

1. *Eva and Otto, Resistance, Refugees, and Love in the Time of Hitler* by their 3 children, Tom, Kathy, and Peter Pfister ©2020. 460pp. Photos. The authors are American contemporaries of mine. Diaries, letters, FOIA requests, and, in the epilogue, their own eyewitness testimony, form the factual basis for this book. Both Otto (1900-1985) and Eva (1910-1991) escaped, separately, from the Nazis by hiking over the Pyrenees. In 2011 their 3 offspring took that hike together. Eva and Otto met in France, both ex-pats from Germany, raised in, respectively, Jewish and Catholic families.
2. *The Beak of the Finch, a Story of Evolution in our Time* by Jonathan Wiener ©1994. 332pp. Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction. Peter and Rosemary Grant spent 20 years meticulously measuring multiple aspects of every bird on Daphne Major, an island in the Galapagos. Darwin himself thought evolution took eons so it could not be seen in a lifetime. J.B.S. Haldane defined the "Darwin," a unit of evolution, as a change of 1% per million years. After the multi-year drought the Grants measured a change of 25,000 Darwins; after the El Nino, 6000 Darwins. Changes ebb and flow, so if you only look at two fossil records thousands of years apart you only see the cumulative change. Farmers see that insects get resistant to their sprays within a couple of years.
3. *Mendel's Daughter* by Martin Lemelman. ©2006. 217pp. A graphic memoir by the son of Holocaust survivors. In 1989 he videotaped his widowed mother telling her story. After Gusta (1919-1996) died, Martin transcribed it, along with his illustrations, into this book. Village life, the 21 months of Russian occupation, the Nazi period when four siblings lived in the forest for years, and finally an Epilogue. I captured some drawings for fodder for my jigsaw-puzzle app.
4. *The Education of an Idealist* by Samantha Power ©2019. A memoir read by the author in 21 hours. Power was born in Dublin in 1970. Her family emigrated to Pittsburgh when Samantha was nine. Samantha became a freelance correspondent in Bosnia. That and Rwanda led her to write *The Problem from Hell* about genocide. In the Obama administration she first ran an office dealing with human rights, then was ambassador to the U.N. She's married to Cass Sunstein who also worked for Obama. Two kids. I like being reminded of the sequencing of news events from recent decades, and I was interested in the nuts and bolts of Samantha's work and their household.
5. *Karen* by Marie Killilea ©1952 314pp. and *With Love from Karen* ©1963 371pp. Karen (1940-2020) was born prematurely with cerebral palsy into an ideal Catholic family of the era. Marie became a leader of the United C.P. Assoc. She wrote books, had several more kids, and both parents did *hours* of P.T. with Karen *every day!* Marie smokes a lot, including in medical settings. Readers in the '50's and '60's probably barely noticed that.
6. *Kentucky Memoir* by Jeff Hooper ©2015 82pp. Tells of Jeff's time working at Appalshop 1975 thru 1978, which overlapped the time MaryDan and Bob were there. Appalshop was a consortium of young people, mostly from Appalachia and college educated, trying to represent the traditions of the region in theater, film, photography and sound, all on a shoestring. Jeff tells about his varied work within the context of his personal life and the social mores of the day. He personally delivered a copy of this keepsake book to MD & Bob. Jeff's wife was Wendy Ewald, now famous.
7. *The Secret to Superhuman Strength* by Alison Bechdel ©2021. 233pp. A graphic autobiography. Alison uses sports to combat depression and to get high on endorphins. Her longest stretch outside a relationship was 6 months. And through it all she's a workaholic cartoonist. Just what I want to know: work, significant others, what a person reads and thinks about (vignettes about Margaret Fuller, Kerouac, Coleridge and the Wordsworths), and what she does to relax. Markers for where we are in history are scattered throughout the book: Whole Earth Catalog, 9/11, birtherism, COVID.
8. *Alan's War* by Emmanuel Guibert ©2008 (English edition). Originally published in France in 3 volumes starting in 2000. 304pp. The memories of G.I. Alan Cope (1925-1999) as told to Cope's graphic artist friend. Cope remained in Europe after the war as a civilian translator for the U.S. Army. Alan abandons a youthful idea of becoming a Minister. Cope had a gift for friendship, and he made the most of army life, picking up new interests, like classical music.
