

Check It Out!

What Library Staff Are Reading

by Lynn Nowak

DO YOU KNOW what book you're going to read next? Are you hankering to revisit an old favorite? Or are you looking for a new read that might transport, illuminate, or inspire you? Whatever your present state of mind, whatever your relationship with books, you need look no further than your library staff (and the pages of this newsletter) for a sound book recommendation.

Employees at the Port Townsend Public Library are like the rest of us, with wildly disparate reading tastes, interests, and curiosities; their book ideas are all over the map. Your new favorite title could be just within reach, sparked by one of these staff picks.

Personal and literary history

Library director Melody Eisler reached to the past—her own and a classic author's—for a Jane Austen–themed summer. “My appreciation for Jane Austen only grows with each rereading of her works, and I love how she has inspired other great works of fiction, like ***The Jane Austen Book Club***, by Karen Joy Fowler [2005].” Eisler also stumbled across ***The Jane Austen Project: A Novel***, by Kathleen Flynn [2017], and was intrigued by the sci-fi plot of Jane Austen fans in the near future traveling back in time to save one of her unfinished novels.

“I would recommend that everyone read or reread at least one Jane Austen book this year,” Eisler said. “I think her genius and wit often get misunderstood because people know her mostly from all the film adaptations of her books or because they were forced to read *Pride and Prejudice* in high school and didn't enjoy it then.”

As a further option, Eisler recommends listening to Austen audiobooks read by actress and comedienne Alison Larkin. “She brings the books to life. Not all voice actors are created equal, and she reads Austen with alacrity and aplomb!”

Library staffer Shilah Gould said her current read, another classic, is ***War and Peace***, by Leo Tolstoy. “It's taking me months to read and is absolutely worth every minute. Tolstoy explores so many aspects of being human,

(continued on next page)



Library staff members have plenty of good ideas for your next book to read, since they're readers too. Clockwise from top left: Shilah Gould, Lynn Ring, Kathi Johnson, Kasper, public and technical services manager Keith Darrock, library director Melody Sky Eisler, youth services manager Hilary Verheggen, and Nancy Grant.

STAFF PICKS

writes vivid descriptions, makes you love the characters and their flaws, and covers so much history,” Gould said. “It’s incredible!”

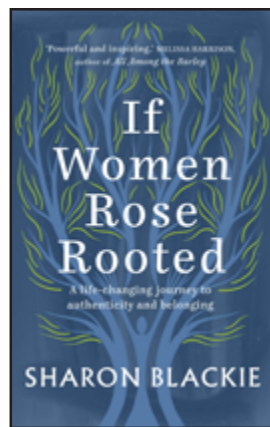
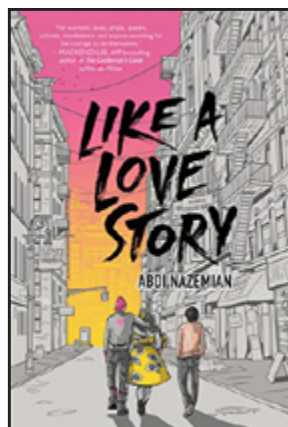
In addition to Austen, over the summer Director Eisler dived into a childhood favorite, ***A Wrinkle in Time***, by Madeline L’Engle [1962], the fantasy that won the Newbery Medal in 1963. Eisler received the book on her tenth birthday from her godfather, who encouraged her to read it once every decade, as he had. She accepted the challenge. “I reread it every ten years and appreciate how much more I get out of it with each reading, and what themes stand out to me. I so appreciate growing up with such a courageous heroine as Meg.”

Two recent, contemporary reads stirred childhood memories for youth services manager Hilary Verheggen. The books themselves were new to her, but the topic was all too familiar.

devastated by AIDS. The story is intertwined with present-day Fiona, the sister of a man who died of AIDS. In 2015, thirty years afterward, she is still affected by what was daily fear and loss. “I related very closely to Fiona, since I grew up in Chicago during this time period,” Verheggen said.

