

*book*WOMEN

A READERS' COMMUNITY FOR THOSE WHO LOVE WOMEN'S WORDS



Hand in hand

For Michelle Skally Doilney, reading enriches her writing, and writing illuminates her reading.

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Best reads of 2020

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Dedicated to:

- Building a community of readers • Celebrating the joys of living with books •
- Exploring the place of reading and books in women's lives • Spreading the word about women writers and their work • Supporting independent booksellers and publishers •

Profile of a BookWomen Reader

For Michelle Skally Doilney, reading enriches her writing and writing illuminates her reading.



Hand in hand

A few days before Christmas, Michelle Skally Doilney packed up her car in St. Paul, Minn., and headed to the North Shore of Lake Superior to spend a week in nature. With her, she brought along her “three loves”: books, writing materials, and equipment and clothing for excursions in the winter landscape.

The time was a gift she was giving herself, Doilney said, “an opportunity to quiet down.” It was wonderful: “No people, but lots of waves, nature, silence. It’s a truly magical place.”

Each day she wrote, read, and rambled through the snowy woods and along the shore. She had time to reflect on the past and look ahead.

Last year was difficult for Doilney in many ways. She had to deal not only with the ramifications of the pandemic, but also with leaving a long-term relationship, uprooting herself, and setting up a new home.

One casualty of all this was her desire to read. “In hard times books can be refuges, but for months my desire for reading just vanished.” It was a new experience—“I can’t remember when in my life I didn’t read”—and one that carried a little shame, even though Doilney knew that was unwarranted.

“If a reader isn’t reading, it can feel like something wrong, something to be ashamed of,” she said. “But we need to be gentle with ourselves. The reading will come back when the time is right.”

Writing is as much Doilney’s passion as is reading. For her, the two have always gone hand in hand.

Growing up in St. Paul, she began writing

early on, and she still has notebooks from when she was 7. She felt supported and encouraged to write, both in school and at home. Grade-school poetry competitions were exciting, and Doilney remembers her pride in winning in fifth grade. In high school, the city-wide Poets-in-the-Schools program gave her the opportunity to work personally with well regarded local poets and writers.

Early on, Doilney’s stepmother, Terry Skally, an avid reader and longtime BW reader, gave her a copy of Brenda Ueland’s **If You Want To Write**, and her stepsister Amy Pickett, another avid reader, gave her a gift of Natalie Goldberg’s **Writing Down the Bones**.

Having lived in Utah for 16 years before she returned to St. Paul last fall, Doilney appreciates even more the literary culture of the Twin Cities. “Reading and writing are strong presences here—we take it for granted. It’s different in Utah, but I’m thrilled to see the numbers of writers and publications increasing there.”

Although many fine books about writing are available these days, and she appreciates and learns from them all, the books her stepmother and stepsister gave her years ago are “the two I always go back to. They’re classics. Anybody can pick them up and be inspired.”

Doilney is passionate about encouraging others to think of themselves as writers. “Everyone is a writer,” she believes. “Get a simple notebook, nothing fancy,” she advises, “and a fast writing pen, and just write. No editing. Just a flow of words.”

Many readers have an exalted view of who can be a writer, what “real” writing is, Doilney said.

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“I’ve found that writing enriches my reading experience. ... Writing practice helps me understand the writer and also understand myself.”

DOILNEY, FROM 3

A few of Michelle Skally Doilney's favorite books:

West with the Night, memoir by Beryl Markham. "For me it's important to read books that are beautifully written, by people who actually did the things they wrote about."

Pema Chodron's **When Things Fall Apart**: "Universal messages on dealing with loss and change, a book I've given to many friends during hard times."

Natalie Goldberg's **Three Simple Lines: A Writer's Pilgrimage into the Heart and Homeland of Haiku**. "Not just for haiku lovers; the book is her journey through Japan and haiku, bringing this form into words anyone can use to learn about life."

Donna Leon's Guido Brunetti mysteries set in Venice. "Her prose brings you right there. When I finally made it to Venice, her books made it so much more 'home' for me."

The Thing Around Your Neck, Chimamanda Azochi Adiche: "This book of short stories leaves you with every story alive in your mind."

"People think you have to have an end product in mind and a desire to be published." She doesn't buy it. "I have friends who write about simple things in their lives, for themselves, and I think they're magnificent writers."

Doilney's commitment to the daily practice of writing shapes her approach to reading. "I've found that writing enriches my reading experience. Having that flow of my own internal words gives me a deeper insight into the books I'm reading. Writing practice helps me understand the writer and also understand myself."

Her commitment to her own writing has changed even the way she approaches a book. When she picks up a new book, she looks at it all—covers, copyright page, the dedication, the foreword or afterword, the index—before going to the story. "Really looking at the entire book gives me a different level of reading, helps me better understand what I'll be reading."

An avid traveler, Doilney finds that experiencing other places is most rewarding when combined with reading and writing.

"Before I travel, I look for memoirs or mysteries set in the place, to read and prepare myself before I go." For example, a favorite book is **Stasiland** by Anna Funder, which, it happens, she found years ago on a cruise ship going through the Suez Canal. But if she were planning a trip to Germany today, she would turn to this book of stories of life behind the Berlin Wall. "I would gain a sense of history, which would help me understand things I wouldn't have understood otherwise."

On her travels, she maintains her daily writing habit. "I have a cabinet filled with journals from my travels." The journals contain not only her writing, but also other things that help her remember the experience, such as ticket stubs, maps and photos. "I call the journals my time capsules."

On a writing trip to Cuba with a group led by Natalie Goldberg, Doilney met BookWomen reader and occasional contributor Barbara Courtney, of Massachusetts, a writing kindred spirit. The two have become friends and have participated in other retreats with Goldberg.

As a reader, Doilney appreciates books "that you can read bits of"—like a book of travel essays, or Goldberg's memoirs and books on writing, or a poetry collection.

"I like books that you don't have to be committed to for hours. Sometimes I'll read just one essay, or one poem, and I come away full."

Being able to choose from among a variety of kinds of books is important, Doilney said. "It stretches the mind. It's good for my mind and my soul to have a mix of reading experiences."

So, although she always is drawn to books written from writers' true experiences, and she enjoys good mysteries, she makes an effort to reach out in other reading directions. "I prefer to try a lot of different paths. There's always a new way to see things."

In the past year she read through some "really tough books about racism" with her writing group. "I used a lot of energy making myself read things that page after page broke my heart."

Ta-Nehisi Coates' novel, **The Water Dancer**, was one. Doilney's stepsister gave her the book. "It was one of the most difficult books to read, but I trusted her, so I read it all. It's beautifully written, and after reading it I understood slavery in a way I never had before."

Other challenging reads the group tackled included **Bury the Chains**, a history by Adam Hochschild, and **Heavy**, a memoir by Kiese Laymon. Although such reading was difficult, "it's what we need to do now."

From a career that has included Fortune 100 corporate work, working for nonprofits, teaching yoga, and creating her own Feng Shui consulting business (PracticalEnvironments.com), Doilney has decided to take a sabbatical of sorts this winter. "I want to be mindful about what's next. For the first time in my life I've been able to take some time. I'm spending four months with no projects, no expectations. There's no plan, I'm just spending the winter reading and writing, processing the past years."

Between Covid and the changes in her life, and blessed with having enough money to live on for a few months, she said, "I thought, why not go for it." —**Mollie Hoben**



FROM GLENDA & MOLLIE

The Great Books—Because Women Say So!

It's that time again—time to announce the books that BW readers selected last year as the Great Books of all they read and discussed in BW book groups, reading retreats and book trips. (Though, actually, we had no book trips last year, and probably none this year—but we live in hope.)

The criteria for selecting a Great Book? We define Great Books as those that most intrigued, inspired and stretched readers; that stimulated strongest response and discussion; that readers want others to know about.

Back in 1986, when we were frustrated that the titles promoted by the Great Books Foundation all were books written by white men, Glenda said it was time to put a new lens on the concept. "We'll decide for ourselves what books are great," she proclaimed.

In 2020, 16 books were selected for the list; of these, seven were designated Greatest of the Great, having been named by more than one group or by a group (or groups) in earlier years. They are marked with an asterisk.

How many have you read?

Great Books 2020

* **Becoming** (2018), memoir by Michelle Obama

* **Dutch House** (2019), novel by Ann Patchett

Gathering Moss (2003), nature essays by Robin Kimmerer

* **Invention of Wings** (2015), novel by Sue Monk Kidd

Island of Sea Women (2020), novel by Lisa See

* **Library Book** (2019), history by Susan Orlean

Long Way to a Small Angry Planet (2016), science fiction by Becky Chambers

* **Night Watchman** (2020), novel by Louise Erdrich

Place in the Woods (1999), memoir by Helen Hoover

Prayers for Sale (2010), novel by Sandra Dallas

* **Rift** (1988), novel by Liza Cody

Sisters: The Lives of America's Suffragists (2006), biography by Jean H. Baker

Twelve-Mile Straight (2018), novel by Eleanor Henderson

* **Where the Crawdads Sing** (2018), novel by Delia Owens

White Heart of the Mojave (1922), travel memoir by Edna Brush Perkins

"We define Great Books as those that most intrigued, inspired and stretched readers; that stimulated strongest response and discussion; that readers want others to know about."

The mail must go through

We know some readers received their last copy or two of BookWomen with an exaggerated cancellation stamp on the back cover, which made it difficult to read *The Last Word*.

The photo on the right, sent by a helpful reader, shows what it looked like.

We talked with several helpful people at the Post Office. The man in the national Mailing and Shipping Solutions Center suggested, interestingly, that during the run-up to the election, clerks were being especially careful with everything they processed and perhaps

they were more zealous than usual. He hoped the problem might disappear by this time around.

