

# Check It Out!

## This Western Community Reads

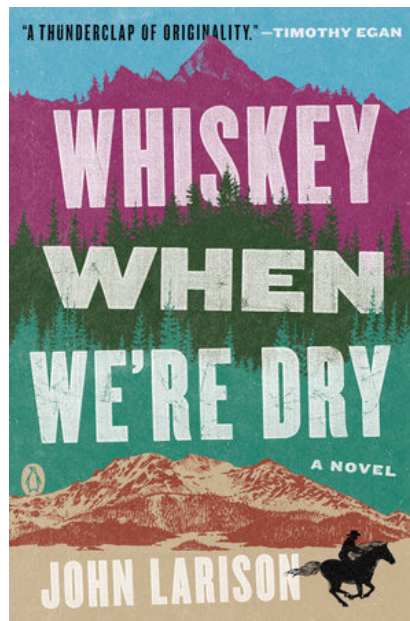
by Lynn Nowak

After reading just two paragraphs, Port Townsend Public Library associate Bev Moore was taken with the western-themed novel *Whiskey When We're Dry*, by John Larison. She suspected then and there that the book might prompt wide-ranging discussions of sweeping topics. In other words, it seemed an excellent choice for the 2020 Community Read.

With a positive recommendation from Moore, Keith Darrock, library manager for public and technical services, read it and concurred. He heads Community Read programming this year. "It hooked me right away and kept me engaged," Darrock said. "I wanted to pick it up every night."

Since that time several months ago, he and other library staff members have been prepping for this year's Community Read, including purchasing 500 copies of the book, more than ever before, with funding from the Port Townsend Public Library Foundation.

Darrock said a myriad of activities and discussion groups are planned throughout the month of March, kicking off March 5 with an opening reception, a new addition this year. An old-fashioned hoedown at the library features live music by the Eagle Mountain String Band, readings by special guests, and chili and cornbread served courtesy of Kris Nelson's restaurants. The monthlong slate of events culminates in an appearance by author Larison on March 26 at the Northwest Maritime Center.



Larison worked as a fly-fishing guide and a high school English teacher before turning full time to writing. *Whiskey When We're Dry* was a *Los Angeles Times* bestseller and has earned several other awards and accolades. It is currently becoming a feature film.

*Whiskey When We're Dry* is the library's fifteenth Community Read. Darrock said it's the first time for a western. But the story isn't typical; Darrock and Moore agree that the book bends the genre.

The year 1885 is a dangerous time for a young woman on her own in the American West. When she finds herself alone, plucky protagonist Jessilyn, seventeen, cuts off her hair, dons a boy's clothing, and rides off

on her beloved horse in search of her outlaw brother. She survives by her wits and her marksmanship, a skill she learned from her father.

*(continued on next page)*



**About the author:** Born in Oregon, John Larison spent much of his childhood in remote and far-flung regions from Australia to Alaska, before graduating from high school in Ithaca, New York. He studied philosophy and literature at the University of Oregon, earned an MFA from Oregon State University, and stayed there to teach while writing *Whiskey When We're Dry*. He lives with his family near Bellfountain, Oregon.

"Reading this book together, we all get to go on a heroine's journey," said library director Melody Eisler. "Larison's sublimely evocative writing gives us a new spin on the classic western. Let's just say it's not your grandfather's western."

Eisler said she hopes the book will attract participants who love westerns but also others who might never have sampled the genre. "Full confession: It was my first western; I cannot believe I waited so long to read one," she said, adding that she deeply appreciates Larison's diversity of characters and experiences. "I love the western landscape. It's almost a character in this book," Moore added.

Author Larison was raised with horses. That familiarity is evident, Moore said. As a horse person herself, she related to the protagonist's bond with her animal. "Jess's trust in her horse was huge."

