

MVAH ZOOM BOOK CLUB

December 10, 2020 3PM

Next MVAH ZOOM Book club January 14th at 3PM

Attendees: Host: Barbara Brennan Cher Terry Betsy Stephens Louise & Robert McLean	Carol Mattaino Norma Brodsky
--	---------------------------------

NOTE: I think in the beginning we decided to limit the books discussed to one or maybe two, but no more. It was suggested to expand a bit more on the book, the author – at least a paragraph about it and why you are recommending it. Thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

No	Book	Page
1	TALKING TO STRANGERS by Malcolm Gladwell	2
2 A	OVERSTORY by Richard Powers	2
2 B	CLOCK WINDER by Ann Tyler	3
3	THE SPY WORE RED by Aline, Countess of Romanones	3
4	DEAD WAKE by Erik Larsen	4
5	GREAT EXPECTATIONS by Charles Dickens	5
6	I HAVE SOMETHING TO TELL YOU by Chasten Buttigieg	6
7	PERSONAL HISTORY by Katherine Graham	7

1. Louise – TALKING TO STRANGERS by Malcolm Gladwell. 2019 published. 275 pages

In Malcolm Gladwell's newest book Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know about the People We Don't Know; he dissects why we're so bad at judging others and what to do about it. Humans naturally default to believing that others are telling the truth and are incapable of telling when someone is lying.

2. Betsy – A. OVERSTORY by Richard Powers. 2018 published. 408 pages.

It is Powers's twelfth novel. The novel is about five trees whose unique life experiences with nine Americans bring them together to address the destruction of forests. Powers was inspired to write the work while teaching at Stanford University after he encountered giant redwood trees for the first time.

People see better what looks like them,” observes the field biologist Patricia Westerford, one of the nine—nine—main characters of Richard Powers’s 12th novel, The Overstory. And trees, Patricia discovers, look like people. They are social creatures, caring for one another, communicating, learning, trading goods and services; despite lacking a brain, trees are “aware.” After borers attack a sugar maple, it emits insecticides that warn its neighbors, which respond by intensifying their own defenses. When the roots of two Douglas firs meet underground, they fuse, joining vascular systems; if one tree gets ill, the other cares for it. The chopping down of a tree causes those surrounding it to weaken, as if in mourning. But Powers’s findings go beyond Dr. Pat’s. In his tree-mad novel, which contains as many species as any North American forest—17 is named on the first page alone—trees speak, sing, experience pain, dream, remember the past, and predict the future. The past and the future, it turns out, are mirror images of each other. Neither contains people.

B. CLOCK WINDER by Ann Tyler. Published 1972. 322 pages.

Having sacked her handyman, newly-widowed Mrs. Emerson finds a replacement in Elizabeth, a lanky, awkward girl. The Emerson’s – there are seven grown-up children – have a reputation for craziness and Elizabeth finds herself drawn into

their disorderly lives against her will. But in the end, it is hard to tell whether she is a victim of the needy Emerson's, or the de facto ruler of the family.

3. Cher – THE SPY WORE RED by Aline, Countess of Romanones.

Published 1987. 338 pages.

New York Times best seller list When Aline Griffith was born in Pearl River, New York, in 1923, one might have guessed from her exceptional beauty that a career as an actress or a model might be in her future. Few would have imagined that twenty-one years later, she would find herself in Spain as a deep-cover OSS agent, infiltrating the highest levels of Spanish society; or that five years later still, she would marry a Spanish grandee and become one of the most watched, most admired, most fascinating women of international society. This is the story of Aline, Countess of Romanones, a story of courage, beauty and success that will move readers with its amazing combination of autobiographical fact and narrative force. Reading The Spy Wore Red is like stepping into the script of Hitchcock's 1946 Cary Grant- Ingrid Bergman film Notorious.

The spy series – The Spy Went Dancing, The Spy Wore Silk are based on the authors memoirs but the books read like a novel.

Note: Cher has all three books. She has offered to loan them out. Contact Cher if you are interested.

4. Carol – Dead Wake by Erik Larsen. Published 2015. 674 pages.

“Dead Wake” by Erik Larson tells the story of a fabulous steamship, the Lusitania. It was called the “magnificent ship” standing seven stories from dock to bridge and consuming coal at a rate of 140 tons a day while just standing still. This splendid example of man's advancements in shipbuilding was a commercial vessel that carried passengers and cargo. While some of Britain's private steamships had been converted for the war, the Lusitania had no connection whatsoever with the war or wartime maneuvers. However, being an ocean liner for passengers wasn't to be the reason why it became an important part of world history.

