

## BOOK CLUB SELECTIONS FOR 2024-25

### **OCTOBER – Morning 17<sup>th</sup>- Evening 29<sup>th</sup>**

#### **The Story Keeper by Lisa Wingate. 448 pages. 4.6 stars (fiction)**

Successful New York editor Jen Gibbs is at the top of her game with her new position at Vida House Publishing—until a mysterious manuscript from an old slush pile appears on her desk. Turning the pages, Jen finds herself drawn into the life of Sarra, a mixed-race Melungeon girl trapped by dangerous men in turn-of-the-century Appalachia. A risky hunch may lead to *The Story Keeper*'s hidden origins and its unknown author, but when the trail turns toward the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a place Jen thought she'd left behind forever, the price of a blockbuster next book deal may be higher than she's willing to pay.

### **NOVEMBER – Morning 21<sup>st</sup> – Evening 26<sup>th</sup>**

#### **(UWF) Women Rise Up: Sacred Stories of Resistance for Today's Revolution by Kate Zey. 190 pages. 4.7 stars. (nonfiction)**

*Women Rise Up* shares the stories of biblical women connecting them to contemporary global gender issues. In doing so, Zeh speaks truth to women's oppression and erasure while reminding us of the sacredness of women's experience, wisdom, solidarity, and sisterhood.

### **DECEMBER – Morning 19<sup>th</sup> – No Evening Meeting**

#### **The Only Woman in the Room by Marie Benedict. 336 pages. 4.3 stars. (historical fiction)**

Her beauty almost certainly saved her from the rising Nazi party and led to marriage with an Austrian arms dealer. Underestimated in everything else, she overheard the Third Reich's plans while at her husband's side and understood more than anyone would guess. She devised a plan to flee in disguise from their castle, and the whirlwind escape landed her in Hollywood. She became Hedy Lamarr, screen star.

But she kept a secret more shocking than her heritage or her marriage: she was a scientist. And she had an idea that might help the country fight the Nazis and revolutionize modern communication...if anyone would listen to her.

A powerful book based on the incredible true story of the glamour icon and scientist; *The Only Woman in the Room* is a masterpiece that celebrates the many women in science that history has overlooked.

### **JANUARY – Morning 16<sup>th</sup> – Evening 28<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Number the Stars by Lois Lowry. 160 pages. 4.7 stars. (for 9-11 yr-olds) (historical fiction)**

The unforgettable Newbery Medal-winning novel from Lois Lowry. As the German troops begin their campaign to "relocate" all the Jews of Denmark, Annemarie Johansen's family takes in Annemarie's best friend, Ellen Rosen, and conceals her as part of the family.

Through the eyes of ten-year-old Annemarie, we watch as the Danish Resistance smuggles almost the entire Jewish population of Denmark, nearly seven thousand people, across the sea to Sweden. The heroism of an entire nation reminds us that there was pride and human decency in the world even during a time of terror and war.

A modern classic of historical fiction, *Number the Stars* has won generations of fans and continues to speak to today's readers. Jessica Grose wrote in a November 2022 New York Times essay entitled "This Perfect Mother-Daughter Read Holds a Powerful Lesson for Fighting Antisemitism": "*Number the Stars* is particularly relevant to our family, and to this moment."

### **FEBRUARY – Morning 20th – Evening 25th**

**The Art Thief: A True Story of Love, Crime, & Dangerous Obsession by Michael Finkel. 240 pages. 4.3 stars. (nonfiction)**

In this spellbinding portrait of obsession and flawed genius, the best-selling author of *The Stranger in the Woods* brings us into Breitwieser's strange world—unlike most thieves, he never stole for money, keeping all his treasures in a single room where he could admire them.

For centuries, works of art have been stolen in countless ways from all over the world, but no one has been quite as successful at it as the master thief Stéphane Breitwieser. Carrying out more than two hundred heists over nearly eight years—in museums and cathedrals all over Europe—Breitwieser, along with his girlfriend who worked as his lookout, stole more than three hundred objects, until it all fell apart in spectacular fashion. Unlike most thieves, Breitwieser never stole for money. Instead, he displayed all his treasures in a pair of secret rooms where he could admire them to his heart's content.

