

# MVAH ZOOM BOOK CLUB

June 10, 2021

**Next MVAH ZOOM Book Club July 8th at 3PM**

<b>Attendees:</b> Host: Barbara Brennan Cher Terry Betsy Stephens Louise & Robert McLean	Carol Mattaino Sarah Tatum
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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 Dutch House by Ann Patchett.** 2019. Pages 352 Audio read by Tom Hanks.  
It tells the story of a brother and sister over the course of five decades.

The novel was a finalist for the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

The Dutch House is a mansion located in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. It was built in 1922 by the VanHoebeek family, a husband and wife originally from the Netherlands who made their fortune in the tobacco industry. Cyril Conroy, a self-made real estate mogul, bought the mansion in 1946 to surprise his wife Elna. Their children, Danny and Maeve, were raised in the Dutch House. Elna dislikes the Dutch House. When Danny is 3 and Maeve is 10, Elna falls ill and abandons the family to work with the poor in India, later relocating to New York City. After their father dies, the two siblings are forced out of their home by their stepmother, Andrea. Left with no one else, the two siblings rely on each other. Maeve discovers a scholarship trust and uses it to send Danny to Choate Rosemary Hall, Columbia University and to Columbia Medical School. He finishes medical school despite being uninterested in working as a doctor, hoping to please Maeve. The novel is narrated by an adult Danny Conroy.

2. Carol – **Carville’s Cure by Pam Fessler** – nonfiction. 2020. 368 pages.

The unknown story of the only leprosy colony in the continental United States, and the thousands of Americans who were exiled—hidden away with their “shameful” disease.

The Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans curls around an old sugar plantation that long housed one of America’s most painful secrets. Locals knew it as Carville, the site of the only leprosy colony in the continental United States, where generations of afflicted Americans were isolated—often against their will and until their deaths.

Following the trail of an unexpected family connection, acclaimed journalist Pam Fessler has unearthed the lost world of the patients, nurses, doctors, and researchers at Carville who struggled for over a century to eradicate Hansen’s disease, the modern name for leprosy. Amid widespread public anxiety about foreign contamination and contagion, patients were deprived of basic rights—denied the right to vote, restricted from leaving Carville, and often forbidden from contact with their own parents or children. Neighbors fretted over their presence and newspapers warned of their dangerous condition, which was seen as a biblical “curse” rather than a medical diagnosis.

3. Cher – A. **3 hours in Paris by Cara Black**. 2020 360 pages. Historical fiction/mystery

This is a spy story set during World War II in Occupied Paris. It is about an American woman sharpshooter who is parachuted by British intelligence into France to assassinate Adolf Hitler during the three hours Hitler is in Paris. She fails and then

must evade the Gestapo to make it back across the English Channel. Her chances of success are extremely low because the Nazis are everywhere.

In 1940, before the US entered WW II, she was the American wife living with her British husband and baby in northern Scotland. The Nazis attacked the Orkney Islands where they lived, killing her little family and causing her to hate the Nazis. She couldn't return to family members in the US because civilian ocean crossings had been halted by Hitler's U-boats. British Intelligence became aware of her skills as a sharpshooter and also that she spoke French and had formerly lived in Paris so she was very familiar with the city. So, they proposed the assignment to her and she accepted, feeling she had nothing to lose.

After she missed killing Hitler when he stooped over to pat the head of a child in front of the Sacré Coeur, Hitler ordered a homicide detective from Munich to find the sniper within 36 hours, or else. With the anger of a woman who suspects she may have been set up to fail by her male handlers, Kate struggles to stay one step ahead of the detective.

FYI, here is the link for the Washington post review:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/yearning-for-escape-so-is-the-heroine-of-cara-black-heart-racing-new-novel/2020/04/15/aeb50aa6-7e85-11ea-8013-1b6da0e4a2b7\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/yearning-for-escape-so-is-the-heroine-of-cara-black-heart-racing-new-novel/2020/04/15/aeb50aa6-7e85-11ea-8013-1b6da0e4a2b7_story.html)

**B. Lessons from Lucy by Dave Barry** 2019. 240 pages. Humor and entertainment. In this "little gem" (Washington Independent Review of Books), Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist and New York Times bestselling author Dave Barry learns how to age happily from his old but joyful dog, Lucy.

4. Sarah – **My Beloved World by Sonia Sotomayor** - Memoir. 2014. 432 pages. A "searching and emotionally intimate memoir" (The New York Times) told with a candor never before undertaken by a sitting Justice. This "powerful defense of empathy" (The Washington Post) is destined to become a classic of self-invention and self-discovery.

