

My Last Continent ~ Midge Raymond

Last Man Off ~ Matt Lewis

Page Turners Meeting – November 14, 2017 @ 6:30

Discussion Questions:

1. In the first few pages of *My Last Continent*, Deb offers the following analysis of why the *Australis* and Air New Zealand Flight 901 both crashed in Antarctica: “Each was felled by what its crew knew existed but was unable to see, or chose not to see” (page 1). Do you think this is a self-aware comment on Deb’s personal history or on Keller’s final moments? Why do we feel the need to castigate others when analyzing tragedies in hindsight?
2. Consider your first impression of Deb and Keller’s relationship coupled with Deb’s belief that “we have fallen in love with each other as much as with Antarctica, and we have yet to separate ourselves, and what we are, from this place” (page 14). How did your opinion of their relationship change as you learned more about their history? Do you think Deb’s assessment rings true throughout their relationship?
3. One of the major thematic points of Keller’s story line is the concept of being changed by a journey. What were Keller’s touchstones in his evolution from grief-stricken lawyer to Antarctic researcher? Do you think it is possible point to specific moments in his journey, or was it more of a gradual development? What role, if any, did Deb have in all of this?
4. According to Keller, whereas previously he lived in blissful ignorance and was then caught unaware, in Antarctica “you know the risks—the hazards are tangible.” (page 72). Was Keller truly always aware of the risks in Antarctica? Which way of living do you prefer?
5. Discuss the paradox of Antarctica as Midge Raymond presents it: a place that is attractive to tour groups due to its unique climate and wildlife, yet is faced with a constantly changing landscape due in part to those same tourists. What do you make of the give-and-take nature of environments like Antarctica that are both preserved and harmed by tourism?
6. Kate and Richard are presented as foils and mirrors for Deb and Keller. What similarities do you find between the two couples? Did you like one more than the other? Compare how the two couples relate to each other and their difficult relationships with the truth.
7. Icebergs and what is hidden are a dominant theme in the book. Discuss how the chronological structure and the way previously unknown facts and events were presented influenced your understanding of the characters and their motivation.
8. According to Deb, in Adélie penguin colonies, mothers focus on the chick most likely to continue the next generation (page 162), a characterization she sees reflected in her own family dynamics. Would you consider Deb a reliable narrator in this instance? What sort of events may have shaded her understanding of her relationship with her mother?
9. Deb says to Kate, “It seems like there are two kinds of people who come to Antarctica. Those who have run out of places to go, and those who have run out of places to hide” (page 179). Do you think Deb really believes this? In which camp would you place Deb and Keller? Why do you think Deb doesn’t talk to Kate about her love for the penguins and the natural landscape?

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10. Keller's initial denunciation of tourism in Antarctica seems at odds with his later employment on the *Australis*, a cruise ship, only a year later. Why do you think he changed his mind? Is he rejecting his ideals in order to return to the continent?

11. Consider the book's title, ***My Last Continent***, and Keller's observation that explorers were obsessed with firsts and now society is obsessed with lasts (page 190). In what ways is Antarctica a "last continent" for those who visit? Why do you think the author chose this title?

JOTTINGS...

In the book, Keller describes his feelings towards Antarctica as *fernweh*, i.e., the German term for longing for somewhere you've never been (page 100). Discuss what places you feel *fernweh* toward and why you have never visited.

Penguin Watch offers ways to support Antarctic penguin colonies. Consider participating by observing and marking penguins, nests, eggs, and their neighbors in research images. For more information visit **www.penguinwatch.org**