

# 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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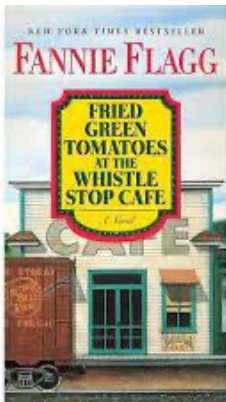
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### NO-RULES BOOK GROUP (NRBG)

We welcome a new year! 2024. Here is a recap of our last No-Rules Book Group of 2023 in December.

We'll meet again on Thursday, January 18 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.

### DECEMBER 2023 BOOK SELECTIONS

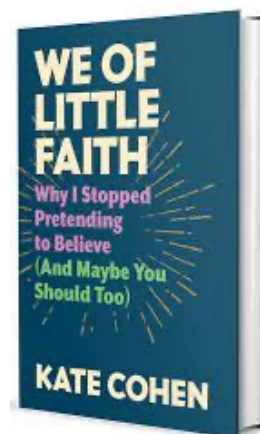


#### FRIED GREEN TOMATOES AT THE WHISTLE STOP CAFE by Fannie Flagg

This book was first published in 1987 and became a well-loved film in 1991. For those who have only seen the film version, you are definitely in for a treat. And for those who haven't seen the film or read the book, this might be the time to start! The story is actually two stories in one: 1980s nursing home resident Ninny Threadgoode tells stories to her friend, Evelyn Couch, about the people of Whistle Stop, Alabama in the 1930s. Evelyn learns all about the lives of the Whistle Stop residents, in times of mischief and times of tragedy, while also becoming inspired to make important changes in her own life. The book contains many important details that had to be omitted from the film version. It is a delight to read, and reread.

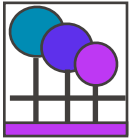
#### WE OF LITTLE FAITH: WHY I STOPPED PRETENDING TO BELIEVE by Kate Cohen

Author Kate Cohen was a kind of closet atheist for years. She didn't believe in God, but she was afraid of saying so in public. In this book she shares how and why she gradually became able to tell her family members and others about her lack of belief. As one reviewer put it, "Kate Cohen does not dismiss religion as dangerous or silly. Instead, she investigates religion's appeal in order to explain the ways we can thrive without it." Whether or not you believe in God, this book can help understand the reasons why some choose to be nonbelievers, and to reduce the stigma around making this decision.



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**NO-RULES BOOK GROUP**

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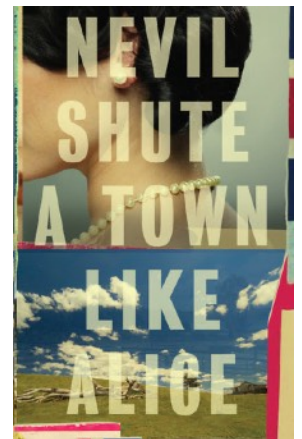
**THE BEST WE COULD DO** by Thi Bui



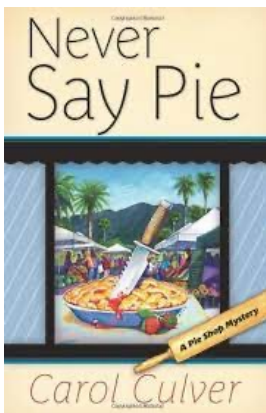
Thi Bui was born in Vietnam in 1975, near the very end of the Vietnam War. Her family fled the country when Thi was a toddler and settled in the United States, where she grew up in southern California. While her family was finally safe from the intense violence and tragedy of years of war, they still spent decades struggling with war-related PTSD. Thi Bui’s parents were particularly damaged by their war experiences, which made it challenging for them to adjust to being parents in an unfamiliar country. When Thi gave birth to her own son, she wanted to understand more about her background in order to become the best possible parent, so she wrote and illustrated this graphic memoir. The book tells an honest story of her parents’ lives, both before and after immigrating to the U.S.: the painful experiences that shaped them, and the choices they made that helped them survive.

