Book Club Questions—So Long, Chester Wheeler

From the very first line of the book and continuing through the story, there is significant friction between Chester and Lewis. What deep-seated feelings and beliefs are being triggered in both characters that contribute to this outcome?

When Lewis first meets with his friend Anna, she says about Chester, “Look, I get it. . . . He upset you . . . It usually takes me about three days to let a thing like that move all the way through my system and move on. But while you’re waiting, try not to feed it.” Do you agree with Anna that an upset of this level takes about three days to move through you? What does she mean by advising not to feed it?

There is a famous Joseph Campbell quote that says, “We must be willing to let go of the life we planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us.” How does this quote apply when Lewis decides to take the job of being Chester Wheeler’s caretaker?

One of the themes running through this novel is whether amends or apologies are appropriate. When Chester finally meets up for the last time with his ex-wife, Sue, she tells him, “I couldn’t help falling in love with somebody else, so I’m not really apologizing for it, but there’s a right and a wrong way to handle a thing like that.” What do you think of her explanation, and do you agree?

After Chester’s visit with Sue, she kisses him on the forehead and tells him to pack in as much life as he can in the short time left. In her own way, perhaps, she was trying to make amends. Do you believe in the power of forgiveness, or do you think some things can never be reconciled?

After Chester’s death, Lewis ruminates about his experience with the man he’d been in conflict with for so long. “He wasn’t a great person, but he was a person,” Lewis says. What does this statement mean to you?

After caring for both Chester and Estelle, Lewis comes to know himself better. What do you see as some of his biggest areas of growth and most significant shifts in his beliefs about himself and others?

Something Lewis realizes toward the end of the book is, “All the way down to my gut I got something I’d never gotten before. I got that when a person is rude and abusive to me, it’s not about me at all.” Do you agree with this statement and all that it implies?

By the end of the book, each character has irrevocably altered the other’s life. Have you had a similar situation in which someone irrevocably altered your life?

Ultimately, Lewis decides to choose a career that might not be as profitable as his previous one, but will provide him more fulfillment, and honor the gift he can share with others. Do you believe that everybody has something special that they can bring to the world?\