

CUMC BOOK CLUB SELECTIONS 2022-23 (final)

SEPTEMBER 15 & 27

The Personal Librarian by Benedict & Murray. 352 pages. 4.5 stars.

A remarkable novel about J. P. Morgan's personal librarian, Belle da Costa Greene, the Black American woman who was forced to hide her true identity and pass as white in order to leave a lasting legacy that enriched our nation. In her twenties, Belle da Costa Greene is hired by J. P. Morgan to curate a collection of rare manuscripts, books, and artwork for his newly built Pierpont Morgan Library. Belle becomes a fixture in New York City society and one of the most powerful people in the art and book world, known for her impeccable taste and shrewd negotiating for critical works as she helps create a world-class collection.

But Belle has a secret, one she must protect at all costs. She was born not Belle da Costa Greene but Belle Marion Greener. She is the daughter of Richard Greener, the first Black graduate of Harvard and a well-known advocate for equality. Belle's complexion isn't dark because of her alleged Portuguese heritage that lets her pass as white—her complexion is dark because she is African American.

The Personal Librarian tells the story of an extraordinary woman, famous for her intellect, style, and wit, and shares the lengths she must go to—for the protection of her family and her legacy—to preserve her carefully crafted white identity in the racist world in which she lives.

OCTOBER 20 & 25

Beauty of What Remains: How our Greatest Fear Becomes our Greatest Gift by Steve Leder. 240 pages. 4.7 stars.

As the senior rabbi of one of the largest synagogues in the world, Steve Leder has learned over and over again the many ways death teaches us how to live and love more deeply by showing us not only what is gone but also the beauty of what remains.

This inspiring and comforting book takes us on a journey through the experience of loss that is fundamental to everyone. Yet even after having sat beside thousands of deathbeds, Steve Leder the rabbi was not fully prepared for the loss of his own father. It was only then that Steve Leder the son truly learned how loss makes life beautiful by giving it meaning and touching us with love that we had not felt before.

Enriched by Rabbi Leder's irreverence, vulnerability, and wicked sense of humor, this heartfelt narrative is filled with laughter and tears, the wisdom of millennia and modernity, and, most of all, an unfolding of the profound and simple truth that in loss we gain more than we ever imagined.

NOVEMBER 17 & 29

For the Glory: The Untold and Inspiring Story of Eric Liddell, Hero of Chariots of Fire by Duncan Hamilton. 400 pages. 4.7 stars.

Many people will remember Eric Liddell as the Olympic gold medalist from the Academy Award winning film Chariots of Fire. Famously, Liddell would not run on Sunday because of his strict observance of the Christian sabbath, and so he did not compete in his signature event, the 100 meters, at the 1924 Paris Olympics. He was the greatest sprinter in the world at the time, and his choice not to run was ridiculed by the British Olympic committee, his fellow athletes, and most of the world press. Yet Liddell triumphed in a new event, winning the 400 meters in Paris.

Liddell ran--and lived--for the glory of his God. After winning gold, he dedicated himself to missionary work. He travelled to China to work in a local school and as a missionary. He married and had children there. By the time he could see war on the horizon, Liddell put Florence, his pregnant wife, and children on a boat to Canada, while he stayed behind, his conscience compelling him to stay

among the Chinese. He and thousands of other westerners were eventually interned at a Japanese work camp.

Once imprisoned, Liddell did what he was born to do, practice his faith and his sport. He became the moral center of an unbearable world. He was the hardest worker in the camp, he counseled many of the other prisoners, he gave up his own meager portion of meals many days, and he organized games for the children there. He even raced again. For his ailing, malnourished body, it was all too much. Liddell died of a brain tumor just before the end of the war. His passing was mourned around the world, and his story still inspires.

DECEMBER 15 & 27

The Christmas Glass by Marci Alborghetti & Hilde Sophie Plau. 298 pages. 5 stars.

The heart-warming story of "The Christmas Glass" shows how, today as always, the Christmas miracle works its wonders in the human heart. In the early days of World War II in Italy, Anna, a young widow who runs a small orphanage, carefully wraps her most cherished possessions -- a dozen hand-blown, German-made, Christmas ornaments, handed down by her mother -- and sends them to a cousin she hasn't seen in years. Anna is distressed to part with her only tangible reminder of her mother, but she worries that the ornaments will be lost or destroyed in the war, especially now that her orphanage has begun to secretly shelter Jewish children. Anna's young cousin Filomena is married with two-year-old twins when she receives the box of precious Christmas glass. After the war, Filomena emigrates to America, where the precious ornaments are passed down through the generations. After more than forty years, twelve people come to possess a piece of Christmas glass, some intimately connected by family bonds, some connected only through the history of the ornaments. As Christmas Day approaches, readers join each character in a journey of laughter and tears, fractures and healings, as Filomena, now an eighty-four-year-old great-grandmother, brings them all to what will be either a wondrous reunion or a disaster that may shatter them all like the precious glass they cherish.

