

## Silver Bay YMCA

### Book Talk Readers' Recommendations

From Summer of 2008

#### Albom, Mitch **The 5 People You Meet in Heaven**

Part melodrama and part parable, Mitch Albom's *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* weaves together three stories, all told about the same man: 83-year-old Eddie, the head maintenance person at Ruby Point Amusement Park. As the novel opens, readers are told that Eddie, unsuspecting, is only minutes away from death as he goes about his typical business at the park. Albom then traces Eddie's world through his tragic final moments, his funeral, and the ensuing days as friends clean out his apartment and adjust to life without him. In alternating sections, Albom flashes back to Eddie's birthdays, telling his life story as a kind of progress report over candles and cake each year. And in the third and last thread of the novel, Albom follows Eddie into heaven where the maintenance man sequentially encounters five pivotal figures from his life (a la *A Christmas Carol*). Each person has been waiting for him in heaven, and, as Albom reveals, each life (and death) was woven into Eddie's own in ways he never suspected. Each soul has a story to tell, a secret to reveal, and a lesson to share. Through them Eddie understands the meaning of his own life even as his arrival brings closure to theirs.

#### Baldacci, David **Wish You Well**

A coming of age story about two children from NYC . First published in 2001 it follows Precocious twelve-year old Louisa Mae Cardinal Lives in the hectic New York City of 1940 with her family. then tragedy strikes and Lou and her younger brother, Oz, must go with her invalid mother to love on their great grandmother's farm in the Virginia mountains

Recommended by Cheryl Corsi

#### Bryson, Bill **Thunderbolt Kid**

An autobiography

Recommended by Penny Klebe

#### Carr, James Lloyd **A Month in the Country**

In J. L. Carr's deeply charged poetic novel, Tom Birkin, a veteran of the Great War and a broken marriage, arrives in the remote Yorkshire village of Oxdogby where he is to restore a recently discovered medieval mural in the local church. Living in the bell tower, surrounded by the resplendent countryside of high summer, and laboring each day to uncover an anonymous painter's depiction of the apocalypse, Birkin finds that he himself has been restored to a new, and hopeful, attachment to life. But summer ends, and with the work done, Birkin must leave. Now, long after, as he reflects on the passage of time and the power of art, he finds in his memories some consolation for all that has been lost.

Recommended by Janet Sarjeant

Faust, Drew Gilpin **Mothers of Invention**

When Confederate men marched off to battle, southern women struggled with the new responsibilities of directing farms and plantations, providing for families, and supervising increasingly restive slaves. Drew Faust offers a compelling picture of the more than half-million women who belonged to the slaveholding families of the Confederacy during this period of acute crisis, when every part of these women's lives became vexed and uncertain. Faust chronicles the clash of the old and the new within a group that was at once the beneficiary and the victim of the social order of the Old South.

Recommended by Ellie Foreman

Fforde, Jasper **The Eyre Affair**

A novel about society's relationship to novels, [Jasper Fforde's \*The Eyre Affair\*](#) quotes in form and substance from a half-dozen fiction genres. Yet this debut novel featuring the coyly named detective Thursday Next is very much its own book -- delightfully playful, while commanding serious attention.

Recommended by Sue Glossbrenner

Fisher, Antwone Quenton **Finding Fish**

Recommended by Jan Whittaker

Flagg, Fannie **Can't Wait to Get to Heaven: A Novel**

Combining southern warmth with unabashed emotion and side-splitting hilarity, Fannie Flagg takes readers back to Elmwood Springs, Missouri, where the most unlikely and surprising experiences of a high-spirited octogenarian inspire a town to ponder the age-old question: Why are we here?

Fossum, Karin **Don't Look Back**

Lovers and partners-in-crime investigators Lavinia Lake and Tobias March continue their exciting newfound relationship, with its delicious mix of risky business, rising passion, and now--murder.

Recommended by Penny Klebe

Franklin, Ariana **Mistress of the Art of Death**

In 1170 children start to disappear from Cambridge. Then a body turns up, horribly mutilated. The finger is immediately pointed at the Jewish community who flee to the local castle for protection. To try and solve the mystery and exonerate the Jews, Simon of Naples is sent to Cambridge to investigate. He brings with him Adelia, a doctor from the school of Salerno, and her Moorish man-servant Mansur. Although Adelia is skilled at treating the sick, that is not why Simon has brought her with him. No, the dead talk to Adelia..... Yet England is not as forward thinking as it's European neighbours and Adelia must hide her talents for fear of being branded a witch. Can she overcome this hindrance and help Simon uncover the killer, before they strike again?