It's the main character's voice that seems to capture readers from the start. Life is far from idyllic for Jess; it is in turns heartbreaking, brutal, and lonely, although she comes to know sweet moments, too. The dense story offers plenty of discussion points—not least of which is a woman's role in the nineteenth-century West. But along with that theme, the book launches a raft of ideas about gender and identity, race, violence, wealth, power, immigration, and even religious fervor. "It was able to tell me things I hadn't heard before," Darrock said.

In an interview with Larison (which appears at the end of the book), the author said he sought to write an epic about the West for all Americans, one that doesn't flinch from historical truth yet still retains the genre's magic. "The western's enduring appeal may be its potent combination of stakes and setting: we see immigrant characters who live on the boundaries of the known and unknown, where they must use wits and brawn (and sometimes gunpowder) to surmount

daunting challenges that threaten their family or way of life."

### March is "Reading Month"

In its early years, the Community Read program was funded by a Humanities Washington grant. No longer financed that way, Community Read is made possible by donations from the Friends of the Port Townsend Library, the Port Townsend Library Foundation, and other community supporters.

Many considerations factor into book selection for the program, according to Darrock. Title suggestions come from varied sources—through book reviews, staff or patron recommendations, and other word-of-mouth endorsements. Library staff attempt to alternate between male and female authors and between fiction and nonfiction. They also consider if authors are regionally based—or at least hail from the West Coast.

Naturally, when choosing a Community Read title, library planners also ask themselves whether a book is interesting to a wide audience, not just library "power users," as Darrock described frequent patrons.

The City of Port Townsend has proclaimed March as its official "Reading Month." Community Read is designed to promote closer ties among community members through the shared experience of reading, talking about the same book, and exchanging ideas arising from topics in the book.

Readers who pick up a copy of *Whiskey When We're Dry* from the library are encouraged to pass it on to a friend, discuss it in an established book group, or join in discussion groups scheduled throughout the month in Port Townsend and Chimacum.

"If we can get more people to use the library, great!" Darrock said.

Of the book itself, Eisler chimed in: "*Whiskey When We're Dry* has inspired an exciting month of programs for the city that whiskey built." 

## Community Read Events free and open to everyone

### Kickoff: Hoedown in the Carnegie Thursday, March 5

Carnegie Reading Room, 6–7:30 PM  
Live music by Eagle Mountain String band and readings by special guests. Chili and cornbread provided by Kris Nelson and her family of restaurants.

### Northwind Arts Center Juried Exhibit Opening Reception Saturday, March 7

Northwind Arts Center, 5:30–8 PM  
"Just Passing Through" runs March 5–29.

### PT Shorts: Reader's Theatre

Saturday, March 7, Location TBA, 7:30 PM  
Reader's Theatre: Dramatic reading of excerpts from *Whiskey When We're Dry* by Key City Public Theatre performers.

### Author Talk with Glynda Peterson Schaad Thursday, March 12

Carnegie Reading Room, 7 PM  
Schaad talks about her book, *High Divide: Minnie Peterson's Olympic Mountain Adventures*.

### Movie Screening *True Grit* Friday, March 13

Carnegie Reading Room, 7 PM  
The Coen brothers' 2010 production adapted from the 1968 novel by Charles Portis.

### Author Talk with Christine Hemp Thursday, March 18

Port Townsend Library, 7 PM  
Hemp speaks about her new book, *Wild Ride Home*, a memoir about the relationship and language between people and horses.

### Archery Demonstration & Instruction with Wapiti Bowmen

Saturday, March 21  
Jefferson County Fairgrounds, 2 PM  
A free family and youth activity.

### Meet the Author, John Larison Thursday, March 26

Northwest Maritime Center, 6:30–8 PM  
Larison talks about his book, followed by "In Conversation" with local author Adrienne Harun. Larison will sign books—for sale at the event by Imprint Books—afterward.

