

BOOK CLUB SUGGESTIONS 2020-2021

Dear '66ers ~

Thanks to all for sending summaries of your recommended books. Once again, many intriguing choices! Please review the descriptions below and send me your top 6 choices in order of preference with "1" being your first choice by **JULY 20th**.

Thanks,
Karen

NOVELS:

~ **THIS IS HAPPINESS** by Niall Williams (Mary Randall McMahan)

This is an Irish novel par excellence. The narrator is a gentleman of our age looking back on his teen years when life with his family in London became too difficult for his mother and he was sent to live with his grandparents in the West of Ireland.

The story centers around the rural electrification of Ireland, sometime in the '40s, the relationships between the young man, his grandparents and one of the workers who comes for this electrical project. The Irish Church is, of course, central in everyone's life...for good or ill. The writing is spectacularly wonderful...it's almost written in brogue...and captures the lilt of Irish speech in a very easy manner. It's one of several by this author highly rated on Amazon...a consistent 4.5 stars!

~ **OUT OF DARKNESS, SHINING LIGHT** by Petina Gappah (Linda Iacelli)

I was drawn to it because it received the Chautauqua Institution 2020 Book Prize. It's a novel about the expedition through the continent of Africa to carry the remains of Dr. David Livingstone to be returned to his home in England for burial. Dr Livingstone (Dr. Livingstone I presume?) was known as a physician, missionary, explorer and abolitionist. There are many African characters in the story. Two of them, his cook and his male secretary, are the narrators of the book. What makes it fascinating is that the African members of the expedition who are usually mere footnotes in most accounts of Livingstone's explorations to discover the source of the Nile, are the main characters in this account. If you would like to read a unique view of 1870s Africa, conceived through the imagination of African author Gappah, this

book is worth the attention!

~ **AMERICAN DIRT** by Jeanine Cummins (Connie Ryan Perry)

Having worked with a migrant parish in Florida, this book struck a chord. It tells the story of a middle class Mexican woman who flees Acapulco with her 8-year-old son after their family is killed by the drug cartel. It tells of their ordeal trying to escape to the U.S., knowing the cartel continues to look for them.

~ **THIS TENDER LAND** by William Kent Krueger (Connie Perry)

This is a novel about 4 orphans on a life-changing odyssey during the Great Depression. After escaping from a pitiless school, they head for the Mississippi, meeting along the way others struggling with the epic challenges of that time.

~ **THE TEA GIRL OF HUMMINGBIRD LANE** by Lisa See (Carolyn DellaPietra Frost)

A thrilling new novel from bestselling author Lisa See explores the lives of a Chinese mother and her daughter who has been adopted by an American couple. Li-Yan and her family align their lives around the seasons and the farming of tea. There is a ritual and routine, and it has been ever thus for generations. Then one day a jeep appears at the village gate--the first automobile any of them has seen- and a stranger arrives. In this remote Yunnan village, the stranger finds the rare tea he has been seeking and a reticent Akha people. The author shares the customs of a Chinese ethnic minority, the Akha, whose world will soon change.

~ **THE VANISHING HALF** by Brit Bennett (Dorothy Lyndon)

This is a novel about twin sisters, inseparable as children, raised in a black community, who run away at age 16. Many years later, after following different paths, one sister lives with her black daughter in the same southern town she had escaped from. The other twin secretly passes for white, married to a white man with her daughter. This is a story of race, gender and identity as the sisters uncover secrets of the past.

~ **ELEANOR OLIPHANT IS COMPLETELY FINE** by Gail Honeyman (Cheryl Gravelle Learned)

This novel will make you laugh and it will break your heart. Quirky Eleanor learns that she can desperately try to forget her past but, in the end, it will always be a part of who she is. An unlikely friend is instrumental in guiding her life's journey.

~ **LEFT NEGLECTED** by Lisa Genova (Barb Olmstead Long)

Barb suggests that this book be put back on the list since we chose it last

year but never got to discuss it.

As a result of an auto accident, a traumatic brain injury completely erases the left side of Sarah's world. Now, as she wills herself to regain her independence and heal, Sarah must learn that her real destiny may lie far from the world of spreadsheets and conference calls, and that a happiness and peace greater than all the success in the world is close within reach, if only she slows down long enough to notice.

HISTORICAL FICTION

~ **THE GIVER OF STARS** by Jo Jo Moyes **AND THE BOOK WOMAN OF TROUBLESOME CREEK** by Kim Michele Richardson (Jeanne Gasser McElhinney)

I would like to recommend both these books of historical fiction because they are on the same unusual topic of women in Kentucky during the Depression who, with the support of Eleanor Roosevelt, delivered library books on horseback to the people of Appalachia. One deals more with characters, the other with bigotry. It would be interesting to compare them, especially since one of their authors is accused of plagiarism!

~ **CHILD OF THE FOREST** by Jack Grossman (Marcia Grucza Beck)

This is the true story of a Polish/Jewish teenage girl's survival on her own during WWII after escaping a camp. I met the author at my book club meeting last October. He met with this survivor in person after a trip to the Holocaust Museum in DC and got her story written. She has visited him here in NC and he is hoping to get a movie made.

