine than she should? She's entitled. But when a long-held secret is divulged, Harriet is utterly unprepared for how it will cause her to question everything she has held dear for 60 years, and even more, she's totally thrown by the surprise appearance of her estranged daughter on the cruise.

***This is Your Life, Harriet Chance!*** is a rollicking ride through all of the moments, big and small, that brought Harriet to her current state. As further clarity is given to incidents in her childhood, throughout her marriage and raising her children, and caring for Bernard through his decline, you begin to learn that Harriet isn't as blameless as she seems for incidents in her life, but she's also not the only one responsible. This is a book about soldiering through disappointment when your dreams don't work out as you had hoped, the sacrifices we are forced to make in life and how we handle them, how our behavior and the choices we make can haunt us, and how love can both surprise and injure us.

I loved Jonathan Evison's first book, ***The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving***, and this book had a similar banter-ish tone to it. This is both a humorous and emotional book, sometimes melodramatic, sometimes surprising, sometimes endearing. The narrator of the book kept referring to the way that each episode in Harriet's life would come up at random as like a pinball machine, and that is the way it felt at times. It was hard to keep the way her life flowed straight when things came up willy-nilly in that way, but although some of the incidents in her life were predictable, Harriet is still an interesting, albeit slightly flawed, character, even if everything that happened wasn't her fault.

I enjoyed this book, although not as much as Evison's first, but it's definitely and interesting and somewhat heartfelt look at the near-totality of a woman's life, and how each event somehow led to another.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo...>

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## **Clif Hostetler says**

This novel reviews the life of a seventy-eight-year-old woman named Harriet Chance. It is a life filled with many regrets and disappointments. As the book progresses additional layers of difficult history are revealed.

She was born ten years too early to benefit from the liberating effects of the book *Feminine Mystic* (published 1963) so she dutifully gave up a budding career and got married. Her enduring patience managed to allow the marriage to survive in spite of her husband's difficult personality. In his later years he suffered from Alzheimer's which she patiently cared for as long as she could. His death brought relief for her, but then she learned that (view spoiler).

That was bad enough but then additional layers of Harriet's background are revealed. Her relationship with her parents was strained, and as a young person she had experienced sexual abuse from an uncle. Then the reader is shocked to be informed that (view spoiler).

As this story drew near its end I thought surely something optimistic or uplifting would occur. There is some resolution of feelings in Harriet's relationship with her daughter. But overall I experienced this book as a downer.

The omniscient narrative speaks to Harriet in second person voice bouncing through time, first stating the age, year and then proceeding to say, "Harriet, then you did \_\_\_\_, or \_\_\_\_ happened to you." Exceptions to this second person voice occurred when her dead husband shows up and there's dialog between the two.

At first I as a reader took this to be an indication of Harriet's dementia, but then the book provides a couple scenes showing her husband's afterlife (presumably heaven) where he has to bargain for permission to return to earth to try to straighten things out. So I guess the author is trying to let the reader know that her husband's spirit is indeed returning from the dead to speak to her.

I'm trying to think of what sort of person to whom I would recommend this book. Well, perhaps an older reader who feels their life has been miserable might be made to feel better by reading this story about Harriet who had a more miserable life.

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## **Jennifer Lane says**

### **What's the Point?**

I found this novel to be well-written but depressing and meaningless. I was craving humor and some sort of purpose in this examination of a woman's life, and those cravings remain unsatisfied. But I did finish the book, which says something about the easy writing style.

Harriet Chance is a 79-year-old widow who learns her husband booked an Alaskan cruise for them before his death. She takes the cruise alone, much to the consternation of her grown son and daughter. Her health is failing and she has many regrets.

The story bounces from present day to points throughout her life, through the point of view of a rather nasty and cruel narrator. I wasn't sure if the narrator represented death like in *The Book Thief*? Every flashback seemed to cover a mistake or regret, without relief or later character growth.