Recommended by Rebecca Johnson

Frazer, Charles **Thirteen Moons**

Charles Frazier's "Thirteen Moons" is the story of one man's remarkable life, spanning a century of relentless change. At the age of twelve, an orphan named Will Cooper is given a horse, a key, and a map and is sent on a journey through the wilderness to the edge of the Cherokee Nation, the uncharted white space on the map. Will is a bound boy, obliged to run a remote Indian trading post. As he fulfills his lonesome duty, Will finds a father in Bear, a Cherokee chief, and is adopted by him and his people, developing relationships that ultimately forge Will's character. All the while, his love of Claire, the enigmatic and captivating charge of volatile and powerful Featherstone, will forever rule Will's heart.

In a distinct voice filled with both humor and yearning, Will tells of a lifelong search for home, the hunger for fortune and adventure, the rebuilding of a trampled culture, and above all an enduring pursuit of passion. As he comes to realize, "When all else is lost and gone forever, there is yearning. One of the few welcome lessons age teaches is only desire trumps time."

Recommended by Janet Sarjeant

Glasgow, Elizabeth **North and South**

When her father has a crisis of faith and leave his position as a cleric in scenic southern England, Margaret and her tempestuous mother are moved to England's industrial north, where she must somehow find a way to survive. Her progress is hindered by the presence of Mr. Thornton, a factory owner who seeks to become a "gentleman" in order to win Margaret's affections and his mother, a money-grubbing cow who sees Margaret as a penniless hindrance to her son's glorious career. But in the end, Margaret's future becomes a great deal less bleak when an unexpected bank account arrives and she can finally realize her dreams."

Recommended by Sue Glossbrenner

Goldsmith, Barbara **Other Powers**

In *Other Powers* Barbara Goldsmith takes a wide-ranging approach to the life of controversial feminist Victoria Woodhull (1838-1927). Goldsmith places her buccaneering subject within the context of 19th-century America's fascination with spiritualism, which enabled an accomplished medium like Woodhull to escape her impoverished origins and amass considerable wealth. Goldsmith also ably delineates the freewheeling Woodhull's uneasy relations with more respectable ladies in the women's suffrage movement and portrays the hatred of sexual hypocrisy that ultimately brought Woodhull's relentless enemies who wrecked her public career. History illuminates biography--and vice versa--in this boundary-defying work.

Recommended by Darilyn Manring

Greer, Andrew Sean **The Story of a Marriage: A Novel**

"We think we know the ones we love." So Pearlie Cook begins her indirect and devastating exploration of the mystery at the heart of every relationship, how we can ever truly know another person.

It is 1953 and Pearlie, a dutiful housewife, finds herself living in the Sunset district of San Francisco, caring not only for her husband's fragile health but also for her son, who is afflicted with polio. Pearlie's story is a meditation not only on love but also on the effects of war—with one war just over and another one in Korea coming to a close. Set in a climate of fear and repression - political, sexual, and racial - *The Story of a Marriage* portrays three people trapped by the confines of their era, and the desperate measures they are prepared to take to escape it. Lyrical and surprising, *The Story of a Marriage* looks back at a period that we tend to misremember as one of innocence and simplicity.

Recommended by Rebecca Johnson

Gulland, Sandra **The Many Lives & Secret Sorrows of Josephine B.**

Since completing high school history, few of us have managed to keep straight the details of the French Revolution. Beyond suggestions of eating cake and the effectiveness of the guillotine, this sordid time period has remained--for many--somewhat obscure. Now, through the novel *The Many Lives and Secret Sorrows of Josephine B.*, not only do we learn of the many differences between Robespierre and Rousseau, but we gain insight into the marriage of one of history's greatest political couples: Napoleon and Josephine.

