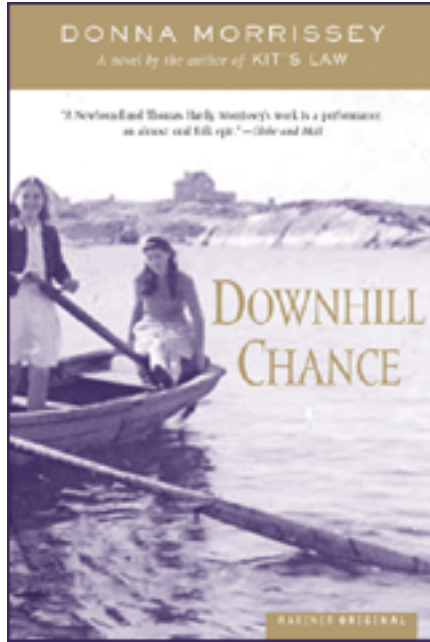


Press Release



Downhill Chance

by Donna Morrissey

- [Introduction](#)
- [About the Author](#)
- [A Conversation with Donna Morrissey](#)
- [Praise for Donna Morrissey](#)

Introduction

Donna Morrissey's highly acclaimed debut novel, *Kit's Law* (Mariner, 2001), a rich portrait of life in one remote Newfoundland community, was a reader and reviewer favorite worldwide and earned Morrissey comparisons to Thomas Hardy, Annie Proulx, and William Faulkner. This summer, she takes her readers back to the rocky shores of Canada's easternmost province with *DOWNHILL CHANCE*. The captivating story of two families struggling to endure war, isolation, and their own pasts, *DOWNHILL CHANCE* recently won the prestigious Atlantic Fiction Prize.

The tiny fishing villages of Rocky Head and The Basin have no road connecting them to the outside world, but their remoteness fails to protect them from the reach of World War II. When Job Gale leaves his wife and young daughters, Clair and Missy, in The Basin to fight in Europe, his absence nearly ruins them, and when he returns, haunted by the war and a secret he can never reveal, the family's struggles intensify and tragedy ensues.

Left on their own, the sisters become estranged when Clair leaves Missy in the care of their uncle and takes a teaching job in Rocky Head. Clair soon falls in love with Luke Osmond, who is charming and loving but struggling with demons from his own past. Together they must gain the courage to face the future for themselves and their daughter, Hannah, whose close relationship to Missy helps bring about a family reconciliation.

Written with Morrissey's singular blend of earthiness and mysticism, her strong sense of place and larger-than-life characters, *DOWNHILL CHANCE* is a story that spreads beyond the windswept coastline of Newfoundland and encompasses universal themes of human frailty, redemption, and the powerful ties of family and community.

About the Author

Donna Morrissey was born in The Beaches, a small outport with no electricity, telephones, or roads on the west coast of Newfoundland. She left home at sixteen and set off across Canada, working for periods of time waitressing and cooking in an oil rig camp. Eventually she returned to Newfoundland with her two children to care for her terminally ill mother. After a doctor misdiagnosed Donna herself with a terminal illness and gave her six months to live, she quit her job at a fish plant and enrolled in college, eventually earning a degree in social work.

Morrissey wrote several screenplays before completing her first novel, *Kit's Law* (Mariner, 2001), which won the 2000 Canadian Booksellers Association Libris Award and the British Winifred Holtby Prize. She lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

A Conversation with Donna Morrissey about *Downhill Chance*

Q) Can you tell us a little about your background — where you grew up, things you've done?

A) I was raised on a strip of beach in rural Newfoundland with no roads, no electricity, till I was about ten. There were twelve houses in that little outport and we weren't allowed to talk to six of those because our families were feuding — which would make for a small, small world, one would think.

Q) But you don't think so?

A) No. Put a bell jar over that outport and you would see all the great loves, the great tragedies, the great mysteries, and all those things in between that constitute a life. It's being able to stand back and see the mythic proportions that the ordinary takes on that make for great storytelling. We may feel as if we're little people in the scope of the world, and our problems may feel trivial compared with great literary stories, but the world and great literature are made up of people like us and our problems.

Q) Was *DOWNHILL CHANCE* based on the lives of "little people" from your past?