### Discussion Groups

Monday, March 2, Book Lovers' Café, 2 PM  
Library Learning Center (Pink House)

Tuesday, March 10, Community Book Discussion, 1 PM, Velocity Coffee

Wednesday, March 18, Community Book Discussion, 2 PM Old Whiskey Mill

Tuesday, March 24, Community Book Discussion, 6 PM, Keg & I

# What Friends Are Reading

## ◆ *One Long River of Song*

Brian Doyle (2019)

I have never been a sports fan, never really understood the urge to don face paint and jersey to root for a team. But I would gladly do both to lead a metaphorical stadium of fellow fans in a rousing cheer for the late Oregon writer Brian Doyle.

I have read and reread his novels and savored a fair sampling of his short stories, but I had never dipped into Doyle's prodigious canon of nonfiction—a deficit recently remedied with *One Long River of Song*, a collection of essays gathered together by his friend and fellow author David James Duncan.

This is simply an awe-inspiring collection, each piece filled with Doyle's sense of joyous wonder at the extraordinary nature of all ordinary lives. Whether writing about hawks and owls, faith and frailties, a father's terror for a sick child, or the absolute shrewness of a tiny shrew, Doyle's voice is so plain, so present, so rhythmic and compelling that he leads you along like a drum major, wielding words as his baton, with purpose and drive and the occasional playful behind-the-back twirl and toss. A word of warning, though: you'll need to pace yourself. Try not to inhale this book in one sitting. Measure out a healthy portion, read that far, then rest and look up at a world that may seem just a little different, a little clearer, than it was before. —Kristine Kaufman

P.S. "Brian Doyle Interviews Brian Doyle" (page 81) is one of the best things I've ever read about writing, writers, reading, and readers. Plus there's a book list that will keep you busy for the rest of your life.

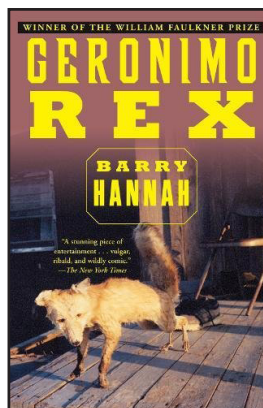
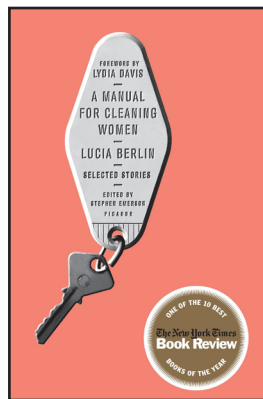
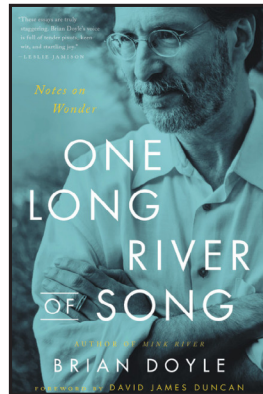
## ◆ *A Manual for Cleaning Women*

Lucia Berlin (2016)

## ◆ *Geronimo Rex*

Barry Hannah (1998)

Sometimes when you read a book, you know the author is writing from personal experience. You just know. When I read Lucia Berlin's *A Manual for Cleaning Women*, a collection of short stories, I knew she had been a cleaning lady. As I continued to read, I was equally



convinced that she had been an emergency-room nurse, a high school teacher, a recovering alcoholic married to a heroin addict, and a switchboard operator. Berlin writes of growing up in mining camps and of living in New York, Mexico, and high-society Chile. As unlikely as it may seem, these stories are indeed based on personal experience.

Berlin's powers of observation give the stories a sense of realness, but her wry sense of humor, an appreciation for quirkiness, and a deep compassion for flawed human beings are what make these stories so engaging. Berlin is able to find beauty in unexpected places and to make the ordinary seem extraordinary. Her writing style has been compared with that of Anton Chekhov, Raymond Carver, and Barry Hannah, among others. The casual tone of her storytelling belies meticulous crafting; her carefully chosen words pack a punch.

A few years ago I managed to talk my book club into reading Barry Hannah's *Geronimo Rex*. Although they did not immediately eject me from the club, a full year passed before I was allowed to recommend another book. It's not hard to understand why people, and particularly women, are riled by Hannah's writing. His protagonists often sport a macho swagger and seem to have little understanding of women. Yet his writing is engaging, unpredictable, and entertaining.

