



# THE BOOK STALL

December 2020  
Vol. XXXI, No. 10  
Nancy Dreher, *Editor*



## THE FRONT LINE



It's December, and we've decked the halls and dressed the windows! We're doing our very best to celebrate the holiday season while staying safe and distant. We miss seeing the throngs of people crowded at the registers, and I definitely miss talking to customers about suggestions for their loved ones. Surprisingly, one of our favorite things to do is wrap books so we're truly sorry we can't do that this season. In the past we've been shoulder to shoulder behind the registers but that obviously won't work this year.

We're constantly working to keep our staff and customers safe, but as I write this, cases in Illinois are rising at an alarming rate, and our Governor is urging people to stay home except for essential errands. Although I think books are essential, I also know that our store has gotten very adept at fulfilling orders and helping customers without anyone having to come inside. I don't know if we'll close the store to traffic at the moment, and I'm not sure about opening our doors for our annual Red Invitation sale, but I know that we're here to help with books. So, check our website, follow us on social media, or call us to get the latest on our operations. And avail yourself of the many ways we can connect you with books! And don't forget our gift items—including some wonderful puzzles!!

Although the loss of events and school author visits have taken their toll on our bottom line, we are grateful for all the support from the community, and in-store sales have been brisk both online and by appointment. A new addition this year is our online book fairs, where we donate a portion of sales to the participating school. We were delighted to welcome new schools to the fold. We curated titles, created book bundles, and even produced videos featuring master children's bookseller Betsy Balyeat talking about some of her favorite new titles. If your school or charity would like to work with us in 2021, please give us a call at 847 446-8979.

As the pandemic continues, many of us look to books as an escape from the stress of the daily news. To that end we've created a window displaying titles that we hope will distract you from the distressing times. A few suggestions: for a dishy read set in Brooklyn, pick up Cecily von Ziegesar's *Cobble Hill*. Von Ziegesar is famous for the *Gossip Girl* books but has just penned her first adult novel. Two important comic voices have books out this season. Jerry Seinfeld's book, *Is This Anything*, is compendium of hundreds of his comedy routines, organized by decade, from the beginning of his career at an open-mic audition at Catch a Rising Star in New York City in May 1975. "Is this anything" is something comics ask each other about bits as they hone their monologues. *The Best of Me* by David Sedaris is a collection of his essays which are literally laugh-out-loud funny! Finally, events coordinator Robert McDonald suggested *Boyfriend Material* by Alexis Hall as a fun read set in the UK with witty banter and a sweet romance between the wayward son of an old rock star and a slightly uptight barrister. Absolutely adorable! And last, but certainly not least, one of my favorite humorists, Steve Martin, has collaborated with *New Yorker* cartoonist Steve Bliss in *A Wealth of Pigeons*, where Martin provides the caption and Bliss must provide the image. What I loved most about this book was the amusing back and forth between Martin and Bliss over the course of their collaboration.

And for further reading recommendations, our 2020 *Books of the Year* are included in this issue. We cast a wider net this year, so you'll see more genres represented. 2021 might be a good year to expand your reading horizons!

Happy Holidays and Reading!

*Steph*

### THURSDAY, DEC. 3

7 pm, A Family Action Network (FAN) Program  
ROSALIND WISEMAN

*The Distance Learning Playbook for Parents: How to Support Your Child's Academic, Social, and Emotional Development in Any Setting*

Please visit the FAN website for webinar details:  
[www.familyactionnetwork.net](http://www.familyactionnetwork.net).

### SATURDAY and SUNDAY, DEC. 5 and 6

#### Red Invitation Holiday Sale

We're offering **20% off** all orders placed in the store and online on **Saturday and Sunday, December 5 and 6**, and will also offer **20%** on all orders placed online on both **Friday, December 4** and **Monday, December 7**. Check our website or follow us on social media for details.

In December, we have two virtual book recommendation evenings featuring titles for holiday giving—and good reads for the winter.

### TUESDAY, DEC. 1

6:30 – 7:30 pm

Holiday Book Recommendations  
Presented by The Book Stall and  
League of Women Voters Wilmette

We are partnering with the LWV Wilmette for a virtual presentation of book recommendations. Whether you are looking for holiday gift ideas, or a great book to carry you through the end of 2020 and beyond, we'll try to provide you the perfect selection! Book Stall staffers will share our top fiction and nonfiction picks for the season. Registration is required; go to [eventbrite.com](http://eventbrite.com).

### THURSDAY, DEC. 10

6:30 – 7:30 pm

Books to Keep Your Spirits Up This Winter!  
Alice Moody and Ann Walters

Book Group leaders Alice Moody and Ann Walters are teaming up to present Book Stall readers with great titles chosen with the goal of keeping our spirits up. Ann and Alice will be recommending titles both old and new--books to inspire, books to provide escape, and books to lighten a heavy heart. This Zoom meeting is free, but registration is required, and space is limited. Email Robert at [events@thebookstall.com](mailto:events@thebookstall.com) to reserve your place. Attendees will get a chance to win Book Stall gift cards and free advance reading copies of upcoming titles. (You have to actually attend the Zoom call, not just register, to be entered into the raffle!)

