

MVAH ZOOM BOOK CLUB

January 20th, 2022

Next MVAH ZOOM Book Club February 17th 3PM

<p><i>Attendees:</i> Host: Barbara Brennan Cher Terry Betsy Stephens Carol Mattaino Sarah Tatum</p>	<p>Louise McLean Robert McLean Norma Brodsky</p>
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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. Louise McLean – **Omnivore Dilemma by Michael Pollan**. 2007. 450 pages. In this groundbreaking book, one of America’s most fascinating, original, and elegant writers turns his own omnivorous mind to the seemingly straightforward question of what we should have for dinner. To find out, Pollan follows each of the food chains that sustain us—industrial food, organic or alternative food, and food we forage ourselves—from the source to a final meal, and in the process develops a definitive account of the American way of eating. His absorbing narrative takes us from Iowa

cornfields to food-science laboratories, from feedlots and fast-food restaurants to organic farms and hunting grounds, always emphasizing our dynamic coevolutionary relationship with the handful of plant and animal species we depend on. Each time Pollan sits down to a meal, he deploys his unique blend of personal and investigative journalism to trace the origins of everything consumed, revealing what we unwittingly ingest and explaining how our taste for particular foods and flavors reflects our evolutionary inheritance.

2. Robert McLean – **Nickel and Dimed by Barbara Ehrenreich**. 2001. 224 pages. Written from her perspective as an undercover journalist, it sets out to investigate the impact of the 1996 welfare reform act on the working poor in the United States.

The events related in the book took place between spring 1998 and summer 2000. The book was first published in 2001 by Metropolitan Books. An earlier version appeared as an article in the January 1999 issue of Harper's magazine.

3. Betsy Stephens – **Martha Jefferson Randolph (Daughter of Monticello) Cynthia A Kierner**. 2014. 376 pages.

As the oldest and favorite daughter of Thomas Jefferson, Martha "Patsy" Jefferson Randolph (1772-1836) was extremely well educated, traveled in the circles of presidents and aristocrats, and was known on two continents for her particular grace and sincerity. Yet, as mistress of a large household, she was not spared the tedium, frustration, and great sorrow that most women of her time faced. Though Patsy's name is familiar because of her famous father, Cynthia Kierner is the first historian to place Patsy at the center of her own story, taking readers into the largely ignored private spaces of the founding era. Randolph's life story reveals the privileges and limits of celebrity and shows that women were able to venture beyond their domestic roles in surprising ways.

4. Carol Mattaino -. **Cilka's Journey by Heather Morris**. 2019. 352 pages. Cilka's Journey by Heather Morris is the heart-wrenching story of Cilka Klein, who in 1942, at the age of sixteen, is sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp. Cilka is a beautiful girl and her beauty catches the eye of some of the guards at the camp, who decide to separate her from her fellow prisoners. Forcibly separated from the other women prisoners, Cilka learns quickly that power, even unwillingly taken, equals survival.

When the war is over and the camp is liberated, freedom is not granted to Cilka: She is charged as a collaborator for sleeping with the enemy and sent to a Siberian prison camp.

But did she really have a choice? And where do the lines of morality lie for Cilka, who was sent to Auschwitz when she was still a child?

In Siberia, Cilka faces challenges both new and horribly familiar, including the unwanted attention of the guards. But when she meets a kind female doctor, Cilka is taken under her wing and begins to tend to the ill in the camp, struggling to care for them under brutal conditions.

Confronting death and terror daily, Cilka discovers a strength she never knew she had. And when she begins to tentatively form bonds and relationships in this harsh, new reality, Cilka finds that despite everything that has happened to her, there is room in her heart for love.

From child to woman, from woman to healer, Cilka's Journey illuminates the resilience of the human spirit—and the will we have to survive.

5. Sarah Tatum -**Cloud Cuckoo Land by Anthony Doerr**. 2021. 640 pages. A New York Times Notable Book, a Barack Obama favorite, selected as a Top 10 Book of the Year by Fresh Air, Time, and Entertainment Weekly, and a Best Book of the Year by Goodreads Choice Awards, the Associated Press, and many more.

Cloud Cuckoo Land is a book about a book, told through sets of characters in time periods in the past, present and future. An ancient Greek tale -- Aethon, an old shepherd in search of a "utopian city in the clouds" -- is what binds them all together.

Doerr's cast includes an orphan girl and farmer's boy in Constantinople in the 1400's, an environmental activist setting off a bomb in a library in 2020, and a girl on a mission to a distant planet in the not-so-distant future. In telling the story of their

lives, we also see the journey of an ancient story through time. This is one for people who love books and storytelling.

6. Norma Brodsky – **Blanche on the Lam by Barbara Neely**. 2020. 224 pages. Blanche White is a plump, feisty, middle-aged African-American housekeeper working for the genteel rich in North Carolina. But when an employer stiffes her, and her checks bounce, she goes on the lam, hiding out as a maid for a wealthy family at their summer home. That plan goes awry when there's a murder and Blanche becomes the prime suspect. So, she's forced to use her savvy, her sharp wit, and her old-girl network of domestic workers to discover the truth and save her own skin. Along the way, she lays bare the quirks of southern society with humor, irony, and a biting commentary that makes her one of the most memorable and original characters ever to appear in mystery fiction.

7. Barbara Brennan – **The Personal Librarian by Heather Terrell and Victoria Christopher Murray**. 2021. 352 pages.

I have a confession: I am not a fan of the passing trope. From Nella Larsen's 1929 classic, *Passing*, to the original *Imitation of Life* (the 1934 movie starred the incomparable Fredi Washington as Peola, the little girl who wanted to be white) to Britt Bennett's 2020 novel *The Vanishing Half*, the notion of a Black person posing as white to escape her Blackness just felt ... tired.

And that, basically, is at the crux of *The Personal Librarian*, a new novel by Heather Terrell (writing as Marie Benedict) and Victoria Christopher Murray. Their heroine, Belle Da Costa Greene, was one of the most prominent career women of her time. As the personal librarian to financier J.P.Morgan, she pursued and curated a collection of rare books, manuscripts and art that became world-renowned. *Review by Karen Grigsby Bates for NPR*