Beyond books that shined a light on a chapter of her own past, Verheggen said her favorite book so far this year is the nonfiction ***If Women Rose Rooted: A Journey to Authenticity and Belonging***, by Sharon Blackie [2019]. This recent find has led her to giving it as a gift already—twice. “It’s all about reclaiming your authentic self, and becoming rooted,” she said. “It weaves the author’s personal experiences in her life’s journey with traditional Celtic tales and explores femininity; environmentalism; and oppression, both external and internal. It’s beautifully written and hopeful—a game changer in my outlook and how I live my day-to-day life.”

Another nonfiction title, this one autobiographical, is a recent favorite of staffer Nancy Grant. ***Don’t Let’s Go to***



Verheggen explained that when she was a child, “My mom worked on the infectious disease ward at a hospital, which was almost solely full of HIV/AIDS patients. These men and women became very good friends to our family, and sadly, we lost almost every one of them.”

Like a Love Story, by Abdi Nazemian [2019], is a poignant and well-written young adult novel about three teens in the late 1980s and early 1990s who learn about friendship, first loves, sexuality, and fear as they are engulfed by the AIDS crisis, according to Verheggen. ***The Great Believers***, by Rebecca Makkai [2018], follows a similar story but with adults, she added. It tracks a group of friends in 1980s Chicago who are

the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood, by Alexandra Fuller [2002], is a story of the author’s childhood in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s with her sister and expat parents from Britain. Grant elaborated, “Her candor and sensitivity come through in the often-hilarious stories she shares and her descriptions of what it was like to live in that hostile and beautiful environment.”

Gritty literary novels

Keith Darrock, library manager for public and technical services, discovered two books recently that he would recommend to readers who enjoy fast-moving, gritty literary fiction. Published just a year ago, ***Whiskey When We’re Dry***, by John Larison [2018], offers a unique story and distinctive writing, Darrock said. Set in nineteenth-

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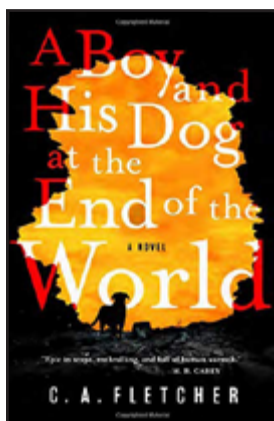
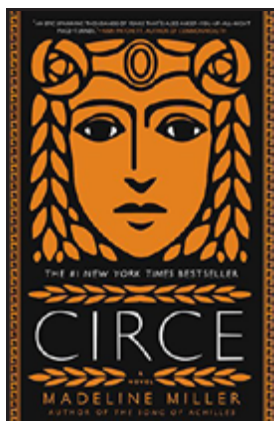
century America, it concerns a young woman who disguises herself as a boy and heads west. “I have a hunch that you’ll be reading it soon,” Darrock said. Darrock also enjoyed ***The River***, by Peter Heller [2019], a fictional thriller about a tragic wilderness canoe trip. “The ending is rough, so be advised,” he cautioned.

Another adventure story is ***A Boy and His Dog at the End of the World***, by C. A. Fletcher [2019]. “Set in post-apocalyptic Scotland, this book has a perfect amount of suspense and adventure,” staffer Gould said, “and offers a fascinating take on how our planet might reclaim its wildness if most of the humans were gone.” For adventure of a different sort, Gould praises ***Circe***, by Madeline Miller [2018], which she calls a beautiful and riveting retelling of the saga about the Greek witch-enchantress-demigod. “This book brought me to tears, in a good way. It’s a new all-time favorite.”

want,” Ring said. “The dialogue is thoughtful, clever, and laugh-out-loud—or snicker, anyway. So, even though it isn’t really my style, I read the whole thing, and I recommend it!”

Another staff-recommended relationship story is ***Dear Evelyn***, by Kathy Page [2018], a recent favorite of Grant’s. The tale follows Harry and Evelyn’s seventy-year marriage, which began during World War II. “After reading this, I kept having to come back to it and have a good think about how our actions and choices affect others. I loved this book!” Grant said.