### WEDNESDAY, DEC. 9

7 pm, a FAN Program

JEFFREY SELINGO  
*Who Gets In and Why:*

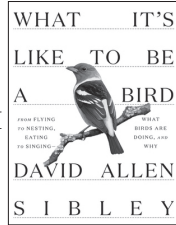
*A Year Inside College Admissions*

Please visit the FAN website for webinar details:  
[www.familyactionnetwork.net](http://www.familyactionnetwork.net)

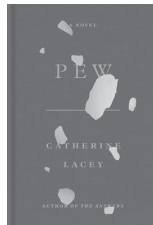
# Book Stall Staffers Pick Their 2020 Favorites

**STEPHANIE HOCHSCHILD**

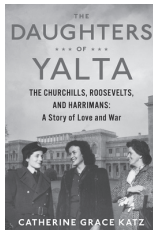
*What It's Like to Be a Bird: From Flying to Nesting, Eating to Singing--What Birds Are Doing* by David Allen Sibley (\$35). Sheltering in place left me plenty of time to gaze out our back windows and notice all the wildlife in our yard. I was particularly intrigued by the birds visiting our birdfeeders, and David Sibley is the perfect guide to teach anyone about our feathered friends. This book is richly illustrated in Sibley's signature style – each bird comes to life on the page – far more so than in a photograph. Learn about nesting, mating, calls and other bird habits. This beautiful book has a permanent spot by my window!



*Pew* by Catherine Lacey (\$26). This odd book was pressed into my hands by a bookseller who's reading tastes I trust, but I was still reluctant. The premise of the story is that a young person is found sleeping on a pew in a church somewhere in the American South, hence the character's name. Little is known about Pew, and Pew's sex and race are not readily apparent, but a family in the congregation takes Pew in. The enigmatic Pew never speaks and the family and the town become more and more frustrated and suspicious even as they confess their fears and secrets to them. This highly original work is as much about compassion and belonging as it is about judgement and the reader's preconceptions. Months later, I'm still thinking about this unsettling but compelling book.



*Daughters of Yalta: The Churchills, Roosevelts, and Harrimans* by Catherine Katz (\$26). I am a great fan of narrative non-fiction featuring strong female characters and this book certainly fits the bill! Of course, it helps that the author is a Winnetka native and friend of the store. But pick up *Daughters of Yalta* for a well-written, carefully researched account of the Yalta Conference in 1945, which laid the groundwork for the Cold War. Three key figures, Roosevelt, Harriman, and Churchill brought their daughters to assist them in the delicate diplomatic proceedings, helping with crucial logistics and gathering information. This book offers up a behind-the-scenes look at a pivotal moment in history.



**BETSY BALYEAT**

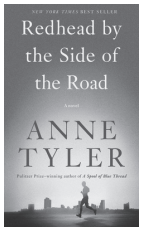


*The Paper Girl of Paris* by Jordyn Taylor (\$17.99), a young adult novel. *Now*: Sixteen-year-old Alice is in Paris. Her grandmother, who died two months ago, has left Alice a Paris apartment that no one in her family knew existed and has remained locked for 70 years.



Alice sets out to find out why the apartment was never mentioned and abandoned. *Then*: Grandmother Chloe never told the family that she had a much-loved younger sister named Adalyn. Sixteen-year-old Adalyn does not recognize Paris anymore. Every day brings a new horror under the Nazi Occupation. She joins a resistance group for a chance to fight back, and she soon finds herself making more and more compromises to her safety, her reputation, and relationships to those she loves. This is an engrossing story of two girls' courage and commitment, seven decades apart.

*Redhead by the Side of the Road* by Anne Tyler (\$26.95). Anne Tyler once again plumbs the male heart and psyche with tenderness and honesty in her adult novel. The narrative tone is warm, and the protagonist, Micah Mortimer, is a likeable oddball. He is the superintendent of a three-story slightly run-down apartment building in Baltimore, along with running a tech help service called Tech Hermit. Micah is a creature of habit. He rises at the same time every day, goes for a run, comes home and eats some toast, and then washes the kitchen floor. He seems content until the day his routines are blown apart. His woman friend tells him she is facing eviction, and a teenage boy arrives at his door convinced he is Micah's son. This is a funny and compassionate tale about learning to see the world through new eyes.



**LAURA BERENGER**

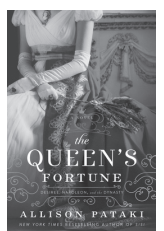


*The Authenticity Project* by Clare Pooley (\$26). I think this book needs a new cover! If that cover featured a London coffee shop set next to a London book shop set next to enticing artwork hanging in the next shop, one would have a much better idea of what delights wait on the pages inside. My reading tastes have changed

a bit in the time of the pandemic; like many others, I do not necessarily want to read "heavy" literature right now. This novel is fun and entertaining, without being frivolous. Julian, an aging artist, leaves the following question in a notebook; "What's the one thing that defines you, that makes everything else about you fall into place?" He leaves the notebook in a café, hoping others might answer the question "authentically" and pass the notebook on. The premise may be implausible, but it also carries enough gravity to make reading this book feel satisfying and worthwhile; and remind us, with a light touch that is tender, not saccharine, of the joy in our connectedness to one another.



