

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)

During the October meeting of the *No Rules Book Group* we shared several crime novels, two international novels, a collection of non-fiction memoir/essays, and a story about the fascinating (if rather unnerving) world of internet gaming. We also talked a bit about our current video recommendations. As always, the conversation was energetic and the company superb. Our next meeting will be held in Conference Room 1 on the lower level of the Richland County Courthouse on Thursday, November 16th at 10:30 a.m. Please join us if you can.

OCTOBER BOOK SELECTIONS

WINTER IN SOKCHO

by Elisa Shua Dusapin

This relatively short (154 pages) debut novel won writer Dusapin the *Prix Robert Walker* award. The author, who is of French and Korean descent, describes the life of a French Korean woman working in a town at the border between North and South Korea. The woman serves as the receptionist for a guesthouse. During the winter guests are fewer and the landscape far less inviting. One evening a French cartoonist arrives at the guesthouse for an extended stay and encourages the receptionist to show him the Korea of its everyday residents, from the local fish markets to the remnants of war. The result is a gently moving, beautifully written story.



HOW CAN I HELP YOU

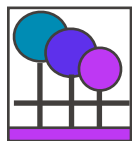
by Laura Sims



This creepy thriller is written from the perspective of two women working at a public library. Margo has been working successfully for several years, hiding her previous name and nursing career behind her current personality as a charming librarian. When Patricia joins the staff, however, she notices Margo's sinister edge and begins to research the unexplained deaths from the former nurse's past even as a dead patron is inexplicably found in the library bathroom. Publishers Weekly called this book "a brilliant slice of psychological suspense."

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NO-RULES BOOK GROUP

(Continued from page 1)



ONLY THIS BEAUTIFUL MOMENT

by Abdi Nazemian



In this Young Adult Novel, award-winning writer Nazemian uses his own international childhood to help fill out the details. Moud is an out gay teen living in Los Angeles when he is suddenly required to travel with his father to Tehran in order to spend time with his ailing paternal grandfather. While there Moud learns the truth behind many family secrets. The book is told from the perspective of Moud in 2019, of his father (Saeed) in 1978 Tehran, and of his grandfather (Bobby) in 1939 Hollywood. The revelations help Moud better understand his cultural roots, his family’s struggles, and his current life path.

SITTING PRETTY: THE VIEW FROM MY ORDINARY RESILIENT DISABLED BODY

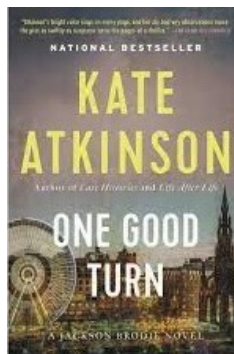
by Rebekah Taussig



This is a memoir in essay form. Writer Taussig describes what it means to live inside a body that doesn’t quite fit into societal expectations of “normal.” Reviewed more thoroughly on page 4 in this newsletter.

ONE GOOD TURN

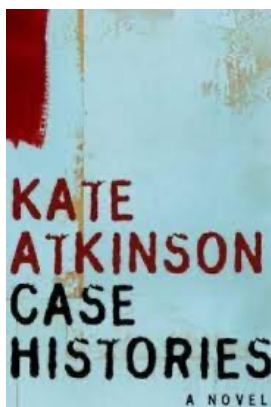
by Kate Atkinson



Atkinson’s second Jackson Brodie story (out of five published so far) pushes our hero out of retirement to solve a case that involves three women: the wife of a crooked real estate mogul, a mysterious Russian, and a police detective. Once again Brodie is able to discover the secrets behind each woman’s choices—love, money, redemption, and escape. The plot is described by reviewers as ingenious, delightful, and surprising.

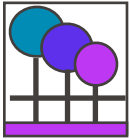
CASE HISTORIES

by Kate Atkinson



Kate Atkinson is a bit of a star in our book reviews this month. This is the first in a series of detective stories featuring Jackson Brodie, Private Investigator. In this story, Brodie is working on three cold cases that are each thirty years old and appear to be completely unconnected: a little girl who disappeared; a young office worker who was attacked by a maniac; and a woman who created a bloody escape from her life as an overwhelmed wife and mother. Fortunately our hero is able to discover the connections between the cases and solve the crimes. This book was an *Orange Prize* Nominee for Fiction and won the *Saltire Society Literary Award* for Scottish Book of the Year in 2005.