**A TOWN LIKE ALICE** by Nevil Shute (Norway)

After reading *Pied Piper* last month, our Nevil Shute fan-reviewer went on to read the author’s best-known novel, *A Town Like Alice*. “Alice” refers to Alice Springs, and, overall, this novel is a bit of a love letter to this area of Australia. The main character in the novel, Jean Paget, is captured by the Japanese in Malaya, where she meets an Australian soldier named Joe. The two strike up a friendship, but are quickly separated by their difficult and dangerous wartime circumstances. Jean survives the war and returns to her home in England. But after several years she finds she is still wondering what happened to Joe, and travels to Malaya and Australia to find him. The powerful story line is based loosely on a woman named Carry Geysel, whom Shute considered one of the bravest people he had ever met. In the 1980s it was made into an award-winning Australian television miniseries which can be found on *YouTube*.

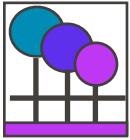


**NEVER SAY PIE** (The Pie Shop Mysteries)  
by Carol Culver



Prolific romance novelist Carol Culver took a short detour in her career to write two mysteries. This one takes place in Crystal Cove, California, where expert pie maker, Hanna Denton sells her delicious pies at the community outdoor Food Fair. When the unpleasant local food critic, Heath Barr, is found stabbed to death, Hanna decides that it is up to her to find the killer. This “cozy” mystery includes mouth-watering pie recipes, such as Double Chocolate Cream Pie and Butterscotch Pecan Pie.

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***NO-RULES BOOK GROUP***

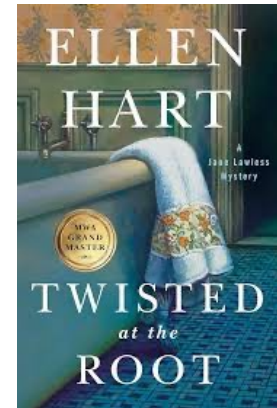
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## **TWISTED AT THE ROOT**

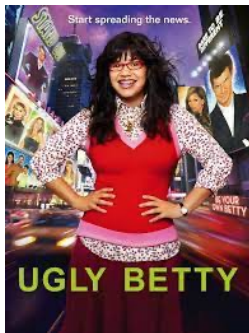
by Ellen Hart

Here's another wonderful mystery featuring a female sleuth. One of several dozen mysteries penned by Ms. Hart, this 2019 novel features Hart's favorite restaurant-owner-and-detective, Jane Lawless, along with her melodramatic best friend, Cordelia Thorn. The challenge for Jane and Cordelia this time is to find out who *really* murdered the wealthy Gideon Wise, and to overturn the conviction of his grieving husband. The plot twists involve not only a financially overextended elite art dealer and his extended family, but Jane's suddenly missing brother. As usual, Hart combines plot twists with well-developed characters and a bit of comedy to produce a satisfying solution.



## **FILM REVIEWS:**

### **UGLY BETTY** (streaming on Netflix)

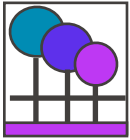


Despite the fact that this television series ended its four-year run in 2010, our reviewer hadn't ever seen it before now. Thank goodness for modern streaming services! It would have been such a shame to have completely missed it. The series follows the life of Betty Suarez (played by America Ferrara) a recent college graduate from Queens, New York, who is eager to find her dream job as a journalist for a serious news magazine. Instead, she gets a job as an assistant to a rich, self-centered, womanizing editor of a fashion magazine. The fashion-conscious staff make fun of Betty's glasses, her braces, and her colorful clothing choices. But in spite of everything, Betty survives and prospers. The show was ground-breaking for its portrayal of Latinx and LGBTQ characters. Even after more than a decade, the scripts continue to be entertaining and wise.