*The Queen's Fortune: A Novel of Desiree, Napoleon, and the Dynasty That Outlasted the Empire* by Allison Pataki (\$28). This is armchair traveling and historical exploration and juicy novel all in one. Allison Pataki is known for her meticulous research and her ability to vividly bring history to life. Here is the story of Desiree Clary, Napoleon Bonaparte's mistress. Women throughout history and into the present are powerful, complicated, passionate, smart, tactical, and savvy; this is the story of one of them that invites you to sit next to the fire and lose yourself in her ambition amidst the backdrop of turbulent times. And what's not to love about figuratively spending time in Paris and the French Riviera right now?



*What Will These Hands Make?* by Nikki McClure (\$19.99). This children's picture book is a story of creativity and community. It reminds us of all that we can do to demonstrate care and love and joy to the people in our lives, whether they are in our own home, or in the larger neighborhood. Everyone knows that making a cake is more than having something to eat; it is about caring and celebration. McClure asks young and old to consider what gestures and activities make a difference to those we cherish. The final pages provide a place to have a child leave his or her handprints, making this book a wonderful gift to parents and grandparents from young readers.

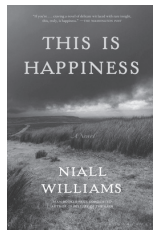




## KATHLEEN CRAWFORD



***This Is Happiness*** by Niall Williams (\$28). A small town in Western Ireland on the brink of big change in mid 1950s is the setting in this engaging coming-of-age story. Noel Crowe is a young man newly living with his grandparents when a man named Christy arrives on their doorstep. The story is what follows



Christy's appearance and includes his tale of lost love, Noel's tales of falling in and out of love, and the villagers' embrace of the advent of electricity, a development that will bring change not seen in centuries. Williams has mastered the art of Irish storytelling, and the pages are filled with wit as well as rich wisdom. You will want to have a highlighter handy while reading this novel in order to capture the lyricism in the descriptions of the quotidian ways of life in a rural village.

***The Boy in the Field*** by Margot Livesey (\$26.99).

Three siblings—Matthew, Zoe and Duncan Lang—are walking home from school outside Oxford, England, one afternoon when they discover an injured boy lying in a field bloody and unconscious; however, thanks to their intervention, the boy is saved. In the aftermath, the siblings are irrevocably changed, and the story tells about their search for answers to the complicated feelings they experience while attempting to come to terms with the violent scene they witnessed. This elegantly written story is both a tender and beautiful exploration of family, philosophy, and what it means to grow up in a complicated world—as well as a taut mystery. Thoughts of the three Lang children will stay deep within you long after you have finished this sharp yet spare novel.



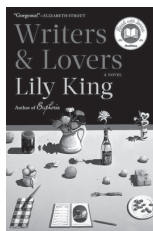
***Hamnet*** by Maggie O'Farrell (\$26.95). This is a deeply moving novel about the death of Shakespeare's 11-year-old son during the plague and the years leading up to the production of his great play with the interchangeable name. As a young Latin tutor in Stratford, England, Shakespeare—who has been viciously bullied by his violent father—meets and falls in love with a mysterious woman who is known to have unusual gifts as a healer. They marry, and soon after a daughter named Suzanne is born, with twins Judith and Hamnet following a few years later. Just as Shakespeare's gifts as a writer are beginning to awaken, their beloved young son succumbs to the bubonic plague. The parents' horrific grief begins to tear them apart, and Shakespeare leaves to go to London for better work, leaving his wife and daughters behind. A vivid and bold portrait of a marriage complicated by grief and loss as well as a fascinating tale of what life may have been like for this most revered literary figure.



## KARA GAGLIARDI



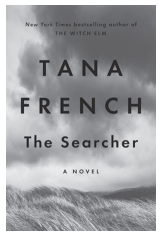
***Writers & Lovers*** by Lily King (\$27). In a season rich with historical fiction—pandemics in the time of Shakespeare, maternity wards during the Spanish flu—this book is about relationships. And that is refreshing. I put Lily King's *Writers & Lovers* in the same category as Sue Miller's *Monogamy*. Sometimes you want a



quieter book that sneaks up on you. I enjoyed reading about Casey Peabody because I felt I knew her. She presents herself as a 31-year-old writer, turned waitress, trying to find her way when her peers have moved on. Credit card debt, wedding invitations, and a moldy garage room rental are the pieces of her life. As the story opens, she has lost her mom and is fighting derailment. Her father saw in her a golf prodigy who wasted a college education. Here's a woman on the cusp of adulthood

who is trying to stick to her dream of being an artist. She falls for two men. Will she choose the man in the motorcycle jacket with a chipped tooth or the successful (yet insecure) author with two adorable boys? Will she have the courage to stop editing the novel that's consumed six years of her life and submit it to an agent? Inquiring minds want to know.

