

MVAH ZOOM BOOK CLUB

July 8, 2021

Next MVAH ZOOM Book Club Sept 9th at 3PM

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| Attendees: Host: Barbara Brennan Cher Terry Betsy Stephens Louise & Robert McLean | Carol Mattaino Sarah Tatum (in absentia) |
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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!

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1. Betsy – **The Truths We Hold by Kamala Harris**. 2019. 336 pages memoir.
From Vice President Kamala Harris, one of America’s most inspiring political leaders, a book about the core truths that unite us, and the long struggle to discern what

those truths are and how best to act upon them, in her own life and across the life of our country.

Vice President Kamala Harris's commitment to speaking truth is informed by her upbringing. The daughter of immigrants, she was raised in an Oakland, California community that cared deeply about social justice; her parents—an esteemed economist from Jamaica and an admired cancer researcher from India—met as activists in the civil rights movement when they were graduate students at Berkeley. Growing up, Harris herself never hid her passion for justice, and when she became a prosecutor out of law school, a deputy district attorney, she quickly established herself as one of the most innovative change agents in American law enforcement. She progressed rapidly to become the elected District Attorney for San Francisco, and then the chief law enforcement officer of the state of California as a whole. Known for bringing a voice to the voiceless, she took on the big banks during the foreclosure crisis, winning a historic settlement for California's working families. Her hallmarks were applying a holistic, data-driven approach to many of California's thorniest issues, always eschewing stale "tough on crime" rhetoric as presenting a series of false choices. Neither "tough" nor "soft" but smart on crime became her mantra. Being smart means learning the truths that can make us better as a community, and supporting those truths with all our might. That has been the pole star that guided Harris to a transformational career as the top law enforcement official in California, and it is guiding her now as a transformational United States Senator, grappling with an array of complex issues that affect her state, our country, and the world, from health care and the new economy to immigration, national security, the opioid crisis, and accelerating inequality.

By reckoning with the big challenges, we face together, drawing on the hard-won wisdom and insight from her own career and the work of those who have most inspired her, Kamala Harris offers in *THE TRUTHS WE HOLD* a master class in problem solving, in crisis management, and leadership in challenging times. Through the arc of her own life, on into the great work of our day, she communicates a vision of shared struggle, shared purpose, and shared values. In a book rich in many home truths, not least is that a relatively small number of people work very hard to convince a great many of us that we have less in common than we actually do, but it falls to us to look past them and get on with the good work of living our common

truth. When we do, our shared effort will continue to sustain us and this great nation, now and in the years to come.

2. Carol – **Lottery by Patricia Wood**. 2007. Novel.

Lottery is a 2007 novel by Patricia Wood. Her first published novel, it was shortlisted for the 2008 Orange Prize for Fiction. The novel focuses on Perry Crandall, a man with an IQ of 76, who wins \$12 million in a lottery. Wood drew on personal experience: her father won \$6 million from the Washington state lottery, and her brother-in-law had Down syndrome. Wood wrote the novel in 3 months, and sold it for a reported six-figure deal.

3. Cher – **My War by Andy Rooney**. 1995. Biography/Autobiography. 352 pages.

This is a Rooney's memoir of coming of age as a reporter and as a man during World War II - a story featured in *The Greatest Generation* - now in a hardcover gift edition. A first-hand account of one man's role in history, *My War* is a memoir from one of America's personalities. As a naive, young correspondent for *The Stars and Stripes* during World War II, Andy Rooney flew bomber missions, arrived in France during the D-Day invasion and crossed the Rhine with the Allied forces, traveled to Paris for the Liberation, and, as one of the first reporters into Buchenwald, witnessed the discovery of Hitler's concentration camps. Like so many of his generation, Rooney's life was changed forever by the war. Tom Brokaw featured Rooney's experiences in *The Greatest Generation*. Now, for the readers who would like to know the whole story, Rooney's own memoir, illustrated throughout with black-and-white photographs, is now available again in a hardcover edition.

4. Louise – **Jane Austen Book Club by Karen Joy Fowler**. 2004. 304 pages.

A book club discuss the works of Jane Austen and experience their own affairs of the heart in this charming “tribute to Austen that manages to capture her spirit” (*The Boston Globe*).

In California's central valley, five women and one man join to discuss Jane Austen's novels. Over the six months they get together, marriages are tested, affairs begin, unsuitable arrangements become suitable, and love happens. With her eye for the frailties of human behavior and her ear for the absurdities of social intercourse,

Karen Joy Fowler has never been wittier nor her characters more appealing. The result is a delicious dissection of modern relationships.