### **LEAVE THE WORLD BEHIND** (streaming on Netflix)

This new film starring Julia Roberts and Mahershala Ali is described as an "apocalyptic thriller" in its promotional materials. But our reviewers found it to be more than this. The story centers on two families who are trapped in a fancy home on Long Island, New York during a sudden, unexplained world blackout. They can no longer get any kind of cell phone or internet service or access traditional forms of transportation. So the central questions become: who and what are truly important in their lives? *and* who can they trust? While the story is fictional, it is realistic enough to make the viewer wonder about their own answers to questions like these, and what compromises each of us might make (or not make) in such a situation. This is a film that leaves you pondering its important questions for a long time.





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**HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?**



**NANA ASMA'U (1793-1865)**

Probably the first thing to know about Nana Asma'u is her actual name.

The woman known as Nana Asma'u was born *Asma'u bint Shehu Osman dan Fodiyo*. She became known as Nana Asma'u because of her importance as a publicly-recognized female religious teacher. Asma'u's father, Osman dan Folio, and her half-brother, Muhammad Bello, were both powerful Islamic leaders who helped found an Islamic empire known as



the Sokoto Caliphate when Asma'u was a young girl. Osman believed strongly in the value of universal education, and Asma'u was educated in the finest literature of the Arab and Classical world, was fluent in four languages, and an avid poet. She used these skills as well as her status as the daughter of a powerful political leader as a positive influence for change in Nigerian society. And because she outlived both her father and her half-brother, she was able to serve as an advisor to several generations of political leaders in Nigeria, to help them

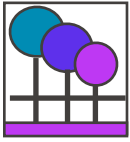
understand and embody the principles on which the Sokoto Caliphate was founded.

Asma'u's poetry included historical narratives, elegies, laments, and admonitions that were used to teach the founding principles of the Caliphate. Her work emphasized the government's promotion of women leaders and women's rights, a relatively radical concept at the time. As an adult, Asma'u was responsible for women's religious and cultural education. She organized a group of female teachers who travelled throughout the country, educating women in their homes. Each of these teachers, known as *jajis*, was given a red hat, and they became symbols of the new, educated state. Gradually, all types of women were included in this educational initiative: rich and poor, urban and rural.

While Asma'u's work for women was very important during her lifetime, it is perhaps even more important today. As some political and religious movements have tried to dissuade or even banish women from positions of leadership or from opportunities for education, Nana Asma'u's work continues to be cited not only for its literary value, but as concrete evidence that all classes and genders should have access to education and civil rights.

Nana Asma'u began teaching when she was only fourteen years old, married soon afterward, and went on to raise six children. But her greatest life contribution was to the education and empowerment of Nigerian women, both during her lifetime, and continuing today.

(Continued on next page)



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***HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?***

**MARY ANNING** (1799-1847)

(Continued from page 4)

If you ever came across a portrait of Mary Anning, you'd be unlikely to imagine her as someone who enjoyed digging in the dirt. But that's exactly the kind of woman she was. Behind the gentle smile, the long skirt, and the conservative bonnet was an accomplished scientist.

It's quite remarkable that young Mary even made it to adulthood, let alone into a life of science.

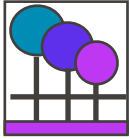
Mary Anning was born in 1799 in the seaside town of Lyme Regis, in Southwestern England. Her family was very poor, and, out of ten children, only Mary and her older brother, Joseph, survived to adulthood. Mary's father, Richard, was a cabinetmaker and amateur fossil collector, and both Mary and Joseph were his companions on fossil-collecting adventures, where they learned how to collect and clean fossils, to be displayed and sold in their father's shop. Lyme Regis is located near what is now called the Jurassic Coast because historically there have been plenty of fossils to be found there, for those who knew how to find them. Sadly, Richard Anning died of tuberculosis in 1810, so Mary's mother encouraged Mary and Joseph to find ways to earn money to help pay off the family's debts. Joseph became an apprentice in an upholstery shop; but Mary used her skill as a fossil-hunter to find and sell fossils for income.