A clerk at the huge mail-processing center in Eagan, Minn., offered two ideas of different ways we could handle our BW mailing if the problem continues.

To find out, we've gone ahead with our usual approach to mailing for this issue, with fingers crossed.

You can help us by letting us know if your copy arrived with a postmark that looks like the one in the photo. Just send us a quick note (books@bookwomen.net). Thanks.



Life goes on

Glenda Martin is reading in Green Valley, Ariz., this winter, as usual.



G.M.'s Column

At every age, books and reading are among life's essentials, and pleasures. By Glenda Martin.

For me, everything seems to be about age. It's good to be exposed to stories where age is acknowledged.

Just watched a BBC mystery on PBS, "Elizabeth Is Missing" with British actress Glenda Jackson. I responded strongly to Jackson's portrayal. Maybe I felt it so much because of her first name, or because she is 84 years old. She was an actor for 35 years, then a Labor member of Parliament from 1992 to 2015, when she returned to acting.

"Elizabeth Is Missing" is a 2019 story of a woman with Alzheimer's, whom Jackson portrays in intimate ways as she tries to solve the mysteries.

I could feel the story, as I experience not being able to read as much as I used to, or remember as well, and am moving around more slowly. All part of aging. I'm intrigued to think about what mysteries I might solve as life continues.

Or perhaps I just need to pick up a new history book and read about a history I was part of. **35 Years of Minnesota Women** (2020), published by Minnesota Women's Press, edited by Mikki Morrisette. There I am, in a history book!

Mollie Hoben and I created the Women's Press newspaper in 1985 in St. Paul, and Mikki has owned it for the past two years. She published this book using pictures and articles taken from 35 years of the Women's Press.

Such a gift to have years of women's stories honored.

I'm intrigued in my advancing age by which books touch me and which do not. I would welcome your reactions to any of the following books I've read in the past two months.

Each of you must read **Caste: The Origins**

of Our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson (2020). This is an important book for every American person about how the caste system has shaped and continues to shape our lives in this country.

"Caste" describes our country in ways I've never read about before, supported by deep research, and it is profoundly written. Would stimulate an important book group discussion. Also good to read her first book, **The Warmth of Other Suns** (2010).

I've been pondering whether there is spirituality in book groups. It surfaced for me reading Robin Kimmerer's book **Gathering Moss** (2003) when she writes of she and her daughters experiencing Spring. "It is the wordless voice of longing that resonates within us, the longing to continue to participate in the sacred life of the world." I read that as spiritual. (As I was reading Kimmerer's book, BW Sue Carroll sent amazing photos she took of moss in Maine. Connections always interesting.)

Had to find a definition of spirituality describing what I may experience reading a book and in book groups. One writer put it this way: "Spirituality is about seeking connection with something bigger than yourself, which can result in positive emotions, such as peace, awe, contentment, gratitude and acceptance." Do you sometimes find this sense as you discuss books read?

In our current world it seems even more important to find a spiritual place. Mine is certainly related to books, reading, and groups. How about you?

In the last issue of BW, Cynthia Kelley, the profiled reader, said she enjoyed reading Qui Xiaolong's Shanghai mysteries. Was great to

read **Red Mandarin Dress** (2007) and **A Case of Two Cities** (2006), with protagonist Chief Inspector Chen, who is also a poet. The author is a poet, himself, with a PhD from Washington University, and I look forward to reading more of his books.

Such a contrast to another mystery I read, **Sworn To Silence** (2009) by New York Times bestselling author Linda Castillo. This is the first of her 13 mysteries set in Amish land in Ohio, featuring Chief of Police Kate Burkholder, who was raised in an Amish family in the area. I plan to read more in the series. Good for escape.

For many months Mollie and I have watched past seasons of "Call the Midwife," which takes place in the Docklands area of East End London in the 1950s and '60s. The series is based on Jennifer Worth's book **Call the Midwife: A Memoir of Birth, Joy, and Hard Times** (2002) of her own experience as a midwife in that area during that time. Reading her book added so much history and a more personal touch to the program I've enjoyed for a long time.

When I read **The Dutch House** (2019), by Ann Patchett, for the second time, I had a mixed reaction, which puzzles me, as I liked it when I first read it. Mollie recently used it with a group and Zoom and said it led to strong discussion. So I had to re-read it. I wonder what the difference was in my second reading. Have you had such an experience, about this book or any book you've re-read?

Here's a book to put on your book list for next December and give as a gift to all those you care about—a children's book for everyone, about the winter solstice. **On the Shortest Day** (2020) by Laura Fredrickson and illustrator Laurie Caple is a treasure, published by Minnesota Historical Society. Mollie and I received it as a gift from BW Mary Leeder and BW Patty Johnson. Thank you Mary and Patty.

I find myself pondering three books I didn't enjoy. I'm including them, in case you've read them. Send me your reactions, please.

The Orphan of Salt Winds by Elizabeth Brooks (2019). With the last line in the first

paragraph being, "... in her eighty-sixth year, there's no good reason to feel dismayed," I had to read it.

The Care of Strangers Ellen Michaelson (2020) is a first book written by a physician in Portland, Ore., Mollie liked this book a lot.

A Likely Story by Jenn McKinlay (2015) is the sixth book in her "Library Lovers" mystery series. Her character, librarian Lindsey Norris, solves a shooting and questions about a missing person.

Over New Year's, my son Doug and his family visited for a couple of days and sat around the house reading, primarily books I do not know. It was great to see the four of them in comfortable positions immersed in books they had chosen.

Doug was reading **Animal Farm** (1946) by George Orwell and **Andy & Don: The Making of a Friendship & A Classic American TV Show** (2015) by Daniel de Vise.

Daughter-in-law Julie was reading the only book I did know, **The Testaments** (2019) by Margaret Atwood. She was glad to finally complete it.

Eighteen-year-old granddaughter Kate was reading **Carry On** (2015) by Rainbow Rowell, and 14-year-old grandson Ryan curled up in his bed with **The Trials of Apollo** (2016) by Rick Riordan.

So when they were getting ready to go back to their home in Mesa, I had to give each of them a book from my shelves that I hope they will read and share their thoughts.

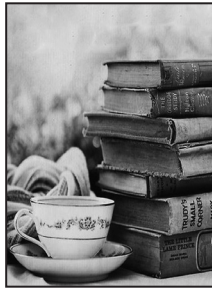
For Doug I chose **The Oracle** (2019) by Clive Cussler and Robin Burcell, and for Julie, **I Could Tell You Stories: Sojourns in the Land of Memory** (1999) by Patricia Hampl. With Kate, I hope to talk with her about **By The Light of My Father's Smile** (1998) by Alice Walker, and with Ryan, **The Ape House** (2010) by Sara Gruen.

For myself, it is intriguing to contemplate why I chose the particular books for each of them. So great to have a family of readers.

How about books and your family, Book-Women readers?

"I've been pondering whether there is spirituality in book groups."

Best reads, 2020



From a year when reading was difficult for some, a refuge for many, readers share their best books.
By BookWomen readers.

“The book is particularly helpful for building real connection in a world that has become so divided.”

Coincidentally, three of my favorite 2020 reads have sunny titles, but they tell stormy tales:

The Yellow House, by Sarah Broom, is a memoir about growing up in a large African-American family in East New Orleans in what they call a shotgun house. Broom reflects on the house as the center of her family before and after Hurricane Katrina.

In the novel **The Yellow Bird Sings**, by Jennifer Rosner, we follow a Jewish mother and daughter hiding from the Nazis in Poland in the 1940s. The daughter’s musical talent helps them through the ordeal, and we get a glimpse of her adult life (involving music) in the 1960s in New York.

How Much of These Hills Is Gold, by C. Pam Zhang, another novel, is a whole new look at immigrant experiences in the American West in the 1800s. Two young Chinese sisters, the daughters of immigrants, are orphaned in a Gold Rush town and must determine how to survive.

Kathy Malchow, St. Anthony, Minn.

I just finished reading **Once I Was You** by Maria Hinojosa and I want to add it to your Best Reads of the Year list. I always enjoyed listening to Hinojosa on NPR, but I knew nothing about her life or politics. I thought I was pretty well informed about current events and the state of the world—but I discovered I really knew nothing about immigration and the laws and actions of our government.

“Once I Was You” opened my eyes to some of life’s harsh realities that I wish I could for-

get. But I need to face them and to support actions to help immigrants be treated with respect, courtesy and fairness as they attempt to escape their home countries, seeking the supposed freedoms and better life here in the United States.

Joanne Ligamari, Loomis, Calif.

I have two books to suggest that have helped me keep my perspective during a very stressful year. Both are by Buddhist nun Pema Chodron, and are composed of short chapters perfect for a thoughtful reading to start your day or to turn to when you need an emotional reset: **When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times** (2016) and **Welcoming the Unwelcome: Wholehearted Living in a Brokenhearted World** (2019).

The first is a classic and shows how becoming intimate with painful life events can open your heart and help you grow through them. The newer book is particularly helpful for building real connection in a world that has become so divided.

Cheryl Anderson, Minneapolis, Minn.

This has been quite the year for reading indeed! Truly the best antidote for staying home and staying safe: front porch, glass of wine, and book in hand.

Here are two recommendations from all I have read this past year to maybe inspire other readers:

The Lost for Words Bookshop by Stephanie Butland gave me a wonderful character in Loveday Cardew. The storyline in this book

was perfect for the year we are living—courage and using our words to tell our 2020 story. The “bookstore” is one for my dreams and the mystery perfect.

The Nightingale by Kristin Hannah (2015) fit one of my themes for year: reading about women in WWII. This book helped me put 2020 in perspective ... nothing to complain about while reading this powerful and riveting story of two sisters, the human spirit, and the women’s war in France.