Possessed of remarkable athleticism and an innate ability to circumvent practically any security system, Breitwieser managed to pull off a breathtaking number of audacious thefts. Yet these strange talents bred a growing disregard for risk and an addict's need to score, leading Breitwieser to ignore his girlfriend's pleas to stop—until one final act of hubris brought everything crashing down.

### **MARCH – Morning 20th – Evening 25th**

**Hello Darkness, My Old Friend by Sandy Greenberg. 336 pages. 4.4 stars. (nonfiction)**

The remarkable and inspiring story of a Columbia undergrad from a poor Jewish family who, after losing his eyesight to disease during his junior year, finds the power to break through the darkness and fulfill his vision for a life of great professional success and distinguished public service.

It's a bitterly cold February in 1961, and Sandy Greenberg lies in a hospital bed in Detroit, newly blind. A junior at Columbia University from a Jewish family that struggled to stay above the poverty line, Sandy had just started to see the world open up to him. Now, instead of his plans for a bright future—Harvard Law and politics—Sandy faces a new reality, one defined by a cane or companion dog, menial work, and a cautious path through life.

But that's not how this story ends. In the depth of his new darkness, Sandy faces a choice—play it “safe” by staying in his native Buffalo or return to Columbia to pursue his dreams. With the loving devotion of his girlfriend (and now wife) Sue and the selflessness of best friends Art Garfunkel and Jerry Speyer, Sandy endures unimaginable adversity while forging a life of exceptional achievement.

From his time in the White House working for President Lyndon B. Johnson to his graduate studies at Harvard and Oxford under luminaries such as Archibald Cox, Sir Arthur Goodhart, and Samuel Huntington, and through the guidance of his invaluable mentor David Rockefeller, Sandy fills his life and the lives of those around him with a radiant light of philanthropy, entrepreneurship, art, and innovation.

### **APRIL – Morning 17<sup>th</sup> – Evening 29<sup>th</sup>**

**The Children of Willesden Lane: a Memoir of Music, Hope and Survival by Mona Golabek & Lee Cohen. 288 pages. 4.6 stars. (historical fiction)**

Based on the true story of her mother, Mona Golabek describes the inspirational story of Lisa Jura's escape from Nazi-controlled Austria to England on the famed Kindertransport.

Jewish musical prodigy Lisa Jura has a wonderful life in Vienna. But when the Nazis start closing in on the city, life changes irreversibly. Although he has three daughters, Lisa's father is only able to secure one berth on the Kindertransport. The family decides to send Lisa to London so that she may pursue her dreams of a career as a concert pianist. Separated from her beloved family, Lisa bravely endures the trip and a disastrous posting outside London before finding her way to the Willesden Lane Orphanage.

It is in this orphanage that Lisa's story truly comes to life. Her music inspires the other orphanage children, and they, in turn, cheer her on in her efforts to make good on her promise to her family to realize her musical potential. Through hard work and sheer pluck, Lisa wins a scholarship to study piano at the Royal Academy. As she supports herself and studies, she makes a new life for herself and dreams of reconnecting with the family she was forced to leave behind. The resulting tale delivers a message of the power of music to uplift the human spirit and to grant the individual soul endurance, patience, and peace.

### **MAY – Morning 15th – Evening 27th**

**When the Men Were Gone by Marjorie Lewis. 240 pages. 4.3 stars. (historical fiction-based in Texas)**

A cross between Friday Night Lights and The Atomic City Girls, this book is a debut historical novel based on the true story of Tylene Wilson, a woman in 1940's Texas who, in spite of extreme opposition, became a female football coach in order to keep her students from heading off to war.

Football is the heartbeat of Brownwood, Texas. Every Friday night for as long as assistant principal Tylene Wilson can remember, the entire town has gathered in the stands, cheering their boys on. Each September brings with it the hope of a good season and a sense of unity and optimism. Now, the war has changed everything. Most of the Brownwood men over 18 and under 45 are off fighting, and in a small town the possibilities are limited. Could this mean a season without football? But no one counted on Tylene, who learned the game at her daddy's knee. She knows more about it than most men, so she does the unthinkable, convincing the school to let her take on the job of coach.

