

WOMONSCAPE TIMES

~A monthly publication by the Womonscape Center Inc.~



W O M O N S C A P E C E N T E R

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NO-RULES BOOK GROUP (NRBG)

Here is a recap of our first *No-Rules Book Group* of 2024.

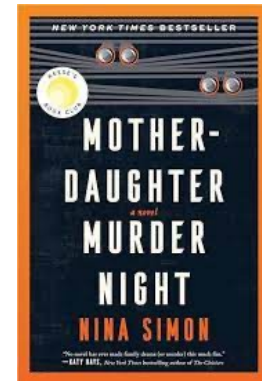
We'll meet again on Thursday, February 15 at 10:30am at the Richland County Courthouse. Look for us in Conference Room #1 on the lower level. Come with a book or other media favorite to share, or just come and join us for some always-fascinating conversation.

Here are the books we shared in January:

MOTHER-DAUGHTER MURDER NIGHT

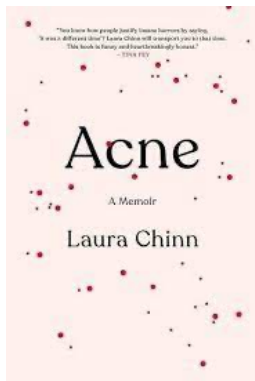
by Nina Simon

In her debut novel, Simon has written a mystery that has three generations of women joining forces to find a murderer. Lana, the 50-something grandmother, is a high-powered real estate developer from Los Angeles. Beth, the 30-something daughter, is a single parent, working as a nurse in a small coastal town in Northern California. Jaqueline (Jack), the teenaged granddaughter, has a part-time job working for an oceanside outfitter. One day while leading a group of tourists on a kayak tour, Jack discovers a dead body, and the women start sleuthing. The writing is clever and the story intriguing, but probably the most important aspect of the book is the reason it was written. In real life, Simon quit her job to take care of her mother, who was facing intense cancer treatment. As the author explains, "We were grateful to be together, but as the surgeries and treatments mounted, we started to lose hope. We needed a distraction, a project that could connect us in joy instead of anxiety. This book was that project."



ACNE: A MEMOIR

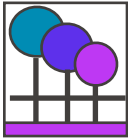
by Laura Chinn



Laura Chinn is an actor and television writer, known for her work on shows such as *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Florida Girls*. In magazine, radio, and television interviews she appears unblemished, light-hearted and confident. But her past was often deeply sad, downright dangerous, and even tragic. In her memoir of growing up in Florida and Los Angeles, Chinn tempers honest descriptions of the most difficult incidents with an insightful sense of humor. She credits her survival to the support she received from friends and family, but certainly her honest, self-deprecating wit has also been key to Chinn's ability to face the past without being overtaken by it.

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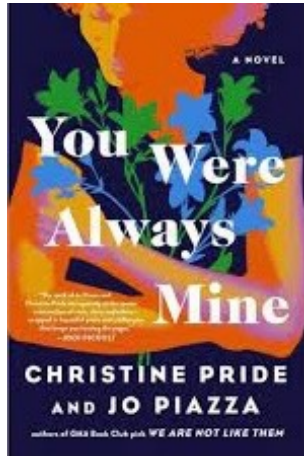
NO-RULES BOOK GROUP

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YOU WERE ALWAYS MINE

by Christine Pride and Jo Piazza

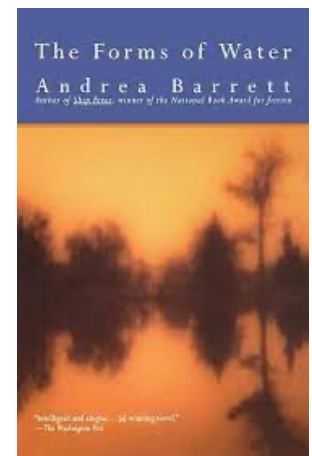


Authors Pride and Piazza wrote this novel together, but from two very different viewpoints. The first is that of Daisy Dunlap, who has just had a baby. Daisy is young and unsettled, without a stable home or job. She can't see herself providing for a baby at this point in her life, so she leaves the baby in a place where she knows a woman named Cinnamon will find it, and heads out of town. Daisy is convinced that Cinnamon will be a great mother for the child. The other viewpoint in the novel is that of Cinnamon. Cinnamon's carefully constructed life is upended by Daisy's decision—Cinnamon's husband, friends, extended family—all have questions about how this unexpected leap into parenthood can possibly work. And there is one more major cultural challenge: Cinnamon is black; the baby is white. Pride and Piazza have looked at this ethical dilemma from all possible viewpoints and produced a unique and satisfying story.