Thanks for asking us to share a few of our favorites.

Kathy Ennen, Southport, N.C.

For the best book I read in 2020, I chose **Through the Narrow Gate: A Memoir of Spiritual Growth** by Karen Armstrong, the religious scholar. She reflects on her years in a convent and her decision to leave it. Her process of grappling with faith issues and an intellectual life speaks to me personally.

Nancy Maywar, Pittsford, N.Y.

I have three titles I’d like to highlight from my reading in 2020.

The City We Became by N.K. Jemisin. I am not usually a fan of science fiction, but I really enjoy N.K. Jemisin’s books. This book, the first in a trilogy, is set in New York City with a diverse and vibrant set of characters. I loved it and can’t wait for the next book in the trilogy!

10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World by Elif Shafak. Set in Turkey, this book about the meaning of friendships is a vivid description of a life completely unlikely my own. I learned a lot reading it and was swept away by the beautiful characters.

Such a Fun Age by Kiley Reid. This book was fast-paced and fun to read but with a deep undercurrent of the harm liberal white women perpetuate on Black people. Gave me lots to think about and would be a great for a book club.

Linda Prokopy, West Lafayette, Inc.

Here are my best reads of 2020:

Wild Life: Dispatches from a Childhood of Baboons and Button-Downs by Keena Roberts. Roberts describes her experiences growing up as she spent half the year at her parents’ research camp in Botswana and the other half at a Philadelphia private school. Her unusual upbringing taught her to deal with the dangers and challenges of both wildlife and her classmates in this well done memoir.

Stoned: Jewelry, Obsession, and How Desire Shapes the World by Aja Raden. Do you like jewelry or history or science? Raden shares fascinating and often surprising details of all these in relation to gems of all sorts. Learn about emeralds as currency, how diamonds became “the” engagement stone, and much more. Be sure to read her often irreverent footnotes!

Marion Amdursky, Kalamazoo, Mich.

Among the many books I read this year are two that especially captured my interest: **Homeland Elegies** by Ayad Akhtar and **German Heiress** by Anika Scott.

The first takes place in Iran after the fall of the Shah and the second is based on the immediate aftermath of WWII in Germany. Both stories reflect the upheaval that comes with a change in government and society, the decisions and positions that one took prior to the change and the shock of the aftermath. Very thought provoking.

Another book that had me smiling along with the story is **Uncanny Valley** by Anna Wiener. Having been employee #125 in a tech startup, I relived many of the stories that she tells. If any BW reader was in IT during the lead-up to web-based apps, this is for you!

Karen Obegi, Green Valley, Ariz.

I’m like the gardener with too much zucchini, accosting neighbors and strangers alike, saying “Read this book!” **Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents** by Isabel Wilkerson is without doubt the most significant book I’ve read in a long time. ‘Nuff said. Read it.

“The storyline in this book was perfect for the year we are living—courage and using our words to tell our 2020 story.”

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BEST READS, FROM 9

Another book worthy of the characterization “significant” is **The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee** by David Treuer. Both this history and Wilkerson’s book are mind openers, broadeners, giving the reader new insights and perspectives on our cultural history.

And for my third offer, to those nonfiction readers who are interested in n(N)ature and love elegant use of language, some armchair adventure awaits in **The Living Mountain** by Nan Shepherd. Small, rich with description and philosophy.

Carolyn Burnett, Birchwood, Wis.

“Both this history and Wilkerson’s book are mind openers, broadeners, giving the reader new insights and perspectives on our cultural history.”

A book that gave me new insight was **Caste** by Isabel Wilkerson. She connects the present African American position in the U.S. to the caste society in India and the Nazism of the 20th century. After completing it, I thought to myself, “How come I never learned about this before?” I discussed this book in an online book club meeting, and having fellow readers share their life experiences in different times and parts of this country definitely enriched the discussion.

Linda LaGarde Grover’s latest novel, **In the Night of Memory**, is a poignant story of two girls whose mother surrendered them to Social Services and then disappeared. Grover has a creative way of seeing the world through the eyes of children, as she writes stories of sadness, courage and humor.

Finally, the Minneapolis writer Peter Geye wrote a trilogy set in Norway and the Borderlands north of Duluth from the late 19th century forward. Begin with **The Lighthouse Road**, and if you are curious, go on to **Wintering** and **Northernmost**.

Noell Reinhiller, Moorhead, Minn.

To avid readers, selecting most memorable reads from any one year is a challenge, and to limit that choice to only three, nearly impossible.

I sincerely apologize to all the wonderful books

I did not select, and if space allowed I’d offer them honorable mention. There are three that edged out the competition, however, and being at an age when I can barely remember what day it is, these three books have won a lingering niche in my mind.

I love historical fiction and nonfiction, and each of the three offer that up.

World War II from the British point of view during the year-long Blitz, and how Churchill managed to rally his countrymen to never give up, highlights **The Splendid and the Vile** by Erik Larson in a very readable, novel-like way.

Staying with the theme of WWII, but offering a new twist is **The Book of Lost Names** by Kristin Harmel. Based on true events, this riveting novel describes the efforts of brave French citizens who find a way to secretly log the names of hundreds of children whom they help to escape the Nazis, during the German invasion of France.

Lastly, **The Giver of Stars** by Jojo Moyes, also based on true events, describes the Appalachian women-operated Packhorse Libraries, a Depression-era effort proposed by Eleanor Roosevelt. The author skillfully weaves this wonderful historical attempt to offer rural and remote citizens access to books into a lovely story of friendship, love and giving.

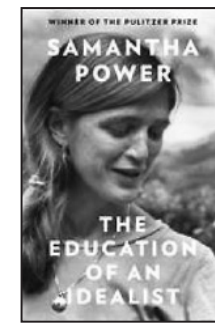
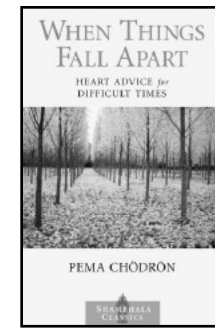
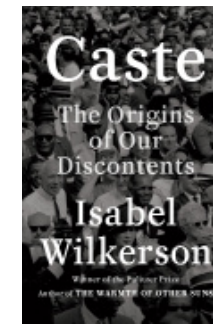
Cindy Schuster, Marshfield, Wisconsin

Here are my choices for best reads of 2020.

Code Name Helene by Ariel Lawhon is historical fiction about New Zealander Nancy Wake, a leader in the French Resistance during WWII. Wearing her trademark red lipstick, she eludes the Gestapo at every turn, causing them to call her The White Mouse. Wake’s real life exploits were also the basis for the TV series “Wish Me Luck.”

Family of Origin by CJ Hauser is an interesting read. Step siblings travel to an island in the Gulf where their father has been working with Reversalists, people who believe evolution has not only stopped but is beginning to go backwards. Complex family dynamics.

Cathy Kerr, Asheville, N.C.



Here are three books that made me think in 2020:

Americanah, novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche. This Nigerian author writes masterfully via her protagonist about the differences between African blacks and African Americans and their varied expectations with and relationships to White America and the significance of Color as part of one’s identity.

White Fragility, nonfiction by Robin DiAngelo. This book really challenged my sense of reality and life experiences—bursting my bubble about my unwitting complicity in perpetuating a white supremacist culture in America. Definitely a book to reread!

The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue, fiction by V.E. Schwab. I purchased this book after hearing an interview with its author on the Nerdette podcast. It’s her first adult novel and is a hard book to describe: not quite fantasy nor historical fiction. Both the plot concept about the importance (or lack thereof) of being remembered and the many, many instances of lyrical prose intrigued and enchanted me.

Michele McNabb, Iowa City, Iowa

The Blazing World, by Margaret Cavendish, the world’s first science fiction work, published in 1666. Cavendish (1623-1673) was a prolific writer. The author even appears in her story as a friend of the Empress of the Blazing World.

The Museum of Whales You Will Never See and Other Excursions to Iceland’s Most Unusual Museums, by A. Kendra Greene.

An American museum person explores and interviews people who run some of the 265 museums in Iceland, which has a population of only 330,000. The whole of Iceland has one phone book, with listings by first name.

Black Tudors, by Miranda Kaufmann. This nonfiction book offers fascinating facts from the time of Henry VIII—about African immigrants who settled in England and were valued for their talents like music; a maid named Mary who was the keeper of the King’s silkworms; and so much more from a country that values its history.

Linda Crum, Portland, Ore.

The clear winner for my best read of 2020 is **Late Migrations: A Natural History of Love and Loss**, by Margaret Renkl, beautifully illustrated by her brother Billy Renkl. Margaret Renkl relates stories of her childhood in the South and intertwines them with her observations of the natural world. She writes about her parents and grandparents with affection and honesty, about loving them, taking care of them, and losing them. Somehow she captures in words my feelings of love and grief when life follows its natural course. I don’t want to make it sound grim—this book is a joy to read and re-read.

Lisa Essman, Lewisberry, Pa.

Three books?? Just three books? EEEK!

The first book I read in 2020, which I had on my list for a long time, became one of the

BEST READS, TO 12

“The author captures in words my feelings of love and grief when life follows its natural course. I don’t want to make it sound grim—this book is a joy to read.”

BEST READS, FROM 11

year's favorites—**Kindred** by Octavia Butler, a time-travel tale published in 1979. The main character, a Black woman married to a white man in current time, travels back and forth between her current life and life on a Southern plantation where she is a slave. My favorite line in the book is “Slavery was a long slow process of dulling.”

My second favorite book was a book I had never heard of until a member of our couples' book group recommended it, and I now rank it as one of the best books I have ever read. **The Street**, by African-American writer Ann Petry, is set in Harlem post WWII. The main character, Lutie Johnson, a single mother, lives in a crummy apartment with her young son. Lyrical, painful, moving with strong characters.

