

BOOK CHAT ***WHITE PEOPLE***

Did you know? author Allan Gurganus:

- trained as a painter and has art displayed in public and private collections?
- received 2 years of college credit for the 1200 books he read in the Navy?
- grew up in the South but could not write about it until he left there?
- believes heroes are the people who get up every day and try?

In “Reassurance” the main character looks back at his life from beyond the grave and says, “It seems to me from here that your Frank has cared way too much for how others saw him.” (p. 188) The same thing can be said of many high school students. How does one avoid this and still feel accepted?

We all learn lessons from our parents, our school, and our religious leaders. What life lessons have you learned in unexpected places?

Think of the family stories passed down to you. What meaning do they give to your life? What stories from your life will you pass on to others? Why?

The character in “Blessed Assurance” says, “You know how it is, once a crowd splits into separate faces, nothing can ever mash them back into that first safe shape.” (p. 211) What different ways do we group people (freshmen/seniors, male/female, black/white, gay/straight), and how does this make it “safe?” What does it tell us about our preconceptions and stereotyping of others? Why is it important not to group people together?

Gurganus states, “My goal is to write the funniest books possible about the worst things that can happen to people. The sadder our world becomes, the holier comedy grows.” How does humor help you deal with serious situations?

In “Condolences to Every One of Us” Mrs. Gracie writes a letter and concludes, “We are really the lucky ones. The rest think they are outside looking in at happiness. If they only knew. When the highs and lows are so far apart, it’s hard to stay in the middle and think of yourself as a good person.” (p. 37) Do you consider yourself a lucky person? A happy person? A good person? Why? If not, what would need to change to bring this about?

Jerry, the main character in “Blessed Assurance” carries the guilt of his actions many years later. How do we forgive ourselves for our guilty choices? Name some things you have done that make you feel proud.

The father in “Minor Heroism” cannot understand his son. What can we do to help people understand and accept who we really are?

What have you learned about being a friend?