***The Searcher*** by Tana French (\$27) is a guilty pleasure. I will read every book French writes. Why? I love crime fiction and several books ago she won me over with her knowledge (talent) for character development, homicide detectives, and all things Irish. While some fans may have found her last book, *The Witch Elm*, a departure of sorts, this book returns to familiar territory—the protagonist cop. Cal Hooper is retired after 25 years on the Chicago police force, no less. After his daughter is accosted and his marriage falls apart, he seeks solace in a sleepy Irish village. He buys a fixer-upper, restores his new home, and tries to mind his own business. And then...Trey Reddy comes calling. A local kid in need of guidance, she picks up a paint brush, a hammer and they settle into a routine. She also asks for help finding a loving brother who has gone missing. Here is the crux of the novel. Cal can't help being the good guy. (Think Lee Child's Jack Reacher). Against his better judgement, he tracks the whereabouts of brother Brendan by interrogating the local drug dealer and regulars at the pub. He walks the line between happy-go-lucky American and Missing Persons. Lena, the widow and potential love interest, is impossible not to like. Throw in her litter of dogs, and she shows patience plus resolve. In the end, Cal finds what Trey needs to know. But the question remains: will he stay or will he go?



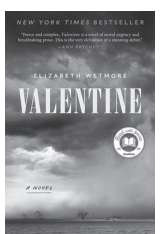
## MELANIE HAUCK



***Leave the World Behind*** by Rumaan Alam (\$27.99) depicts an uncertain life in the near future, when all digital communication has stopped, a family in a remote vacation house sequesters with strangers, and animals in the wild act unnaturally. What is happening? Written before Covid, this story is riveting and haunting. Netflix has adapted it to star Denzel Washington and Julia Roberts.



***Valentine*** by Elizabeth Wetmore (\$26.99) is a powerful debut. A 15-year-old Mexican girl is brutally raped in an oil field outside Odessa, Texas in the 1970s. An oil boom is happening, but bad times are coming—for women, that is. The story focuses on how a pregnant mother intent on justice, an older widow drowning her grief in booze, an abandoned preteen girl, and a woman striving for the community's respectability react. They each respond differently to survive this violent, sexist, racist environment. You applaud their courage, strength, and resilience. The gritty yet beautiful landscape is also a character and a metaphor for the impact of the oil business. Westerns usually feature men. This engrossing novel makes you realize women's voices need to be heard more often in this genre. (Remember "I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar!" by Helen Reddy and Ray Burton?)



***Stories from Home Dover Days*** by Sara Hoagland Hunter (\$17.95) are delightful, funny, and comforting reminiscences from Hunter's childhood days in the 1950s and '60s in Dover, Massachusetts. They made me laugh and reflect on my own childhood memories. Times were simpler then, right? This is the perfect gift for those who grew up then and want to give younger loved ones a taste of life back in the day. Read one story a night before bedtime. Sweet dreams!





## ELIZABETH HUBBARD



**Valentine** by Elizabeth Wetmore (\$26.99). This debut novel both gutted and encouraged me. Set in 1970s West Texas, it is the story of a young girl's brutal attack, but also the women who come together to help her heal. I love novels that invite us into the lives and hearts of characters, and this one did just that. *Valentine* was the

best book I read during "shelter in place," and its desolate landscape, well-crafted story line, and inspiring women characters make it a must read!

**Anxious People** by Fredrick Backman (\$28). For Backman fans or people who like a story that twists and turns, *Anxious People* is a must-read. This Swedish author tackles the subject of mental illness in a relatable and actually funny way by introducing us to a wacky cast of characters who come together after an attempted bank robbery. Anxiety isn't usually a humorous topic, but Backman lets us laugh out loud while seeing this tale to its end. A well-crafted tale that gives the characters and the reader hope.

**The Midnight Library** by Matt Haig (\$26). A somewhat magical tale that examines regret and disappointment and the eternal question, "what might have been?" The book's main character is sad, depressed, and done with her unsatisfying life. But she is given the opportunity to see what life might have been if she had taken different paths, and this offers her the type of perspective many people greatly need. This book will make you think about your own life's journey, but in the best way!

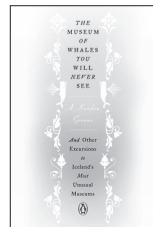
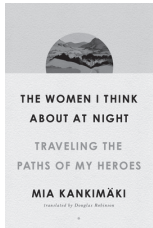
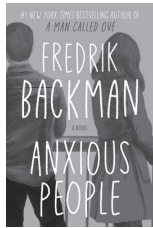
## ANN KEIL



**The Women I Think About at Night: Traveling the Paths of My Heroes** by Mia Kankimäki (\$27). After publishing her first book in her early 40s, Mia Kankimäki found herself a bit adrift. Drawing inspiration from the journals of female world travelers in the late 19th century, she chronicles her journey to Tanzania, to see

where Isak Dinesen lived and worked. Other featured women include Mary Kingsley, who wrote droll best-selling travel books about her experiences in West Africa among crocodiles, rhinoceros beetles, and cannibals. And, my personal favorite: Nellie Bly, who traveled around the world in a record-shattering 72 days in 1889, carrying only a leather handbag for luggage! This is a fascinating book about some truly intrepid women.