Just like the Titanic before it, the Lusitania was considered to be virtually unsinkable. It's size alone was daunting; its image would scare off most warships that were smaller and barely faster than the swift steamship. It was fully capable of ramming and destroying a smaller ship. Besides while the Great War between Great Britain and Germany had been ongoing for years, there was a tacit agreement that neutral and commercial vessels were not fair game.

Despite an announcement from the German embassy which ran in the New York Times on May 1, 1915, warning that commercial vessels were vulnerable to attack in waters encompassed in the war zone, no one paid much attention. On the morning of May 1st, passengers boarded, luggage and cargo were loaded and the officers and crew of the Lusitania did their daily inspection of lifeboats and all systems of the gigantic ship. While the German warning didn't rattle anyone about the dangers of taking the transatlantic journey from New York Harbor to Liverpool, England, perhaps the ship's captain and crew and the passengers would have been alarmed to find out that a top secret unit called Room 40 working under British intelligence was tracking the movements of U-boats in British waters, especially U-20 which was the most notorious and ruthless of the German subs, and that there was great concern about the possibility of submarine attacks on British ships. A chill would have gone down the collective spine of all those on board the Lusitania had they known that the Germans specifically mentioned the Lusitania in a number of intercepted messages. But the British Admiralty, led by a young Winston Churchill, did not want to share the intel with the Lusitania captain because it might expose the existence of Room 40.

On May 7th, when passengers and crew could see the coastline of Ireland coming into view, the Lusitania was struck in its hull with one torpedo launched by U-20. In just ten minutes after being struck, all the systems on the Lusitania were inoperable. The rudder no longer functioned and all the lights were out. The elevators stopped, some filled with panicked passengers. The baggage workers down below in the hull were all dead or soon would be. Water began to seep through opened portholes. There were 70 opened portholes causing the starboard alone to take on water at 260 tons a minute.



The crew of the U-20 was jubilant that it had attacked the Lusitania, an important symbolic victory. The ocean liner that was too big to sink, sank in eighteen minutes. Over half of the people on board were lost. The Lusitania disaster was a pivotal event in the war and one of the stepping stones that led President Woodrow Wilson to abandon his policy of neutrality and eventually enter the war.

Ironically, Great Britain and Germany agreed on one important element in their conflict: each, for their own purposes, wanted America in the war. The British had been eager for America to enter the war as an ally and the Germans had been trying to lure them into the conflict by baiting them with attacks on their vessels. The tragedy on May 7, 1915, represented a strange confluence of the goals of these two nations. There remains a mystique about the Lusitania, unanswered questions that have never been resolved in a century and, at this point, never will be.

5. **Hugh – GREAT EXPECTATIONS by Charles Dickens.** Published 1860. 544 pages.

Great Expectations follows the childhood and young adult years of Pip a blacksmith's apprentice in a country village. He suddenly comes into a large fortune (his great expectations) from a mysterious benefactor and moves to London where he enters high society. What is the main message of great expectations?

Ambition and Self-Improvement. The moral theme of Great Expectations is quite simple: affection, loyalty, and conscience are more important than social advancement, wealth, and class.

6. **Norma – I HAVE SOMETHING TO TELL YOU by Chasten Buttigieg.** Published 2020. 256 pages. Non-fiction- autobiography.

A moving, hopeful, and refreshingly candid memoir by the husband of former Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg about growing up gay in his small Midwestern town, his relationship with Pete, and his hope for America's future.

Throughout the past year, teacher Chasten Glezman Buttigieg has emerged on the national stage, having left his classroom in South Bend, Indiana, to travel cross-country in support of his husband, former mayor Pete Buttigieg, and Pete's groundbreaking presidential campaign. Through Chasten's joyful, witty social media posts, the public gained a behind-the-scenes look at his life with Pete on the trail—moments that might have ranged from the mundane to the surprising, but that were always heartfelt.

Chasten has overcome a multitude of obstacles to get here. In this moving, uplifting memoir, he recounts his journey to finding acceptance as a gay man. He recalls his upbringing in rural Michigan, where he knew he was different, where indeed he felt different from his father and brothers. He recounts his coming out and how he's healed from revealing his secret to his family, friends, community, and the world. And he tells the story of meeting his boyfriend, whom he would marry and who would eventually become a major Democratic leader.

7. **Barbara – PERSONAL HISTORY by Katherine Graham.** Published 1998. 642 pages. In lieu of an unrevealing Famous-People-I-Have-Known autobiography, the owner of the Washington Post has chosen to be remarkably candid about the insecurities prompted by remote parents and a difficult marriage to the charismatic, manic-depressive Phil Graham, who ran the newspaper her father acquired. Katharine's account of her years as subservient daughter and wife is so painful that by the time, she finally asserts herself at the Post following Phil's suicide in 1963 (more than halfway through the book), readers will want to cheer. After that, Watergate is practically an anticlimax.