The first Hispanic and third woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court, Sonia Sotomayor has become an instant American icon.

In this story of human triumph that "hums with hope and exhilaration" (NPR), she recounts her life from a Bronx housing project to the federal bench, a journey that

offers an inspiring testament to her own extraordinary determination and the power of believing in oneself.

Here is the story of a precarious childhood, with an alcoholic father (who would die when she was nine) and a devoted but overburdened mother, and of the refuge a little girl took from the turmoil at home with her passionately spirited paternal grandmother. But it was when she was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes that the precocious Sonia recognized she must ultimately depend on herself. She would learn to give herself the insulin shots she needed to survive and soon imagined a path to a different life.

With only television characters for her professional role models, and little understanding of what was involved, she determined to become a lawyer, a dream that would sustain her on an unlikely course, from valedictorian of her high school class to the highest honors at Princeton, Yale Law School, the New York County District Attorney's office, private practice, and appointment to the Federal District Court before the age of forty.

Along the way we see how she was shaped by her invaluable mentors, a failed marriage, and the modern version of extended family she has created from cherished friends and their children. Through her still-astonished eyes, America's infinite possibilities are envisioned anew in this warm and honest book.

5. Louise – **Giver of Stars by JoJo Moyes**. 2019. 400 pages.

A great narrative about personal strength and really captures how books bring communities together.” —Reese Witherspoon

From the author of *The Last Letter from Your Lover*, soon to be a major motion picture on Netflix, a breathtaking story of five extraordinary women and their remarkable journey through the mountains of Kentucky and beyond in Depression-era America

Alice Wright marries handsome American Bennett Van Cleve, hoping to escape her stifling life in England. But small-town Kentucky quickly proves equally claustrophobic, especially living alongside her overbearing father-in-law. So, when a call goes out for a team of women to deliver books as part of Eleanor Roosevelt's new traveling library, Alice signs on enthusiastically.

The leader, and soon Alice's greatest ally, is Margery, a smart-talking, self-sufficient woman who's never asked a man's permission for anything. They will be joined by three other singular women who become known as the Packhorse Librarians of Kentucky.

What happens to them--and to the men they love--becomes an unforgettable drama of loyalty, justice, humanity, and passion. These heroic women refuse to be cowed by men or by convention. And though they face all kinds of dangers in a landscape that is at times breathtakingly beautiful, at others brutal, they're committed to their job: bringing books to people who have never had any, arming them with facts that will change their lives.

Based on a true story rooted in America's past, *The Giver of Stars* is unparalleled in its scope and epic in its storytelling. Funny, heartbreaking, enthralling, it is destined to become a modern classic--a richly rewarding novel of women's friendship, of true love, and of what happens when we reach beyond our grasp for the great beyond.

6. Barbara – **The Lost Tudor Princess: The Life of Lady Margaret Douglas.** by Alison Weir. 2017. 592 pages.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY THE INDEPENDENT • From bestselling author and acclaimed historian Alison Weir comes the first biography of Margaret Douglas, the beautiful, cunning niece of Henry VIII of England who used her sharp intelligence and covert power to influence the succession after the death of Elizabeth I.

Royal Tudor blood ran in her veins. Her mother was a queen, her father an earl, and she herself was the granddaughter, niece, cousin, and grandmother of monarchs. Lady Margaret Douglas, Countess of Lennox, was an important figure in Tudor England, yet today, while her contemporaries—Anne Boleyn, Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth I—have achieved celebrity status, she is largely forgotten.

Margaret's life was steeped in intrigue, drama, and tragedy—from her auspicious birth in 1530 to her parents' bitter divorce, from her ill-fated love affairs to her appointment as lady-in-waiting for four of Henry's six wives. In an age when women were expected to stay out of the political arena, alluring and tempestuous Margaret helped orchestrate one of the most notorious marriages of the sixteenth century: that of her son Lord Darnley to Mary, Queen of Scots. Margaret defiantly warred

with two queens—Mary, and Elizabeth of England—and was instrumental in securing the Stuart ascension to the throne of England for her grandson, James VI.

The life of Margaret Douglas spans five reigns and provides many missing links between the Tudor and Stuart dynasties. Drawing on decades of research and myriad original sources—including many of Margaret’s surviving letters—Alison Weir brings this captivating character out of the shadows and presents a strong, capable woman who operated effectively and fearlessly at the very highest levels of power.