Staffer Kathi Johnson recently finished ***The Strawberry Hearts Diner***, by Carolyn Brown [2017]. “This is just a sweet story about a young woman [who] has moved with her father her whole life because he couldn’t stay still. On her way to live with a cousin, she passes through the town where her mother grew up and her



Relationship fiction

Moving from adventure to romantic comedy, Gould and staffer Lynn Ring both heartily endorse ***The Flatshare***, by Beth O’Leary [2019]. Gould described it as a fun, uplifting story set in London, with likeable leads “and enough depth to keep it from being overly sweet.” Tiffany needs a cheap place to live, Ring explained, and Leon needs a little extra money per month to help his brother. He offers his one-bedroom, one-bed flat for the times of the day—and night—when he is working. Tiffany accepts, since she is working when he needs the bed and the flat. They communicate via Post-it notes and haven’t even met face to face.

“Boyfriend-girlfriend angst stories do not appeal to me, and there is plenty of that in this book. However, it is presented well, with fun story twists and the ending we all

grandmother is buried. She had lived there for two years in high school and felt like an outsider. She stops at her grandmother’s grave, and when she drives away, her car catches on fire. The story unfolds from there.”

For a little humor, Grant is a big fan of the first volume of a newly discovered series for middle grades by Maryrose Wood, ***The Incurable Children of Ashton Place***. The first book is ***The Mysterious Howling*** [2010, 2015], which she so enjoyed, she is looking forward to the remaining titles in the series. “This would be a nice book to read aloud with a child, but the writing is humorous, instructive and entertaining even for adults.” 

What Friends Are Reading

◆ *Deep River*

Karl Marlantes (2019)

Karl Marlantes's second novel, *Deep River*, is a big, meaty, old-fashioned family saga, a story of the Scandinavian immigrants who came to the Northwest to log the forests and fish the rivers. It is both a universal tale of immigration—what's left behind, what carries forward when one becomes more American than not—and a closeup view of one family's struggle toward assimilation and acceptance.

The story opens in Russian-occupied Finland in 1893. Three of the Kolski family's children have died in a cholera outbreak, leaving three surviving siblings: brothers Ilmari and Matti and sister Aino. Ilmari is first to leave, drawn to America by the promise of a better life; he ends up in southwest Washington, across the Columbia River from Astoria. Matti follows a few years later, after an incident with a Russian soldier makes him an outlaw in his own country. And Aino, increasingly involved with socialism, flees Finland after she is arrested and tortured by the Russians because of her politics. Reunited on the banks



of *Deep River*, the three Koskis set about making a life in a new land.

Marlantes writes with vivid detail about the dangers and hardships the brothers face as they log the rugged landscape or fish for salmon on the Columbia. But it's Aino's character that propels this novel forward. She is determined to be self-reliant at a time when a woman's place was limited at best, which puts her in conflict with most of the men in her life. Her adherence to her socialist principles and her growing involvement with the IWW (the Wobblies) keeps her, sometimes literally, in the crosshairs of the

timber bosses; the police; and, ultimately, the antiunion, anti-immigrant federal authorities. Not always making the wisest choices, Aino loses much by refusing to bend.

I found *Deep River* to be a profoundly satisfying read, with well-drawn characters and plenty of dramatic tension. I also loved its depiction of life in Washington little more than a century ago, when the big trees were still plentiful, and salmon filled the rivers.

—Kristine Kaufman

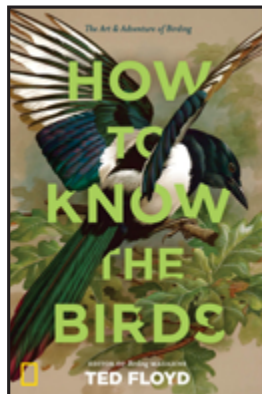
◆ *How to Know the Birds: The Art and Adventure of Birding*

Ted Floyd (2019)

How to Know the Birds is an excellent series of lessons for the intermediate birder in our modern era, or for anyone wanting to learn more about birds. For bird expert and writer Ted Floyd—who also wrote *The Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America*—this new book is his tribute to Roger Tory Peterson's 1948 classic, whose identical title Floyd “knowingly and respectfully adopt[s] for this present volume.”

