



## Dear Current Occupant

*Chelene Knight*

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## **Dear Current Occupant** Chelene Knight

From Vancouver-based writer Chelene Knight, *Dear Current Occupant* is a creative non-fiction memoir about home and belonging set in the 80s and 90s of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Using a variety of forms, Knight reflects on her childhood through a series of letters addressed to all of the current occupants now living in the twenty different houses she moved in and out of with her mother and brother. From blurry non-chronological memories of trying to fit in with her own family as the only mixed East Indian/Black child, to crystal clear recollections of parental drug use, Knight draws a vivid portrait of memory that still longs for a place and a home.

Peering through windows and doors into intimate, remembered spaces now occupied by strangers, Knight writes to them in order to deconstruct her own past. From the rubble of memory she then builds a real place in order to bring herself back home.

## **Dear Current Occupant Details**

Date : Published March 1st 2018 by BookThug

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Author : Chelene Knight

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## **From Reader Review Dear Current Occupant for online ebook**

### **Lenore says**

I never know how to rate a personal memoir. How can it be less than 5 stars when it is a reflection of a part of the author's growing up experience? Beautifully written.

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### **Helen Polychronakos says**

When the book arrived, I was dealing with many deadlines. I did not have time to read it, but told myself I would look at one page to get a feel for it. I could not put it down. Chelene Knight describes her childhood through the Vancouver apartments she grew up in. The writing in this mixed-genre memoir is honest and unconstrained: the sentences flow and the images render the characters and events in poignant detail.

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### **Mridula says**

I was curious about this book as anything about identity and 'home' generally peaks my interest. Author Chelene Knight surpassed what I hoped for and expected. Dear Current Occupant is a brilliant memoir.

Knight uses a unique, kaleidoscope style to present her story. We see bits and pieces of her childhood merging and then morphing into something greater. The reader learns about her family and her struggles around identity--in particular, growing up mixed race within crippling poverty.

Dear Current Occupant is both eloquent and stunning in presentation. Knight plays with boundaries, forms, and non-linear ways of grasping the experience of identity. It was a pleasure to read and I would highly recommend it.

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### **Dení C. says**

This book is Real, raw, heartbreaking and heart-mending. Chelene made me connect with her inner child and her mother. I felt the ache, anguish and love with her. She touched every fiber of my soul and took my heart on an emotional rollercoaster.

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### **Travis Lupick says**

This is not a review but is based on an interview I had with the author. It was originally published in the Georgia Straight newspaper.

In Chelene Knight's memoir of a nomadic childhood in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, she shares fragments of her life that are so nakedly candid, the reader can feel like they've intruded on a private conversation or wandered into a room they were forbidden to enter.

"I lay in bed and searched the ceiling for her," Knight writes about her mother in *Dear Current Occupant*. "I slept with my shoes on in case she came home screaming that we had to leave.

"I worried about her most when the bathroom door was closed. I worried when the light under the door didn't change because I knew what the frozen light meant," reads another passage. "I worried that she'd never come back and I would have to pack my things again."

It's a gritty and often heartbreaking journey through the eyes and mind of a child. But, in a telephone interview, Knight emphasized there's also hope buried in *Dear Current Occupant*.

"There are so many stories of struggle and abuse and neglect," she told the Straight. "I think that a lot of young girls think, 'Well, that's my path. This is what I've seen, this is the way I grew up, and this is the only way to go.'

"I'm showing folks that 'Yes, this is kind of rough stuff, but...there is light at the end of the tunnel. You can go through all of these things and still be bloody amazing.'"

Published last month by Book\*hug, the book recounts Knight's disjointed memories of no less than 25 locations where she lived through the 1980s and '90s. Some, many Vancouver readers will quickly recognize, such as "Palms Motel, Kingsway". Others are labelled with less specific descriptions: "Apartment on Clark Drive above the convenience store", for example.

As the title suggests, Knight hopes the people living in these buildings today will find the book she's written. But *Dear Current Occupant* is also a letter to the mother that Knight describes in its pages.

"As a way for me to say 'Here's what I went through, here's the relationship that I wish I had with you,'" she explained.

Today, Knight's mother still lives in the Downtown Eastside.

"She struggles a bit here and there, but she's super supportive of my work," Knight reported. "Our relationship is really strong."

*Dear Current Occupant* began as a single poem that was published in 2015 in Knight's first book, *Braided Skin*.