A) It certainly started that way. All my life I carried around this image of my grandfather sitting in a chair by the window, his reflection somber in the lamplight, and the flankers from his pipe burning an arc in the canvas floor around his feet. *DOWNHILL CHANCE* started with that image. My grandfather had been in World War I, and there was a lot of secrecy around it. I exploited his secrecy through a character named Job, and uncovered the great, horrid reason for his subsequent depression. "War ain't no place for a thinking man," says Job, and we watch his growing anguish from the war, which finally kills him ten years after the shelling has stopped.

Q) To what degree does culture have an impact on your characters?

A) It varies. In most small outports, there is a great isolation and great dependency on each other for survival. When Job went to war, he left behind an emotionally distraught wife, two

daughters, and a cohort of neighbors forced to confront their own cowardly or heroic behavior. As in most cultures, the characters in *DOWNHILL CHANCE* choose different ways of working through inner conflicts. But in those small, rocky outports there is one great commonality that many souls have to contend with: everyone knows everyone's business! And this, unfortunately, amplifies the often horrific conflicts in *DOWNHILL CHANCE*.

Q) Have you found a "great commonality" among most cultures?

A) Yes. Emotions are the great, universal commonality. Whether a love story takes place over a pickle barrel or a cotton plantation or a rice paddy, the emotions remain the same. The difference is in the voice of the teller of the tale.

Q) It is this voice that lends *DOWNHILL CHANCE* its sense of place, the strong flavor of Newfoundland, its language, its people. Yet your writing has been published around the world and translated into a host of different languages. Was it a challenge to tailor the local feel so that it is authentic while still maintaining a level of accessibility for people who haven't lived in or been to Newfoundland, Canada, or even North America?

A) No, not really. Despite the uniqueness of cultures, some things endure. For example, most of us have been greatly wounded by the experiences of our past. Therefore, going back and reliving these experiences becomes part of our healing, and a pattern that takes place in most corners for the world. In *DOWNHILL CHANCE*, the heroine, Clair, is almost mortally wounded with issues of abandonment, of death, of madness. Who hasn't had to contend with issues such as these, either in our own lives or in the lives of people close to us? As with Clair, it is only when she confronts her past that she is able to start gathering those missing pieces of herself and find meaning and understanding in the events that make up her life. Isn't that what we crave universally — to find peace? love? meaning? In those quests, we are the one soul, seeking. And that is a language that requires no alphabet.

Praise for Donna Morrissey

Praise for *DOWNHILL CHANCE*

"Superb . . . An achingly beautiful novel. [Morrissey's] sense of place is overpowering — not just the natural beauty of remote Newfoundland but also the almost suffocating intimacy of outport life. A major novel by a remarkable writer." — *Booklist*, starred review

"The narrative moves like a house afire, and its racy energy keeps our attention riveted." — *Kirkus Reviews*

"Morrissey's prose, threaded with echoes of Shakespeare, Carl Jung, and Joseph Campbell, is a perfect fit for her almost mythical story of fractured families, wars, and homecoming." — *Quill and Quire*

"I doubt if any writer has given readers a clearer sense of . . . the voices of the people and the subjects of their conversation as they negotiate the tricky terrain of their everyday lives in Newfoundland during the middle years of the twentieth century. Morrissey's work is a performance, an almost oral folk epic." — *Globe and Mail*

"A masterly, compelling story, which is magnificently created." — *Telegram*

Praise for *KIT'S LAW*

"[A] beautiful first novel . . . With a poet's attention to sound, Morrissey combines wonderful, rich characters and compelling family intrigue with a powerful, almost meditative sense of place. Startling, vivid, and expertly crafted, this novel introduces an exciting writer whose career needs to be followed closely." — *Booklist*, starred review

"Don't deny yourself the pleasure of reading [this] book. *Kit's Law* is a charmer." — *Library Journal*, starred review

"Suffused with a wonder for the natural world like Thomas Hardy's, and the tart forthrightness of Marilynne Robinson, this atmospheric coming-of-age story marks the promising debut [of Morrissey] . . . Kit is valiant and impulsive, but most fetching is her voice . . . which Morrissey captures with thrilling verve and precision." — *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"The rich, rocky terrain of Newfoundland has borne a native storyteller with talent to burn in Donna Morrissey . . . Irresistible." — *Boston Globe*