Recommended by Jill Baker

Haddon, Mark **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time**

Mark Haddon's bitterly funny debut novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, is a murder mystery of sorts--one told by an autistic version of Adrian Mole. Fifteen-year-old Christopher John Francis Boone is mathematically gifted and socially hopeless, raised in a working-class home by parents who can barely cope with their child's quirks. He takes everything that he sees (or is told) at face value, and is unable to sort out the strange behavior of his elders and peers.

Recommended by Marge Gonzalez

Harrington, Joyce **Someone Knows My Name**

Abducted from Africa as a child and enslaved in South Carolina, Aminata Diallo thinks only of freedom—and of the knowledge she needs to get home. Sold to an indigo trader who recognizes her intelligence, Aminata is torn from her husband and child and thrown into the chaos of the Revolutionary War. In Manhattan, Aminata helps pen the Book of Negroes, a list of blacks rewarded for service to the king with safe passage to Nova Scotia. There Aminata finds a life of hardship and stinging prejudice. When the British abolitionists come looking for "adventurers" to create a new colony in Sierra Leone, Aminata assists in moving 1,200 Nova Scotians to Africa and aiding the abolitionist cause by revealing the realities of slavery to the British public. This captivating story of one woman's remarkable experience spans six decades and three continents and brings to life a crucial chapter in world history.

Recommended by Rebecca Johnson

Harris, Joanne **Five Quarters of the Orange**

In her bestselling and critically acclaimed novel *Chocolat*, Joanne Harris told a lush story of the conflicts between pleasure and repression. Now she delivers her most complex and sophisticated work yet, an unforgettable tale of mothers and daughters, of the past and the present, of resisting and succumbing -- an extraordinary work of fiction lined with darkness and fierce joy. When Framboise Simon returns to a small village on the banks of the Loire, the locals do not recognize her as the daughter of the infamous woman they hold responsible for a tragedy during the German occupation years ago. But the past and present are inextricably entwined, particularly in a scrapbook of recipes and memories that Framboise has inherited from her mother. And soon Framboise will realize that the journal also contains the key to the tragedy that indelibly marked that summer of her ninth year....

Recommended by Ellie Foreman

Horan, Nancy **Loving Frank**

*I have been standing on the side of life, watching it float by. I want to swim in the river. I want to feel the current.*

So writes Mamah Borthwick Cheney in her diary as she struggles to justify her clandestine love affair with Frank Lloyd Wright. Four years earlier, in 1903, Mamah and her husband, Edwin, had commissioned the renowned architect to design a new home for them. During the construction of the house, a powerful attraction developed between Mamah and Frank, and in time the lovers, each married with children, embarked on a course that would shock Chicago society and forever change their lives.

Jordan, Hillary **Mudbound**

It is 1946, and city-bred Laura McAllan is trying to raise her children on her husband's Mississippi Delta farm - a place she finds foreign and frightening. In the midst of the family's struggles, two young men return from the war to work the land. It is the unlikely friendship of these brothers-in-arms that drives this powerful novel to its inexorable conclusion.

Recommended by Rebecca Johnson

Kennedy, Jacqueline **The Best Loved Poems of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis**

Recommended by Janet Sarjeant

Lahiri, Jhumpa **Unaccustomed Earth**

In the stunning title story, Ruma, a young mother in a new city, is visited by her father, who carefully tends the earth of her garden, where he and his grandson form a special bond. But he's harboring a secret from his daughter, a love affair he's keeping all to himself. In "A Choice of Accommodations," a husband's attempt to turn an old friend's wedding into a romantic getaway weekend with his wife takes a dark, revealing turn as the party lasts deep into the night. In "Only Goodness," a sister eager to give her younger brother the perfect childhood she never had is overwhelmed by guilt, anguish, and anger when his alcoholism threatens her family. And in "Hema and Kaushik," a trio of linked stories—a luminous, intensely compelling elegy of life, death, love, and fate—we follow the lives of a girl and boy who, one winter, share a house in Massachusetts. They travel from innocence to experience on separate, sometimes painful paths, until destiny brings them together again years later in Rome.

Unaccustomed Earth is rich with Jhumpa Lahiri's signature gifts: exquisite prose, emotional wisdom, and subtle renderings of the most intricate workings of the heart and mind. It is a masterful, dazzling work of a writer at the peak of her powers.