Faced with extreme opposition—by the press, the community, rival coaches, referees and even the players themselves—Tylene remains resolute. And when her boys rally around her, she leads the team—and the town—to a Friday night and a subsequent season they will never forget.

### **JUNE – Morning 19th – Evening 24th**

**(UWF) Sleep Pray Heal by Donna Fado Ivery. 350 pages. 4.4 stars. (nonfiction)**

For 17 years Donna relied on opiates, cane, and wheelchair to get around. Now she walks freely.

A multi-generational family excursion, including her nursing infant and preschool daughters, started with a freak accident and disabling brain injury for Donna Fado Ivery. *Sleep, Pray, Heal* chronicles her transformational journey through chronic pain, career loss, and child-rearing/marriage challenges, to healing through faith, poetry, and painting.

With humor and humility, she shares her struggles through medical, legal, social, and church barriers with the abiding support of family and the Holy Spirit. This book is helpful to those with brain injury, their caregivers and professionals. And to those who feel stuck and in need of inspiration!

## **JULY – Morning 17<sup>th</sup> – Evening 29<sup>th</sup>**

### **Book of Lost Names by Kristin Harmel. 416 pages. 4.7 stars. (historical fiction)**

Inspired by an astonishing true story from World War II, a young woman with a talent for forgery helps hundreds of Jewish children flee the Nazis in this “sweeping and magnificent” (Fiona Davis, bestselling author of *The Lions of Fifth Avenue*) historical novel from the #1 international bestselling author of *The Winemaker’s Wife*.

Eva Traube Abrams, a semi-retired librarian in Florida, is shelving books when her eyes lock on a photograph in the *New York Times*. She freezes; it’s an image of a book she hasn’t seen in more than sixty years—a book she recognizes as *The Book of Lost Names*.

The accompanying article discusses the looting of libraries by the Nazis across Europe during World War II—an experience Eva remembers well—and the search to reunite people with the texts taken from them so long ago. The book in the photograph, an eighteenth-century religious text thought to have been taken from France in the waning days of the war, is one of the most fascinating cases. Now housed in Berlin’s Zentral-und Landesbibliothek library, it appears to contain some sort of code, but researchers don’t know where it came from—or what the code means. Only Eva holds the answer, but does she have the strength to revisit old memories?

As a graduate student in 1942, Eva was forced to flee Paris and find refuge in a small mountain town in the Free Zone, where she began forging identity documents for Jewish children fleeing to neutral Switzerland. But erasing people comes with a price, and along with a mysterious, handsome forger named Rémy, Eva decides she must find a way to preserve the real names of the children who are too young to remember who they really are. The records they keep in *The Book of Lost Names* will become even more vital when the resistance cell they work for is betrayed and Rémy disappears.

## **AUGUST – Morning 21<sup>st</sup> – Evening 26<sup>th</sup>**

### **The Which Way Tree by Elizabeth Crook. 288 pages. 4.5 stars. (fiction)**

*Texas State Library “Great Read”*

Early one morning in the remote hill country of Texas, a panther savagely attacks a family of homesteaders, mauling a young girl named Samantha and killing her mother, whose final act is to save her daughter's life. Samantha and her half-brother, Benjamin, survive, but she is left traumatized, her face horribly scarred.

Narrated in Benjamin's beguilingly plainspoken voice, *The Which Way Tree* is the story of Samantha's unshakeable resolve to stalk and kill the infamous panther, rumored across the Rio Grande to be a demon, and avenge her mother's death. In their quest she and Benjamin, now orphaned, enlist a charismatic Tejano outlaw and a haunted, compassionate preacher with an aging but relentless tracking dog. As the members of this unlikely posse hunt the panther, they are in turn pursued by a hapless but sadistic Confederate soldier with troubled family ties to the preacher and a score to settle.

In the tradition of the great pursuit narratives, *The Which Way Tree* is a breathtaking saga of one steadfast girl's revenge against an implacable and unknowable beast. Yet with the comedic undertones of Benjamin's storytelling, it is also a timeless tale full of warmth and humor, and a testament to the enduring love that carries a sister and brother through a perilous adventure with all the dimensions of a legend.