

BROWN BAG BOOKTALK RECOMMENDATIONS

NOVEMBER 2ND 2023

Blackwell, Juliet *The Paris Showroom* <20223> {historical fiction} (Fiction Blackwell) - In the 1940s the Germans are occupying Paris. They have literally moved in, and slowly taken over the daily routines of life. They are also secretly deporting people to concentration camps. Capucine Benoir and her father Bruno have a business together making exotic fans for the upperclass French families. They have very little fear of deportation until Bruno is accused of being a communist and Capucine is assumed guilty by association. Arrested and awaiting their disposition they discover the Germans are looking for workers with experience in design and Capucine highlights her connection to Parisian design houses. She is sent to a little-known concentration camp within an abandoned department store. Hundreds of workers sort and repair stolen items from Jewish and other deported families. These items are mostly sent to Germany, but a showroom allows resident Germans to pick items to furnish their stolen residences. Capucine's estranged daughter, Mathilde, is cared for by Capucine's in-laws. She is living an extravagant life as her Grandfather has ties to Germany through the company he works for. When Mathilde discovers her Mother and Bruno were arrested and a very long term has disappeared, she starts seeing the reality of the Occupation. Circumstances bring Capucine and Mathilde in contact, but with much danger for both. This historical novel is an eye-opening view of the Germans. The suffering in the prison is realized, but still hope remained for a better future. I loved the French characters. -- recommended by CC

Bryson, Bill *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid: A Memoir* <2006> {nonfiction} (Nonfiction Biography 92 Bryson, Bill) -- Born in 1951 in Des Moines, Iowa, Bill relates a story of the decade of the fifties. He uses an imaginary character which he invented ("The Thunderbolt Kid") to describe anecdotes from his life. Post-World War II was a rich era with the world trying to reestablish itself. Bill shows how average Americans in small town towns responded to the challenges of the time. The book is laugh-out-loud funny in parts and informative in others. This is a unique look at an historical time and place. I found this a quick, enjoyable read. It makes you think about how you felt back then. -- recommended by CC

Chiaverini, Jennifer *Canary Girls* <2023> {historical fiction} (New Fiction Chiaverini) - Chiaverini is the author of several best-selling novels of historical fiction. As World War I began in earnest in England more and more men left their jobs to join the armed forces. Arsenals began to hire women to replace the men. Their recruiting slogan was "Be the Girl Behind the Man Behind the Gun." Thousands of British women such as cooks, maids, shopgirls, and housewives joined up to make the munitions urgently needed by their soldiers. They worked long hard shifts with little protective gear while handling explosives. April and Marjorie were former housemaids who answered the call. Lucy Dempsey is married to Olympic footballer gold medalist Daniel Dempsey. These three join other canaries to organize a lady's football club for some extracurricular fun and competition. The girls were called canaries because of the lurid gold color of their skin which came from working with munitions. They soon acquire an unexpected fan in Helen Purcell, the arsenal boss's wife. She was deeply appreciative of their growing prowess in winning football games. But she also recognized that their frequent illnesses were caused by the TNT they handled. Helen finally joins the arsenal administration and does her best to protect all the workers. There are the usual personal tragedies and inspiring stories as Great Britain finally is victorious. -- recommended by JAC

Cleeves, Ann *Telling Tales: A Vera Stanhope Mystery* <2005> {mystery fiction} (Fiction Cleeves) -- In this second Vera Stanhope mystery, ten years have passed since the murder of 15 year-old Abigail Mantel. Jeanie Long, her convicted killer, has just committed suicide in her jail cell. Only days later, an eyewitness comes forward to substantiate Jeanie's alibi and the small community of Elvet is again set upside-down. Detective Vera Stanhope and side-kick Joe Ashworth from Northumberland are brought in to re-evaluate Abigail's murder. As Stanhope gently teases the truth out of surrounding community members, including Abigail's best friend, Emma, another murder is committed. Cleeves has a real talent for bringing Stanhope and her settings to life. The PBS series, *Vera*, is one of my favorite television series. They are available in the Glendale Library system in DVD format. --recommended by SCR