Also wrote the **Namesake**

Recommended by Joan Bowen

McCarthy, Cormac **The Road**

A man and his young son traverse a blasted American landscape covered with the ashes of the late world. The man can still remember the time before but not the boy. There is nothing for them except survival and the precious last vestiges of their own humanity. At once brutal and tender despairing and hopeful spare of language and profoundly moving *The Road* is a fierce and haunting meditation on the tenuous divide between civilization and savagery and the essential sometime terrifying power of filial love. It is a masterpiece.

Recommended by Janet Sarjeant

McCormick, Patrice **Sold** (historical fiction)

When she is tricked by her stepfather and sold into prostitution, thirteen-year-old Lakshmi becomes submerged in a nightmare where her only comfort is the friendship she forms with the other girls, which helps her survive--and eventually escape.

Recommended by Rebecca Johnson

Meloy, Maile **Liars and Saints**

Maile Meloy's debut novel, tells the story of the Santerre family from World War II to the present. The story starts with the marriage of Teddy and Yvette before he's sent off to war and follows the stories of their marriage and their offspring for the next four generations. It's a Catholic family with Yvette the most devout. It's the secrets and lies, told with the best intentions for good, that provide much of the drama and strife. Maile Meloy tells the story through different characters over the years, and lets each provide a different perspective on the family and the times it lives in. *Liars and Saints* has received mostly positive reviews. The Cleveland Plain Dealer says, "Here's a book to remind us that ordinary people find themselves in wild trouble often enough and that the world seldom ends because of it."

Recommended by Blake Mitchell

Mitford, Nancy **The Pursuit of Love**

***The Pursuit of Love*** is a [novel](#) first published in 1945. It is the first in a trilogy about an upper-class family in the period between the wars. Although a [comedy](#), the story has tragic overtones.

Recommended by Morgan Glossbrenner

Mortenson and Relin **Three Cups of Tea**

The astonishing, uplifting story of a real-life Indiana Jones and his humanitarian campaign to use education to combat terrorism in the Talibans backyard

Recommended by Penny Klebe

Murphy, Anne and Peter de Rosa **Forbidden Fruit: The True Story of My Secret Love Affair With Ireland's Most Powerful Bishop**

The true story of how Annie Murphy fell in love with Eamonn Casey, the Bishop of Galway, and had his love-child. It describes her fight to keep her son despite Casey's pleas for her to have the baby adopted, and the ramifications of being a single mother for 18 years.

Recommended by Ginny Rose

Olsen, Lynne **Troublesome Young Men: The Rebels Who Brought Churchill to Power and Helped Save England**

Acclaimed historian Lynne Olson's collective biography explores one of the most important turning points in 20th-century history - the months leading up to Winston Churchill's accession to Prime Minister and the decisive turning of the tide in Britain against the appeasement of Hitler.

Recommended by Eunice Matthews

Ondaatje, Michael **Anil's Ghost**

With his first novel since the internationally acclaimed *The English Patient*, Booker Prize-winning author Michael Ondaatje gives us a work displaying all the richness of imagery and language and the piercing emotional truth that we have come to know as the hallmarks of his writing. *Anil's Ghost* transports us to Sri Lanka, a country steeped in centuries of tradition, now forced into the late twentieth century by the ravages of civil war. Into this maelstrom steps Anil Tissera, a young woman born in Sri Lanka, educated in England and America, who returns to her homeland as a forensic anthropologist sent by an international human rights group to discover the source of the organized campaigns of murder engulfing the island. What follows is a story about love, about family, about identity, about the unknown enemy, about the quest to unlock the hidden past—a story propelled by a riveting mystery. Unfolding against the deeply evocative background of Sri Lanka's landscape and ancient civilization, *Anil's Ghost* is a literary spellbinder—Michael Ondaatje's most powerful novel yet.

Recommended by Virginia Avanesya and Ellie Foreman

Paver, Michelle **Wolf Brother**

Thousands of years ago the land is one dark forest. Its people are hunter-gatherers. They know every tree and herb and they know how to survive in a time of enchantment and powerful magic. Until an ambitious and malevolent force conjures a demon: a demon so evil that it can be contained only in the body of a ferocious bear that will slay everything it sees, a demon determined to destroy the world. Only one boy can stop it - 12 year old Torak, who has seen

his father murdered by the bear. With his dying breath, Torak's father tells his son of the burden that is his. He must lead the bear to the mountain of the World Spirit and beg that spirit's help to overcome it. Torak is an unwilling hero. He is scared and trusts no one. His only companion is a wolf cub only three moons old, whom he seems to understand better than any human. There is a terrifying quest in a world of wolves, tree spirits and Hidden People, a world in which trusting a friend means risking your life.