Monogamy by Sue Miller is my third selection. I was totally absorbed by the characters, Annie and Graham and their adult children. Early in the book Graham dies and Annie discovers a secret in their marriage. The story, however, is not so much about secrets as it is about the way we love in spite of, or because of, love's complications.

Nancy L. Agneberg, St. Paul, Minn.

The Giver of Stars by Jojo Moyes. I loved this novel and so did my book club. As a librarian, I'm a sucker for books like this that demonstrate how reading can truly change people's lives. Moyes paints a vivid picture of

the diverse group of women who deliver books to their far-flung communities through the Depression-era horseback librarian program in Kentucky. The women are so different, yet they grow to understand each other and to become friends. They strive to overcome the social mores that constantly constrict them. I found this book engaging and inspiring and definitely recommend it!

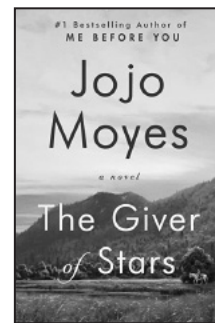
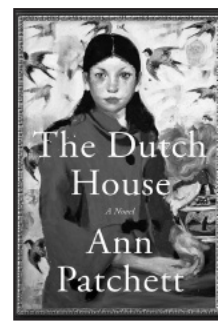
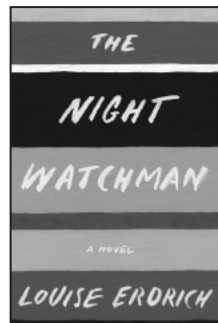
The Dutch House by Ann Patchett. This was another hit with my book club, though part of our spirited discussion stemmed from the fact that many of us found some of the characters infuriating and/or annoying. I listened to the audio version, read wonderfully by Tom Hanks, which added to my enjoyment. Patchett shows all aspects of her characters, their good sides and their flaws. The book reveals how time can heal some wounds, or at least make them less painful.

Ellen McGrath, Buffalo, N. Y.

Of all the many good books I've read this year, the best was definitely **Olive, Again**. Elizabeth Strout is such a master of characterization. A reader comes to care deeply for her flawed and all-too-human characters—even such minor ones whose stories we'll never fully know.

I loved catching up with Olive again—her marriage to Jack, old age, her gruff kindnesses, and her belated insights into motherhood. And for Strout readers, an added bonus at the end: Amy and Isabelle again, too.

Mary Siebold, Bellingham, Wash.



Many women know what it is to be silenced. In 2020 I was drawn to three books that showed women fighting against being silenced.

Fawzia Koofi's memoir, **The Favored Daughter: One Woman's Fight to Lead Afghanistan into the Future**, is a harrowing tale of survival in misogynistic, murder-filled surroundings. Koofi's refusal to be silenced propels her to become Afghanistan's first female Speaker of Parliament. She dreams of better days for her nation and her daughters.

In Sue Monk Kidd's **The Book of Longings**, Ana defies constraints on women and becomes a writer. This work of fiction has Ana marrying a respectfully depicted, human Jesus. The novel ends, “I am Ana. I was the wife of Jesus of Nazareth. I am a voice.”

So You Want to Talk About Race is a hard-hitting work of nonfiction. Ijeoma Oluo's examination of aspects of racism will challenge anyone who thinks they harbor no racism. She says, “Words matter,” and she wants words to be followed by action. “We have to learn and fight at the same time.”

Happy reading in 2021!

Ardith Tofteland, Luverne, Minn.

Miriam's Dive by Deborah E Boyle is a fascinating debut novel of relationships, the creative process of art and the Black Madonnas of France. It wears its learning lightly! Reading it gave me a real positive boost—a requirement for 2020.

Cath Sell, Pickering, N. Yorkshire

The Night Watchman, Louise Erdrich. I loved the mix of characters, the sense of community among the Chippewa, and the things I learned about the language, the culture, and all the humor embedded in the story, which helped to relieve the tough parts.

The Guest Book, Sarah Blake. This was a complex story about three generations of a family trying to save their summer house—an island in Maine. It shows a couple's

secret choices that come to haunt succeeding generations, leading its characters to new and disturbing discoveries about prejudice and privilege.

Ames Sheldon, Eden Prairie, Minn.

The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street by Helene Hanff was perfect reading for this year of limited travel! She describes the joys of her visit to England in 1971. Like me, Helene had dreamed of the trip for decades. Thanks to BookWomen, I experienced the same London literary district years later, when I participated in a Books Afoot trip to London.

Virginia Barzan, Minneapolis, Minn.

The Complete Works of Primo Levi, with an introduction by Toni Morrison. “The triumph of human identity and worth over the pathology of human destruction glows virtually everywhere in Levi's writing. ... Time and time again we are moved by his narratives of how men refuse erasure.”—Toni Morrison

The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance, 1917-2017 by Rashid Khalidi. “One of the best-researched general surveys of 20th and early 21st century Palestinian life ... also a deeply personal work. ... For a people whose history is all but criminalized, this act of retelling is itself a form of resistance.”—The Nation

Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World, by Anand Giridharadas. “The most important intervention yet regarding elite-driven solutions ... courageously answers so many of the critical questions about how, despite much good will and many good people, we struggle to achieve progress.”—Ai-jen Poo, director, National Domestic Workers Alliance

Elaine Wender, Wailuku, Hawaii

Here are my picks for 2020: **The Yellow House** by Sarah Broom **The Dutch House**

BEST READS, TO 14

“In 2020 I was drawn to three books that showed women fighting against being silenced.”

BEST READS, FROM 13

by Ann Patchett, and **The Crooked House** by Christobel Kent. I seem to have a theme! “The Yellow House” is excellent. Our book group picked it as our book of the year. The structure of the book is excellent, with Broom naming the chapters as if she were building a house from the foundation. The story tells about the importance of family and place, and about racial inequality. It’s an amazing book. I listened to Tom Hanks narrate “The Dutch House.” The author recommended the audio book saying Hanks brought the story to life. I agree.

“The Crooked House” is a well done mystery with suspense building with every chapter. I have enjoyed all of Kent’s books.

Kathie Prieve, St. Paul, Minn.

“The story tells about the importance of family and place, and about racial inequality. It’s an amazing book.”

In 2020 I read a number of books. Three I would eagerly recommend are those in Ken Follett’s Century Trilogy: **World Without End**, about WWI; **Fall of Giants**, about WWII; and **Winter of the World**, about the 1960s through the 1980s. Each book teaches us history while spinning fascinating stories of how the lives of families from England, Wales, Germany, Russia and the U.S. are intertwined.

Andee Gelatt, Green Valley, Ariz.

The most significant book I read this last year was **Endurance: My Year in Space and How I Got There** by astronaut Scott Kelly. I purchased the Young Adult edition (which seemed very adult to me) and sent it to my great grandson for Christmas.

Kelly’s year in outer space was very much programmed by NASA, while my year in isolation was pretty much aimless, although I did do copious reading.

Kelly noted that he had read Tom Wolfe’s book, **The Right Stuff** when he was 18, and that is what inspired him to be an astronaut. He says, “I feel certain that I wouldn’t have done any of the things that I have, that there would be no ‘Endurance’, if I hadn’t read

that book.”

He goes on, “On a quiet Saturday afternoon [in space] I called Tom Wolfe to thank him. I got his number from an acquaintance, as I didn’t know him. I tell him we are passing over the Indian Ocean, how fast we’re going, how our communication system works. We talk about books and about New York and about what I plan to do when I first get home (jump into my swimming pool). We agree to have lunch when I’m back on Earth, and that’s now one of the things I’m looking forward to most.”

(Note: While I was reading “Endurance,” Kelly’s twin brother Mark, also an astronaut who has traveled in space, was running for senator in Arizona for the Demcratic party ... and won, a bright spot in my year.)

Cathy Anderson, Green Valley, Ariz.

Note to self-re 2020 reading list: First, to remember, you had to review your “borrowing history” at the library, the contents on your Kindle and audible libraries to write this piece. Second, perusing the lists, imagine the surprise that this lover of literary fiction read—and remembered—more nonfiction than fiction.

She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story that Helped Ignite a Movement, by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey. New York Times journalists tell the story of their investigation of Harvey Weinstein.

The Education of an Idealist, Samantha Power. Power, Obama’s pick to be our United Nations Representative, and now Biden’s choice to head USAID, has written a memoir that is personal, honest and important.

Kochland, The Secret History of Koch Industries and Corporate Power, by Christopher Leonard. It seems incumbent on us to understand the Koch brothers’ continued influence on state legislatures, federal government and even our own purchasing habits. I knew about the lobbying, dark money, and lawmaking, yet I was astounded at the environmental degradation.

Diane Meyer, Green Valley, Ariz.

I’m so glad you asked about our favorite reads in 2020. BookWomen, with listing titles to read, has made life more bearable during this trying year.

My favorite read of the year is **How to Raise an Elephant** by Alexander McCall Smith. It is the 21st, and the best in my opinion, of the No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency series. The part that really touched my heart was about the baby

Best reads of 2020

Here are the all the titles mentioned by readers on the preceding pages.