(Continued on page 3)



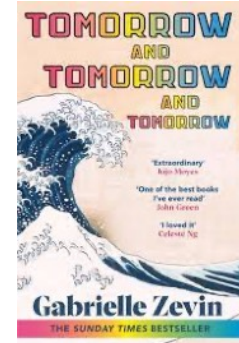
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NO-RULES BOOK GROUP

(Continued from page 2)



TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND TOMORROW
 by Gabrielle Zevin

Our previous reviewer reported on her final push to finish this award-winning novel, set in the world of video game design. Even though she is not herself a gamer and has no real interest in becoming one, our reviewer felt the book was important in helping her understand the dedication and intensity many modern technology users feel toward this “sport.” She now has newfound insights into life in a completely virtual world and strongly recommends that all readers consider reading or listening to the audio version of this book.



VIDEOS TO STREAM OR WATCH

LESSONS IN CHEMISTRY: Apple TV Series



Based on the wonderfully successful novel by Bonnie Garmus, the cast features academy-award winning actor Brie Larson. Larson stars as protagonist Elizabeth Lott, the unapologetically brilliant and determined chemist and TV cooking show host of the 1950s and 1960s. Readers of the novel will likely enjoy watching the way the book’s characters are reimaged for the screen, as did our reviewers. However, as is often the case, both of our reviewers admitted to preferring the novel’s take on the story over the televised one.

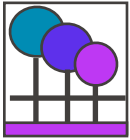
NOVEMBER 2023 PUZZLE

E DOR HOI NBERCH NBSQWCR XWXXUNH NBON E DQWYMR’N
 HOI NQ NBU DBEYMSUR OH OR OMWYN.
 ~ TOSYURU DWITTERCH

This is a classic cryptoquote. Each letter represents another letter of the alphabet. This quote comes directly from one of our stories in this month’s newsletter. See if you can find it!

Hint: N = T

(Continued on next page)



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NO-RULES BOOK GROUP



REBEKAH TAUSSIG: A CLOSER LOOK

(Continued from page 3)

Thank you and thank you to the community of Baraboo, Wisconsin for bringing Taussig's memoir, *Sitting Pretty: The View From My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body* to our attention. Last summer the businesses and organizations involved in *Baraboo Reads* sponsored a community discussion and panel Q & A centered around disabilities and access. In preparation for the event, hundreds of free copies of the book were available at three locations for anyone to pick up and read. Two copies made their way into the hands of some Womonscape Times readers, who passed them along to the Times editors after reading them. What a wonderful gift! Although we missed the August discussion and panel, we were so very pleased to have been introduced to Taussig and her remarkable work.



Taussig is the youngest of six children, born to a father who worked in banking and a mother who was a homemaker. She was raised in Kansas City, Missouri, where she continues to make her home today. At the age of three, Taussig was diagnosed with cancer, which caused paralysis in her legs. She gradually lost pretty much all use of the lower half of her body, getting through life quite well through the use of a wheelchair.

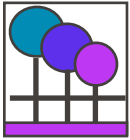
Taussig was born in the mid-1980s, so for most of her life the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has been in effect. This means that, legally, people who are considered disabled are guaranteed access to all buildings and to all aspects of life. But the way this access works in theory and how it works in practice are too often miles apart.

Taussig explains how ableism limits not only the disabled person but also society as a whole. She takes on the differences between physical disability and social disability. She vents her frustrations, fears, and failures in navigating her way through parking lots, retail stores, restaurants, and social engagements. She gives examples of the absurdities of some so-called accommodations for disabled people (bus routes that don't offer sensible transfer connections or ramps that lead to doors that are impossible for a wheel-chair-bound person to open), as well as observations on how her view of herself and her place in the world evolved from fearless, eager young child to tentative, wary young adult based on life experiences.

Taussig's writing is clear and honest without being whiny. She throws in bits of humor and even regret as she recounts her marriages, pregnancy, friendships, college experiences, and career as a high school English teacher. She points out that disability is really based largely on context, and that if we live long enough, all of us experience some kind of disability. This is a book that we may very well re-read before making sure to share it again.