It would not have occurred to me to compare Hannah's writing with Lucia Berlin's, but as I reread *Geronimo Rex* with that comparison in mind, I did see some similarities. Both writers share a keen eye for details and a fascination with unlikely heroes and their behavioral quirks. They also share a similar sense of humor. The big difference is that the narrators in Barry Hannah's books are often insensitive bad boys—a more modern version of Peck's bad boy.

If you prefer a narrator who shares your values, you will probably hate this book. If you don't hold the narrator to the standards you might apply to a friend, it's easier to appreciate Hannah's fine storytelling and be touched by the book's flawed humanity, honesty, and poignant humor. —Christine Heycke

## ... and Doing ... and Reading

### ◆ Baking Bread by the Book

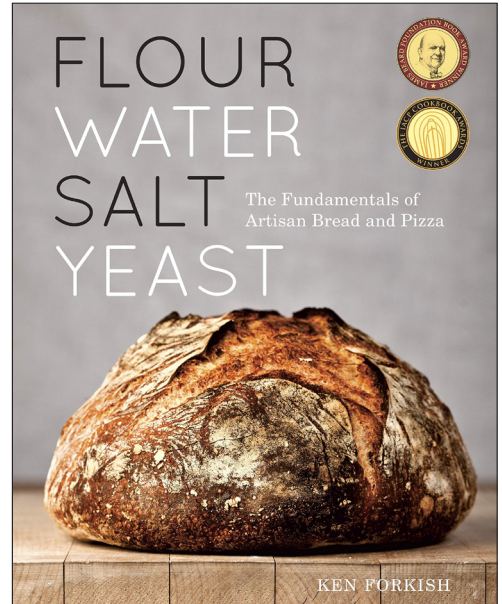
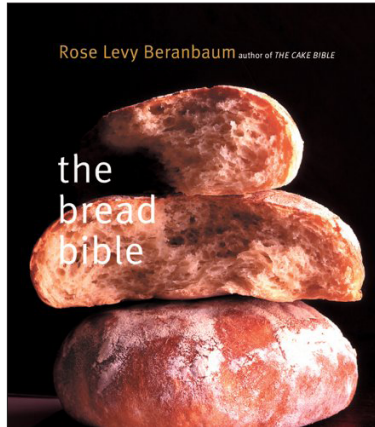
I've been baking bread for many years and have watched bread fashions trend from soft, close-grained, pale loaves and breads that required a lot of kneading to no-knead doughs and airy, artisan breads baked in very hot ovens and blackened on the edges. I love them all. I also love many of the books that have come out since I started baking with ***The Tassajara Bread Book*** (1974) and James Beard's ***Beard on Bread*** (1973). Thankfully, our library is well stocked with books on baking bread.

If I had to recommend just one, I think it would be Rose Levy Beranbaum's ***The Bread Bible*** (2003), a book with clear directions, beautiful color photographs, and recipes for everything from basic white bread to brioche, sourdough, and pumpernickel. Beranbaum's recipes include both cup and weight measures and instructions on how to vary recipes to fit your own tastes or schedule. This book is as well suited for beginners as it is for accomplished bakers.

If you dreamed of going to cooking school and want to understand the science behind techniques and ingredients, ***The Bread Baker's Apprentice*** (2016) may be the book for you. Its color photographs show you how to form everything from a five-braid loaf to pane Siciliano and Kaiser rolls. ***The Bread Builders*** (1999) by Daniel Wing and Alan Scott goes into even more detail on the science behind baking. Once you understand the science, you can tweak ingredients or methods to get the results you want. As if that weren't enough, *The Bread Builders* also tells you how to build outdoor masonry ovens.

Right now one of my my favorite books is ***Flour Water Salt Yeast*** (2012) by Ken Forkish. I have worked my way through almost every recipe in this book and love the reliable results. This is the book that really got me interested in sourdough breads. Once I found ways to use extra starter instead of discarding it, this book rarely left the kitchen counter.