- 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World, Elif Shafka
- Americanah, Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche
- Black Tudors, Miranda Kaufmann
- Blazing World, Margaret Cavendish
- Book of Longings, Sue Monk Kidd
- Book of Lost Names, Kristin Harmel
- Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents, Isabel Wilkerson
- Century Trilogy, Ken Follett (World Without End; Fall of Giants; Winter of the World)
- City We Became, N. K. Jemisin
- Code Name Helene, Ariel Lawhon
- Complete Works of Primo Levi, introduction by Toni Morrison
- Crooked House, Christobel Kent
- Don’t Put the Boats Away, Ames Sheldon
- Duchess of Bloomsbury Street, Helene Hanff
- Dutch House, Ann Patchett
- Education of an Idealist, Samantha Power
- Endurance: My Year in Space and How I Got There, Scott Kelly
- Family of Origin, CJ Hauser
- Favored Daughter: One Woman’s Fight to Lead Afghanistan into the Future, Fawzia Koofi
- German Heiress, Anika Scott
- Giver of Stars, Jojo Moyes
- Guest Book, Sarah Blake
- Heartbeat of Wounded Knee, David Treuer
- Homeland Elegies, Ayad Akhtar
- How Much of These Hills Is Gold, C. Pam Zhang
- Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance, 1917-2017, Rashid Khalidi
- In the Night of Memory, Linda LaGarde Grover
- Invisible Life of Addie LaRue, V. E. Schwab
- Kindred, Octavia Butler

orphan elephant.

My second selection is **Mozart’s Starling** by Lyanda Lynn Haupt. Such a well written book. The reader gets a very personal account of Mozart and his family. Also, one learns so much about our bird world. An educational read.

Lois Rini, Evansville, Ind.

- Kochland: The Secret History of Koch Industries and Corporate Power, Christopher Leonard
- Late Migrations: A Natural History of Love and Loss, Margaret Renkl
- Lighthouse Road; Wintering; and Northernmost, Peter Geye
- Living Mountain, Nan Shepherd
- Lost for Words Bookshop, Stephanie Butland
- Miriam’s Dive, Deborah Boyle
- Monogamy, Sue Miller
- Museum of Whales You Will Never See and Other Excursions to Iceland’s Most Unusual Museums, A. Kendra Greene
- Night Watchman, Louise Erdrich
- Nightingale, Kristin Hannah
- Olive, Again, Elizabeth Strout
- Once I Was You, Maria Hinojosa
- She Said: Breaking the Sexul Harassment Story that Helped Ignite a Movement, Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey
- So You Want to Talk About Race, Ijeoma Oluo
- Splendid and the Vile, Erik Larson
- Stoned: Jewelry, Obsession, and How Desire Shapes the World, Aja Raden
- Street, Ann Petry
- Such a Fun Age, Kiley Reid
- Through the Narrow Gate: A Memoir of Spiritual Growth, Karen Armstrong
- Uncanny Valley, Anna Wiener
- Welcoming the Unwelcome: Wholehearted Living in a Brokenhearted World, Pema Chodron
- When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times, Pema Chodron
- White Fragility, Robin DiAngelo
- Wild Life: Dispatches from a Childhood of Baboons and Button-Downs, Keena Roberts
- Winners Take All, Anand Giridharadas
- Yellow Bird Sings, Jennifer Rosner
- Yellow House, Sarah Broom

Thanks for books



Books and those who sell them were a comfort during the past year, and sharing books with others was satisfying. By Kathy Walker.

Books purchased
from indies, read,
and donated,
helped keep
BookWomen
reader
Kathy Walker,
of Hampden,
Maine, sane
during the
pandemic.

A big red “X” covered 2020 on Time magazine, with the words “worst year ever.” A good depiction of a year we all would like to forget. As I write these words, the first batches of a Covid-19 vaccine are being administered. An end to the virus is not projected to be in sight before millions of people receive two doses of the vaccine, while continuing to wear masks and to remain socially distanced.

The presidential campaign, the election, and its aftermath would have been bad enough without the devastation of Covid-19 thrown into the mix. Add to all this the Black Lives Matter (BLM) rallies, and 2020 goes down as one for the history books.

How would we bookwomen have survived without books? And without lots more time to read all the titles stashed in bookshelves throughout our homes?

I give much credit to my books and to my independent bookstore (Left Bank Books in Belfast, Maine) for keeping me sane throughout the months of lockdown. Missing the spontaneity of going out for lunch with friends, I found old friends and discovered new ones in the books ordered and mailed from Left Bank.

Helping to keep this favorite bookstore in business was part of my incentive for buying books, realizing of course that my own financial situation allowed me to spend the money. I was also able to donate many of the books I purchased and read to our local public library here in Hampden.

The librarian told me that she had processed and added to the permanent collection more than 40 of my donations. Some of these were duplicates of titles already purchased. Because

the library was open only for curbside pickup, and because so many people were reading, more than one copy was gratefully appreciated.

How do I choose the best books read in 2020 out of more than the 110 on my list? Actually this decision is easier than in previous years, although I have a few words to write about other titles that were runners-up.

Caste by Isabel Wilkerson tops my list for nonfiction, and **The Vanishing Half** by Brit Bennett was easily my choice in fiction. Both fit my focus during the past couple of years of reading and learning as much as possible about the experiences of my sister Americans who are Black.

Wilkerson’s writing in both “Caste” and her earlier **The Warmth of Other Suns** is an awesome blend of history and personal stories, her own or as told to her by others. This latest book gave me much to think about, especially in light of my growing up in, and now living in, two states (Vermont and Maine, respectively) with very few Black residents.

I had not read Bennett’s first novel, **The Mothers**, also highly acclaimed. The intriguing plot of “The Vanishing Half” and an interesting cast of characters, both major and minor, kept me quickly turning the pages and staying up late: both signs of a good book.

Through Left Bank Books I was able to Zoom into a wonderful conversation between Lily King and Christina Baker Kline. Both authors with ties to Maine had published new novels in 2020, King’s **Writers and Lovers** and Kline’s **The Exiles**. The Zoom session was ostensibly set up by the publisher to promote Kline’s book, but she was gracious about directing King’s questions back to King about her own

writing process.

I must confess that I was completely shocked midway through reading “The Exiles” by a tragic event I just didn’t see coming. The book depicts an historical event about which I knew nothing: the transport of English prisoners on ships to a penal colony in Australia. King’s novel, by contrast, is more contemporary, and reminded me of my own compulsion to write.

Another opportunity presented itself via Zoom for me to hear and see a dialogue between Louise Erdrich and Ann Patchett, two more of my favorite authors. Earlier in the year I had ordered **The Night Watchman** from Erdrich’s independent bookstore and once again learned much more about Native American history than I was ever taught in school. As in her other novels, the history is subtly inserted into the lives of her very realistic characters.

Elizabeth Berg’s memoir **I’ll Be Seeing You** gave me much to think about as I was reading, and for weeks after I finished. Telling about moving her parents into an assisted living complex, especially given that her mother did not want to move, was handled with Berg’s right-on way with words, whether in fiction or nonfiction.

What has resonated with me since is Berg’s decision to shred the stash of letters she found that her parents had exchanged during WWII. I have a similar stash of letters that my parents wrote. The writer in Berg wanted to use the letters in a book; the daughter in Berg told her these were the private property of her parents. As both a writer and a daughter, I have learned from Berg that shredding my parents’ letters is probably the best course of action for me to take as well.

Louise Penny’s new mystery, **All the Devils Are Here**, Sue Miller’s **Monogamy**, and Yaa Gyasi’s **Transcendent Kingdom**, all deserve honorable mention on my list of best 2020 fiction.

A few new 2020 novels by favorite authors were not as good as expected: **The Book of Two Ways** by Jodi Picoult, **Redhead by the Side of the Road** by Anne Tyler, **Jack** by Marilynne Robinson, and **Afterlife** by Julia

Alvarez. Novels by authors new to me, all very readable, were **Migrations** by Charlotte McConaghy, **All Adults Here** by Emma Straub, and **Long Bright River** by Liz Moore.

What I found myself doing was reading a novel followed by a nonfiction book, and alternating in this manner during the year. An occasional book of poetry, like **On the Way Out, Turn Out the Light**, by Marge Piercy was added to the mix.

Also in the mix were a couple of books ostensibly for children. Enjoyed by me because of both the words and the illustrations were **Cozy** by Jan Brett and **Already a Butterfly**, by Julia Alvarez and Raúl Colón.

The Undocumented Americans by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio sits near the top of my best nonfiction books. An undocumented Harvard graduate writes about her own family and many others in New York City and in Connecticut, often telling their stories for the first time from the perspective of being undocumented.

Because of my career at Rape Response Services, I often gravitate toward accounts of sexual violence, as devastating as they are to read. One to recommend is Lacy Crawford’s **Notes on a Silencing**. This narrative hit close to home, as one of my high school classmates long ago attended St. Paul’s School in New Hampshire, where Crawford’s sexual assault and resultant herpes infection recently occurred.

Two memoirs, **The Purpose of Power** by Alicia Garza and **The Yellow House** by Sarah M. Broom, added to my understanding of the experiences of Black women in this country in recent years. I had the privilege of hearing BLM co-founder Garza speak in person three years ago, and found her written words to be just as dynamic and challenging as those she spoke.

In looking over this annotated list of books read in 2020, I realize that I haven’t mentioned many titles that resonated with me almost as much as those I have highlighted. I also note that, unintentionally, my recommended books are all written by women. Definitely a year for reading and appreciating women’s words!

“How would we
bookwomen have
survived without
books? And
without lots more
time to read all
the titles stashed
in bookshelves
throughout our
homes?”

Why did we keep this?



When there's too much stuff in the attic, can books help with the existential questions that arise? By Janet Mazur.

Janet Mazur is perfecting the art of teaching writing remotely again this semester to first-year students at The College of New Jersey. She lives at the Jersey Shore and relishes winter walks on the deserted boardwalk and beach.

They quarantined. They tested. And then they drove home to New Jersey for Christmas week—both my grown daughters and son-in-law. A joyous reunion after months apart! A grateful mother and father.

We unwrapped presents under the tree. We told stories and debated politics over meals. We laughed so hard we cried. We played cards and games. We gorged on home-baked cookies. We watched a few movies.

Oh, and then we cleaned out the attic.