**The Museum of Whales You Will Never See: And Other Excursions to Iceland's Most Unusual Museums** by A. Kendra Greene (\$22). I read this book in the middle of the Covid epidemic and decided that I really need to visit Iceland. A. Kendra Greene has written a smart, funny book about just a few of the 265 museums that can be found in this island nation of only 330,000 people. The places featured are both weird and wonderful. There is Sigurgeir's Bird Museum full of taxidermied native birds, the Icelandic Phallological Museum, home to the male reproductive organs of every mammal known to exist in Iceland, and the Skogar Museum, which is the largest, containing 15,000 objects, and is located in a town of 21 people. This beautifully written, quirky book was my favorite of the year.



## ROBERT McDONALD



The book that had the greatest impact for me this year is a slim volume by Beth Pickens called **Your Art Will Save Your Life** (\$14.95). I found Pickens' calming message about focus, about art, about creation, even, perhaps especially in turbulent times, to be a tonic for my

anxiety and despair—and I first read this book in January of 2020, before Covid-19 had pressed its awful prickly little hands across the entire world. I loved the book so much that I bought a dozen copies to give away to every creative friend I know. For painters, for writers, for musicians—*Your Art Will Save Your Life* is a title to go back to again and again for inspiration, for practical advice, and for hope. As Pickens says, "You are not alone. You have what you need for your life, for art, and for justice. Stay with your creative path, trust your vision, and know that your contributions will matter to someone else."

A useful companion volume, for me, was writer and art critic Olivia Laing's **Funny Weather: Art in An Emergency** (\$26.95). You'll need a notebook by your side to record all the books you will want to read, and the artwork you will want to see, and the movies to add to your queue, after reading Laing's appreciations of artists as disparate as Joseph Cornell, Derek Jarman, David Bowie, and Hilary Mantel. Her celebration of the creative geniuses she discusses here is clear-headed, optimistic, and succinct. And she cites them for their "hospitality," which she defines as "a capacity to enlarge and open, a corrective to the overwhelming political imperative...to wall off, separate and reject." For me, art criticism can often be obscuring, full of lingo and double-speak. Laing's clear and beautiful prose serves to open up the world to the reader and invite us to a banquet that's always available.

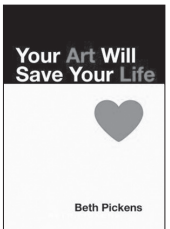
## SHARMAN MCGURN



**Monogamy** by Sue Miller (\$28.99) deals with familiar subjects—contemporary adult life, families, and complicated relationships. Annie has been divorced for seven years when she meets Graham at the opening of his bookstore in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Graham, recently divorced, and Annie quickly fall in love and marry. We follow them through their life together, learning about their careers, children, a former wife, and a current lover. Graham is physically big with a personality to match, filling any room with his presence, attracting people to him. Annie is small, quiet, aloof. Graham constantly tells Annie how happy he is with her. "Annie was happy too. But occasionally through their years together and in spite of everything that was pleasurable and loving between them, she would feel it again, the sense of his having overtaken her somehow, overwhelmed her." Annie's photography career has stalled, becoming secondary to Graham's store and his status as an arbiter of literary taste. Something is missing, but what? A cast of well-developed minor characters contribute to the story. The novel is tight, beautifully descriptive and well written, with some unexpected twists and turns. Fans of Sue Miller will not be disappointed!

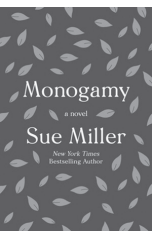
**The Pull of the Stars** (\$28) by Emma Donoghue is set primarily in a hospital room in Dublin during the autumn of 1918, as the Spanish flu pandemic rages and World War I is drawing to a close. Overworked nurse Julia Power is assigned to a special ward—Maternity / Fever—where pregnant women ill with influenza are put during their labor



**Funny Weather**  
Art in an Emergency



Olivia Laing



Monogamy

Sue Miller

New York Times Bestselling Author

THE PULL OF THE STARS

EMMA DONOGHUE

Hardcover, 320 pages, \$28.95



and convalescence. We follow Julia through three days as she takes care of sick, mostly poor, women. This rich novel is populated by powerful, passionate female characters. There is so much going on, despite the compact timeframe. The incredible devastation of World War I, the Great Influenza, Dublin's dire poverty, the stigma of unwed mothers, suffrage and women's rights, and Sinn Féin and the quest for Irish home rule are explored. Donoghue's meticulous research has resulted in historical fiction containing fascinating scientific and cultural information. Unintentionally timely, the final draft was submitted to the publisher in March as Covid-19 was spreading throughout the world. Julia relevantly remarks, "I was having trouble foreseeing any future. How would we ever get back to normal after this pandemic?" Indeed. *The Pull of the Stars* provides a compelling story and much food for thought.