Floyd covers 200 common North American birds, but instead of writing detailed descriptions about each bird and its behavior, like those in most bird guides, he uses each species as an example of a lesson in ornithology (bird study) or in birding (bird observation). Many lessons are connected to others. On migration, for example, we find “60 The Logic of Migration: Resource Availability: Osprey” and “61 The Logic of Migration: Wing Morphology: Swainson's Thrush,” among others. Each of the 200 lessons covers “a big idea, a method or technique or resource, about bird study in our age.”

By the time you complete the book, you've learned about birding history, field methods, the latest technology that



may enhance the study of birds, and the visible and invisible effects of climate change. Although Floyd describes technological wonders such as eBird, Doppler radar, and the Breeding Bird Atlas (too much about that, in my opinion), he doesn't mention iNaturalist (a major omission, in my opinion.)

Over and over, I was delighted to learn facts I'd never known about familiar birds, inspiring me to become a better birder. Did you know that Buffleheads nest in holes already excavated by Northern Flickers and Pileated Woodpeckers? Floyd concludes his book with

a section called, “What We Don't Know,” whose every page speaks to a philosophical issue. Lesson “196 Ethicalness” centers on the Barred Owl, which, though native to North America, is pushing Spotted Owls closer to extinction. Lesson “197 Morality: Northern Pintail” observes, “We haven't gotten to the point that hunting in America is a moral crisis. Not yet. But if there's anything that American history has taught us, it is this: Times change.”

I highly recommend this book to anyone wanting to think, wonder, and learn more about birds!

—Wendy Feltham

What Young Friends Are Reading



◆ *The Complete Book of the Flower Fairies*

Cicely Mary Barker (1923, 2016)

It's a good book because it has baby fairies in it and big fairies and medium fairies. There are some boy fairies and some girl fairies. There are all kinds of flowers in it, and grass and all colors of flowers and fairies, and all the pictures are so pretty. I love it because of all of that stuff.



◆ *Secrets of the Vegetable Garden*

Carron Brown (2017)

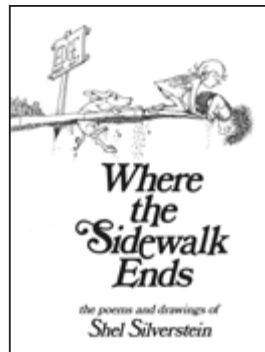
I like my flower book because you need a light to see the stuff through the page. It is so good because it has bees and lots of insects in it and flowers and birdies, and I love those.



◆ *Where the Sidewalk Ends*

Shel Silverstein (1974)

It's a great poem book, and it is all gray, but is still a great, great, great book! One of my favorite poems is "Jimmy Jet and the TV Set." He turns into a TV set because he watches TV too much. I like the poem "For Sale" because it has a little sister. I think that the book is good.



◆ *Nanny Paws*

Wendy Wahman (2018)

I like the book because it has two little girls and a little doggy that babysits them and wakes them up in the morning and feeds them breakfast. Every day the dog walks them to school. The next morning, they got sick so they needed their dog. The book is sweet and snuggly.

—Solvei Mortensen, age 6

◆ *The Sea Runners*

Ivan Doig (1982, 2006)

A story set in the early 1850s, *The Sea Runners* is about trust, leadership, teamwork, and believing even when you cannot see the end. It is about accepting your leadership even if your leader is running you down the Pacific Northwest coast from Alaska to Oregon, with no maps and no idea where you are. The diversity of the four crew members doesn't help either; from Braaf (thief) and Sven Melander (original leader, navigator, organizer, and motivator) to Nils Karlsson (jack-of-all-trades and hunter) and Anders Wennberg (blacksmith), the differences are apparent. All four were indentured servants at a Russian-held work camp in New Archangel (now called Sitka), Alaska. Their contrasting personalities clash regularly, resulting in hilarious dialogue and struggles to work as a team.