My husband thought this would be a splendid time to sort through stacks of storage boxes with both daughters (“Better now than when we’re dead, Jan,” said he.) Boxes mainly containing their items—toddler Halloween costumes, Power Puff Girl dolls, medals from swimming competitions, greeting cards from deceased grandparents and more. So, we spent a few hours each day on the attic floor, dividing the contents: a keep pile, a toss pile and a massive donate pile. More laughter. Some tears. And then, a startling epiphany.

Why, oh why did we keep all this? What is *wrong* with us? If we pitch these things, does the memory or the proof vanish? Have we become enslaved to our *stuff*? Suddenly, an exercise in housekeeping becomes an existential crisis.

I know we are not alone in our struggle. Nor are we the first to beat ourselves up, figuring out why we got bogged down by all our stuff in the first place. “When I have my own kids, I’m not saving a thing,” declared the firstborn, who only reluctantly ditched a dozen college note-

books from a decade ago.

Which brings me to the question of what makes sense to save, versus what does one toss? And why is all so hard to do? I turned to my friend Jessica Varian Carroll, who is a professional organizer in New Jersey, to recommend *the* definitive books on the topic. A simple search reveals a proliferation of such books, far too tedious to sort through and frankly, I’m sick of sorting right now.

Her top title is, **Clutter Busting: Letting Go of What’s Holding You Back**, by Brooks Palmer. “It’s the only organizing book I’ve read from start to finish,” she said.

In this 2009 volume, the author takes a deep dive into the emotional aspect of why we cling to our stuff. “When you think of clutter busting your home or office, do you fear losing your link with the past?” Palmer asks. “If so, remember that the past doesn’t matter. ... When you hold onto the past, you are gripping an anchor that is swiftly moving to the bottom of the ocean.”

Varian Carroll also recommended, **The Year of Less: How I Stopped Shopping, Gave Away My Belongings and Discovered Life Is Worth More than Anything You Can Buy in a Store** by Cait Flanders.

Less of a practical guide and more a memoir, this 2018 publication recounts the millennial author’s battle with alcohol, drugs and a \$30,000 credit-card debt for all the stuff she’d bought. This culminated with a year of purchasing only necessities and focusing on the intangible things in life. It all seems perhaps too



Janet Mazur and daughters take a break from sorting through stuff in the attic.

good to be true, but, still, a fascinating read from a promising young author.

Incidentally, Varian Carroll herself penned a memoir in 2019, **She Had No Business: A Real Life Tale of Faith, Courage and Beating the Odds**. In it, she explains the genesis of her very successful organizing company. As an impoverished single mother of four, she founded Organista Home after a nun in a church program pointed out her keen knack for organizing.

The focus of her book is not on how-to. Rather, it’s about encouraging women to take chances, to network, be of service in their communities and to follow their dreams, even if they have “no business.” Each chapter ends with an advice box, and the book is filled with anecdotes galore, folksy good humor and has a breezy, conversational tone.

Of course, the ultimate title in the organizing genre is Mari Kondo’s 2014, **The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up**, and its follow-ups.

Kondo’s name has become a verb for downsizing or decluttering, as in, “I just ‘Kondo-ed’ my kitchen.” My firstborn loaned me the original book a few years ago. As evidenced by our unmanageable clutter, it has not resonated.

Having read and appreciated Gretchen Rubin’s **The Happiness Project** (2018), I was intrigued to learn that in 2019 she’d also written **Outer Order, Inner Calm: Declutter and Organize to Make More Room for Happiness**.

Rubin approached the prior book with facts gleaned from multiple disciplines on what makes people happy and applied them to her life for a year. Her approach with “Outside Order, Inner Calm” is more spare. Very practical,

Cleaning out the Capital

And for the ultimate housecleaning and reorganizing this season – let’s talk about the White House. Yes, dear reader, as you are leafing through this issue of BW, there is a new administration. A fresh start. A clean slate.

I am not naïve enough to think this will create automatic change. We are shattered and divided as a nation and have a rocky path ahead. Nevertheless, I am immensely curious about the new first family, and began my quest to know more by plunging into First Lady Jill Biden’s 2019 memoir, **Where the Light Enters: Building a Family, Discovering Myself**.

I’ll admit it—I’ve been a fan of Dr. Biden’s for some time. Having taught writing a community college, I am fascinated that she has devoted her career to this population, and will continue to teach even after becoming First Lady. How inspiring and what a boost for teachers!

handy and interspersed with pithy quotes and anecdotes from her own experiences.

And then there is **The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning: How to Free Yourself and Your Family from a Lifetime of Clutter**, by Margareta Magnusson, which may have subconsciously inspired my husband, though he has not read it!

This 2018 guide explains the macabre-sounding concept as simply the notion of cleaning up and getting rid of one’s things so our survivors are not left with a mess. “I think women have always death cleaned, but women’s work is not often in the spotlight, and should be appreciated more,” the author writes in the introduction. “When it comes to death cleaning, in my generation and those older than me, women tend to clean up after their husbands first, and then they clean up before they themselves are no more. While one would usually say, ‘clean up *after* yourself,’ here we are dealing with the odd situation of cleaning up before ... we die.”

A fascinating concept and a treasure-trove of hints and ideas as well.

So, if you are wondering, our Christmas attic project yielded six bags of donations for a local charity and at least as many for the trash. It also inspired me to continue to winnow down and clean out, knowing it will have positive psychological benefits—at least according to all the books I’ve unearthed on the topic. However, this is far easier said than done.

Dear Reader, Let me know what books you’ve turned to when you needed to manage and/or organize your lives. You can email me at: JMazurCavano@gmail.com

Meanwhile, her highly readable memoir is, in part, honest and vulnerable, as well as evasive, glossing over some areas of her life. With warmth and good humor, Biden recounts growing up as the spunky, eldest of five daughters in a middle class family in Pennsylvania. Of note is the bond she shared with her loving Italian-American grandmother, her late-life determination to complete two master’s degrees and a doctorate, her emergence as a marathon runner and an unapologetic practical joker.

No doubt we can expect a follow up, as a new chapter unfolds for this fascinating First Lady. I can’t wait to see how she will handle the role, a role with few set guidelines and an enormous platform that can be used for good.

But I am still left to wonder—how does she handle clutter?—**J.M.**



READERS WRITE BOOKS

BookWomen readers in print

Ames Sheldon: Inspiring women



Ames Sheldon has been writing since she was a child, penning numerous stories and poems as she grew up. At age 29 she wrote her first novel, but ended up putting it in a drawer, where it remained for more than 30 years.

Meanwhile, life went on, and Sheldon's writing efforts were directed at her professional work as a journalist and then as a grant writer and development officer for a variety of major nonprofit organizations.

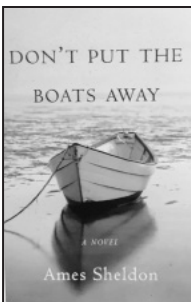
When she retired seven years ago, she threw herself into a new career as writer of historic fiction. Since then, she has published two novels, and in May, her third will appear.

At this point, Sheldon is busy promoting the second novel, **Don't Put the Boats Away**, and preparing for the launch of the third, **Lemons in the Garden of Love**.

She believes "Don't Put the Boats Away" is a timely tale: "It's a great pandemic read, because it's a story about characters who encounter obstacles, reinvent themselves, and develop resilience in the process. By the end it becomes inspiring, while still being realistic."

Set in the period from 1945 to 1970, the story is a sequel to her first novel, **Eleanor's Wars** (which was featured in BookWomen's Readers Write Books section in the August-September, 2016 issue).

"Eleanor's Wars" and "Don't Put the Boats



Away" grew out of Sheldon's lifelong interest in U.S. women's history. In the 1970s, as the field of women's history was emerging, she was the lead writer and an editor of the ground-breaking **Women's History Sources: A Guide to Archives and Manuscript Collections in the United States**.

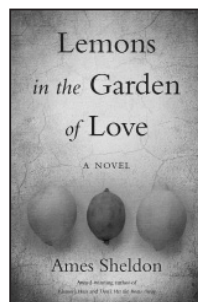
In the process of working on the monumental reference book, Sheldon said, "I discovered my love for women's history and for using primary sources for research."

Four years ago, as the political climate of the country changed and state legislatures were actively making it harder for women to get reproductive health care and abortions, Sheldon's thoughts turned to her unpublished first novel.

It was a story set in 1977 about a Women's History graduate student at the University of Minnesota who discovers that she's related to the woman who founded the Birth Control League of Massachusetts in 1916.

"I decided to pull the manuscript out of the drawer and rework it." After three research trips to the archives at Smith College and several major rewrites, the still timely 30-year-old manuscript became "Lemons in the Garden of Love."

Sheldon is pleased that the current directors of Planned Parenthood chapters in both Massachusetts and Minnesota have written blurbs for the back cover of the book. Fifty per-



cent of royalties from book sales will be donated to the two organizations.

At this point in her life, Sheldon thinks, this might be her last big historical novel. "They require lots of research and travel. To keep a whole book in my brain

is very fun, consuming, and I love it, but it's exhausting, too." Her husband is 80, and she would like to have more time in the future to do things together, perhaps travel more.

"After launching 'Lemons,' I'll probably turn my attention to short stories, which I used to write a lot of, but haven't for a long time."

Jennifer Soule: "Postcard Days"



Poet Jennifer Soule likes Japanese poetic forms. She has written haiku seriously for more than 25 years, and is intrigued by the format called haibun, which is a short essay with haiku in it.

"Haibun is a kind of hybrid, and I like it because I think most lives are hybrids. Haibun is a useful form, especially when one is examining one's life."