~ **THE LOST GERMAN SLAVE GIRL** by John Bailey (Karen Boggs)

A poor German family emigrates to the U.S. and when the parents die their orphan child is designated as a slave so that she can be sold. As an adult she is recognized by the German community in New Orleans and a trial to claim her freedom ensues. A true story, this becomes a riveting courtroom drama exploring slavery and its laws.

MYSTERY

~ **MAIGRET AND THE TOY VILLAGE** by Georges Simenon (Diane DeMay Hammar)

Simenon was a prolific writer who authored over 40 books that centered around Chief Inspector Jules Maigret whose keenly honed intuitive abilities enable him to put together pieces of a murder puzzle that

others cannot. At the same time, he is portrayed as very human, seldom passing up an opportunity for a glass of wine or beer, able to keep his brain charged despite very little sleep and married to a woman with whom he shares mutual trust and respect.

This book takes place in a small village outside Paris and the murder has been committed prior to the beginning of the story. The lead character is Felicie, a young and dramatic creature who lives in the house where the murder was committed and acts as a housekeeper for Peg Leg, a gentleman who suffered a horrible accident that left him missing a leg. During the course of the story, Maigret and Felicie resolve their differences, and Maigret and his officers figure out who the killer is and, as usual, wrap up the case. (Maigret stories run on both Netflix and Amazon)

MEMOIRS

~ **THE GIRL WITH SEVEN NAMES** by Hyeonseo Lei (Barb Dobbertin Englert)

This is the true story of a girl who escaped from North Korea, survived her 11-year journey through China to South Korea, changing her name to protect her identity, and who then spoke out to the world the truth about her homeland.

~ **READING WITH PATRICK** by Michelle Kuo (Eileen Pinto)

This is a 2017 memoir about the transformative relationship that develops between two very different people: an optimistic Teach for America volunteer and a promising student at a school in one of America's poorest counties. It is a complex story that demonstrates both the healing power of literature and the resilience of the human spirit.

NON-FICTION

~ **BEHIND THE BEAUTIFUL FOREVERS** by Katherine Boo (Judy Conboy Acton)

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Katherine Boo spent almost 4 years interviewing the residents of Annawadi slum, which is hidden behind a wall of flowered tiles close to Mumbai Airport in India. In this book she describes the relationships among the residents and their economic struggle as trash collectors.

~ **HOW TO BE AN ANTIRACIST** by Ibram X. Kendi (Nora Brennan Shannon)

Kendi takes readers through a widening circle of antiracist ideas - from the most basic concepts to visionary possibilities - that will help readers see all forms of racism clearly, understand their poisonous consequences, and work to oppose them in our systems and in ourselves.

- ~ **BLACK LIKE ME** by John Howard Griffin (Dory McKenzie Wilson)
A perfect time to read (re-read) this history-making classic now celebrating its 50th anniversary. It is the story of journalist John Griffin who used a medication that darkened his skin to deep brown, exchanged his privileged life as a Southern white man for the disenfranchised world of an unemployed black man and then recorded his experiences as he made his way through the segregated Deep South.
- ~ **MAYFLOWER** by Nathaniel Philbrick (Dory McKenzie Wilson)
A terrific and compelling read and education during the 400th anniversary of Plymouth Rock 1620-2020." Hell of a history and top-notch history writer." A page turner revealing the truth behind the voyage of the Mayflower and the settlement of Plymouth Colony.
- ~ **THE NEW JIM CROW: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness** by Michelle Alexander (Pat Curtis Link)
This 10th anniversary edition includes a new preface by the author. Alexander believes that the rebirth of the new "racial caste system" began as a response to the Civil Rights Movement. The War on Drugs became the vehicle to implement this. The ("prison industry") criminal justice system has continually and systematically discriminated against African American men, so much so that the U.S. has the largest incarceration rate and African American men have a higher disproportionate rate of incarceration.
Alexander chronicles the time since the Civil Rights Movement and War on Drugs...a very disturbing picture yet one that is informative, enlightening and impactful.

****** As I typed this great list of books I decided to offer two book titles but not to include them in those to be selected for book group, one because it's too long and one because it's too silly. Both would be good additions for the pile of books on your bedside table though (at least that's where I stack all my "someday books." The first, **The Warmth of Other Suns**, is an astoundingly researched, surprisingly readable tome about the Great Migration, an historical event that I knew little of in which 6 million blacks emigrated from the south to the north over several decades. Because she tells the story through the lives of 3 people it reads like a novel and as we continue to wrestle with the complicated matters of racial equality, the book offers countless insights as to how we got here. It is written by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Isabel Wilkerson, who wrote last Sunday's NYT magazine's

cover story.

The second is **Wishin' and Hopin'** by Wally Lamb. As short as the other is long, it is Lamb's account of being a pre-teen boy in a Catholic school in the 50s. Hilarious.

If I have omitted anyone's suggestion or if your summary needs correction, please let me know.

I'll look forward to receiving your votes by **MONDAY, JULY 20TH !**