

SEASONS

SNDdeN US EAST-WEST QUARTERLY SUMMER 2019



Summer Reading
T O S H A R E

"What a blessing it is to love books."
Elizabeth von Arnim, The Solitary Summer

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Seasons is a quarterly publication produced by the SNDdeN US East-West Communications Support Circle. Please send comments or suggestions to: EWCommunicationsSupportCircle@sndden.org. Most photos used are royalty-free stock images.

A photograph of a sun-dappled forest path. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a soft, hazy atmosphere. The path is paved and leads into the distance. The text is overlaid on the upper left and center of the image.

A Summer Theme

We asked Sisters and Associates to share a book or film that others might like. We hope you have long, leisurely stretches of time this summer to check out one or more of the books suggested in this issue of *Seasons*.

A Great Read

I heartily recommend Barbara Kingsolver's new novel *Unsheltered*. Her latest book tackles complex economic, social and political issues while focusing on the lives of two families: one from the 19th century and one in the 21st century. Both stories are set in crumbling homes on the same property during different time periods.

In the 21st century Willa Knox, her husband Iano, their passionate and political daughter Tig, son Zeke, his infant son, and Iano's bigoted father all live in a house inherited from a relative of Willa's. A series of calamities precipitated their move into this crumbling house. Willa and Iano lost their jobs. Now Iano only has a part-time teaching job while Willa cares for her sick father-in-law. Tig has just returned from Cuba and Zeke is caring for his infant son after the baby's mother committed suicide.

The parallel story set in 1870 follows Thatcher Greenwood and his family who have moved into a similarly unstable house. Thatcher is a science teacher in a local school. He has recently become enamored of the ideas of Charles Darwin but cannot teach this in the school. The town was founded as a Christian Utopian community and ideas that stray from creationism are not tolerated. Thatcher, however, finds a kindred spirit in his next door neighbor, Mary Treat, a naturalist in her own right and a frequent correspondent of Charles Darwin.

The environment plays a major role in this novel particularly through the relationship of Thatcher and Mary who explore the interconnectedness and interdependence of the species she discovers and studies. On the 21st century track of this story, Willa's daughter Tig learned to live more simply in Cuba. She is a rabid recycler, creating vegetable gardens throughout the property and sharing them with residents of a local school for difficult children.

As the two narratives stand beside each other in this absorbing novel, they reflect each other, reminding us of the interdependence of the human family and the earth we share.

- Nancy Uhl, SNDdeN



A Harsh Beauty

The *Great Alone* is the title of a recent novel written by Kristen Hannah who last wrote the much acclaimed *The Nightingale*. Her current tale is the story of the Allbright family: Ernt, the father, Cora, the mother, and Leni, their 13-year old daughter who travel to Alaska to seek a new life. (the Alaska of cruise ships and glaciers it is not!)

Ernt, a Vietnam veteran and a former POW has inherited a small portion of land in the wilderness of the state. On arrival, the family finds that they are poorly equipped for survival in this harsh landscape. In order to provide food, each family member must learn to hunt, fish and plant crops. Aside from acquiring these necessary skills, Cora and Leni are faced with the frequent, violent outbursts of Ernt, especially during the dark Alaskan winters.

While furnishing the reader with a narrative of forgiveness and abiding love, Hannah places her story against the beauty and wilderness of our 49th state.

- Jeanne Sullivan, SNDdeN

Two Good Books

Grace on the Journey to God by Michael Casey, OCSO from the Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia.

This lovely book is theologically rich and, at the same time, prayerfully written. It invites us to explore through a variety of themes such as faith, prayer, silence, community and revelation how God is somehow always gifting us.

The Lost Girls of Paris by Pam Jenoff.

This novel is based on true events. It is the story of three courageous, determined women who braved constant danger to help in World War II.

- Barbara Metz, SNDdeN

An Ode to Nature

Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens is so full of emotion it is hard to describe in a logical narrative. It is a full-blossomed ode to nature, especially to the myriad forms of life in the marsh off the coast of North Carolina, and it is a robust testimony to the resilience of an abandoned child and to the brilliant woman she became – a naturalist, artist and writer. While it is a story of wrenching abandonment, isolation and rejection, it is also a tale of enduring friendship and dedication.

You will be rooting for Kya and Tate, the key figures of the book, and you will love Jumpin' and Mabel as the adult mentors everyone should have in life. Scattered throughout the book are other characters in the sleepy town of Barkley Cove, among them Chase Anderson whose tragic death casts suspicion on Kya. You think you can breathe in relief as Kya survives a murder trial, but up until the last pages suspense and emotion hold you in their grip. A MUST READ!