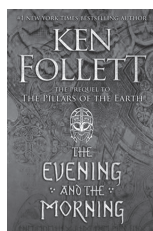
#### AIMEE OGDEN



*What You Are Going Through* by Sigrid Nunez (\$26). This is a little book that packs a big punch. It is the story of a woman who is experiencing life by listening to other people's stories. Some are complete strangers, some are good friends. The underlying thread is that all those people have a need to be heard, an audience to bear

witness on their life. She is mostly a passive listener until a friend asks her to accompany her on an incredible journey that will transform them both.

*The Evening and the Morning* (\$36) is a must-read for fans of Ken Follett's earlier trilogies. This book is actually a prequel to *The Pillars of The Earth*, but even if you are not familiar with Follett's works, it is a perfect place to start. Set in the year 997, this book transports you back to the Dark Ages—complete with Viking raids, Norman nobles, and monks looking to build abbeys that will be known throughout Europe. It's a perfect distraction from 2020!



#### KATHY RILEY



Among my favorite books this year were *The Book of Lost Friends* by Lisa Wingate and *How Much of These Hills Are Gold* by C Pam Zhang. Both books portray the individual stories of those who helped form our country.

*The Book of Lost Friends* (\$28). Lisa Wingate is a marvelous storyteller. Told in the first person in two stories, one set in

1875 and another in 1987, this book is based on actual newspaper advertisements that were placed in Louisiana papers after the Civil War, as family members tried to locate relatives that had been sold before the war. In 1875, freed slave Hattie Gossett is traveling with her former owner Lavinia and Lavinia's half-sister Juneau Jane, who are looking for their father to secure the deed for their plantation. It is a treacherous journey by steamboat, horse-drawn cart, and on foot from Louisiana to Texas. Practical, strong Hattie provides their backbone and courage. In alternate chapters, in 1987 we encounter Benedetta Silva. Benny has arrived in Augustine, Louisiana to teach school on the poor Black side of a town that is still deeply prejudiced. An idealist who wants to pay off her student debt, Benny unearths the hidden history of the Gossett plantation and the Book of Lost Friends. Wingate integrates the characters and sense of place in both parts of the book so well. It was a pleasure to immerse myself in the lives of these women.

*How Much of These Hills Is Gold* (\$26) could be considered a coming-of-age story, both for sisters Lucy and Sam but also for the American West. Orphaned at 10 and 12, the sisters undertake

an epic journey westward on a stolen horse, carrying their father's dead body. Their precarious existence is set among unsavory characters, the exploitation of Native Americans, immigrants, and dreams of finding gold. We read of the rough side of the wild west in evocative language which captures the struggle to survive in the land of opportunity, for some. Incorporating Chinese myths and a mystical tiger, a talisman for the family, Zhang's debut novel is a gritty book. The stories of Lucy and Sam's parents leaving their childhood homes to attempt to find home for their family in the 1850s, given the prejudices and inequality of the mine bosses, is a struggle of sacrifice, desperation, and love. Rightfully so, this book is longlisted for the 2020 Booker Prize. An adventure tale of sisters bonding through their travels and travails captured my imagination.



#### NATALIE ROBBINS



*Why Fish Don't Exist: A Story of Loss, Love, and the Hidden Order of Life* by Lulu Miller (\$26). In a blend of biography, memoir, and science nonfiction, NPR writer Lulu Miller tells a story that can only be described as wonderfully chaotic. David Starr Jordan's life's work, tagging new fish species, was destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco

earthquake. Undeterred, he continues his scientific studies. In addition to studying fish, Jordan became a proponent of eugenics, leaving a horrific mark on society that lingers even today. Did I mention he was the first president of Stanford and rumored to have murdered the university's founder? Seriously, this book is wild, and Miller tells the story perfectly.

*Mañanaland* by Pam Muñoz Ryan (\$18.99).

Ryan's books use stories to humanize and explain complex social issues; *Mañanaland* is no exception. In this timeless tale, 11-year-old Maximiliano is struggling with his strict father and trying to make a coveted spot on the town's fútbol team. But when he uncovers a family secret that might lead him to his mother, who went missing when he was a child, his life changes completely. Max is thrown into the world of the guardians: secret protectors of people fleeing from trouble in a neighboring land. Filled with growth and compassion, Max's adventure reminds readers of our shared humanity. *Ages 8-12 (and beyond!)*



*A Burning* by Megha Majumdar (\$25.95). In the wake of a terrorist attack in India, the lives of three unforgettable characters intersect. Jivan, a Muslim girl from the slums, is accused of abetting the attack after authorities misconstrue a comment on social media. PT Sir is Jivan's former gym teacher whose ascent in a right-wing political party may lead to a guilty verdict for Jivan. The alibi rests in the hands of Lovely, a social outcast. Majumdar's storytelling pulled me in from the first chapter with authentic and compelling characters that are a vehicle for social commentary in modern-day India.



#### CHARLOTTE ROBERTSON



Among other things, 2020 has provided us with a lot of time for reading, and two of the books that I particularly enjoyed are both nonfiction. *Hollywood Park* (\$27.99), a memoir by Mikel Jollett, is a beautifully written recounting of his very challenging childhood, being born into and escaping from a cult, reuniting in his teens with his absent father, and ultimately becoming a well-known





musician and songwriter. There is poetry in his description of the longing, fear, and hunger for a family, and literal hunger that permeated his youth. His is a story of unflinching hope in a child who overcame hurdles in life that would trip up many.

