

Friends of the Moultonborough Library Literature Series

Theme: Friends and Family

Fall 2022-Spring/Summer 2023

Susan Merrifield

Dates of discussion:

THURSDAY, SEPT. 29 at 10:30, Thursday, OCT. 27 at 10:30,

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 7 at 10:30

Yes, it's the name of a phone plan, but more importantly it's who we rely on to keep us (mostly) sane and grounded, especially since the beginning of the pandemic. Whether it's sharing a cup of coffee on FaceTime, Zooming with our extended family on holidays, or finally getting to meet in person for a hike, bike or weekend long conversation, we have generally come to appreciate our friends and family more than we did in 2019.

Like most things, the role that family plays in our life is not always positive. In our July 2022 book, ***My Name is Lucy Barton*** by Elizabeth Strout, we meet a main character who has never truly left her impoverished childhood and her abusive mother. Though Lucy becomes a successful writer living in New York, her sense of self can easily drift back to that of a marginalized young girl who "comes from nothing".

On **Thursday, September 29, 2022**, Dr. Suzanne Brown will lead a discussion of one of her favorite novels, ***Housekeeping*** by Marilynne Robinson. Written in 1981, this is Robinson's debut novel. Many critics say it is her best. Sylvie an eccentric, loner, is at this novel's center. Uncharacteristically, this drifter commits to staying in one place to raise her orphaned nieces, Ruth and Lucille Stone. However, the local community takes note of Sylvie's horrible housekeeping and seeks to separate her from her nieces.

Our scholar, Dr. Suzanne Brown has a deep appreciation for Robinson's language, characterization and philosophical point of view. As a retired Dartmouth English Professor and experienced literature instructor for

the New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine Humanities Councils, she always leaves us with a sense of being intellectually challenged.

Our second book, a work of historical fiction will be discussed on **Thursday, October 27 at 10:30**. Written in 2018, ***The Great Believers*** by Rebecca Makkai was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and was a finalist for the National Book Award. This novel centers on a group of friends living and dying in Chicago in the early days of the AIDS epidemic in the mid-1980's. Most readers find themselves drawn to the charismatic, artistic and compassionate character of Yale Tishman. As his dearest friends succumb to the disease, one of the few friends Yale has left is a lost friend's younger sister, Fiona. Makkai interweaves the life stories of these two late twentieth century characters in a novel that most reviewers describe as a page-turner.

As a group, we have become impressed with Mr. Will Speers' ability to discuss and understand difficult subjects. As a former school administrator and lifelong literature teacher, Speers' ability to interrogate demanding texts is nuanced, thoughtful and engaging.

On **Wednesday (not Thursday), December 7, 2022**, I will discuss ***Anything is Possible*** by Elizabeth Strout. This collection of deceptively simple short stories presents the reader with new insights and back stories on many of the character in ***My Name is Lucy Barton***. The Nicely sisters, Pete and Vicky Barton, Mississippi Mary and others whom we have wanted to know more about are presented in their full humanity.

Even though this short story collection will add depth to our understanding of characterization in ***My Name is Lucy Barton***, there is no need to read this book for an enjoyable and complete reading experience. That said, the extra time between the October book and this December discussion allows time to review ***My Name is Lucy Barton*** which was discussed on July13, 2022.