This is only a small selection of the many bread baking books available at the library. There are lots more, including ***Bread Baking for Beginners*** (2018) by Bonnie Ohara and several books featuring gluten-free recipes. —CH



### ◆ On the Come Up

Angie Thomas (2019)

Author Angie Thomas's follow-on to her acclaimed debut novel, *The Hate You Give*, this new book is a black coming-of-age story full of teenage angst and joyful romping. Both books are about the black experience in the USA.

Bri is a 16-year-old girl with an older brother, mother, and grandparents. Drugs and violence are a constant in their neighborhood. Bri has some good neighborhood friends and with them attends a magnet arts high school. Although the school is supposedly integrated, black and white students self-segregate, and the black students face a great deal of racism and inequality perpetuated by other students, faculty, and staff.

Bri's family is strong, with high expectations for the future and the kids, but struggling

financially. When Bri's mother loses her job, things go from bad to worse. Bri aspires to be a rapper like her deceased father. She thinks she can solve the family's financial woes with her talent as a rap writer and singer. She raps with her own voice and such lines as, "You'll never silence me. You'll never kill my dream. Just recognize that when you say brilliant, you're also saying Bri." She also writes gangsta rap lyrics having the promise of making money. Her ultimate choice of which voice to use forms her future.

I resorted to using Google to look up slang, such as *props*, or proper respect, credit, or recognition. But even having to learn the slang, I found *On the Come Up* a compelling, interesting, heartbreaking, and funny page turner. Refreshing to have a page-turner with depth. —Geraldynn Rackowski



## ◆ *Lost and Wanted*

Nell Freudenberger (2019)

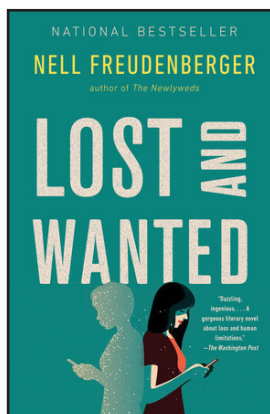
*Lost and Wanted* is billed as a novel, but it's more mysterious than most novels. Helen, a tenured professor at MIT has recently lost a dear friend, Charlotte (Charlie) Boyce, whom she met when they were students at Harvard. There, they had confided in each other about everything. But years have passed, their lives have changed, and they have grown apart.

Charlie is married and has a daughter. Helen is well known as a quantum physics writer for the general public. One day, immediately after Charlie's death, Helen gets a call from her. As the story unfolds, Helen continues getting calls or texts from Charlie's phone. Sometimes she hears muffled noises, sometimes just a hang-up; sometimes cryptic icons or text messages appear. Helen comes to believe someone is playing tricks with Charlie's phone. For what reason is the real question.

In the meantime, Helen reconnects with Neel Jonnal, a former colleague who is also highly acclaimed for his own work in physics. Some think he may soon be awarded a Nobel Prize for work he has been doing with LIGO, the Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory. During college, Neel and Helen were lovers, but that relationship ended years ago. Now their friendship picks up where it left off, or so it seems.

I liked this story for a number of reasons: The characters were three-dimensional, with the qualities and imperfections of everyday people. The author has worked hard to make various aspects of quantum physics understandable and interesting to a reader like me, who has no background in any type of physics. The plot was compelling, with unique and unexpected twists. I was not only sorry to finish the book, but I also found myself continuing to think about it long after it ended.

—Fran Post



## ◆ *Meet Me at the Museum*

Anne Youngson (2018)

*Meet Me at the Museum* is a compelling tale about two strangers who begin exchanging letters, initially about Tollund Man, an Iron Age man from 650 BC, who was found preserved in peat moss near the village of Tollund, Denmark. After a time, the tone of their letters begins to change, becoming much more personal, deeper, and increasingly insightful. As a result of this correspondence, a charming and layered relationship develops, which totally affects the strangers' perception of their lives.

