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Mitch Albom

How to pronounce Mitch Albom: al-bum (as in record album)

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An interview with Mitch Albom

Mitch Albom talks about his uncle, the real life Eddie, and why he felt the need to write *The Five People You Meet In Heaven* as a personal tribute to Eddie.

The lead character in "The Five People You Meet In Heaven" is a grizzled war veteran named Eddie, who dies on his 83rd birthday. The character, Mitch Albom says, was inspired by his real-life uncle, Edward Beitchman, who was also a World War II veteran, who also died at 83, and also lived a life like that of the fictional character, rarely leaving his home city, and often feeling that he didn't accomplish what he should have.

Mitch Albom says.... I tell stories. For awhile I told stories through music and then I told stories in newspapers and later I told stories in books, the best known being *Tuesdays with Morrie*, a story about my old teacher who was living to the fullest even as he was dying.

But before I started telling stories, I heard them. My family loved to rattle them off, especially the senior members, grandparents and uncles and aunts, usually around a Thanksgiving table, always with plates of food close at hand. These were stories about family, history, war, some might have even been closer to fairy tales. Someone would inevitably say, "Oh, no, not THAT one again," but we would settle in and listen anyhow. I never minded. In fact, I loved it. Those stories made me feel part of something, gave me stories of my own, as if my elders' tales, through their telling, could become my tales, too.

One I always remembered was told each year by a favorite uncle of mine, a squat, ex cab driver who had served in World War II and was a pretty gritty guy. He talked of a night when he went to the hospital with a raging fever. In the middle of that night, he said, he woke up and saw his dead relatives, waiting for him at the end of his bed.

Of course, we kids asked him breathlessly, "What did you do? What did you do?" And being the salty fellow he was, he shrugged and said, "I told them to get lost. I wasn't ready for them yet."

I filed that story away in my head, but I never forgot it. And I never forgot my uncle, even as he aged into his 70's and 80's. As I got older, I saw him as a tough, devoted but sad old man who never got to see his dreams fulfilled and never really knew how much we loved him.

When time came for me to write something after *Tuesdays with Morrie*, I moved

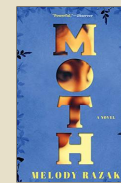
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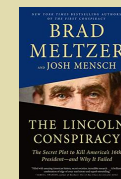


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Who Said...

slowly. I didn't want to do any sequels. No "Wednesdays with Morrie." No self-help series. I wanted to return to the world of stories, to delve deeper into life and death and the connections between the two - which lead me, inevitably, to the idea of heaven.

Somewhere, swimming in my head, was the image my uncle had given me around that table, a handful of people waiting for you when you die. And I began to explore this simple concept: what if heaven was not some lush Garden of Eden, but a place where you had your life explained to you by people who were in it – five people - maybe you knew them, maybe you didn't, but in some way you were touched by them and changed forever, just as you inevitably touched people while on earth and changed them, too.

And so, one predawn morning, coffee in hand, I sat down to write my next story, which now, several years later, is presented to you here. It's a tale of a life on earth. It's a tale of life beyond it. It's a fable about love, a warning about war, and a nod of the cap to the real people of this world, the ones who never get their name in lights.

This story is also a personal tribute to my uncle, whom I only wish could be here to read it.

By the way, his name was Eddie.

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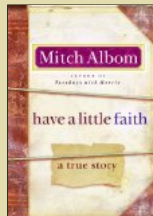
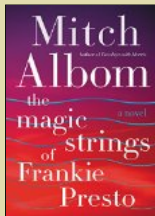
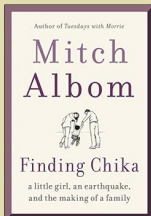
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