

Evison writes the Great American Landscaping novel

Among contemporary authors, the Pacific Northwest's own Jonathan Evison has developed one of the best touches for developing down-on-his-luck Everymen. Via a growing stack of novels, many of them set west of the Salish Sea, the Bainbridge Island author has made it his life's work to show that people of all shapes and sizes and backgrounds can be much more interesting and even more lovable than we might give them credit for at first glance.

It happened in "The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving" when we met loser Ben Benjamin, whose new and diminished career turn as a caregiver pits him against his first client, a randy teenager in the advanced stages of Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

It happened again in "This Is Your Life, Harriet Chance," when readers discovered that the 78-year-old widow who intends to embark alone on a cruise to Alaska is actually much more than the ditsy little old lady she might, at first glance, appear to be.

And now, in "Lawn Boy," we encounter Evison's empathetic genius once again when he introduces us to Mike Muñoz, member of a local landscaping crew who yearns to pursue his



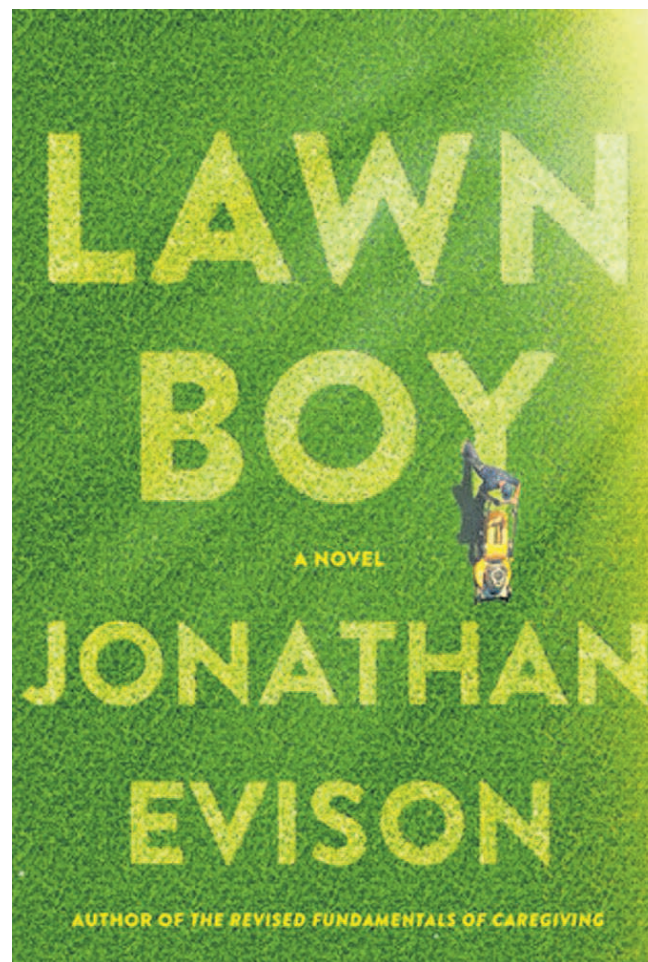
Jonathan Evison

American Dream — if only he could figure out what that was.

Mike grew up in a household rife with disadvantages — his dad was a bum who left the family early on, his brother is developmentally disabled, and his mom has to work double shifts as a wait-

ress at the local dive bar in an effort to make ends meet.

Mike knows he wants something more out of life, so he embarks on a haphazard course of self-appointed challenges to improve his circumstances. He courts the cute waitress at the local Mitzel's. He reads books from



the local library. He puts in applications around town in the hope of securing a gig that's a step up from mowing lawns even though he thinks that, in its purest form, yard work is noble.

Along the way, there are missteps. And ideas that don't pay off. And situational

changes, like when his boss gets arrested, or when his mom's boyfriend moves in.

When the latter occurs, Mike moves out back to the dilapidated work shed and improvises furniture out of concrete blocks and splintered plywood to make the place look "homey, in a third-

"Lawn Boy"
By Jonathan Evison
Algonquin Books
320 pp
\$26.95

world way."

Sharply written and laugh-out-loud entertaining, this novel explores the class system in America, and how the ladder to the American Dream is fraught with broken rungs and splinters.

Through his work, Mike sees how the rich folks live. And through Mike's eyes, the reader sees how the system can be stacked against a guy who has a Hispanic surname, even if he is a conscientious and talented worker.

But Mike is at his core an optimist, and although he wryly calls himself a "poster boy for the unwashed peasantry," the decisions he begins to make for himself gradually help him invent his own version of a worthwhile future.

"Lawn Boy" is a uniquely uplifting read.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com

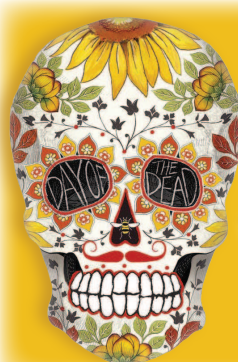
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