If you haven't already been introduced to Taussig or her book, by all means do so. You might want to start by watching her *Ted Talk* on "The Complications of Kindness" to get a taste of her take on life.





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HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN? MARLENE CUMMINGS



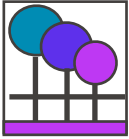
The city of Madison, Wisconsin, has an ethnically and culturally diverse student population today, along with many school district programs teaching about and celebrating this diversity. But this was not always the case. Back in the late 1960s, when Marlene Cummings moved into town with her husband and four children, the community attitude toward families of color was less-than-welcoming. When the African-American Cummings family showed up at housing that was listed as available for rent, it suddenly became unavailable. And even when a real estate agent signed a lease on the family's behalf, the owner somehow managed to back out of the deal.

Before moving to Madison, Cummings had a successful career in nursing. But she knew from experience the importance of maintaining a respectful, diverse atmosphere in education. Her own class at *Arsenal Technical High School* in Indianapolis was the first to be integrated. So, beginning in 1969, she used her new job working with the *Madison Metropolitan School District Human Relations Department* to change these attitudes, beginning at the classroom level. She traveled from classroom to classroom around the district with a series of activities she had created herself, all geared to teach respect for people regardless of ability, race, ethnicity, sex, size, or economic background. Children loved her, and ran to greet her when they saw her coming. In fact, after several years, her activities were compiled as a manual to be shared with other educators.

By November of 1969 Cummings had her own weekly column, *Dear Mrs. Cummings*, published in the *Wisconsin State Journal*. In it, she included carefully worded responses to the questions of Madison children about diversity. She encouraged her young readers to ask about everything from “black skin to Black power, soul food to hair, prejudice to pride.” And to the adult staff at the State Journal she explained that it was essential to have had a Black experience to answer these questions, “how it feels to move into a white community as a Black family, how it feels to be a Black mother.”

But Cummings didn't stop there. By 1973 she had her own PBS-sponsored television show, *Everyday People*, featuring children having frank discussions about diversity. Cummings designed and used puppets to stimulate engaging conversations—such as Chip, who was black, Patrick, who had an artificial arm, Jason, who was blind, and Ben who was Native American. “I can say things through puppets that I couldn't say to the children as an adult,” Cummings explained in an interview in the *Wisconsin State Journal*.

By 1979, Cummings had garnered the attention of the governor and was appointed to be the first state advisor for *Women Initiatives*. Later she worked as the Wisconsin Secretary for Regulation and Licensing. But at the time of her death, in 2020, it was for her work with school children that she was most revered. A former Madison student remembered her this way, “My classmates from Shorewood Elementary School in 1970 have had several opportunities to get together over the past decade. The visits to our classroom by Mrs. Cummings to discuss race and race relations inevitably come up in our conversation. The fact that she is so fondly remembered demonstrates what a profound and lasting impact she had on all of us. It seems to me that what the world needs now is a lot more people like Mrs. Cummings.”



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HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?

KATE WARNE: THE WOMAN WHO SAVED PRESIDENT-ELECT LINCOLN

Every American schoolchild learns early in their education that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated before he finished his second term as president. But what if he'd never served as president at all? How might the entire course of the history of this country have changed?

Fortunately, Kate Warne, Pinkerton detective, was on the job in 1861.

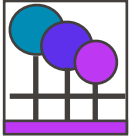
From the little that is known about Warne's personal life, it appears that she was born in Erin, New York, sometime in 1833. Her father was a minister and her family was poor. At one time she wanted to be an actor, if only to escape her duties in running the family household. At some point she got married. But by the time she was 23 she was simply a widow living in Chicago who was looking for a job.



Answering a newspaper ad from the Pinkerton Detective Agency in 1856, Warne went directly to the office of Allan Pinkerton himself. When Pinkerton told her he wasn't looking for a secretary, Warne replied that she wanted to be a detective, an occupation no American woman had ever had. She explained that since no one would ever expect a woman to be a detective, she would be able to befriend the wives and girlfriends of known and suspected male criminals, and collect information male detectives could not. According to Brian Meltzer, co-author of the 2020 book [The Lincoln Conspiracy: The Secret Plot to Kill America's 16th President—and Why it Failed](#), "To this moment, we don't know if Allan Pinkerton is just an amazing advocate for women's rights, or he's just a shrewd businessman who realizes she's going to make him some money. Whatever his reason is, he hires her."