THE FORMS OF WATER

by Andrea Barrett

Brendon Auberon is an 80-year-old former monk who lives in a New England nursing home and is confined to a wheelchair. He longs to see the land where his family lived once more before he dies, so he convinces his nephew, Henry, to steal the nursing home's van and take Brendan to the homesite. The trip is complicated by the fact that the land is now underwater, since it was flooded some fifty years ago to create a reservoir. The story begins as a bit of comedy but evolves into an observation on family history, grief, and life. The author is a winner of the National Book Award and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

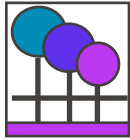


SO I AM GLAD

by A.L. Kennedy

A.L. Kennedy is a standup comic, writer, and academic. In this novel, a reclusive Scottish voice-over actor gets involved in an unlikely and dark romance with her new housemate, who turns out to be none other than Cyrano de Bergerac. Author Kennedy is known for her ability to combine realism and fantasy in her writing. This book definitely shows her ability to do so.

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NO-RULES BOOK GROUP

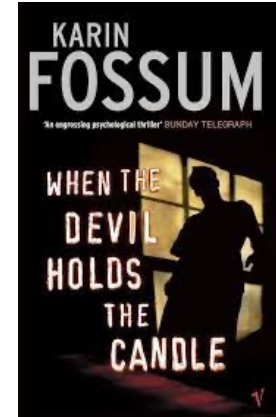
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WHEN THE DEVIL HOLDS THE CANDLE

by Karin Fossum

Norwegian mystery writer Fossum has written a number of novels featuring Inspector Konrad Sejer and his sidekick Jacob Skarre. In this one, life in a small town is rocked by the work of two teenaged criminals. They begin by stealing a purse from a stroller, which results in an infant's death. Then they try to burglarize the home of an elderly woman. Fortunately, Sejer and Skarre are able to get to the bottom of the case, and justice prevails. When it was published in the US in 2007, this book won the Gumshoe Award for Best European Crime Novel.



IT IS WOOD, IT IS STONE

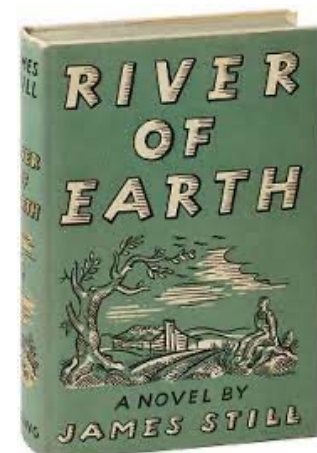
by Gabriella Burnham

Linda, an American woman, moves to Sao Paulo, Brazil with her professor-husband, Dennis. Linda does not adjust well to the move, and finds she is increasingly unstable, and increasingly dependent on her maid, Marta. While Dennis is involved with his work, Linda finds herself on her own emotional journey with the help of Marta and a charismatic artist-friend named Celia. This debut by Brazilian-American Burnham focuses on the relationships between women and the role of classism and racism in society. The novel was named one of the best books of the year by *Good Housekeeping*, *Marie Claire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Publisher's Weekly*.

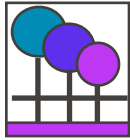
RIVER OF EARTH

by James Still

Appalachian writer and playwright Still first published this novel in 1940. Written from the point of view of an 8-year-old boy, it tells the story of three years in the life of a rural mountain family in Alabama. The book shows the challenges and the joys of living in Appalachia, between the coal mining camps and small family farms.



