

NMPL BOOK CLUB – MAY 13, 2014 @ 6:30

Author Bio

- Birth— July, 1968 Seattle, Washington
- Education—Art Institute of Seattle
- Currently—lives in Montana

Jamie Ford is the son of a Chinese-American father and the great-grandson of Nevada mining pioneer Min Chung. Min immigrated from Kaiping, China, to San Francisco in 1865, where he adopted the Western name William Ford, thus confusing countless generations. Jamie grew up near Seattle's Chinatown; he now lives in Montana with his wife and children.

Ford is the author of two novels: the bestselling *The Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* (2009) and *Songs of Willow Frost* (2013). He is also an award-winning short-story writer, an alumnus of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers, and a survivor of Orson Scott Card's Literary Boot Camp. (*Adapted from the publisher.*)

Discussion Questions

1. William's life at Sacred Heart is, he feels, a hard one. Do you agree? In the long run, do the caregivers at Sacred Heart do more to help or harm their young wards?
2. The orphans at Sacred Heart share a collective "birthday," one for boys and one for girls. What would it be like to celebrate such an event? Would feel less special without a focus on the individual, or even more joyful to share it with a community?
3. On May 4, 1931, the first bookmobile hit the streets of Seattle, where it did indeed visit the historical Sacred Heart Orphanage (as well as Boeing Field). Why do you think there was such a need to bring the library to its patrons, rather than allowing those patrons to visit the library as they chose?
4. What qualities does Liu Song share with her mother? How are their lives similar or different?
5. Does Liu Song's mother represent strength, weakness, or a little of both? Do you think she knew she was a second wife?
6. Why doesn't Liu Song study Cantonese Opera instead of pursuing a career in film and stage?
7. What do you think happened to Mr. Butterfield after the loss of his music store? Personally and professionally, how would he react to Liu Song's newfound fame as Willow?
8. Imagine that you are Liu Song and pregnant under her circumstances. What would you do? Who might you tell? Would you keep the baby?
9. The novel explores the subject abandonment, whether by wilful desertion or by circumstance. Does abandonment take on different forms among contemporary families?
10. In the time period the novel is set, economic and social classes were clearly defined, and while change was desired by some, it was feared by others. Do you think the time we live in today is more just and fair, or are we in fact worse off?
11. The social worker Mrs. Peterson represents an outside authority at a time when mothers had fewer rights to their children than fathers. When did that begin to change and why?

Songs of Willow Frost ~ Jamie Ford

NMPL BOOK CLUB – MAY 13, 2014 @ 6:30

12. What factors contributed to the eventual demise of the grand movie palaces of the 1920's and 30's?
13. Willow always knew where her son was, so why didn't she come back sooner, especially as she gained success?
14. Why does Willow die in all her films?
15. How do you think Charlotte's death impacted Sister Briganti?
16. In the end, Willow comes back for William. What do you think happened to them after the novel's conclusion? What happened to her career?
17. Overall, do you think the story is one of hope and promise or suffering and sacrifice?

JOTTINGS...