- Bobby English, SNDdeN

Beauty, Courage, Transformation

In April, Julia Alvarez, a Dominican-American author came to Lawrence, MA to give a talk at the public library in celebration of the 25th anniversary of her novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Her novel is the historical, fictionalized account of the lives and deaths of the Mirabal sisters.

The butterflies in the title refer to the code name which three of them shared as members of the underground movement they led with their husbands in opposition to the Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo. At the end of the novel, on November 25, 1960, Patria, Minerva and Maria Teresa along with their driver, Rufino de la Cruz, were ambushed and assassinated as they returned home from visiting their imprisoned husbands.



Patria, Minerva and Maria Teresa

The fourth sister, Dede was a sympathizer to the movement, but she was forbidden by her husband to join her sisters in overt political action. During Patria, Minerva and Maria Teresa's own earlier imprisonments, Dede smuggled medicine, food and other supplies into their jail. Following their deaths, she came to realize that her mission as the last Mirabal sister was to keep their memories alive.

A source of amazement for me as I read the novel was the fact that Trujillo saw the sisters as being more dangerous to him than their husbands. He feared their strength and their ability to generate hope.

A colleague of mine at the Notre Dame Educational Center, who is also a poet, suggested that I read *In the Time of the Butterflies* so as to open my heart to a journey through a terribly dark, yet glorious period in the history of the Dominican Republic. Emilia's suggestion introduced me to women who underwent a metamorphosis. They became butterflies, powerful symbols of beauty, courage and resurrection.

- Maureen O'Brien, SNDdeN

Louise Penny Mysteries

If you like fast-paced, action-packed mysteries, stop reading! If you like complex mysteries solved in the midst of a community of fascinating people, with characters you get to really know and love, then you will want to read the engaging mysteries of Louise Penny.

Penny's mysteries are situated primarily in the small village of Three Pines and in Montreal. One wonders if the village reflects her own small village south of Montreal. Her characters are unforgettable. Chief among them is Chief Inspector Armand Gamache, a man of integrity, strength, and charm who sometimes gets it wrong but always admits his mistakes. Ruth Zardo, poet laureate, is FINE – you'll have to read the books to find out what that means! And there are many more fascinating personages filling the pages.

What's wonderful about Penny's books – of which there are many both in print and in audio – is that you really get to know her characters, their thoughts, their feelings, their gifts and limits. They become your friends – each to a different degree as happens with the many people we meet in life.

If you can, start with *Still Life*, Penny's first book. But wherever you start, you'll want to keep meeting the wonderful people of Three Pines along with CI Gamache, Agent Beauvoir and their families as they solve cases of murder and mayhem. Be prepared to laugh, to cry, to be amazed, and to enjoy it all.

- Edithann Kane, SNDdeN

Made in China

Since I am a tea lover, the novel, *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*, immediately caught my fancy. My interest in cultures different from my own kept me engrossed in this book. Written by Lisa Lee, a Chinese American, the story follows the life of Li-yan, a Chinese infant abandoned at an orphanage in China. She was raised by a loving, well-to-do American family but always wondered about her origins.

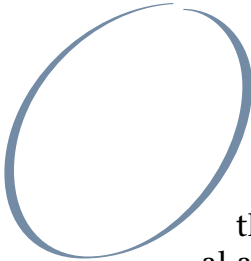
Throughout the book it is hard to miss the importance of the role of the woman, culture and family bonds. We are taken into a remote Yunnan mountain village in China where life centers around the growing and production of tea. This is not only arduous but frequently dangerous. Producing the best tea is the guiding principle. The unwavering hard work, tradition and family bonds, however, have succeeded in making China the largest and best tea producer in the world.

Although Li-yan lives a charmed American life, the longing for her tradition, culture and a mother-daughter bond keeps her from feeling complete as she seeks the ties that bind her to her culture.

As I watch the influx of immigrants coming to America and look at the many “made in China” labels, I ponder what are the ties that bind us. Our cultures seem to collide as we vie for the best tea, economy, technology, trade and military power. You too might feel drawn to learn more about another culture. As you drink your next cup of tea, you might enjoy reading *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*.

- Sheila Palmer, SNDdeN

Empowering Women



One book I recommend to everyone who strives to live according to gospel values is Melinda Gates' *The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World*. For a non-fiction work, it reads more like a novel. The pace is quick and compelling. The narrative is one of searching, listening and developing relationships. The author describes her evolving consciousness of her values, both personal and within the Gates' Foundations. She is a skilled storyteller as she recounts her experiences among people living in extreme poverty and how these visits cause her to reflect on her own practices and incorporate new learnings into her personal and professional life.