Finkel, Michael *The Art Thief: A True Story of Love, Crime, and a Dangerous Obsession* <2023> {nonfiction true crime} (Nonfiction 364.1628 F499a) -- 25 year-old Stephan Breitwieser was one of the most prolific art thieves of our time. With the aid of his girlfriend, Anne-Catherine Kleinklaus, he "relocated" more than 2 billion euros' worth of art from museums around France and nearby countries to the home he shared with his mother. Some days he stole up to a dozen items, including ivory carvings, vases, a tobacco case once owned by Napoleon, and even a life-sized statue of Mary from a church. Always in it for the pleasure, he never attempted to sell any of the art. Instead he just really enjoyed living surrounded by all this beauty. When the pair was finally caught, his "clueless" mother dumped a lot of the priceless pieces into a nearby river and burned most of the paintings. -- recommended by SCR

Goodman, Matthew *Eighty Days: Nellie Bly and Elisabeth Bisland's History-Making Race Around the World* <2013>{nonfiction} (Nonfiction 910.41092 G623e) -- This engrossing tale of narrative nonfiction brings the nineteenth century to life. Most of us have heard of the trail-blazing journalist Nellie Bly who also is remembered for getting herself admitted to a lunatic asylum so she could report on the deplorable conditions. Bisland is barely remembered but their race captivated America from 1889-1890. Bly initially suggested a trip around the world to her editor at the *New York World* to see if she could beat the fictional trip of Phileas Fogg as presented in Jules Verne's novel *Around the World in Eight Days*. It took a year before the *World* decided to send her on the trip. Bly departed on 9:40 a.m. on November 14, 1889 to begin her 24,898 mile journey. Elizabeth Bisland, with virtually no warning, was dispatched by *Cosmopolitan* to attempt to beat both Bly and Fogg's journey. Bly started out going to the East and Bisland started out going to the west. Goodman's book tells us about seasickness, bad weather, wardrobe planning, helpful passengers, unhelpful travel agents and is also revelatory about the culture of that time and place. So, who won? Well, they both did ... Bisland's journey took 76½ days and Bly's took 72 days, six hours. Their accomplishment really helped to bring women journalists away from being relegated to the women's pages of newspapers and magazines. Women were finally (although progress was still slow) allowed to report on so-called hard news. This is a very entertaining look at an iconic story in American journalism. -- recommended by JAC

Kiernan, Stephen P. *The Glass Château* <2023> {historical fiction} (New Fiction Kiernan) - I picked this book up thinking it might be an historical biography of the artist Marc Chagall. It was not. However, it was inspired by the stained glass of Chagall and the visionary artist. The story begins in France at the end of World War II. The atrocities committed by the Nazis, and by the French Resistance fighters

in retaliation, were so awful and inhumane that it seems impossible for the French people to survive. The main character, Asher, lost all of his family and many of his friends in the war. In revenge he becomes an assassin for the Resistance. He is devastated by both grief and guilt and is just wandering aimlessly around the country. He hears that he might receive a decent meal at the Château Guerin. After the best meal he has had in years he begins to discover that the Château is different kind of sanctuary. It is filled with many devastated people who have their own damages to heal. Asher discovers that fire and sand can be turned into glass. Then that glass can be turned into stained glass to repair the windows of the bombed cathedrals of France. Asher decides not to reveal that he is Jewish and gradually becomes a valued member of the glass-making team. In fact, he becomes a glass artist. The stories of the men and women of the Château and their gradual healing are extremely inspirational. Somehow it had never occurred to me that PTSD (not identified as such after WWII) was the outcome of all wars, not just our contemporary ones. In a final twist, Asher and a former German soldier set off to repair stained glass all over Europe. -- recommended by JAC

King, Stephen *Holly* <2023> {horror fiction} (New Fiction King) -- Holly, Bill Hodge's protégé at Finders Keepers, answers the urgent call to investigate the disappearance of a young woman named Bonnie Dahl. Though she is still in mourning for her COVID-stricken mother, Holly senses she is in a race for time. Though King makes no mystery of who the bad guys are in his latest mystery, this book is a fast-paced thriller. -- recommended by SCR

