



***Chances Are...*, by Richard Russo**
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, October 2019

Richard Russo perhaps is best known for writing *Empire Falls*, the 2002 Pulitzer Prize fiction winner. His latest novel, *Chances Are...*, which is titled after the Johnny Mathis song of the same name, centers on the friendship of three men who had come of age during the tumultuous Vietnam War years.

As the story begins, Lincoln, now a middle-aged real-estate developer in Las Vegas is contemplating selling his family's beach home in Martha's Vineyard. He invites his two old college friends, Teddy, a small-press publisher based in Syracuse, and rock-musician Mickey who lives in Cape Cod, to join him for a weekend at the Martha's Vineyard house they had frequented as students.

When Teddy and Mickey agree to the reunion, Lincoln ponders if they'll discuss Vietnam: "The war had been over for decades, except not really, not for men of their age. It had been their war, whether or not they'd served."

The three friends had met as freshmen assigned to the same dorm suite at a small liberal arts college in Connecticut. As scholarship students, the boys worked in the kitchen of the Theta sorority house as "hashers," to earn extra money. The Theta girls were wealthy, beautiful, and seemingly unattainable.

One golden Theta girl, nevertheless, stood out from the pack. Free-spirited Jacy Calloway was the hashers' secret crush. In December 1969, the night of the first Vietnam War lottery draft, the three friends gathered at the Theta house to anxiously watch as the birthdate numbers are drawn. When one hasher gets a low number, targeting him for draft selection, Jacy's tender reaction is something the boys will never forget. "We were all in love with her," Teddy muses years later. "But what did we really know about her?" For that matter, they also wondered what became of Jacy after graduation.

When it comes to depicting male relationships, Richard Russo has few equals. The distinct personalities of Lincoln, Teddy, and Mickey are skillfully rendered, and their life-long friendship is authentic. The three men's intense interactions with their fathers also are spot-on. Jacy and the women characters, on the other hand, are a bit idealized and less nuanced.

Chances Are... abounds with 60s cultural references from its iconic music to the political upheavals of the time. Indeed, Mr. Russo's homage to his boomer generation is sure to resonate with Woodstock-era readers.