Dedicated Austenites will delight in unearthing the echoes of Austen that run through the novel, but most readers will simply enjoy the vision and voice that, despite two centuries of separation, unite two great writers of brilliant social comedy.

5. Robert – **Doughnut Economics by Kate Raworth.** 2017. 320 pages.

by Kate Raworth

Economics is broken. It has failed to predict, let alone prevent, financial crises that have shaken the foundations of our societies. Its outdated theories have permitted a world in which extreme poverty persists while the wealth of the super-rich grows year on year. And its blind spots have led to policies that are degrading the living world on a scale that threatens all of our futures.

Can it be fixed? In *Doughnut Economics*, Oxford academic Kate Raworth identifies seven critical ways in which mainstream economics has led us astray, and sets out a roadmap for bringing humanity into a sweet spot that meets the needs of all within the means of the planet. En route, she deconstructs the character of ‘rational economic man’ and explains what really makes us tick. She reveals how an obsession with equilibrium has left economists helpless when facing the boom and bust of the real-world economy. She highlights the dangers of ignoring the role of energy and nature’s resources – and the far-reaching implications for economic growth when we take them into account. And in the process, she creates a new, cutting-edge economic model that is fit for the 21st century – one in which a doughnut-shaped compass points the way to human progress.

Ambitious, radical and rigorously argued, *Doughnut Economics* promises to reframe and redraw the future of economics for a new generation.

6. Sarah – **A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines.** 1994 (Oprah Book Club)

256 pages.

Good Afternoon Barbara,

Sorry I missed book club today. Just as I was getting ready to log in to our meeting my son came by to check to see if I had any damage from the storm last night. I

didn't have any damage, but I have been worn out all day. We were under a tornado warning from 7 last night until 5 am. Rowdy kept me up for 4 hours last night. Now it's getting ready to storm again so he is under my computer desk.

I did reread *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines. It takes place in Louisiana in the 1940's. A young Black boy was with the wrong group and in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was accused of murdering a white store owner during a robbery. A young Black school teacher is asked to visit the boy in jail until he is executed. When I taught 16–21-year-old special ed. students who were expelled from the high school for weapons or drugs we read this book as part of a literature unit.

Probably not the type of reading most would want to read. Hope you both are doing well and hope to join in next month.

Amazon.com Review

Oprah Book Club® Selection, September 1997: In a small Cajun community in 1940s Louisiana, a young black man is about to go to the electric chair for murder. A white shopkeeper had died during a robbery gone bad; though the young man on trial had not been armed and had not pulled the trigger, in that time and place, there could be no doubt of the verdict or the penalty.

"I was not there, yet I was there. No, I did not go to the trial, I did not hear the verdict, because I knew all the time what it would be..." So begins Grant Wiggins, the narrator of Ernest J. Gaines's powerful exploration of race, injustice, and resistance, *A Lesson Before Dying*. If young Jefferson, the accused, is confined by the law to an iron-barred cell, Grant Wiggins is no less a prisoner of social convention. University educated, Grant has returned to the tiny plantation town of his youth, where the only job available to him is teaching in the small plantation church school. More than 75 years after the close of the Civil War, antebellum attitudes still prevail: African Americans go to the kitchen door when visiting whites and the two races are rigidly separated by custom and by law. Grant, trapped in a career he doesn't enjoy, eaten up by resentment at his station in life, and angered by the injustice he sees all around him, dreams of taking his girlfriend Vivian and leaving Louisiana forever. But when Jefferson is convicted and sentenced to die, his grandmother, Miss Emma, begs Grant for one last favor: to teach her grandson to die like a man.

As Grant struggles to impart a sense of pride to Jefferson before he must face his death, he learns an important lesson as well: heroism is not always expressed through action--sometimes the simple act of resisting the inevitable is enough. Populated by strong, unforgettable characters, Ernest J. Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying* offers a lesson for a lifetime.

7. Barbara – **The Four Winds by Kirstin Hannah.** 2021. 464 pages.

Texas, 1934. Millions are out of work and a drought has broken the Great Plains. Farmers are fighting to keep their land and their livelihoods as the crops are failing, the water is drying up, and dust threatens to bury them all. One of the darkest periods of the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl era, has arrived with a vengeance.

In this uncertain and dangerous time, Elsa Martinelli—like so many of her neighbors—must make an agonizing choice: fight for the land she loves or go west, to California, in search of a better life. *The Four Winds* is an indelible portrait of America and the American Dream, as seen through the eyes of one indomitable woman whose courage and sacrifice will come to define a generation.