At the time, it was fashionable for vacationing tourists to buy fossils to display in their homes. Mary had very little formal education, but she was able to read, and she used this skill to teach herself geology and anatomy, which were helpful in her fossil-hunting and study. She also began making detailed sketches of the fossils she found. She spent much of her time finding, digging up, and cleaning *ammonites* to study them and prepare them for sale. Sometimes Joseph helped her. In about 1811, when Mary was 12, her brother found a strange-looking fossilized skull. Mary went back to where he'd found the skull and spent months digging up the outline of the creature's entire skeleton, about 16 feet in length. Scientists were fascinated. They spent years studying and debating Mary's specimen and eventually named it *ichthyosaurus*. In 1823 Mary was the first to discover a complete skeleton of a *plesiosaurus*, and in 1828 she was the first to identify a *pterodactyl*.

Unfortunately, as a woman from a lower-class background, Mary did not get much credit for her discoveries and significant contributions to paleontology. Male scientists were happy to buy Mary's cleaned and identified fossils, but often did not credit her discoveries in the scientific papers they wrote about those fossils. Indeed, they often claimed Mary's discoveries as their own. And the Geological Society of London stubbornly refused to admit any women until 1904.

(Continued on page 6)



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**HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?**

**MARY ANNING** (1799-1847)

(Continued from page 6)

But her work did inspire the work of others, one of whom was truly supportive. The famous geologist Henry De la Beche was a childhood friend of Mary's who also enjoyed painting. In 1830 he used Mary's discoveries of the *ichthyosaur*, *plesiosaur* and *pterosaur* as inspiration to imagine and paint the first picture of prehistoric life. He called the painting "Duria Antiquior—A More Ancient Dorset,:" and sold prints of the painting to raise money for Mary. This painting was the first known example of *paleoart*, an art form which helps people understand life on earth millions of years ago.

Mary died of breast cancer in 1847, still relatively poor and unknown, but her legacy in paleontology lives on. In 2020 a BBC film entitled "Ammonite" (starring Kate Winslet and Saoirse Ronan) told a fictionalized version of Mary's life and work. Several of the major fossils she discovered are now permanently on display in the Natural History Museum of London. And the Lyme Regis Museum, which currently stands on the site of Mary's childhood home, has dedicated a whole gallery to her life and work. Mary's story is now taught in British schools and in 2018 an eleven-year-old girl from Dorset, successfully launched the "Mary Anning Rocks" campaign raise funds for a statue of Mary in Lyme Regis. The campaign was delayed some by the covid pandemic, but was finally unveiled in 2022 on the 223rd anniversary of Mary's birth.



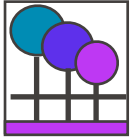
London's Natural History Museum

But perhaps the most honest and important tribute to Mary came just after her death. Her friend Henry De la Beche, then president of the Geological Society of London, broke with the members-only tradition to read the following eulogy at a meeting of the society.

*"I cannot close this notice of our losses by death without adverting to that of one, who though not placed among even the easier classes of society, but one who had to earn her daily bread by her labour, yet contributed by her talents and untiring researches in no small degree to our knowledge."*

NOTE: "*She sells seashells on the sea shore*" is based on the real life of Mary Anning, who dug up fossils to sell to tourists at the beach in the 1800s to help her poor family. Her life story was an inspiration to many and a song was written about her which we still use today as a tongue twister:

She sells seashells on the seashore.  
The shells she sells are seashells, I'm sure.  
So if she sells seashells on the seashore.  
Then I'm sure she sells seashore shells.



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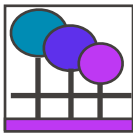
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JANUARY 18— is  
our next scheduled  
*No-Rules Book Group*  
in Richland Center.  
See Page 1 for details.

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Times**

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Here is the answer to our December Cryptoquote:

EVEN NOW, I CONSIDER REALITY A MAJOR FLAW WHEN  
IT COMES TO MEN.

~ APARNA NANCHERLA

**QUOTES BY MARY ANNING:**

This world has used me so unkindly. I fear it has made me suspicious of  
everyone.

It is Large and heavy, but...it is the first and only one discovered in Europe.

(See pages 5-6 to read about Ms. Anning)