

BROWN BAG BOOKTALK

August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Bivald, Katarina** *Welcome to the Pine Away Motel and Cabins* (Fiction Bivald) -- Bivald is the best-selling author of *The Readers of Broken Wheel Recommend*. Once again the premise of her novel is a bit quirky, to say the least. The Pine Creek Motel has seen better days, but Henny thinks it is just charming. But Henny always sees the best of things, even though she was killed by a truck as she crossed the road. The funeral is now over but Henny is still around so that she can help her friends, family, and community. Each character is distinct and very complex, although the setting is quite ordinary. -- **JAC**

**Blackwell, Juliet** *The Lost Carousel of Provence* (Fiction Blackwell) -- Blackwell has developed quite a following for her novels taking place in France. This may well be her best yet. This time she has written a story that takes place in beautiful Provence, and her descriptions are indeed beautiful. She narrates the story from several different time periods and perspectives. It begins with Maëlle Tanguy, who is an apprentice at the famous carousel factory of Gustave Rayol. It is an unusual profession for a young woman in 1900s France, but she loves her work crafting beautiful and whimsical animals for the carousel. There are also several love stories in various time periods. And finally, there is Cady Anne Drake, a troubled and extremely talented photographer living in present-day Oakland, California. I especially enjoyed learning about carousels. -- **JAC**

**Blackwell, Juliet** *The Vineyards of Champagne* (Fiction Blackwell) -- Widowed Rosalyn Acosta, who works for a small Napa Valley vineyard/distributor, is on her way to France to represent her company in a local champagne festival. On the plane, she meets an Australian woman, Emma Kinsley. While the two are on their long journey, Emma shares some World War I vintage letters written to her great-aunt. These letters document the lives of Lucie and her family while they are sheltered in the vineyards' underground caves. The caves, carved out during Roman times, were used to store and age the champagne during the war. Blackwell incorporates the history of the famous champagne houses along the way to produce another interesting historical novel. -- **SCR**

**Blake, Heather** *A Potion to Die For* (Paperback Mystery Blake) -- This is a paranormal cozy mystery that keeps you guessing till the very end. Carly Hartwell is a healing witch and the owner of Little Shop of Potions. But when a local lawyer ends up dead in her shop, clutching one of her potions, she becomes a top suspect in a murder investigation. Carly now feels she has to find evidence to clear her name and find the real killer, before the whole town turns on her. Things become even messier for Carly when her cousin and long-time rival Delia and her ex-fiancé Dylan get caught up in the twists and turns of the mystery. -- **NM**

**Dawson, Kate Winkler** *American Sherlock: Murder, Forensics, and the Birth of American CSI* (Non-Fiction 363.25 D272a) -- This is a wonderful true crime book starring the detective. Probably most of us haven't heard of Edward Oscar Heinrich, who solved over 2000 cases between

1933 and 1953. He was responsible for a staggering number of forensic tools that are still used today. These include bloodstain pattern analysis, ballistics, lie detector tests and fingerprints. He had a wonderful knack for finding clues, establishing evidence and deducing answers. Dawson concentrates on several important cases in telling the super-detective's story. You'll also see how the man's very brilliance and self-confidence could make juries uncomfortable and possibly lead to mistrials. -- **JAC**

**Gowda, Shilpi Somaya** *The Shape of Family* (Fiction Gowda) -- The Olander family lives a good life in Southern California. Jaya, daughter of an Indian diplomat, and Keith, a banker, met in London and now have two beautiful children. This perfect life falls apart when Prem, their young son, drowns in the family pool while Karina, the daughter, is supposed to be babysitting him. Jaya and Keith cope very differently; Mom throws herself deeply into her spirituality, while Dad spends his days and nights working. Karina is left to navigate her own way as Prem watches from beyond. -- **SCR**

**Hoover, Colleen** *All Your Perfects* (Fiction Hoover) -- Quinn and Graham's story is that of a couple that truly loves each other but is not sure if love is enough to keep their marriage alive. Secrets and lies keep adding up and with each new complication their marriage is pushed closer to the breaking point. The story is told alternating between the past and the present, where you can see how beautiful their relationship was and how devastatingly painful it became. A love story that shows the importance of communication and finding hope when everything feels lost. -- **NM**

**Hoover, Colleen** *It Ends with Us* (Fiction Hoover) -- Lily has worked hard to create the life she has always wanted and now she has Ryle Kincaid, a handsome neurosurgeon, to complete it. Ryle, on the other hand, is against relationships and dating, but can't get Lily out of his head and decides to give it a try. When things are starting to go well, Atlas Corrigan, her first love, reappears, and with him come memories of the past that threaten Lily's new relationship. A heartbreaking and haunting romance that sticks with you well after it ends. -- **NM**