JANUARY 19 & 31

Becoming Mrs. Lewis: The Improbable Love Story of Joy Davidman & C. S. Lewis by Patty Callahan. 416 pages. 4.5 stars.

When poet and writer Joy Davidman began writing letters to C. S. Lewis—known as Jack—she was looking for spiritual answers, not love. Love, after all, wasn't holding together her crumbling marriage. Everything about New Yorker Joy seemed ill-matched for an Oxford professor and the beloved writer of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, yet their minds bonded over their letters.

Embarking on the adventure of her life, Joy traveled from America to England and back again, facing heartbreak and poverty, discovering friendship and faith, and against all odds, found a love that even the threat of death couldn't destroy.

In this masterful exploration of one of the greatest love stories of modern times, we meet a brilliant writer, a fiercely independent mother, and a passionate woman who changed the life of this respected author and inspired books that still enchant us and change us. Joy lived at a time when women weren't meant to have a voice—and yet her love for Jack gave them both voices they didn't know they had.

At once a fascinating historical novel and a glimpse into a writer's life, *Becoming Mrs. Lewis* is above all a love story—a love of literature and ideas and a love between a husband and wife that, in the end, was not impossible at all.

FEBRUARY 16 & 28

(UWF) *Girl Gone Missing* by Marcie R. Rendon. 208 pages. 4.5 stars.

Her name is Renee Blackbear, but what most people call the 19-year-old Ojibwe woman is Cash. She lived all her life in Fargo, sister city to Minnesota's Moorhead, just downriver from the Cities. She has one friend, the sheriff Wheaton. He pulled her from her mother's wrecked car when she was three. Since then, Cash navigated through foster homes, and at 13 was working farms, driving truck. Wheaton wants her to take hold of her life, signs her up for college. She gets an education there at Moorhead State all right: sees that people talk a lot but mostly about nothing, not like the men in the fields she's known all her life who hold the rich topsoil in their hands, talk fertilizer and weather and prices on the Grain Exchange. In between classes and hauling beets, drinking beer and shooting pool, a man who claims he's her brother shows up, and she begins to dream the Cities and blonde Scandinavian girls calling for help.

Author Marcie Rendon is a citizen of the White Earth Nation. In 2020, she became the first Native American woman to receive the McKnight Distinguished Artist award. Her novel, *Girl Gone Missing*, Cinco Puntos Press, is the second in the Cash Blackbear series.

MARCH 16 & 28

(UWF) *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* by Greg Boyle. 240 pages. 4.8 stars.

For twenty years, Gregory Boyle, a Jesuit priest, has run Homeboy Industries, a gang-intervention program located in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, the gang capital of the world. In *Tattoos on the Heart*, he distills his experience working in the ghetto into a breathtaking series of parables inspired by faith.

Arranged by theme and filled with sparkling humor and glowing generosity, these essays offer a stirring look at how full our lives could be if we could find the joy in loving others and in being loved unconditionally. From giant, tattooed Cesar, shopping at JCPenney fresh out of prison, we learn how to feel worthy of God's love. From ten-year-old Lula we learn the importance of being known and acknowledged. From Pedro we understand the kind of patience necessary to rescue someone from the darkness. In each chapter we benefit from Boyle's gentle, hard-earned wisdom.

These essays about universal kinship and redemption are moving examples of the power of unconditional love and the importance of fighting despair. Gorgeous and uplifting, *Tattoos on the Heart* reminds us that no life is less valuable than another.

APRIL 20 & 25

***Fly Girl: A Memoir* by Ann Hood. 288 pages. 4.3 stars.**

An entertaining and fascinating memoir of "gifted storyteller" (People) Ann Hood's adventurous years as a TWA flight attendant.

In 1978, in the tailwind of the golden age of air travel, flight attendants were the epitome of glamor and sophistication. Fresh out of college and hungry to experience the world—and maybe, one day, write about it—Ann Hood joined their ranks. After a grueling job search, Hood survived TWA's rigorous Breech Training Academy and learned to evacuate seven kinds of aircraft, deliver a baby, mix proper cocktails, administer oxygen, and stay calm no matter what the situation.

In the air, Hood found both the adventure she'd dreamt of and the unexpected realities of life on the job. She carved chateaubriand in the first-class cabin and dined in front of the pyramids in Cairo, fended off passengers' advances and found romance on layovers in London and Lisbon, and walked more than a million miles in high heels. She flew through the start of deregulation, an oil crisis, massive furloughs, and a labor strike.