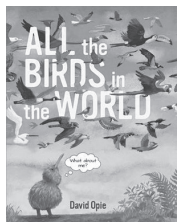
The other book that has really stayed with me is *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures* by Merlin Sheldrake (\$28), which takes a deep dive into the world of fungi. From truffles to lichens to psilocybin "magic mushrooms" to yeasts, the role of fungi in human life stretches back many millennia. The promise of fungal activity going forward is almost limitless. Fungi are proficient decomposers and show great promise for consuming the leftovers from our industrialized lifestyle. They are also critical for the Earth's entire ecosystem, both storing and releasing carbon into the atmosphere. It is without question that the Earth's future may well be determined by fungi! This is a fascinating and timely book (with a beautiful cover) that might thrill an earth scientist on your Christmas list.

#### AMY TROGDON

*All the Birds in the World* by David Opi (\$16.99). A confused kiwi travels with readers through this exploration of birds and their characteristics, illustrated realistically and with great detail.



The birds are shown nesting, wading, roosting, and flying. The text is rhythmic: "All birds have wings/all birds have beaks," always ended by kiwi's question: "But what about me?" Eventually, we have a discussion of kiwis. "The kiwi has no tail/but has whiskers like a cat."



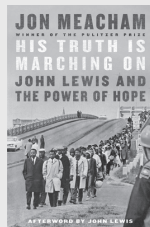
And all birds in this book/are part of the same feathered family." Even kiwis! An extra bonus is the key that identifies every bird in the book. Young birders and readers everywhere will return to this book again and again. *Ages 4-8*

*Lift* by Minh Lê, illustrated by Dan Santat (\$17.99). Iris loves to push the buttons on the elevator in her apartment building. But when her younger brother starts pushing them first, she is sad and frustrated. One day she finds an old elevator panel in the trash and puts it on the wall in her room. When she pushes the button, a door opens. Every time the door opens, Iris travels to a new, fantastical place. As time goes on, she includes her brother too. With very little text, this story is told through the artwork, each page full of details and clues. This is a book to revisit again and again. *Ages 4-8*



*Best Biography: His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope* by Jon Meacham (\$30). It may be too close in time for a full-scale biography of John Lewis. Rather, as Meacham points out, this is "an appreciative account of the

major moments of Lewis' life in the movement, of the theological understanding he brought to the struggle, and of the unity of that vision as America enters the third decade of the 21st century amid division and fear." But even that modest portrait of humanitarian courage inspires awe and respect. Lewis' determination to find justice was matched by his deep religious beliefs. He was no theologian. Rather he was an activist determined to live a Christian life. He endured the blows, turned the other cheek, and moved forward seeking to free all people from the shackles of racism. The pages of the book are printed...but the story is written in blood.



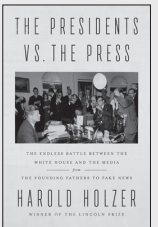
### From Jon Grand, Our Nonfiction Guru

power and who does not. And like any caste system, it is not based on merit. It is based on things like bloodlines and stigma. And just as there is a high rung on the ladder, so too there is a bottom rung, so that those in the middle can measure themselves against others and define their place. This is a brave and thought-provoking book.

*Best General History: Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings* by Neil Price (\$35). In one of the few comprehensive histories of the Vikings available in English, this superb volume examines the Viking world in all its aspects: religion, warfare, trade and exploration, domestic life, sexual mores and even personal grooming. The emerging portrait is of a people who maintained a complex culture quite different in many regards from the popular image of barbaric marauders. Separated as we are by almost two millennia, the Viking world that Price describes is not as alien to us as one might imagine.



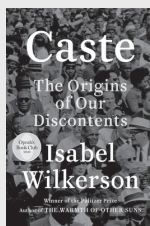
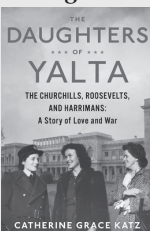
*Best General Nonfiction: The Presidents vs. the Press: The Endless Battle Between the White House and the Media—from the Founding Fathers to Fake News* by Harold Holzer (\$30). From the earliest days of the republic, the press and the presidency have been at odds. The feuds between Jefferson and Hamilton were fueled by invective hurled by newspapers aligned with one side or the other. Even the august person of George Washington was not immune from attacks by the press. For a time, the press respected certain "personal" boundaries. FDR, for example was never shown being lifted from a car, and references to his infirmity were rare. As a result, few Americans were aware that he could not walk. Likewise presidential affairs, though well known, were rarely reported. Up until the present, the White House and the press needed each other, despite the inherent tension in their different roles. Beginning with Obama, new technologies allowed the president to get his message out directly to the people, thus bypassing the traditional press. Under Trump that approach has expanded, and the press has been increasingly relegated to the role of fact-checker. Holzer is best known as a Lincoln historian, but his look at the evolving role of the press and its use by the White House is fascinating.