Everything begins when Melander hatches an escape plan and begins recruiting people to execute the plan and come on the journey. The fugitives escape the camp in a stolen canoe full of stolen supplies on the night of Russian Orthodox Christmas. They encounter

death, foul weather, Kolosh natives, starvation, and more. The struggles men face when placed against Mother Nature in the most unforgiving fight of all are accurately told in this tale, based on a similar incident in 1853.

The coast from New Archangel to Astoria—a stretch of roughly 1,000 nautical miles—has a plethora of coves, islands, and channels, all encrusted in beautiful evergreen forests, thick with the smell of sap. The climate is mild and rainfall constant because of the area's mountains, which trap clouds and moisture, especially over the shore and islands.

Before reading *The Sea Runners*, I thought the book was going to be fairly boring, but I was surprised to find it quite interesting. Ivan Doig does a good job using figurative language, which I think drew me in and made me want to keep reading. The language also made it hilarious at parts. All in all, I would

definitely recommend this book to somebody who is interested in that era, the Pacific Northwest, or adventure stories.

—Ruby Mills, grade 7, Blue Heron School



More Friends' Reading

◆ *The Gown*

Jennifer Robson (2018)

Advertised as a historical romance, *The Gown* is considerably more substantial than that term usually implies. The characters, main and supporting, are richly drawn and (except the villain!) people we can care about. The historical setting—grim, grey London in 1946; not enough coal, not enough food, not enough clothes coupons; the adrenaline of the war years drained away—is itself a powerful player. (The author has a doctorate in British social and economic history from Oxford.)



The bright spot in this bleakness is the forthcoming wedding of the Princess Elizabeth, and the gown of the title is her wedding dress, which is being made in the atelier of Normal Hartnell. Of the three protagonists, two, Ann and Miriam, are embroiderers in this salon; the third, Heather, is Ann's granddaughter from Canada.

The book is structured as sets of sequential chapters told from the points of view of these three. Their plots form a complex narrative, whose main themes are the relentless public appetite for advance information about the gown (Hartnell had to whitewash his salon windows to foil peepers), Miriam's attempt to come to terms with the loss of her family to concentration camps in France, and Heather's search for the history of her mysterious and dearly loved grandmother Ann.

The book has, for me, a pervasive flavor of Jane Austen. It is a novel of manners: good characters are good and the bad ones, bad; in the end, all is resolved happily for the good, and the bad are appropriately punished. I recommend it for history buffs, needlewomen, and lovers of a good story.

—Lois Stanford



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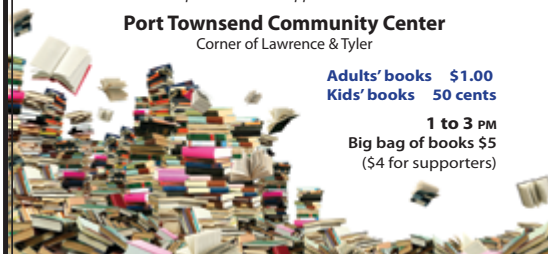
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Who We Are

THE PORT TOWNSEND PUBLIC LIBRARY was founded in 1898 by volunteers and, thanks to continuing community support, has remained an active Carnegie Library since its present doors opened in 1913.

The Friends of the Port Townsend Library, established in 1978, supports programs, services, and materials beyond what the city's library budget covers. Every year we fund reading programs, events, and activities for all ages; we also hold three book sales and publish three newsletters. Newsletters are available in the library, around town, and at friendsofptlibrary.org.

Our funding comes primarily from supporters, donations, and book sales. We invite anyone to become a Friend and attend our board meetings, which take place on the second Wednesday of each month, 3:30 PM, at the Library Learning Center (corner of Lawrence and Harrison). Please contact us by e-mail at friendsofptlibrary@gmail.com.

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