**Letts, Elizabeth** *Finding Dorothy* (Fiction Letts) -- This is a biographical fiction book about the wife of L. Frank Baum, author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and many other books. I grew up adoring the Oz books and actually never saw the movie until sometime in the 1980s. This is a fascinating look at Frank's widow Maud Gage and their life together. When the movie with Judy Garland was being made, Maud invited herself onto the set so she could be sure that the movie would be a true reflection of Frank's vision. We find out what the background was behind the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Lion. Perhaps most importantly, you will discover how Maud rescued the song "Somewhere over the Rainbow" from the cutting room floor. -- **JAC**

**Lombardo, Claire** *The Most Fun We Ever Had: A Novel* (Fiction Lombardo) -- Marilyn and David Sorenson have been married since the 1970s, when he was a medical student and she was studying literature in college. Marilyn's career aspirations get put on hold when she gets pregnant early in their marriage. By 2016, they have four adult daughters. Their eldest girl is Wendy, a widow with

alcoholic tendencies. Her sister, Violet, has retired from her law career to raise two young children. Liza has just earned tenure as a psychology professor when she discovers she is pregnant. Their youngest, Grace, has told her family that she is attending law school. To complicate things further, 15-year-old Jonah, the son of one of the girls, comes back into the family. Lombardo gives each major character a fully fleshed-out life, full of family angst and love. -- **SCR**

**Meck, Su** (with Daniel de Visé) *I Forgot to Remember: A Memoir of Amnesia* (Biography Non-Fiction 92 Meck, Su) -- This is another not-cozy book, and this one (unbelievably) is a true story. Picture it, May 1988: A young (22-year-old) Su Meck, mother of two children, has settled down in sunny Texas with her husband, Jim, just like any average family. Then, in an instant, all of their lives are irrevocably changed when their ceiling fan falls and hits her on the head. While comatose briefly, her stay at the hospital lasted less than a month, as her body healed well enough. What the doctors couldn't heal was the damage done to her memories. From the moment Su wakes up, she cannot remember anything about her life up until that very moment. Twenty-two years erased, never to return. I want to reiterate: Su NEVER recovers her life memories from before her ceiling fan accident. Not only could she not remember events, but her own family (parents, siblings, and even her husband and children!!) was wiped from her memory. This book details her life since the accident, sprinkled with stories from her childhood, which she has been told by her parents and siblings. Her life has been full of tumult, and she has been told she is a much different person post-accident than pre-accident. A strange, heart-wrenching tale that illustrates the resiliency of the human spirit. -- **HV**

**Monson, Marianne** *Her Quiet Revolution: A Novel of Martha Hughes Cannon, Frontier Doctor and First Female State Senator* (Fiction Monson) -- This is an historical novel about an amazing woman. She came to Utah with her Mormon family from Wales. Along the way her baby brother died, and soon after they reached Utah, her father also passed away. Obviously, this made a strong impression on the young girl. Working at such jobs as typesetting and teaching, she saved enough to enter medical school at the University of Michigan and the University of Pennsylvania. She also took courses in public speaking before returning to Utah. She was a very gifted and dedicated doctor and developed a strong interest in the suffragette movement. She married in secret because her husband practiced plural marriage which had just become illegal. Despite this, she was invited to speak at the Columbia Exposition of Chicago. The federal government had taken away the rights for women voters in Utah because of the polygamy scandal, but they were restored once Utah became a state. She was immediately elected to the Utah state senate and served for two terms. She was the first woman to ever be elected to a state senate. -- **JAC**

**Noblin, Annie England** *St. Francis Society for Wayward Pets* (Fiction Noblin) -- The tale of Maeve Stephens is a rocky one. Currently, she's 36, freshly unemployed, then mugged, AND discovers her dreamboat pro baseball player beau is a philandering jerk all in one day. As if that weren't enough, all of her friends and peers seem to have glittering careers and happy lives. Just

as Maeve is planning what to do next with her life, she gets a life-changing phone call. Her birth mother (Maeve was adopted as a baby) has died and named Maeve as her sole beneficiary (house, car, cat) in a small town in WA. Off Maeve goes on a new adventure to discover her familial ties and lay old ghosts to rest. Based on the title, I thought there would be more heartwarming scenes with furry pets and knitting peacefully with kindhearted women as they dish out sensible life advice. While there are small amounts of these things, everything in this book is tinged with a bit of sadness. It has a satisfying enough ending, but it definitely has some dark themes (such as abuse, alcoholism, drugs, etc.). So, while there are comedic moments, this book is much different than I expected. Still a decent read, just be aware that it isn't exactly cozy. -- **HV**