(Continued on page 4)



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NO-RULES BOOK GROUP

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FILM REVIEWS:

THE COLOR PURPLE (In theaters)

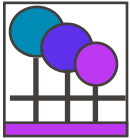
Even though they were familiar with the original film version of Alice Walker's prize-winning novel, our reviewers were curious about the latest adaptation as a musical. *The Color Purple* is the story of Celie, a poor, abused woman living in Georgia during the first part of the twentieth century. Celie's life seems to be nothing more than a dreary lesson in the horrors of poverty and abuse; but, with the help of a community of women, she eventually survives and triumphs. During the first thirty minutes of the movie, our reviewers were not impressed by the addition of music and dancing to Celie's story. But that attitude quickly changed as the story progressed. Indeed, both reviewers were moved to tears by the singing and acting of the women in this cast and highly recommend the film. The production stars Fantasia Barrino as Celie, Danielle Brooks as Sophia, and Taraji P. Henson as Shug.



BAD SISTERS (Streaming on Apple TV)

John Paul (JP) Williams could easily win an award for most hate-able character in the world of fiction. He continually finds ways to control, manipulate and even destroy the lives of anyone and everyone in his life, from his parents to his coworkers, and from his neighbors to his sisters-in-law. More than anything, he is destroying the self-worth of his wife, Grace. Grace's four sisters have unanimously decided he's got to go—literally; as in, he's got to die. And so they kill him. Somehow. But when the shady insurance company JP used for his life insurance policy demands an investigation into the circumstances of his death, the “bad” sisters nervously do their best to protect themselves and, especially Grace, from revealing the truth. This Irish series is brilliantly written and acted, and will have you on the edge of your seat.

(Continued on page 5)



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FILM REVIEWS:

A THOUSAND AND ONE (Streaming on Amazon Prime)

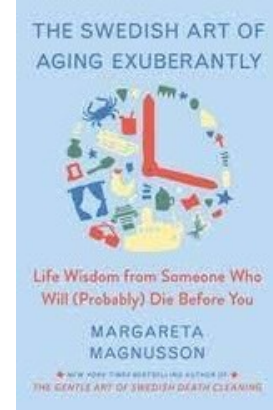
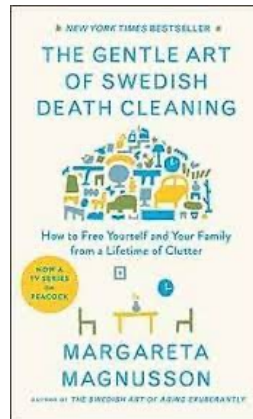
A Thousand and One is the first feature film directed by A.V. Rockwell and the first feature film starring singer-songwriter Teyana Taylor. The story is centered on the life of a struggling family in Harlem during the 1990s and early 2000s. Taylor plays Inez, a twenty-something woman who has just finished a sentence at Rikers Island when she sees her six-year-old son, Terry, on a playground. Terry has been in foster care for years and is clearly not thriving. When Terry ends up in the hospital after trying to escape from his foster home by jumping out of a window, Inez decides to kidnap him and work to provide a better life for them both. Life in Harlem is difficult and Inez is very much aware that her own childhood and early adulthood left her emotionally “damaged,” so that she sometimes seems unable to show much warmth toward her son, or toward anyone around her. Still, she persists, and their apartment, a thousand and one, becomes a home. The film is realistic, well-acted, and moving, with an unexpected ending that will leave the viewer thinking about these characters for some time to come.



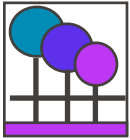
**UNABLE TO GET TO A NO-RULES BOOK GROUP MEETING,
 BUT WANT TO CONTRIBUTE ANYWAY?**

Please let us know what you'd like to share!
 One of our *Womonscape Times* readers recently recommended these two books.

The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning
 and
The Swedish Art of Aging Exuberantly
 by Margareta Magnusson



“Death Cleaning” or *dostadning* is the Swedish way of decluttering your life, both to embrace the concept of minimalism and to prevent your family members from having to sort through piles and piles of your stuff after you’re gone. Artist Magnusson uses a combination of humor and practical suggestions to decide what to get rid of and what to keep. Our reviewer reports: “In an American culture that has overemphasized accumulating ‘stuff,’ [Magnusson] helps look at it from a different perspective. A refreshing read.” Magnusson’s books have also inspired a reality television series on Peacock that was produced and narrated by Amy Poehler. Eight Americans, at various stages of life, are guided through the *dostadning* process by a three-person team from Sweden: an organizer, a designer, and a psychologist.



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HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?



