

Hunting for classic reads

'Goodbye, Mr. Chips'

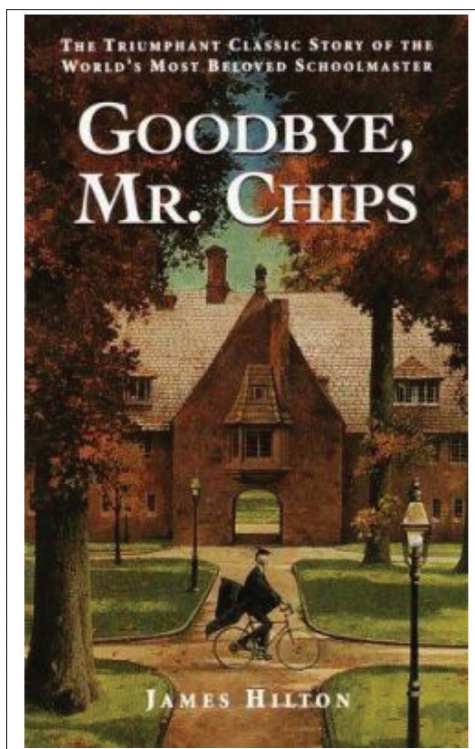
By Cheryl Hoefler
Go! Magazine

I'm frequently on the hunt for classics — books that I think I should have read, or should read now, or probably did read sometime but don't remember. I figure maybe I'll be ready with knowledgeable responses if one of them ever pops up as a topic on "Jeopardy."

Not sure if "Goodbye, Mr. Chips" fits the "classic" category, but I'd certainly heard of it and decided to check it out.

In the space of a short novella, author James Hinton crafts an endearing tale of an English schoolteacher, Mr. Chipping, during his tenure at a fictional boys' boarding school.

"Chips" (his first name is never revealed) is firm and disciplined as an educator at Brookfield, and a conservative man with traditional ways and views of the world. He's also a likeable guy who charms his students and colleagues with a quiet wit



and dry sense of humor.

He's aghast at the changes taking place in the late 19th century — women pushing for the vote and "this new craze for bicycling which was being taken up by women equally with men." Chips is uncomfortable with the newness whirling about in the world, and relishes the stability and routine of his refuge at Brookfield.

So, it's at this time during Chips' contented bachelorhood, in his middle-age years while on holiday in a remote mountain location, that he meets a woman. A much younger woman. One who rides bicycles, climbs mountains, believes women should be admitted to higher education and has radical political views. Moreover, Chips marries this woman — much to the shock and amusement of all who know him.

His marriage to Katherine is brief (you'll have to read the book to learn why), but during their short, blissful union, this modern woman of the world makes a soft impression on her dear Chips. He seems to mellow and loosen the firm grip he has had on the world. He takes more pride in his position, now one of seniority at Brookfield, devoting himself to the education of his beloved students.

The war-torn years ahead in the early 20th century are filled with changes, grief and loss at Brookfield. Through it all, Chips endures, often recalling the names of the multitude of schoolboys who have passed through his classroom doors. He's had under his tutelage generations of the same families and occasionally, he enjoys encounters with students years later, now

settled into their own adult endeavors.

Near the end of his life, when it's assumed that he never had any children, he replies, "But I have, you know ... thousands of 'em ... thousands of 'em ... and all boys."

"Goodbye, Mr. Chips" was written in 1934, following Hilton's bestseller "Lost Horizon" the year before.

For movie buffs, the story resulted in two theatrical films. One in 1939 starring Robert Donat (who won an Oscar for the role) and Greer Garson, and another in 1969, a musical starring Peter O'Toole and Petula Clark. I haven't seen the latter, but the former I watched immediately after reading the book, being a Donat fan from Hitchcock's "The 39 Steps" (1933).

The 1939 movie version stayed pretty true to the book and it did not disappoint.

The book (and movie) led to ponderings about my years as a teacher and educators I have known. You may not be a teacher yourself, but you've certainly known many over the years. Do you remember any of them, especially those who had a lasting, positive influence on you? Ever wonder if they remember you, and if you had a lasting, positive influence on THEM?

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