9. *The Return of the Native* by Thomas Hardy ©1878. 406pp. I was surprised that the novel, set in the 1840's, says most dwellers of "Egdon Heath" went to church only to be "married and buried." Eustacia Vye, 19, sets her cap for Clym Yeobright, the "native" recently returned from Paris, even though he told her he was home to stay. She eventually heads for Paris by herself, which I applauded—the direct approach. Diggoty Venn loves Thomasin who marries Wildeve.
10. *Geniuses at War, Bletchley Park, Colossus, and the Dawn of the Digital Age* by David A. Price ©2021. 190pp. Draws on material only declassified in 2009. Wm. Tutte, a new recruit, was given a code that had stumped everyone. He came up with a purely statistical algorithm that defied manual execution. Price gives a lot of credit to the original director of BP, Alistair Denniston, for recruiting "the right sort of people." But Denniston disdained machine-aided cryptography as lazy. His underlings went over his head to Churchill. Denniston was replaced. Tommy Flowers, a telephone engineer, saw that electro-mechanical devices would never be fast enough. Bletchley Park did not trust vacuum tubes, but Flowers (and Turing) prevailed. The XOR adds & subtracts identically. XORing a key to a string encrypts it. XORing the same key to the encrypted string unencrypts it. I was fascinated by the Knickerbocker story: The Brits found the nifty technology in a downed plane after overhearing two prisoners say, "They'll never find it" That was all the hint they needed.
11. *Two Lives, Gertrude and Alice* by Janet Malcolm ©2007. 227pp. Bernard Fay (a Nazi collaborator friend who may partially explain how the two Jewish lesbians made it through WW II in France) said that the three people of first rate importance he had met were Picasso, Gertrude Stein, and Andre Gide, to which Gertrude replied, "But why include Gide?" Toklas became a Catholic after Gertrude died in hopes of getting back together with her in the afterlife. Stein hated FDR, supported Franco, and feared Communism. She regarded a man out of work as lazy or incompetent. She herself had a fixed income. Alice did all the housework. The Nazis gave a ration to their pedigreed dog. So their race theories extended even to animals.

12. ***This is Happiness*** by Niall Williams ©2019. 380pp. Set in 1960 in Co. Clare the year electrification came. 17-yr-old Noel Crowe, a seminary dropout, is spending the summer with his grandparents. Christy McMahon boards with the Crowes. Noel learns that Christy seeks to make amends for his wronging Annie Mooney in their youths. Quotes: “As though it was the open door of a Rolls Royce, Ganga gestured to the bar of his bicycle.” “Mossie had reached the age where he no longer had dominion over his bladder.”
13. ***O Come Ye Back to Ireland*** by Niall Williams & Christine Breen ©1987. 233pp. Memoir by a young couple restoring an ancestral cottage. They plan to write (both) and paint (she) there. The place is near Labasheeda where my grandfather grew up. Niall and Chris threw a great New Year’s Eve party for their neighbors, most of whom were a generation older. They participated in community theater. They learned they have fertility problems. They cut peat.
14. ***The Kissing Bug, A True Story of a Family, an Insect, and a Nation’s Neglect of a Deadly Disease*** by Daisy Hernandez ©2021. 263pp. I like medical detective stories. The author’s parents are immigrants from Columbia. Her aunt, Tia Dora, who lived with the family, suffered from Chagas, a parasitic disease introduced by the bite of an infected “kissing bug.” Newborns can also be infected from their mothers. The parasite attacks a hollow organ, usually the heart, but in Tia Dora’s case, the gastrointestinal tract. She had a colostomy. The family dynamics put me in mind of a Julia Alvarez novel, *Afterlife*, which I had read with my book group. I loved the story of Carlos, who had a heart transplant in his 40’s. There’s a technique to keep the parasites in Carlos’s body away from the new heart. Statistic: 5-14% of Latinos with heart disease have Chagas. Darwin may have had it. Even though we screen babies at birth for half a dozen diseases less common than Chagas, and Chagas can be cured in young children, we don’t screen for Chagas. We do screen donated blood, but only the first time an individual donates. Some of the interviewees were informed they had Chagas after donating blood. It can lie dormant for years
15. ***The Boy in the Field*** by Margot Livesey ©2020. 7 CDs performed by Imogen Church. Set in 1999 near Oxford in a family about whom it was a pleasure to read. The 3 children are Duncan, 13, a precocious artist, Zoe 16, and Matthew, 18. Coming home from high school together they accidentally discover a bleeding and unconscious boy in a field. Thanks to their timely intervention, he lives. Duncan, who is adopted, wants to search for his birth mother. Other characters also have issues they initially keep secret but ultimately share with others. My book group selected this.