RUTH BROWN: THE FABULOUS MISS RHYTHM



Back in 1949, the Billboard music rating chart changed one of its categories from “Race Music” to “Rhythm and Blues.” The change acknowledged the gradual evolution of American music from being defined by race to being defined by style. And 1949 was also the year that Ruth Brown officially entered the American music scene with her first Rhythm and Blues hit, “So Long.”

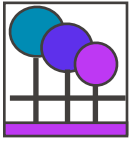
Ruth was born Ruth Alston Brown in Portsmouth, Virginia in 1928. She grew up in Virginia and North Carolina, where she spent her summers helping her grandmother sharecrop. Ruth loved music and loved to sing. She started performing at age 4 in her father’s church choir. But her father didn’t approve of her dreams of singing professionally. So, at seventeen she ran away to Detroit to marry a trumpet player named Jimmy Earle Brown and became the vocal half of the Brown and Brown performers.

Ruth also toured briefly with another band before settling into club performances in Washington, DC. Willis Conover, of *Voice of America*, heard her sing and told Atlantic Records about her talent, resulting in a contract offer. But on the way to New York to sign the contract, Ruth was in a serious car accident that severely broke both of her legs. Undeterred, she signed the Atlantic contract from her hospital bed. During her year of recovery, her husband Jimmy abandoned her.

While Atlantic Records contributed to paying Ruth’s hospital bills, the company profited greatly from Ruth’s work. In all, Ruth cut almost 100 sides of records for Atlantic, including many 1950s hits, such as “Teardrops From My Eyes” and “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean.” A charismatic performer, Ruth toured endlessly, particularly in the South, and was easily the most popular black artist in America. Atlantic Records earned so much money from Ruth’s work that it became known as “The House That Ruth Built.”

In the 1960s, Ruth’s career faltered. Her music wasn’t as popular, and Atlantic Records refused to pay her royalties for her earlier work. Two other marriages each produced a son, but ended in divorce. Ruth retreated to Long Island, where for about fifteen years she worked at a series of low-paying jobs while raising her sons, often as a single parent.

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HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?

RUTH BROWN

(Continued from page 6)

But then Ruth bounced back. In the mid 1970s and throughout the 1980s, she became involved in musical theater, including a Broadway debut and a role in a major motion picture. Behind the scenes, Ruth created the *Rhythm and Blues Foundation*, a non-profit organization focused on providing fair wages, medical assistance and financial support for musicians, and on preserving rhythm and blues' cultural legacy.

Eventually Ruth was able to receive back royalties she was due from Atlantic Records as well as artistic recognition: she received a Tony award in 1989 and was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993.

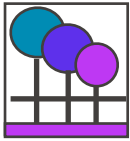


If you want to hear the remarkable voice of Ruth Brown, check out recordings of her songs on *YouTube* or look up her work as the DJ Motormouth Maybelle in the 1988 film version of "Hairspray."

RUTH BROWN QUOTES:

- There was a time we decided that it was songs that were done especially from my background because of the things we were dealing with, but nowadays, anybody who has a need, and can find the need, they can sing the blues.

- The young generation, I believe, have their own place in the sun like I had mine. But I wish it was possible there were other ways to have them understand this music was here before they came, and the reason that it was here.



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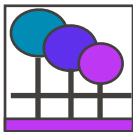
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FEBRUARY 15— is
our next scheduled
No-Rules Book Group
in Richland Center.
See Page 1 for details.

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Times**

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RECIPE FOR COOKING AND PRESERVING A GOOD SUFFRAGE SPEAKER

First: Butter the speaker, when asking her to come, with a stamped and addressed envelope, post card, or telegraph form for reply.

Second: Grease the dish by paying all the speaker's expenses.

Third: Put her to cool or to warm, as the case may be, in a room by herself before the meeting, so that she may be fresh and in good condition for speaking.

Fourth: Beat her to a froth with an optimistic spoon, making light of all disappointments. Carefully avoid too strong a flavor of apologies.

Fifth: Do not let her cool too rapidly after the meeting, but place her considerately by a nice bedroom fire, with a light supper to be taken in solitude.

(If this recipe is carefully followed, the speaker will be found to preserve her flavor to the last moment, and will do her utmost to make the meeting a success.)

~Alys Pearsall Smith from The Women's Suffrage Cookery Book 1912~