This is what Soule is doing in her second poetry chapbook, **Postcard Days**, a collection that includes a number of haibun and haiku. She starts the book with a haibun, "Happy Haiku Day," which recounts the glorious day when two of her haiku were accepted for publication for the first time. "Often times we remember and write of the big days in our lives," the essay begins. "... And though we enjoy them, we sometimes forget the smaller postcard days."

The poems that follow speak to various parts of Soule's life and the places where she has lived, "like a travel journal. I see life as a journey, and it was fun to look at the journey of my life through poems."

Haiku is about the ordinary moments of people's lives, she noted, "a condensed version." There's some prejudice about the form, Soule believes, because it appears so simple. "Actually, it's pretty difficult to condense a moment into those few words."

And she hopes she'll be talking with book groups about her two latest novels. "I love to meet with groups. I did it in person a lot with my first novel, and now with Zoom I can reach beyond Minnesota." Groups interested in connecting with Sheldon can email her at amessheldon07@gmail.com.—**Mollie Hoben**

A South Dakota native, Soule describes herself as "deeply rooted in the Great Plains/prairie." She has lived and worked in various parts of the country, but after retirement she and her husband returned to Sioux Falls. A former community organizer, clinical social worker, and professor of social work, she then returned to school to earn an MFA in creative writing.

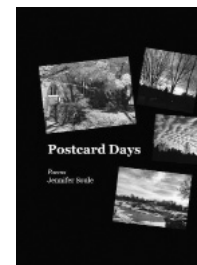
"Postcard Days" is Soule's second chapbook. In 2015 she published **Hiawatha Asylum**, poetry inspired and haunted by the tragic history of the little-known federal Hiawatha Asylum for Insane Indians in Canton, S.D. Last year, she and her husband edited an anthology of poets with connections to South Dakota, **Without Fear of Infamy**.

In the current time of pandemic and upheaval, "poetry is especially important," Soule believes. "During stressful times, when concentration is more difficult, poetry is a comfort. Short pieces feel more satisfying, they offer a sense of connection that's needed now, when there's so little physical connection."

Soule is fan and supporter of independent bookstores and of poets everywhere. "When I go someplace, I always go into the bookstore and buy all the local poets."

Whether in a bookstore or in her poetry, Soule thinks of herself as "a grazing browser. I like to gather images and put them together."

She's feeling good about "Postcard Days," she said. "People who've read it liked it. It's not painful to read, and that's always a plus."—**Mollie Hoben**



"Often times we remember and write of the big days in our lives. ... And though we enjoy them, we sometimes forget the smaller postcard days."

Jennifer Soule's chapbook can be ordered from your local independent bookstore and from online booksellers.

Saved by books



Knowing how essential books are to children, it's a joy to find ways to share them with children who need them. By Heidi Galer.

**BookWomen
reader
Heidi Galer,
Iowa City,
Iowa, has four
adult children
and eight
grandchildren
ranging from 6
years old to 21,
some of whom
were read to in
their mothers'
wombs, and all
of whom are avid
readers.**

When I came by myself to this country from Austria at the age of almost 9 years, I was allowed to enter the United States as a displaced orphan. Thirty-eight days later, on Aug. 21, 1952, President Truman's Displaced Person Act of 1948, which had been extended twice, was terminated. That meant that no more children like me were allowed to enter the United States!

I ended up in the small Iowa town of Spencer with a farm family who adopted me two months later on Sept. 5, 1952.

My new parents knew no German and I did not know English. When school started, I had no idea what the teacher and the children in my class were saying, but that didn't matter to me, because for the first time I saw books!

I was so curious to see so many different books with wonderful pictures in them. I wanted to stay inside the classroom and look at these books, but I was forced to go outside for recess instead. I asked the teacher if I could take a book home, but she didn't understand me, and since she shook her head, I decided we weren't allowed to do that. I was very sad.

My farm family went to town twice a week: on Friday evening to buy groceries and on Sunday to spend most of the day at our church. One Friday my mom showed me the Carnegie Library, and I was hooked!

Every Friday evening I would run to the library and spend every minute looking at the books, even though they were written only in English. I was allowed to look at the books in the library but not to take a book home. (Later I found out that this rule applied to all farm families, because we hadn't paid

higher taxes to use the library and to swim in the city pool.)

Three long years later, when I was 12, I spoke English and understood most of what was going on, even though there were no special classes that helped children who spoke another language. I discovered that the library had a new rule: I could take four books home with me every Friday night! I was on Cloud Nine when I heard that wonderful news.

Usually, however, I read my four books by Sunday and waited impatiently until Friday came again. Eventually, I learned that each child in a family could take four books home with them, and since I had three brothers now, none of whom were readers (I didn't tell the librarian that part!), I was allowed to check out 16 books a week! I was in Seventh Heaven from then on.

Throughout my life, the challenges I faced as a child and the comfort that books and reading gave me have motivated me to share the joys of reading with children. Starting, of course, with my own children, with whom I read every day as they were growing up.

When I retired from teaching in 2002, I immediately volunteered to help children read at an elementary school. I have continued doing this every school year until the pandemic arrived. How I've missed being able to interact with the children this past year!

I also taught English to non-English-speaking immigrants three times a week, and I miss them, too. For those who were parents, I would collect children's books they could give to their children.

Each fall and spring I give children's books to

the Shelter House in Iowa City, which helps families who are looking for work and a place to live. The kids are always excited when I come with books.

Frequently I give children's book to our two public libraries, and to our local Iowa Medical and Classification Center, known as Oakdale Prison, where I donate children's book so that fathers can record themselves reading the books to their children and send the DVDs to their homes.

When I go to Austria to visit relatives, I always bring books to the little ones I'm

related to. They all learn English in school, from kindergarten on, and books are more expensive there than here. This is another way to continue sharing books and encouraging children to read.

Last month I gave one of my former students, who is now a professor of German, 12 boxes of German books, including children's books, so he could start a German Library.

There are so many ways we can all share our books with less fortunate children. I am so happy to help in any way I can.

Creating a children's library

When Heidi Galer retired from her career as a high school German teacher, she was set to fulfill a lifelong dream. Although she had floor-to-ceiling bookcases in every room of the house, she had always dreamed of having a specific space in the house designated as a library, a quiet, comfortable space for reading and thinking.

With time, finally, to think about such a project, Galer had a change of heart. With her three adult daughters and most of her grandchildren living nearby, "I decided that instead of me having a library for me, I would create a children's library."

She chose the biggest bedroom in the house, cleared it out and put in bookshelves, a little desk, colorful rugs on the floor, made cozy spaces to read, to play. She stocked it with her large collection of children's books, as well as puzzles, games, toys.

She had a collection of paintings and images showing children reading books, but when all the shelving was up there was no wall space left, so she took the door off the closet and turned it

into a small art gallery.

Over her lifetime, Galer said, she had saved "all the books I had as a girl in Spencer, all the books I had bought for my children and my grandkids over the years. Also, the many German children's books I had brought back from my 30 trips to Germany and Austria with my high school students (who then learned new German vocabulary as they read the books with one another in groups)."

When the library was ready and the grandchildren saw it, they loved it, Galer said. "They had already been raised by their parents to know that reading was a very important thing." Every time they came to visit, they would head to the library.

"When I invited friends to come visit, they would bring along their kids or grandkids, and we could talk for hours while the children were engrossed in the library."

When Galer and her husband moved a year ago, after 52 years their house, she recreated the library in the new house, and the space is even better, she said. The youngest of her grandchildren still love to come use "their" library.—**Mollie Hoben**



"The challenges I faced as a child and the comfort that books and reading gave me have motivated me to share the joys of reading with children."



A banner made by Heidi Galer's sister-in-law greets children at the door to the library. It says Kinderbibliothek, "children's library" in German.

Readers Write



What's on your mind? What's on your bookshelf? We want to know, and so do other bookwomen, so drop us a line (or a few!) and we'll get the word out.

Kindness during COVID

About seven years ago I put in a Little Free Library (LFL) on my boulevard. I had just retired from teaching in an elementary school and had many children's books I had purchased over the years. When no one at my school had need of the books, I decided to put up the LFL and stock it with children's books and the message, "Take a book and pass it on."

My home is in a low-income neighborhood in St. Paul with quite a few children. The library has been quite successful over the years, judging by the many books that have gone out of it and the nice comments I have received.

In March, as the pandemic was ramping up, the need for food access also ramped up. Because it was winter, book traffic at the LFL had slowed way down, so I decided to convert my Library into a Little Free Food Pantry.

I had planned to continue this for only a few months. However, as the pandemic wore on, I decided to keep on stocking it. I found I needed to add food every day over the summer. One day I noticed a young man, who was carrying a bag, stop at the pantry. After he walked by, I saw in the pantry a couple cans of flavored water that I had not put in there!

This young man was not the only person to add items to the pantry. At least once a week I found items in the pantry that I had not put there, from baby formula to toilet paper to cans of soup. It was heartwarming to realize that in my neighborhood, where life is hard for so many people, there was so much kindness and thought for others.

One day in December before Christmas, I happened to see a police truck in front of my house and a small SUV in front of it. Where I live, it is not unusual to see police vehicles driving around. As I watched, a woman got out of the SUV with an armload of books, the policeman got out with a bag of canned goods and began to stuff the pantry!

I opened the front door to thank them both and found out they were driving around to deliver books and groceries to the Little Free Libraries and Pantries in St. Paul as a community service.

During these past months I have kept up the pantry, and others have continued to give a little to help their neighbors. I am often emotional when I think about the kindness of others during this time of stress and need. It gives me hope for the world I live in.

Sharon Kjellberg, St. Paul, Minn.



Curiosity of the octopus

I was excited when I saw the new BookWomen Quiz in the Dec., 2020-Jan., 2021 issue.

I had just finished reading **The Soul of an Octopus** by Sy Montgomery. In the book, the author writes about the octopuses she has known, writing mainly about the personalities of those she knew at the New England Aquarium in Boston.