*Best World War II: The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz* by Erik Larson (\$32) and *The Daughters of Yalta: The Churchills, Roosevelts, and Harrimans—A Story of Love and War* by Catherine Grace Katz (\$28). These two can be read almost as a complementary pair. Larson

focuses on events at the beginning of the war in Europe, while Katz takes up the story at its end. Both slip behind the public events to look at the private worlds of the leaders and the burdens they carried. In each, the role of family is critical both for support and balance.

*Best American History: Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson (\$32). It is a basic tenet of our national identity: all men are created equal. That deeply held belief is challenged by the inequality we see in our national life. In her new book, Wilkerson examines a heretofore unexamined basis for that inequality: the American caste system. It is a system that determines who gets





## Our Staffers Pick Their Favorite Gift Items

Our wonderful and talented staff at The Book Stall are very loyal buyers of our gift items as well as our books! Here are some examples of what the staff buys and gifts to others.

**Kathleen** is loving the new and delightfully smelling handmade soy holiday candles by **Lake Life Co.** This three-generation candle company is from across the border in Waunakee, Wisconsin, and their candles burn slowly, evenly and smell divine. Stop in to check them out as they make a cozy gift for family, friends, and neighbors.

Also, we just received brand-new 500-piece puzzles from **Rifle Paper Co.**, and they are show-stopping gorgeous!



They will make a unique and lovely gift (see photo). **Melanie** is known to give friends and family socks. She particularly loves to give socks that promote a cause like the **Conscious Step** brand. This NY company was created to bring more awareness to the problems faced by the world today and the organizations

fighting these problems. These well-made socks sell out fast, so stop in soon to get yours.



Our manager, **Mike** loves to bring home the clever games for kids by **Eeboo** and the art supplies from **Ooly** and his 4-year-old daughter really appreciates that! These items are perfect for kids starting at 3 years old. They are located in our new "Family" room where we have games for all ages, puzzles, art supplies and, of course, our cookbooks. **Betsy** from our children's department especially likes **Magna-Tiles**. These magnetic blocks fuse together math, science and creativity and are great for encouraging screen-free play. **Amy**, also from our children's department loves to buy our readers from **Peepers**.

**Ann** adores the stationery and little notes from **e. frances**, and you will too when you see the sweet and amusing designs. She also favors the holiday socks we have from **Happy Socks**. **Sharman's** choice is our puzzles from **Pomegranate** and we have plenty! **Kari** and **Aimee** choose our puzzles from **White Mountain**, and we also have plenty! **Natalie** picks out our puzzles from **Cavallini & Co**—but supplies are already running low.



**Robert** points to our selection of journals, and while our selection is limited this pandemic year, we do have an array to choose from.

And **Stephanie** will be giving lambswool socks from UK's **Catherine Tough**. These sumptuous socks are a warm and cozy item to accompany a book, and what's a more thoughtful gift for this long winter?

We also have games for the family to play together, 2021 calendars, holiday boxed cards and everyday boxed cards. We encourage you to make an appointment online or by phone to secure your shopping time. You can also stop at the store to see if there is an opening for browsing. Often times there is room or it's just a matter of minutes before a spot opens up. If you would rather not come in person, please call the store and we will happily help you pick out the gift items and books that you desire. All of us at The Book Stall look forward to assisting you this holiday. Be well, and thank you for supporting The Book Stall.

—*Kathleen Crawford, Gift Buyer*





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***Books...and Much More!***

Think of The Book Stall as your one-stop gift center as you shop for books, as well as a wide variety of puzzles, games for the whole family, candles for winter coziness, and holiday socks to keep you warm! And also:

- Our **Children’s and Adult Gift Book Clubs:** You can select the frequency (every month, every other month, or four times a year) and the type of book you prefer.
- Our **Discount Club** membership for \$15 that allows a 10% discount on all purchases for a year, plus our monthly newsletter mailed to your recipient’s home.



***Virtual Book Discussion Groups via The Book Stall***

**Wednesday, December 2, Morning Discussion at 9:30 am**  
*Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson  
Led by Judy Levin

**Wednesday, January 13, Evening Discussion at 6:30 pm**  
*The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett  
Led by Alice Moody

These discussion groups are free, but registration is required.  
Please email [emailevents@thebookstall.com](mailto:emailevents@thebookstall.com). Note that space is limited.

**Go Green Reads Book Discussion**  
**Monday, January 11 at 7 pm**  
*Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*  
by Robin Wall Kimmerer

This free event will be held via Zoom. To register, please email [gogreenreads@gmail.com](mailto:gogreenreads@gmail.com).



***Holiday Book Recommendations!***



Let us help you get an early start on your seasonal gift giving. We’re happy to offer great book titles for the readers on your list. Provide us with some details, and we will supply you with a customized list of recommendations from this season’s best titles. Clip and turn in this form to the holiday mailbox at our store, or email your form to us at [bookrecs@thebookstall.com](mailto:bookrecs@thebookstall.com), and we will provide you with our picks within 2-3 days.



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Sample: <b>Uncle</b>	<b>48 years old</b>	<b>Loves biography, history, and thrillers</b>

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