The author's fidelity to core Catholicism is inspiring. When she was criticized/condemned by the hierarchy for making birth control methods known and available, she stood firm citing the hymn she sang in grade school – "God hears the cry of the poor." Women are made poor by bearing more children than they can feed, clothe and nurture. They need to have these methods available. When she visited the most abandoned places, she asked women what they needed; she listened keenly and over time to be sure she understood their message. Then she asked if some would like her assistance in creating what they needed. In some places in India, she met with women sex workers. The only way they could support their children was to do this work. They were aware of possible diseases. What they feared most was the violence perpetrated on them. One local foundation manager started a tearoom where the women could talk with their peers and be strengthened by their solidarity. Readers will be astonished at the agreement they made with one another.

Do read this book and experience your own moments of lift.

- Cathy Waldron, SNDdeN



Two tickets to a world most of us don't know

These two books, *Power of Conviction*, by James C. Tillman, and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, by Jesmyn Ward, are recommended not because I've read them yet, but because I've heard the authors speak and each one was compelling and engaging.

James Tillman's story, that of the first prisoner in Connecticut exonerated on DNA evidence, researched through the Innocence Project after 18 years of insisting on his innocence, was presented as a play at the Hartford Public Library by Groundswell*. Tillman himself was present and interacted with the audience after the play. In spite of the experience of false accusation and conviction, racist behavior of police and prison guards, and the demeaning treatment in prison, Tillman emerged as a gentleman, humble, forgiving and working to help others recently released adjust to the challenges faced upon re-entry.

Jesmyn Ward, the recipient of this year's Mark Twain American Voice in Literature Award, was moved to tears at the sight of 150 mostly white folks present at the award ceremony. She said she has done presentations where only one or two, or sometimes no one showed up. From her youth, she knew the power of story, and this book, though "fiction," speaks of the realities in this "post-racist" world faced by those in the South. She was surprised that many of her readers thought that Parchman Farm, the prison in the book was fictitious. It is a real place and those living anywhere in Mississippi knew it all too well. The deft power of her words and her portrayal of relationships are two of the reasons she received this prestigious award.

**Groundswell Ensemble Theater, Check out their Facebook page. They would be happy to bring this Reader's Play to other venues.*

- Barbara-Jean Kubik, SNDdeN

Priest, Poet, Prophet

A t play in the Lions' Den is both a biography and a memoir of Daniel Berrigan, S.J. The author, Jim Forest, was a close friend. In writing this book, he had access to Berrigan's published works and his unpublished letters and personal papers. He also draws on his personal knowledge of him as a close friend and collaborator for many years.

Forest follows Berrigan from his youth through his formation as a Jesuit. Berrigan began his ministry as a teacher who soon realized that to make the Gospel come alive for his students he had to relate it to their lives. In the sixties, that meant dealing with issues like racism and the Vietnam War. The more he taught the more he came to understand both racism and war as incompatible with God's commandment to love one another. He also realized that his ideals were not popular in those years.



Influenced by Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton and Martin Luther King, Jr, he spent the rest of his life working for peace by teaching, writing poetry, preaching retreats and demonstrating against any injustice especially the Viet Nam War. In 1968, he was part of a group who poured blood on records in the local draft office. The Catonsville Nine as they came to be called were arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to jail for their civil disobedience. This did not stop Berrigan

who continued his activism until his last protest in 2011 when he joined the Occupy Wall Street protesters.

Although Forest admires Berrigan, he portrays a very human man with all his gifts and foibles. A skilled writer, Forest uses his words to bring Berrigan alive. He also lets Berrigan speak for himself with excerpts from his writings on each page. I urge you to read this book and meet a priest, poet and prophet who resembles the ancient prophet Daniel in the lions' den.

- Mary Rose Crowley, SNDdeN

Far Greater Than His Flaws

I recently read *Grant* by Ron Chernow, a long read at over 1,000 pages, but an engaging one. Like many, I had the vague impression of Grant as a mediocre president while also being a celebrated war general. I also had the faint impression of his brutality in leading the Union army. I learned how both flawed and true those impressions are. There was much about this humble man to admire.



Photo of Ulysses S. Grant at his family home.

brutality inflicted from both sides is well-documented, Grant himself never engaged in it and disapproved of and was sickened by unnecessary violence.

What I have come to admire about him was his growth from being mildly against slavery to be a president who made the eradication of slavery a priority. He married into a southern, slave-owning family and struggled with his father-in-law because of it. His wife even owned slaves though Grant eventually persuaded her to give them their freedom.

Like many of us, Grant was more complex than most realized and far greater than his flaws.

He fought against poverty for much of his life and actually did fail at a number of business ventures. His most devastating losses, however, were at the hands of those who took advantage of his trusting nature. He was very likely an alcoholic at a time when that was viewed as moral weakness. He struggled with it all his life.

The great ambiguity of his character was that he was also a brilliant strategist as general for the Union during the Civil War. And while the

- Terry Davis, SNDdeN