I could not help but compare my immediate reaction of interest and curiosity in the new puzzle to the observed interest and curiosity of the octopuses when they were presented with new puzzles to solve. I had known a little bit about these animals prior to reading the book, but I learned so much more. I found them fascinating.

Joyce Hunt Litchy, East Gull Lake, Minn.

Lots of books

I enjoyed everyone's response to the "Bookscape" theme in the last issue. I thought I had a lot of books until I saw someone with the number 12,000 in their submission. I'm an amateur compared to her!

Zoe Irene Van Sandt, Austin, Texas

Kudos

No doubt you have been getting kudos and compliments for the last issue, and I want to add mine. The essays were inspiring; authentic and so well written. It was a joy from cover to cover. I especially resonated to those women who shared their thoughts about poetry. The issue focusing on Best Reads of 2020 will be a bonus for all your readers. You are relentless in giving us what we want to know.

Margaret Shryer, Minneapolis, Minn.

"It was heartwarming to realize that in my neighborhood, where life is hard for so many people, there was so much kindness and thought for others."

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ALMANAC: FEBRUARY-MARCH

History for the well informed reader

**“She destroyed
the last vestiges
of sentimentality
in white Southern
writing.”**

Feb. 1, 1918 Muriel Spark born in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Muriel Spark was a prolific, award-winning Scottish novelist, known for her darkly comedic voice. **The Prime Of Miss Jean Brodie** (1961) was considered her masterpiece.

She was 39, a struggling single mother and recently recovered from a serious breakdown when the first of her more than 20 novels, **The Comforters**, was published in 1957. Her talent as a novelist—an ability to create disturbing, compelling characters and a disquieting sense of moral ambiguity—was immediately evident.

In addition to her novels, Spark published numerous books of short stories, plays, essays and poetry. Although she lived most of her life away from Scotland, Spark always described herself as “Scottish by formation.” She died in 2006.

Feb. 17, 1912, Andre Norton born in Cleveland.

A prolific and award-winning writer, Norton changed her name in the 1930s from Alice Mary to Andre, believing a more masculine-sounding name would make her more acceptable as a writer, especially of science fiction.

Often called the Grande Dame of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Norton wrote novels for more than 70 years.



When Norton died in 2005, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, which had honored her with its Grand Master Award in 1984, announced the creation of the Andre Norton Award. It is

given annually for an outstanding work of fantasy or science fiction for the young adult literature market.

Feb. 26, 1907 Rosebud Yellow Robe born in South Dakota

Yellow Robe's parents were leaders in the Lakota community, and she was one of the first Native Americans to attend the University of South Dakota.

Dedicated to introducing Native American stories and culture to schoolchildren, she taught about Native culture in the New York schools for 20 years. She published **An Album of the American Indian and Tonweya and the Eagles**, stories she had learned as a child. Yellow Robe died in 1992.



March 25, 1925 Flannery O'Connor born in Savannah, Georgia.

O'Connor grew up in Georgia and most of her fiction is set in the South. After moving to the North as a young writer, she was diagnosed with lupus at age 25; she returned to her mother's home in Georgia, where she wrote until her death at age 39.

She published two novels, **Wise Blood** and **The Violent Bear It Away**, and about 30 short stories. Many of her characters are poor, deformed or outsiders in some way. Alice Walker wrote of O'Connor, “She destroyed the last vestiges of sentimentality in white Southern writing.”



AND THE WINNER IS...

BW Quiz: “Spliterature”

Katia McDonough and Melanie Ruda have a weekly puzzle ritual. Every Sunday morning, they do the Sunday crossword puzzle in tandem. One takes the Down clues and the other, the Acrosses. “We each fill in as much as we can,” Ruda explained. “Then we go at the remaining clues together, whoever has ideas.”



Melanie Ruda (L) and Katia McDonough

The two collaborated on the last BW Quiz, and their entry was chosen randomly from all the correct entries, earning them a free year's subscription to BookWomen.

Reading has been a challenge for each of the women during the pandemic. Until the end of January, when she retired, McDonough had been a nurse practitioner in a public health clinic. “I've had a hard time quieting myself down after work, and I'm embarrassed to say that I haven't been able to finish one book since the pandemic started.” She has read chapters of a number of books, “but I haven't had the ability to focus to stay with it.”

This is a real loss, she said, as typically she reads at least five or six books a month. And not having access to libraries has been another huge loss. “I've always been dedicated to the library, so it was really hard when they closed.”

Ruda also has found reading challenging these last months.

Other entrants with correct answers

Dorothy Abramson, Farmington Hills, Mich.; **Elizabeth A. Belden**, Alburnett, Iowa; **Jean Bennett**, Pleasanton, Calif.; **Lucy Bishop**, Urbana, Ohio; **Nan Burke**, Albuquerque, N.M.; **Susan Burns**, East Quogue, N.Y.; **Mary Burmeister**, Askov, Minn.; **Carolyn Burnett**, Birchwood, Wis.; **Sue Carroll**, Edgartown, Mass.; **Mary D'Andrea**, Cable Wis.; **Carol Deckert**, Dearborn, Mich.; **Melinda Emery**, Mankato, Minn.; **Meredith Fossett**, Walpole, Maine; **Mary Lou James**, Green Valley, Ariz.; **JoEllen Kimball**, Hutchinson, Minn.; **Joyce Hunt Litchy**, East Gull Lake, Minn.; **Joanne Kelleher**, Ann Arbor, Mich.; **Rosalie Maggio**, La Crescenta, Calif.; **Brenda Mulry**, St. Paul, Minn.; **Noel Reinhiller**, Moorhead, Minn.; **Sharon Sweet**, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.; **Ardith Tofteland**, Luverne, Minn.; **Vona VanCleef**, El Pao, Texas; **Zoe Irene VanSandt**, Austin, Texas; **Kathy Walker**, Hampden, Maine

“Partly I've been spending way too much time reading news, which has sucked away some of my reading time.” She has also found solace in nature, and has put more time there.

When she retired a couple of years ago, one of her goals was to spend more time in nature. She completed training as a Minnesota Master Naturalist and continues her volunteer work helping promote awareness, understanding, and stewardship of Minnesota's natural environment.

“During the pandemic, nature has given me a place to focus my attention. It helps me feel grounded and calm. Watching the seasons change and the birds migrate helps me see the bigger picture.” Books like **Braiding Sweetgrass** by Robin Kimmerer and **Lab Girl** by Hope Jahren supplement that desire, she said.

The couple, who live in the Minneapolis suburb of Richfield, belong to a book group that has been reading together since 1992. The group reads both fiction and nonfiction, with the “only rule” being that the books be written by women. Recent group selections have included **The Yellow House** by Sarah Broom, **The Story of More** by Hope Jahren, and **The Pull of the Stars** by Emma Donoghue.

A favorite book each would recommend is **The Song Poet** by Kao Kalia Yang for Ruda (“so powerfully written”) and **Lila**, by Marilynne Robinson for McDonough (“I love the whole Gilead series, and this one especially, for the female narrator”).

Some comments from entrants

Another fun test—we need them in these “stay home” days. I just love doing these quizzes and of course reading each issue cover to cover. My list of books to read keeps growing! This was fun and easy, once I began—after a few minutes of wondering!

I really enjoyed this quiz. The second one had me stopped for a few minutes until I remembered my mother patching our clothes during WW II!

Fun puzzle, loved the play with words.

I thought this would be impossible! And then I figured each one out.

This was WAY too easy! But it was a welcome respite from the anacrostic I've been struggling with.

My first ever quiz entry. I am not a quiz/puzzle person but loved this one!



So often in life the things you regard as an impediment turn out to be great, good fortune.—*Ruth Bader Ginsburg*

My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.—*Maya Angelou*

The most courageous act is still to think for yourself. Aloud.—*Coco Chanel*

There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.—*Edith Wharton*

"I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept."—*Angela Davis*

Nothing is impossible; the word itself says I'm possible.—*Audrey Hepburn*

The question is whether or not you choose to disturb the world around you, or if you choose to let it go on as if you had never arrived.—*Ann Patchett*

Do I stay with rage, sorrow, and absence and suffering, or do I land on forgiveness, compassion, acceptance, and moving forward? We always have that choice.—*Cheryl Strayed*

What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?—*George Elliot*

Sometimes only a change of viewpoint is needed to convert a tiresome duty into an interesting opportunity. —*Alberta Flanders*

It is possible that if we stop comparing ourselves to another and their life-styles, we may gain the greatest gift of all ... and that is individuality.—*Lori Foster*

THE LAST WORD

Women on: Surviving and thriving

No one is in control of your happiness but you; therefore, you have the power to change anything about yourself or your life that you want to change.—*Barbara De Angelis*

I believe the greatest gift I can conceive of having from anyone is to be seen, heard, understood, and touched by them. The greatest gift I can give is to see, hear, understand, and touch another person.—*Virginia Satir*

I've come to believe that each of us has a personal calling that's as unique as a fingerprint—and that the best way to succeed is to discover what you love and then find a way to offer it to others in the form of service, working hard, and also allowing the energy of the universe to lead you.—*Oprah Winfrey*

Being defeated is often a temporary condition. Giving up is what makes it permanent.—*Marilyn vos Savant*

My mother drew a distinction between achievement and success. She said that achievement is the knowledge that you have studied and worked hard and done the best that is in you. Success is being praised by others, and that's nice, too, but not as important or satisfying. Always aim for achievement and forget about success.—*Helen Hayes*

BookWomen reader **Mary Ann Cordova**, Albuquerque, N.M., has been a collector of quotes for many years. To be added to her hodge-podge collection, a quote has to meet one rule: it must resonate with her.

We invite other readers to help us curate "The Last Word."

