

## Debut novel “clever, quirky and sharply written”

Except My Love For You  
By: John Hodgert

Reviewed by Sharon Chisvin



Winnipegger John Hodgert is a retired financier, aging rocker and life-long poet. He also is a very fine writer of fiction.

Hodgert’s debut novel, *Except My Love For You*, is a tender, captivating and thought-provoking coming of middle age story that astutely explores the bounds of love, friendship and success. Clever, quirky and sharply written, it abounds with wry observations, witty turns of phrases, sharp dialogue and multi-dimensional characters that appear both familiar and genuine.

The central character in the novel is Gord Strachan, a highly successful 45-year-old Winnipeg financier who has given up everything he has in order to live a simpler and more meaningful life.

With this goal in mind, he has traded his seat of power in boardrooms across the country for a minimum wage job in a furniture factory, and the comforts of his suburban mansion for a small apartment in a working class area of town. He also has transferred all of his considerable wealth over to his ex-wife Liz.

While he tries to adjust to his new way of life, without a cell phone, tailor-made clothing, a car or an expense account, Gord alternately reflects on the carefree days of his youth and more recent interactions with business associates and friends.

His attempts to distance himself from the excesses and successes of his life, however, are continually tested by his ongoing entanglements with Liz and their mutual group of friends, most of whom they have known since high school.

One of these friends is Muriel who, to Gord’s great admiration, had years before deliberately chosen to live an unconventional, non-materialistic, back to basics rural life. Ironically, it is because of Muriel that Gord ultimately reexamines his recent choices and rethinks his decision to give everything up. Money, he comes to appreciate, can be used for purposes other than making more of it.

Gord's connection to Muriel, like his connection to most of the other characters in the novel, is deeply rooted in their shared history. This shared history, nurtured by community club concerts, river walks and school dances, is the glue that binds this aging group of friends together.

Although Gord and his friends, as imagined by John Hodgert, live and work in Winnipeg, they could be any group of lifelong friends in any urban centre.

This is the beauty of this novel. While very specifically set in contemporary Canada, it remains a universal story – a story about not taking anything for granted, especially success, wealth, health, love and friendship.

*Sharon Chisvin's work has been published in numerous magazines, newspapers and anthologies across North America. She is the author of three non-fiction books and has worked as a magazine editor, communications officer, and currently is a regular contributor to the faith and book review sections of the Winnipeg Free Press.*