"Commuting via transit from where I live now [in South Vancouver] to where I work downtown, I would pass a lot of these houses that I lived in," Knight said. "I would look out the SkyTrain window and I would see these places and it would really resonate with me and something would happen.

"I needed to write about it," she continued. "I took a little walking tour around all of these places...and I just stood out front with a notebook and a pen and I'd see what transpired. I realized that a lot of the memories that were locked away and that I had not thought about for years and years and years started to come back."

With a mix of essays, poetry, and photographs, Knight has created a vivid account of the turbulent childhood she spent in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. It's a touching if troubled portrait, both of the relationship Knight shared with her mother and of the community where they called so many places home.

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## Heather says

The structure of this book really gives you the feeling of being in all these apartments and hotel rooms. It was palpable. Photos were remarkable too. Captures the guilt and love and desperation of having a parent who is a burden on a child. Some children have so much to carry. Knight turns it into poetry. Beautiful work.

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## Isabella Wang says

For those out there who weren't hugged enough as children— trust that Chelene's words will hold you as you read them, like a hug, because sometimes to have someone say, "I understand, I've been there, I hear

you,” means as much as just that.

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### **Kim Clark says**

"When all else fails, build a fort." Chelene Knight has done just that, reconstructing her sketchy/painful/hopeful childhood (growing herself up in Hogan's Alley, Vancouver) into a fort, a quilt, a beautiful memoir of prose and poetry, including 90s-style photos (So good!) taken by Jade Melnychuk. Details make the writing shine...the red shoes, a broken doorknob, stairways up and down. Make sure you read the endnotes! I was so curious about how Knight found the perfect shape for this oh-so-personal offering. She says, "Fragments came together in various forms, and craved the folding of poetic verse. Dear Current Occupant is many things. It is a quilt. Each square, each patch--doin' the work." Dear Current Occupant is innovative, heart-wrenching and essential reading...and rereading! And if you get a chance to hear/see her read, do it!

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### **Kevin says**

A deeply personal, sometimes searing, and always honest letter from Chelene Knight to her former homes, her mother, and her childhood. A sharp little book with colour pictures inside - kudos to BookThug for investing in this. Dear Current Occupant is lyrical and arguably should be read in one sitting. On one level it seems wrong to consume a life's story during one sitting, but the short verses pull you in and take you through Knight's early life like a movie. I think an affecting reading of this memoir could be performed, too, should the author ever choose to adapt it for stage.

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### **litost says**

Very poetically written. Just short snatches, not enough for me to follow the story. Very personal, must have been cathartic to write.

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### **Alexis says**

A beautiful, poetic and evocative use of creative non-fiction. This book is very moving and vulnerable and tender. The format is what really makes it interesting. This is a story of survival.

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### **Carole Yeaman says**

Muddled. Quite good at the start, increasingly "transcendent" as it went along, so that by the end -- very little was connecting.

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## **Barbara McVeigh says**

Kintsugi

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## **Malcolm Van delst says**

This is a fantastic book. It kept me up well past my bedtime clicking through one more page, one more and one more until, well, I had finished the book.

The basic story is a little girl growing up with, I think, an addicted prostitute mom who moves the little girl, her brother and herself over and over again from one ratty apartment or room to another, sometimes in the middle of the night, presumably because she can't pay the rent. When the author is an adult, she goes back to these many places, writing down images and memories as she looks at them while her friend takes photographs.

The result is far from a linear, regular story; rather, it's a mishmash of snippets, memories, poetry and even, essays. Illustrated by the photographs.

I suppose that this might not be for everyone but I don't know, I think everyone should read Dear Current Occupant! It's novel and experimental in the good, let's-push-forward-and-change-the-form kind of way. Let's challenge ourselves to see hidden stories and hidden ways of being, experiencing and the breathing of life in and out, you know? Because this book is stunning, tragic but ultimately uplifting—I mean, it's poetry in the real sense of the word because it transforms something, well, sad and ugly, into compassionate and graceful art—It's Art in the real sense of the word, too, and miraculous and magical--life-shifting.

Read this book—let it change how you view your world, maybe notice the incredible beauty where you didn't expect it.

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## **Charlotte (charandbooks) says**

Genre-bending memoir about home and belonging. This story of collected vignettes feels like it needed to be told (almost like a cathartic process) and the reader gets a peek into very personal moments in her early childhood.

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