Recommended by George Blike

### Pilcher, Robin **A Risk Worth Taking**

After the dot-com bubble burst, Dan Porter is laid off from his job and must decide what is truly important. His wife of twenty years, Jackie, a beautiful and successful managing director at a clothing designer shop, no longer connects with him. His teenagers, Josh, Nina, and Millie, are distant and confusing. Jackie is tempted by the attentions of a younger man at her office, and thanks to an opportunity suggested by a magazine article, Dan finds himself contemplating a drastic change in his life.

Recommended by Penny Klebe

### Robinson, Marilynne **Gilead: A Novel**

As the Reverend John Ames approaches the hour of his own death, he writes a letter to his son chronicling three previous generations of his family, a story that stretches back to the Civil War and reveals uncomfortable family secrets.

Recommended by Marge Gonzalez

### Rodriguez, Deborah **Kabul Beauty School**

Soon after the fall of the Taliban, in 2001, Deborah Rodriguez went to Afghanistan as part of a humanitarian aid group. Surrounded by people whose skills--as doctors, nurses, and therapists--seemed eminently more practical than her own, Rodriguez, a hairdresser and mother from Michigan, despaired of being of any real use. Yet she found she had a gift for befriending Afghans, and once her profession became known she was eagerly sought out by Westerners desperate for a good haircut and by Afghan women, who have a long and proud tradition of running their own beauty salons. Thus the idea for the Kabul Beauty School was born. Within that small haven, the line between teacher and student quickly blurred as these vibrant women shared with Rodriguez their stories and their hearts, ultimately giving her the strength to leave her own unhealthy marriage and allow herself to love again, Afghan style.

Recommended by Barb Folkemer

Rubio, Gwyn Hyman **Icy Sparks**

After years of living in a children's asylum for having spontaneous jerks and spasms, Icy returns home and is quickly befriended by Miss Emily, who cares for her and teaches her the ways of life, transforming Icy into a new person and forever changing her

Recommended by Penny Klebe

See, Lisa **Snowflower and the Secret Fan**

Sun Flower and Lily are from vastly different backgrounds but drawn together to be the best of friends - they recount how it was to grow up in 19th century China, through foot binding, and war, seclusion, nu shu (women's writing), motherhood, and above all - friendship.

Recommended by Barb Folkemer

See, Lisa **Peony in Love**

Immersed in the richness and magic of the Chinese vision of the afterlife, transcending even death, Sees novel beautifully explores the many manifestations of love and addresses the age-old desire of women to be heard.

Recommended by Carol Kanis

Setterfield, Diane **The Thirteenth Tale**

When Margaret Lea opened the door to the past, what she confronted was her destiny.

*All children mythologize their birth...* So begins the prologue of reclusive author Vida Winter's collection of stories, which are as famous for the mystery of the missing thirteenth tale as they are for the delight and enchantment of the twelve that do exist.

Recommended by Linda Johnson, Janet Sarjeant and Virginia Avanesya

Sheehan, Jacqueline **Lost & Found**

After Rocky's veterinarian husband dies too young, at 42, she leaves town and her job as a

psychologist and heads to secluded Peak's Island, off the coast of Portland. There, she becomes the local Animal Control Warden and reinvents her past so that it no longer includes the tragic fact of her husband's death.

When Rocky finds a dog with a strange handmade arrow sticking out of his shoulder, she both finds a soulmate, and uncovers the beginnings of a mystery. With the new friends she meets on the island, Tess, the synesthete; Melissa, the young anorexic; and Hill, her archery instructor, whom she is simultaneously suspicious of and attracted to; Rocky slowly unravels the mystery of Lloyd the dog, the arrow, and his missing owner. In doing so, she learns that her grief can be displaced, slowly but surely, by moments of joy.