16. ***Caste*** by Isabel Wilkerson ©2020. 14 hrs 26 min., read by Robin Miles. Points made were illuminated by many specific anecdotes that were fresh and new to me. Long before I got to the Obama presidency I understood that there would be a reaction to this up-ending of the caste system. Consciously or not, many white Americans want to reassert an order in which their group is on top. Later when reading the A. L. Alexander book listed next, I saw that slavery was a perfect caste system: No black was higher than the lowest white.
17. ***Princess of the Hither Isles, A Black Suffragist’s Story from the Jim Crow South*** by Adele Logan Alexander ©2019. 323pp. The author writes of her grandmother Adella Hunt Logan (1863-1915). A lot of people in this family could have passed for white. Some did. Adella did not. In 1888 she married Booker T. Washington’s right-hand man at the Tuskegee Institute. I learned much in the course of this multi-generational saga. The adopted daughter (who was never told she had black ancestry) of Adella’s white friend was expelled from the Emma Willard School (my friend Ellie Miller is an alumnus) when the headmistress got an anonymous letter about Nella’s background. Nella bonded with her newfound birth grandparents in Georgia. In 1929 Nella Larsen wrote the novel *Passing* which has been made into a movie ©2021 on Netflix directed by Rebecca Hall. I saw and liked it. (But that’s just a *tiny* detail of this eventful book).
18. ***The Cloister*** by James Carroll ©2017. 360pp. Three threads: Heloise & Abelard, Nazi occupation of Paris, and Rachel Vedette, 30, meeting Michael Kavanaugh, 38, in the Cloisters museum in 1950, and subsequent getting-to-know-you phase of their relationship, which was the thread I enjoyed most. By Golly stands for By God, Gee Wiz for Jesus, and Hocus Pocus for “Hoc es einem corpus meum.” My book group discussed this novel.
19. ***An American Requiem, God, my Father, and the War that Came Between Us*** by James Carroll ©1996. 279pp. National Book Award. Memoir. It was a Catholic military family. The sons called their father “Sir.” I loved the story about his father helping Jimmy on his paper route. At a Vietnam protest a scruffy bum sidled up to James (1943- ), then a priest, and whispered, “I won’t tell on your friends if you won’t tell on mine.” It was his brother the FBI agent.
20. ***Last Hope Island*** by Lynne Olson ©2017. 475pp. Allied screw-ups are recounted. In an air raid over Holland meant to take out a V2 launch site the x & y coordinates were reversed. SOE ignored omission of a check-digit code meant to signal “I’m captured. Germans are controlling this radio.” MI6 and SOE spent a lot of effort undermining each other in a turf war. This is my 3<sup>rd</sup> Lynne Olson.
21. ***This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage*** by Ann Patchett ©2013 306 pp. Twenty-two non-fiction articles written for periodicals. I liked the title article, and also the account of Ann’s adult friendship with the nun who taught her to read.
22. ***Those Who Remained*** by Zsuzsa Varkonyi ©2005, ©2021 (English edition) 320 pp. The author is a psychologist who drew upon her professional experience to create the characters. Klara, born to a Jewish family in Budapest, is 15 when the novel opens in 1947. She has not faced the fact that her parents are not coming back. Her aunt brings her to a doctor because Klara weighs less than 80 lbs. The doctor becomes a surrogate father. He has lost his wife and children. The two help each other climb back to life. Fear of informers during the early Communist period is dramatized. Also 1956. Bookgroup member Nancy tweaked the English; Her husband helped the author make this book available on Amazon.