**Pataki, Allison** *The Queen's Fortune: A Novel of Desiree, Napoleon, and the Dynasty That Outlasted the Empire* (Fiction Pataki) -- I love biographical fiction; in fact, I learned most of my history from reading good historical novels. Somehow, I've never read much about French history, so this book is an excellent choice to fill in some of my knowledge gaps. Desiree Clary realizes that she may be the only one able to save her family from the guillotine during the French Revolution. She meets Napoleon Bonaparte and his brother, Joseph, and they help the Clary family to survive. Desiree's sister marries Joseph and Desiree has an affair with Napoleon that leads to their engagement. But then Napoleon meets Josephine de Beauharnais and Desiree is cast aside. But the Clarys and the Bonapartes will forever be linked. Eventually Napoleon has Desiree marry one of his generals, Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte. As Napoleon falls from grace, Bernadotte rises in power and is offered the kingship of Sweden. Although Desiree never spent much time in Sweden, the dynasty she and her husband founded is still going strong today. -- **JAC**

**Prior, Hazel** *Ellie and the Harp Maker* (Fiction Prior) -- This is a charming debut novel. Dan Hollis is autistic, but lives a very happy, ordered life on the outskirts of the English moors. He makes exquisite Celtic harps in his barn and socializes with a very limited circle of friends. Ellie Jacobs takes a walk in the woods and accidentally comes across Dan's barn. She is enchanted by his work and he ends up giving her a harp made of cherrywood, to match her cherry socks. He stores it for her until she is ready to learn how to play the instrument. Ellie's abusive and controlling husband does not approve of the gift. But Ellie sneaks away to visit Dan almost every day. Inevitably, this leads to a tragic confrontation, but the believable fairytale-like ending shows that love and friendship can survive. -- **JAC**

**Sundin, Sarah** *The Land Beneath Us* (Fiction Sundin) -- Sundin writes romantic Christian fiction. *The Land Beneath Us* is the third book in her series *Sunrise in Normandy*. Even though this is the third book, readers will have no trouble following the plotline. The series takes place during World War II and tells about the loves of three estranged brothers from Texas. Clay Paxton is the youngest brother and has become a U. S. Army Ranger. Convinced that he is fated to die in battle, he offers to marry Leah, who has been a victim of a horrific rape. After all, he won't be coming back from battle and it is the right thing to do. Needless to say, he survives, she falls in love with him and he reconciles with his brothers. This is a quick, enjoyable read. -- **JAC**

**Turner, Nancy E. *Light Changes Everything*** (Fiction Turner) -- It is hard to believe that Turner's first book about the Prine family, *These Is My Words*, was published over twenty years ago. Her new book is about Mary Pearl Prine, the niece of original heroine Sarah. The summer of 1907 brings about huge changes for Mary Pearl. She has been accepted to Wheaton College in Illinois. She has also received a proposal of marriage from Aubrey Hanna. Just getting up to Illinois by wagon and train is quite an undertaking and she has to adapt to read, write, draw and carry herself like a woman of culture. Despite some family tragedies, including her cad of a fiancé, and an all-out war with neighbors that spreads into Mexico, Mary Pearl conquers all. She becomes a photographer of note and ultimately carves out a fulfilling life in Arizona Territory. -- **JAC**

**Tyler, Anne *Redhead by the Side of the Road*** (Fiction Tyler) -- As in her novel, *The Accidental Tourist*, Tyler presents the reader with another community of oddball and endearing characters. Micah Mortimer is a forty-something guy with highly disciplined and rigid ways. As the super in a small apartment, he lives in a basement rent-free. In addition to maintaining the property, he spends his days as a freelance tech geek. He has a tolerant girlfriend, Cassia Slade. All is well until the son of his old college girlfriend turns up on Micah's doorstep because he thinks Micah is his real father. -- **SCR**

**Wells, Martha *All Systems Red*** (Fiction Wells) -- This sci-fi, space novella is told as a diary from a SecUnit, or security android, who refers to itself as Murderbot and is monitoring an exploratory team as they analyze samples from a distant planet. Murderbot hacked its own governor module and is now self-aware, but pretending to be under the control of the governor module so that it does not get taken to be wiped clean. When a neighboring team goes dark, the scientists begin to wonder if all of the mishaps are system failures or intentional sabotage. With the help of their Murderbot, the team begins searching for the truth. -- **NM**

**Wouk, Herman *The Caine Mutiny*** (Fiction Wouk) -- Winner of the 1951 Pulitzer Prize for literature, this novel was based upon Wouk's own personal experiences on a minesweeper during World War II. When Willis "Willie" Seward enlists in the navy, it is really just to avoid the draft. Seward is a Princeton grad not quite ready to join the adult world; he chooses to spend his time playing the piano in a nightclub. Even after enlisting, he avoids serious duty by entertaining the admiral in Hawaii. But these fun times come to an end when he is posted to the U.S.S. *Caine*, a battle-worn minesweeper under the command of William De Vriess. Because he dislikes the commander, he is happy to discover that Lt. Commander Philip Francis Queeg will be assuming the role. His happiness is short-lived when it becomes apparent that Queeg is not at all suitable for his posting. As the ship's role becomes more important during the war, Queeg's behavior becomes more erratic. During a typhoon, the minesweeper's second-in-command challenges Queeg's authority, resulting in a court-martial. Wouk has a talent for weaving his characters into complex moral situations. -- **SCR**