One reason I didn't connect to Harriet is personal. My parents are both 79 but they act MUCH younger than Harriet. I guess I'm lucky to have such young-at-heart parents, and it made it hard for her character to seem realistic to me. Everything else in the story is so steeped in realism--the strained mother-daughter relationship, the traditional gender roles, the struggles with weight and alcohol, the failed career dreams, the family dysfunction and infidelity--that I wondered why I was wasting my time reading a story when I could just watch the people around me suffer through life.

Hopefully we'll enjoy our next book club selection more!

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## Catherine McKenzie says

This is a great book.

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## Rebecca says

In Evison's fourth novel, a widow in her seventies relives the ups and downs of her life while on an Alaskan cruise to scatter her husband's ashes. Chapters alternate between a third-person account of the cruise and a second-person survey of Harriet's past, delivered in the format of TV's *This Is Your Life*. The narration is fresh and effective because the gradual revelations undermine Harriet's elderly persona in such surprising ways. She is an out-of-the-ordinary but believable protagonist who, like all of us, has a mixture of victories and disappointments behind her. This is a charming novel about learning to reckon with the past.

(Non-subscribers can read an excerpt of my full review at [BookBrowse](#).)

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## marilyn says

This was my latest library book and I enjoyed it but was left with sadness. Sad for Harriet, sad for her daughter Carolyn (although I have hope for Carolyn), sad that children aren't treasured the way they should be treasured.

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## Karen says

A "this is your life" to 78 yr old Harriett, who lost her husband some months prior. This goes back and forth at different stages of Harriet's life and her relationships with family and others. Sometimes sad, sometimes funny.

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## Annet says

This is a bittersweet book, a heartbreaker really, though humorous too, written in a special sort of way. Like this: *'Look at you Harriet Chance, so diligent, so fastidious in your attention to detail!'*

And... *'Well Harriet, it's come to this... You've lost control of your life. Or Bernard's life, anyway.*

*Probably a blessing, don't you think? Really, it ought to come as a relief, when you get right down to it...At least they're not trying to take your house. At least they're not coming for you...'*

It's like the writer is addressing Harriet in a wise, didactic sort of way. The writer being Harriet herself probably... It's a story that makes you laugh and cry.

Harriet, a 78-year old lady, lost her husband of years Bernard and takes a cruise to Alaska to scatter his ashes. And... look back at her life. A cruise her husband apparently planned she found out after a call she receives. *"Hmph. Alaska", "she says, straightening up. What on earth were you thinking dear?* Her estranged daughter Caroline joins her unexpectedly when her long year friend Mildred pulls out of the trip,

for obvious reasons we learn later. The story alternates between Harriet at 78, but also as a baby, in her twenties, thirties, forties, fifties... And we get to know Harriet, her family and her life. A life of abuse, forbidden relationships, joy and bore, careers and lost careers, estranged children and spouses, friendships betrayed, a husband estranged by alzheimer's in the end.... To be honest, it's not very nice, what we hear and witness. But Harriet is seeking redemption and is looking for a fresh start, her thoughts, regrets, stubbornness and determinations are heartfelt and honest....

Together with her daughter and Kurt Pickens, an overweight sleeveless shirt guy (shirts with hilarious crude titles such as: "I'm a virgin (but this is an old shirt) ") who joins their estranged party on the cruise journey to Alaska. While her dead husband Bernhard visits her as a sort of 'ghost' on board and exchanges short observations about their life with her.

A laugh and a tear. Yes... I did cry a bit in the end. That's a sign of a good book for me.

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### **Phrynne says**

Poor Harriet. What a messed up, mixed up life she led. And what awful people she led it with, including her husband, her parents, her 'uncle', her best friend and her children. All of them! Abysmal people.

Regardless of this the book is utterly charming and a most enjoyable read. Funny too more often than not although there are some heart breaking moments as well. I have not done an Alaskan cruise yet but this story put it on my bucket list! I am sure I could get a lot more out of it than Harriet did and I really want to see those glaciers.

A short, entertaining book and well worth a read:)

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