**Recommended by Cheryl Corsi**

Shriver, Lionel **We Need to Talk About Kevin**

by Lionel Shriver

The gripping international bestseller about motherhood gone awry. Eva never really wanted to be a mother - and certainly not the mother of the unlovable boy who murdered seven of his fellow high school students, a cafeteria worker, and a much-adored teacher who tried to befriend him, all two days before his sixteenth birthday. Now, two years later, it is time for her to come to terms with marriage, career, family, parenthood, and Kevin's horrific rampage in a series of startlingly direct correspondences with her estranged husband, Franklyn. Uneasy with the sacr **An Incomplete Revenge** ifices and social demotion of motherhood from the start, Eva fears that her alarming dislike for her own son may be responsible for driving him so nihilistically off the rails.

Recommended by Barb Folkemer

Suskind, Ron **A Hope in the Unseen**

Tsukiyama, Gail **Dreaming Waters**

Bestselling author Gail Tsukiyama is known for her poignant, subtle insights into the most complicated of relationships. *Dreaming Water* is an exploration of two of the richest and most layered human connections that exist: mother and daughter and lifelong friends. *Dreaming Water* is about a mother's courage, a daughter's strength, and a friend's love. It is about the importance of human dignity and the importance of all the small moments that create a life worth living.

Recommended by Penny Klebe

## **Tyler, Anne *Back When We Were Grownups***

"Once upon a time, there was a woman who discovered that she had turned into the wrong person." So Anne Tyler opens this irresistible new novel.

The woman is Rebecca Davitch, a fifty-three-year-old grandmother. Is she an impostor in her own life? she asks herself. Is it indeed her own life? Or is it someone else's?

On the surface, Beck, as she is known to the Davitch clan, is outgoing, joyous, a natural celebrator. Giving parties is, after all, her vocation--something she slipped into even before finishing college, when Joe Davitch spotted her at an engagement party in his family's crumbling nineteenth-century Baltimore row house, where giving parties was the family business. What caught his fancy was that she seemed to be having such a wonderful time. Soon this large-spirited older man, a divorcee with three little girls, swept her into his orbit, and before she knew it she was embracing his extended family plus a child of their own, and hosting endless parties in the ornate, high-ceilinged rooms of The Open Arms.

Now, some thirty years later, after presiding over a disastrous family picnic, Rebecca is caught un-awares by the question of who she really is. How she answers it--how she tries to recover her girlhood self, that dignified grownup she had once been--is the story told in this beguiling, funny, and deeply moving novel.

As always with Anne Tyler's novels, once we enter her world it is hard to leave. But in *Back When We Were Grownups* she so sharpens our perceptions and awakens so many untapped feelings that we come away not only refreshed and delighted, but also infinitely wiser

Recommended by Virginia Avanesya

## **Waugh, Evelyn *Brideshead Revisted***

...' explores memorable characters and deep theological issues with a deft touch. While there is a sincere religious focus to the book, the plot and language employed by E. Waugh are of such a caliber that even irreligious readers will not resist being impressed.

Recommended by Janet Sarjeant

## **Winspear, Jacqueline *An Incomplete Revenge***

In Edgar-finalist Winspear's enjoyable fifth installment in her Maisie Dobbs series (after 2006's *Messenger of Truth*), the psychologist/investigator digs deep into a village's long-buried secrets. Maisie's benefactor, tycoon James Compton, wants to buy an estate in the bucolic hamlet of Heronsdene, but is wary after a string of mysterious fires. Maisie soon proves Compton's suspicions correct when she encounters the shady current landowner and a vaguely menacing band of Gypsies in town for the seasonal harvest. The locals are also curiously tight-lipped about Heronsdene's wartime tragedy, when a zeppelin raid wiped out a family. Teasing out Heronsdene's secrets will take all the intrepid former nurse's psychological skills and test her ability to navigate between the Gypsy and *gorja* (non-Gypsy) worlds. Winspear vividly evokes England between the wars, when the old order crumbled and new horizons beckoned working women like her appealing heroine. Even if a few of the plot twists prove predictable, this jaunt back to a bygone era is as satisfying as a spin in Maisie's MG.

Recommended by Barb Folkemer

Zafon, Carlos Ruiz **The Shadow of the Wind**

The international literary sensation--a runaway bestseller in Spain--is about a boy's quest through the secrets and shadows of postwar Barcelona for a mysterious author whose book has proved as dangerous to own as it is impossible to forget.

Recommended by Penny Klebe