King, Stephen *Mr. Mercedes* <2014> {horror fiction} (Fiction King) -- In the first of the Bill Hodges trilogy, former-detective Hodges is battling depression post-retirement. After failing to catch the person who stole a Mercedes and then plowed into the line for a job fair, killing 8 and injuring 15 people, Bill spends his days sitting in his chair contemplating suicide. His interest becomes re-invigorated after he is sent a note by the perpetrator. This mystery was the winner of the 2015 Edgar Award for best novel. Bill's story continues in *Finders Keepers* and *End of Watch*.-- recommended by SCR

McFadden, Freida *The Housemaid* <2022> {fiction} (New Fiction McFadden) - When Nina Winchester hires Millie to be her housemaid, does she have an ulterior motive? Millie, recently released from prison has found her dream job. This is her last hope. Nina has the perfect life, money, a caring husband, and a beautiful child. Millie could only dream of this type of life. Once she is hired Millie feels a little closer to her dream life. She soon discovers Nina isn't all she seems. Her moods vary from friendly to witchy. Andrew, her husband, is loving and attentive as well as being handsome. Millie starts to feel sorry for the way his wife treats him. Then Millie starts imagining what it would be like to be Nina. As opportunities arise to spend time with Andrew she takes advantage. Millie soon discovers the dark secrets the Winchester family hides and is drawn into them. This is an unbelievably twisty story with unexpected turns and a surprising ending. -- recommended by CC

Pataki, Alison *The Magnificent Lives of Marjorie Post* <2022> {biographical fiction} (Fiction Pataki) - Marjorie Merriweather Post, born 1887, grew up in the modest farmlands near Battle Creek Michigan. She was encouraged by her parents to never take success for granted and to work hard. The family moved to Battle Creek as her father, C.W. Post, sought treatment for a mental breakdown at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, a facility operated by John Harvey Kellogg, brother of the Kellogg cereal company

founder. After his recovery Post founded the Postum Cereal Company. Some of their first products were Grape-Nuts cereal and Post Toasties (cornflakes). From then on the food products manufacturing company made Post a very wealthy man. Marjorie was only 27 when she inherited the company, which was then worth \$20 million dollars. She remained a director of the company until 1958. Meanwhile Marjorie married and divorced four times but was always a very astute businesswoman. She first married Edward Burnett Close in 1905. They divorced in 1919 and then she married Edward Francis Hatton in 1920. She and E. F. Hutton expanded the General Foods Company (as it was known after 1929) and acquired other food companies like Hellmann's Mayonnaise, Jell-O, Baker's Chocolate, Maxwell House and many more. While Marjorie was traveling, she came across the innovations of Clarence Birdseye who had developed a new way to preserve food by freezing. Marjorie was much more than an astute businessman and rich socialite. She quietly was a great philanthropist: funding a Army hospital in France during World War I, a Salvation Army feeding station in New York during the depression, donated the cost of the Boy Scouts of America headquarters in Washington, and donated \$100,000 to the National Cultural Center in Washington now known as the John F. Kennedy Center for the performing Arts. She lived an extravagant lifestyle with her third husband, Joseph E. Davies who was the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union. They collected many valuable Russian works of art. This is a fascinating story of one of America's richest women told in the first person. -- recommended by JAC

Penner, Sarah *The Lost Apothecary* <2021> {fiction} (Fiction Penner) - This is about two women living centuries apart whose stories combine in an unusual way. Nella, who lives in the 1700s is an apothecary who mixes up potions to help women. Taught by her mother, who felt women's maladies were misunderstood by male doctors, Nella learned to provide comfort through potions and elixirs. As Nella grew up she was faced with her mother's death and the betrayal of a man causing her to choose another way to help women. She provided poison preparations to give to cheating or violent husbands. In her hidden shop in the back allies of London her "cures" were touted by word of mouth. She was frequently sought out by women in distress.

Carolyn Parcell lives in the present-day. She is preparing for her tenth anniversary trip to London with her husband. As she is packing, she discovers her husband has been cheating on her and chooses to go to London by herself. In London, she finds an empty antique vial in the River Thames. Using her previous training in English history, and with the help of a research librarian, she sets out to find the old apothecary shop and discover the solution to the long-unsolved "apothecary murders." Both women are faced with challenges that test their values and true self. This is an enjoyable story with strong characters, and it is historically interesting. -- recommended by CC