Tina is a middle-aged woman who lives in England with her husband and grown children. Anders is a recent widower who lives in Denmark and is the curator of the museum where Tollund Man resides. Initially, Tina and Anders exchange letters by post about once a month: she writes, he writes back. As they come to know each other, the pace quickens, the salutations become more personal. After a while, the correspondents decide to use e-mail, which allows for more immediate responses. And as the pace steps up, the reader engages more and more with these two and their life experiences.

This debut novel by 70-year-old Anne Youngson was one of the most charming tales I have heard in a very long time. Yes, heard: my husband read it aloud, and as the story unfolded, we found ourselves discussing the latest development and speculating on what would happen next. As we got closer to the end, we began rationing the letters to prolong the story. And when the tale did end, I wondered for weeks how these two were getting along in their lives.

If you are looking for a thoroughly engaging story—one full of charm—read *Meet Me at the Museum*. I am sure you will enjoy it! —FP



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## ... and Finally

### ◆ *Natural Causes*

Barbara Ehrenreich (2018)

Barbara Ehrenreich's latest book, subtitled *An Epidemic of Wellness, the Certainty of Dying, and Killing Ourselves to Live Longer*, arms itself with facts and humor to skewer the sacred cow of relentlessly pursuing "long life and health." She fillets the wellness movement with ease and relish—revealing just how little research supports the usefulness of everything from annual physical exams to meditation—and dismantles nostrums about the innate balance and wisdom of the body.

Author of many previous books (including *Nickeled and Dimed*, in which she experiences firsthand the near impossibility of making it on poverty-level wages), Ehrenreich contends in *Natural Causes* that there is little scientific justification for much of what we do to prolong life. To her, the only reason anyone should work out or exercise is to feel good in the moment—if in fact you do.

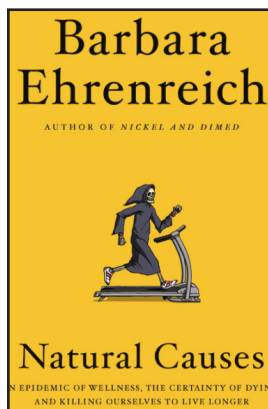
Ehrenreich has a PhD in cellular immunology, and her explanations are both in depth and aimed at the average reader. She introduces us to a world of dystopian "intrabody conflict," where our cells appear guilty of what she calls "Cellular Treason." Our own immune cells, accomplices in cancer?!? "Every death can now be understood as suicide," she writes. Yet "[w]e persist in subjecting anyone who dies at a seemingly untimely age to a kind of bio-moral autopsy: Did she smoke?

Drink excessively? Eat too much fat and not enough fiber? Can she, in other words, be blamed for her own death?"

Many of us in this country are convinced by popular culture that following alternative health practices and food fads will help us live longer. We are loath to be self-critical: if Oprah says something's good, it must be, right? In chapters with titles like "Midlife Revolt," "The Veneer of Science," "The Madness of Mindfulness," and "Successful Aging," Ehrenreich lets no one off the hook.

Highly recommended! Now, step away from the computer and get some exercise!

—Al Bergstein



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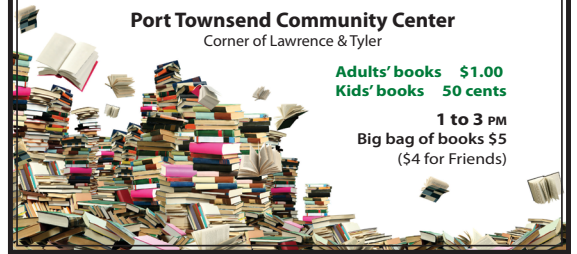
Early admission for Friends, 8 AM

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**We thank you** who have joined us since October 2019:

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## First 2020 BOOK SALE

Saturday, March 21  
Uptown Community Center

Spring ahead  
with books!



## 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](http://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](mailto:friendsofptlibrary@gmail.com).

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