As the airline industry changed around her, Hood began to write—even drafting snatches of her first novel from the jump-seat. She reveals how the job empowered her, despite its roots in sexist standards. Packed with funny, moving, and shocking stories of life as a flight attendant, *Fly Girl* captures the nostalgia and magic of air travel at its height, and the thrill that remains with every takeoff.

MAY 18 & 30

The Power of Thank You: Discover the Joy of Gratitude by Joyce Meyer. 240 pgs. 5 stars.

Experience a renewed mind, an improved attitude, and a life full of joy! Best-selling author Meyer believes having a heart of gratitude for who God is and what he has done will help you fully realize how he's working in your life, lifting your burdens, and showing you everything in a brighter light.

JUNE 15 & 27

The Girls Who Stepped Out of Line: Untold Story of Women Who Changed the Course of World War II by Mari Eder & Mari K. Eder. 464 pages. 4 stars.

The Girls Who Stepped Out of Line takes you inside the lives and experiences of 15 unknown women heroes from the Greatest Generation, the women who served, fought, struggled, and made things happen during WWII--in and out of uniform, for theirs is a legacy destined to embolden generations of women to come.

They are the heroes that you hardly ever hear about. These women who did extraordinary things didn't expect thanks and shied away from medals and recognition. Despite their amazing accomplishments, they've gone mostly unheralded and unrewarded. Liane B. Russell fled Austria with nothing and later became a renowned U.S. scientist whose research on the effects of radiation on embryos made a difference to thousands of lives. Gena Turgel was a prisoner who worked in the hospital at Bergen-Belsen and cared for the young Anne Frank, who was dying of typhus. Gena survived and went on to write a memoir and spent her life educating children about the Holocaust. Ida and Louise Cook were British sisters who repeatedly smuggled out jewelry and furs and served as sponsors for refugees, and they also established temporary housing for immigrant families in London. Retired U.S. Army Major General Mari K. Eder wrote this book because she knew their stories needed to be told--and the sooner the better. For theirs is a legacy destined to embolden generations of women to come.

JULY 20 & 25

The Last Thing He Told Me by Laura Dave. 320 pages. 4.3 stars.

Before Owen Michaels disappears, he smuggles a note to his beloved wife of one year: Protect her. Despite her confusion and fear, Hannah Hall knows exactly to whom the note refers—Owen's sixteen-year-old daughter, Bailey. Bailey, who lost her mother tragically as a child. Bailey, who wants absolutely nothing to do with her new stepmother.

As Hannah's increasingly desperate calls to Owen go unanswered, as the FBI arrests Owen's boss, as a US marshal and federal agents arrive at her Sausalito home unannounced, Hannah quickly realizes her husband isn't who he said he was. And that Bailey just may hold the key to figuring out Owen's true identity—and why he really disappeared.

Hannah and Bailey set out to discover the truth. But as they start putting together the pieces of Owen's past, they soon realize they're also building a new future—one neither of them could have anticipated.

With its breakneck pacing, dizzying plot twists, and evocative family drama, *The Last Thing He Told Me* is a riveting mystery, certain to shock you with its final, heartbreaking turn.

AUGUST 17 & 29

Mrs. Everything by Jennifer Weiner. 288 pages. 4.2 stars.

In this instant New York Times bestseller and “multigenerational narrative that’s nothing short of brilliant” (People), two sisters’ lives from the 1950s to the present are explored as they struggle to find their places—and be true to themselves—in a rapidly evolving world from #1 New York Times bestselling author Jennifer Weiner.

Jo and Bethie Kaufman were born into a world full of promise. Growing up in 1950s Detroit, they live in a perfect “Dick and Jane” house, where their roles in the family are clearly defined. Jo is the tomboy, the bookish rebel with a passion to make the world more fair; Bethie is the pretty, feminine good girl, a would-be star who enjoys the power her beauty confers and dreams of a traditional life.

But the truth ends up looking different from what the girls imagined. Jo and Bethie survive traumas and tragedies. As their lives unfold against the background of free love and Vietnam, Woodstock and women’s lib, Bethie becomes an adventure-loving wild child who dives headlong into the counterculture and is up for anything (except settling down). Meanwhile, Jo becomes a proper young mother in Connecticut, a witness to the changing world instead of a participant. Neither woman inhabits the world she dreams of, nor has a life that feels authentic or brings her joy. Is it too late for the women to finally stake a claim on happily ever after?

In “her most sprawling and intensely personal novel to date” (Entertainment Weekly), Jennifer Weiner tells a “simply unputdownable” (Good Housekeeping) story of two sisters who, with their different dreams and different paths, offer answers to the question: How should a woman be in the world?