



## George Holmes Bixby Memorial Library

2020 Book Discussion Series

(Each program has been scheduled on a Thursday, from 7:00 to 8:30 PM)

**The Cellist of Sarajevo**, by Steven Galloway. April 2, 2020. Led by Marsha Dixon.

In this beautiful novel, Steven Galloway has taken an extraordinary, imaginative leap to create a story that speaks powerfully to the dignity and generosity of the human spirit under extraordinary duress.

Set during the 1990s Siege of Sarajevo, he weaves the story of three people trying to survive in a city rife with the extreme fear of desperate times and of the sorrowing cellist who plays undaunted in their midst.

One day, a shell lands in a bread line and kills 22 people as the cellist watches from a window in his flat. He vows to sit in the hollow where the mortar fell and play Albinoni's Adagio once a day for each of the twenty-two victims. The Adagio had been re-created from a fragment after the only extant score was firebombed in the Dresden Music Library, but the fact that it had been rebuilt by a different composer into something new and worthwhile gives the cellist hope.

Meanwhile, Kenan steels himself for his weekly walk through the dangerous streets to collect water for his family on the other side of town, and Dragan, a man Kenan doesn't know, tries to make his way towards the source of the free meal he knows is waiting. Both men are almost paralyzed with fear, uncertain when the next shot will land on the bridges or streets they must cross, unwilling to talk to their old friends of what life was once like before divisions were unleashed on their city.

Finally, there is "Arrow," the alias for a gifted female sniper, who is asked to protect the cellist from a hidden shooter who is out to kill him as he plays his memorial to the victims.

**Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging**, by Sebastian Junger. June 4, 2020. Led by Elizabeth Hunter Lavallee

Sebastian Junger, the bestselling author of The Perfect Storm, takes a critical look in Tribe at the many challenges facing people in modern society today, including the challenges faced by returning veterans.

He explores "something called self-determination theory, which holds that human beings need 3 basic things in order to be content: they need to feel competent at what they do; they need to feel authentic in their lives; and they need to feel connected to others. These values are considered intrinsic to human happiness and far outweigh extrinsic values such as beauty, money, and status."

Junger was reporting from Sarajevo in the 1990's, and his observations in one chapter of this book on the war and the people there, and their resilience, are a nice tie in with the prior book discussion in April.

He suggests that there are ancient tribal human behaviors – loyalty, inter-reliance, cooperation – that emerge in communities during times of turmoil and suffering. These are the very same behaviors that typify good soldiering and foster a sense of belonging among troops. Drawing from history, psychology, and anthropology, Sebastian Junger shows us just how at odds the structure of modern society is with our tribal instincts. He argues that the difficulties many veterans face upon returning home from war do not stem entirely from the trauma they've suffered, but also from the individualist societies into which they must reintegrate.

Junger believes understanding that beneath our modern guises we all belong to one tribe or another can help us face not just the problems of our nation but of our individual lives as well.

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**Following Atticus: Forty-eight High Peaks, One Little Dog, and an Extraordinary Friendship**, by Tom Ryan. July 30, 2020. Led by Donna Rafdal.

After a close friend died of cancer, middle-aged and overweight newspaperman, Tom Ryan, decided to pay tribute to her in a most unorthodox manner: Ryan and his friend, miniature schnauzer Atticus M. Finch, would attempt to climb all 48 of New Hampshire's four-thousand-foot peaks twice in one winter while raising money for charity. It was an adventure of a lifetime, leading them across hundreds of miles and deep into an enchanting but dangerous winter wonderland. At the heart of the amazing journey was the extraordinary relationship they shared, one that blurred the line between man and dog. Ryan discovered a rare peacefulness that underscores this touching memoir of an adventurous New England journalist and his trusty canine companion.

Following Atticus is an unforgettable true saga of adventure, friendship, and the unlikely of family, as one remarkable animal opens the eyes and heart of a tough-as-nails newspaperman to the world's beauty and its possibilities.

*(Good news: Atticus the dog does not die at the end of this story. Tom Ryan does not die either.)*

**Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking**, by Susan Cain.

Sept 17, 2020. Led by Laura Abrahamsen.

At least one-third of the people we know are introverts. They are the ones who prefer listening to speaking; who innovate and create but dislike self-promotion; who favor working on their own over working in teams. It is to introverts—Rosa Parks, Chopin, Dr. Seuss, Steve Wozniak—that we owe many of the great contributions to society.

In *Quiet*, Susan Cain argues that we dramatically undervalue introverts and shows how much we lose in doing so. She charts the rise of the Extrovert Ideal throughout the twentieth century and explores how deeply it has come to permeate our culture. She also introduces us to successful introverts—from a witty, high-octane public speaker who recharges in solitude after his talks, to a record-breaking salesman who quietly taps into the power of questions. Passionately argued, superbly researched, and filled with indelible stories of real people, *Quiet* has the power to permanently change how we see introverts and, equally important, how they see themselves.

**Born a Crime**, by Trevor Noah. November 19, 2020. Led by Mindy and Kevin Pobst.

Trevor Noah's unlikely path from apartheid South Africa to the desk of *The Daily Show* began with a criminal act: his birth. Trevor was born to a white Swiss father and a black Xhosa mother at a time when such a union was punishable by five years in prison.

*Born a Crime* is the story of a mischievous young boy who grows into a restless young man as he struggles to find himself in a world where he was never supposed to exist. It is also the story of that young man's relationship with his fearless, rebellious, and fervently religious mother—she is determined to save her son from the cycle of poverty, violence, and abuse that ultimately threaten her own life.

The eighteen personal essays in this book are by turns hilarious, dramatic, and deeply affecting. Whether subsisting on caterpillars for dinner during hard times, being thrown from a moving car during an attempted kidnapping, or just trying to survive the life-and-death pitfalls of dating in high school, Trevor Noah illuminates his curious world with an incisive wit and unflinching honesty. His stories weave together to form a moving and searingly funny portrait of a boy making his way through South Africa in a dangerous time, armed only with a keen sense of humor and a mother's unconventional, unconditional love.

*(The summaries of these 5 books are taken primarily from summaries on the goodreads.com website)*