Soon Warne proved how right she was. She was able to befriend Mrs. Nathan Maroney who was involved with her husband in embezzling thousand of dollars from his Alabama employer. Warne switched her Northern accent with that of a Southern belle and helped get a full confession from the Maroneys, resulting in the recovery of almost \$40,000. In other cases she was able to change her clothing or her behavior to infiltrate different social circles or walk, quietly and unnoticed, in different neighborhoods. As a result, "Allan placed unreserved faith in her ability," according to Brian McNary, the current Pinkerton vice president. "He was fond of saying she had never failed him."

So, when Samuel M. Felton, president of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad, asked Pinkerton to infiltrate a secessionist plot to assassinate Lincoln before the 1861 inauguration, Warne was one of several Pinkerton detectives assigned to the job. She reprised her role as a Southern belle and attended several parties with a cockade emblem displayed on her chest. The cockade emblem was the symbol of secessionists. She used various aliases, such as Mrs. Cherry and Mrs. Barley, becoming friendly with the wives and sisters of the men who planned to kill Lincoln in Baltimore, the only slaveholding city on the president-elect's route from Springfield, Illinois to Washington, DC.



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HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?

KATE WARNE: THE WOMAN WHO SAVED PRESIDENT-ELECT LINCOLN

(Continued from page 6)



To avoid the assassins, Pinkerton had Lincoln ride the train that would arrive in Baltimore at 3:30 a.m., The president-elect was disguised as an invalid, with Warne in the role as his caregiver sister. Warne was able to talk the train conductor into arranging a whole sleeping car for her party of four (herself, Lincoln, Pinkerton and Lincoln's body guard). No one other than select Pinkerton employees knew that Lincoln was on board the train, and the president arrived in DC without incident at 6 a.m. Lincoln quipped, "I believe it has not

hitherto been one of the prerequisites of the presidency to acquire in full bloom so charming and accomplished a female relation."

During the Civil War, Pinkerton was appointed chief of intelligence by Union Army commander George B. McClellan and Warne continued posing as a Southern belle, collecting information for her employer about the confederates. Pinkerton even agreed to put Warne in charge of a special division of his company known as the Female Detective Bureau: Warne was the Supervisor of Women Agents. After the war, Warne continued as a detective by working on major bank robbery and murder cases.

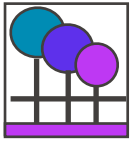
Sadly, Warne died of pneumonia in January of 1868, at the age of 34 or 35. Pinkerton was at her bedside when she died, and had her body interred in the Pinkerton family plot at Graceland Cemetery in Chicago. An Ohio newspaper at the time described Warne as the "best female detective in America, if not in the world." Looking at Pinkerton's history today, vice-president McNary said, "There are so many operatives who gave their all and thought nothing for their own safety or advancement in the protection of rule and law, and that is good and right. Among the brightest and shining stars of the history of Pinkertons, Kate Warne is probably the least known and most loved of all of them. Her resolve and devotion just exemplified what it was to be a Pinkerton agent."

Note: Emily Blunt will star as Kate Warne in the upcoming Amazon Prime film based on Warne's life as a Pinkerton detective. Ms. Blunt will also serve as the film's producer.



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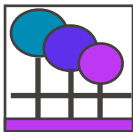
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NOVEMBER 16— is
our next scheduled
No-Rules Book Group
in Richland Center.
See Page 1 for details.

**Womonscape
Times**

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QUOTES BY WOMEN

• Growing up, I never imagined I'd be able to pay my own bills. When I moved into my first apartment on my own, I'd been given complete access to a fully fueled rocket ship—the universe was mine. It didn't matter that the apartment was subsidized or that food stamps paid for my groceries or that my monthly checks were from the Social Security Administration. The fact that I was legally able to divorce my husband—against his will—was nothing less than an unquantifiable gift that existed only because women before me had fought hard to make it possible. Our independence is not something to gloss over. The freedom to vote, to own property, to divorce our spouses, to choose what happens to our bodies—these are game-changers.

• I think we sometimes make claims about the experiences of "all women," because we live in a world that is so often dismissive of those in the margins of established power.

— Both quotes by Rebekah Taussig (see page 4 in this newsletter)