

Parkdale Book Club

March 2019 – Mother of all Questions

Schedule

Date (10 am on 2nd Saturday)

April 13	Medicine Walk	by Richard Wagamese	-- Ruth
May 11	A Rhinestone Button	by Gail Anderson-Dargatz	-- Lindsay
June 8	An Unnecessary Woman	by Rabih Alameddine	-- Lynn

Mother Question

10 of us gathered to discuss this wonderful book (a little editorial license going on there) by Rebecca Solnit. There was a wide range of interpretation, even though we are a less than diverse group.

- ☺ I liked the book
- ☺ I'm going to read everything she has ever written (and, editor here, nominate some for future year's reading, I hope)
- ☺ I thought, every woman on the planet should read this. Then – why just the women?!
- ☺ I asked my husband to read it... 'can't really relate' 'exactly! That's why I want you to read it'
- ☺ Not 'enjoyable' reading
- ☺ Very validating – each page – YES!
- ☺ It is not just me; I'm not crazy
- ☺ Knowing we want more, but in a culture that defines our niche we just end up feeling crazy and wrong
- ☺ I appreciated this part: "For a century, the human response to stress and danger has been defined as "fight or flight." A 2000 UCLA study ... noted that this research was based largely on studies of male rats and male human beings. But studying women led them to a third, often deployed option: gather for solidarity, support, advice. They noted that "behaviourally, females' responses are more marked by a pattern of 'tend and befriend.' Tending involves nurturant activities designed to protect the self and offspring that promote safety and reduce distress; befriend is the creation and maintenance of social networks that may aid in this process." Much of this is done through speech, through telling of one's plight, through being heard, through hearing compassion and understanding in the response of the people you tend to, whom you befriend."
- ☺ Eye-opening
- ☺ This brought up so much
- ☺ I appreciated that it is so up to date

- ☺ This is current, and depressingly reminiscent of books written by women 30, 40, 50 years ago
- ☺ Art of using and not using categories
- ☺ Love the way she shapes it around stories
- ☺ Leads me to view everything I see on TV etc. in a different light
- ☺ Agreed with what she said about men
- ☺ We knew this but thought it had little to do with us
- ☺ My not having children is poorly received
- ☺ Section on women & silence was most useful
- ☺ I could relate to women's voices being shut down
- ☺ Rape culture asserts that women's voices are untrustworthy
- ☺ "Some species of trees spread root systems underground that interconnect the individual trunks and weave the individual trees into a more stable whole that can't so easily be blown down in the wind. Stories and conversations are like those roots.
- ☺ "Even when the evidence (of sexual abuse) was overwhelming some still hurled abuse and threats at the victims and found ways to deny the merits of their stories... (because) to believe them... would be uncomfortable, and many speak of comfort as a right, even when – especially when – that comfort is built upon the suffering and silencing of others."
- ☺ "Silence is what allowed predators to rampage through the decades, unchecked. It's as though the voices of these prominent public men devoured the voices of others into nothingness, a narrative of cannibalism. They rendered them voiceless to refuse and afflicted with unbelievable stories. Unbelievable means those with power did not want to know, to hear, to believe, did not want them to have voices. People died from being unheard."
- ☺ Are things better now because of #metoo?
- ☺ "why did it take her so long to report?"
- ☺ I read this on the day that Camille Cosby 'stood by her man' after his conviction on just a small sample of his long career drugging and assaulting women
- ☺ rape – "what is it like to weaponize your body?"
- ☺ I'm lucky not to have had that kind of personal trauma

- ⚖ Survivors of sexual assault are being triggered by the increase in talking about assaults
- ⚖ Compassion fatigue because we hear these stories over and over (because rapes and sexual assaults are perpetrated over and over and over)
- ⚖ "Of course, Margaret Atwood had made the same point as Louis C. K. much earlier and more pithily when she remarked, "Men are afraid women are going to laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them."
- ⚖ I'm going through bad break-up where my voice was silenced
- ⚖ A pharmacist would not fill a prescription for birth control pills
- ⚖ Physicians refused to give me a tubal ligation, despite migraines from birth control pills
- ⚖ But if a man wants a vasectomy, physician responds by suggesting a tubal ligation for the female partner
- ⚖ Bullying is independent of genders – about how people leverage power
- ⚖ This would be easier to read if it were about power and shutting down story without referencing gender
- ⚖ "alcohol causes pregnancy," "Lady beware" program by CPS – where are the workshops for MEN?
- ⚖ Sometimes I thought she was tougher on women than on men
- ⚖ Stereotyped women
- ⚖ Not good to listen to as audiobook
- ⚖ Went back to Louise Penny a little way into the audiobook
- ⚖ Did not like the last essay
- ⚖ My enjoyment of being domestic not respected
- ⚖ I was a traditional woman – did not hear her saying that is not okay
- ⚖ She is a furious man-hater
- ⚖ Her rage is out of proportion so I was less sympathetic to her opinion
- ⚖ I'm angry at her because she threatens me
- ⚖ I was upset because it resonates with a lot of my experiences – I have lived with these without naming them – my lived experience is being challenged at an older age and that is hard
- ⚖ Various new ideas become the new bible; we lose balance
- ⚖ The real mother of all questions is how do I know I'm making an informed decision, how do I know my actions are not simply a response to received ideas
- ⚖ Language shapes our thinking
- ⚖ "questions that push you into the herd or nip at you for diverging from it, questions that contain their own answers and whose aim is enforcement and punishment."
- ⚖ Feminism is how you treat every woman in every moment
- ⚖ "Lewis's Law ('all comments on feminism justify feminism')
- ⚖ See also: article in the Atlantic last Feb – Holden Caulfield and the culture of sexual abuse

Next reading

April 13 we gather to discuss ***Medicine Walk*** by Richard Wagamese. From Amazon: ... the universal story of a father/son struggle in a fresh, utterly memorable way, set in dramatic landscape of the BC Interior. ... A novel about love, friendship, courage, and the idea that the land has within it powers of healing, *Medicine Walk* reveals the ultimate goodness of its characters and offers a deeply moving and redemptive conclusion.

Nominations for next year

No new nominations this meeting – bring ideas for next time.

Other reading (please send yours)

Not the Price of Admission by Laura S. Brown is a wonderful resource written by a prolific feminist psychologist who has written several training manuals for psychologists published by the American Psychological Association, as well as another book oriented to the general public: ***Your turn for care: Surviving the aging and death of the adults who harmed you.*** I have recommended NTPOA to several clients and friends. It can be emotionally challenging to read, as it invites us to recognize aspects of our childhood and experiences of being parented that we might previously have glossed over, even though our current navigating through relationships is so affected by what we learned back then about our worth and what we have to perform in order to be lovable.

I am loving this book! ***A Velocity of Being: Letters to a Young Reader***, edited by Maria Popova (Brainpickings) and Claudia Bedrick, is a collection of over 250 letters from authors, poets, philosophers, composers, actors, astrophysicists... written to a young reader. They are magic. Martha Nussbaum says, "I work a lot in India, where a majority of poor people are illiterate. Here's what one woman in her thirties, a manual labourer, said about the experience of learning to read for the first time: "Whenever I am alone, I sit with the books. If someone behaves badly with me I go home and sit with the books. And my mind becomes better."" This made me so aware of the privilege of literacy and having books to read. Every letter has entered my heart in its own way. Read it. Buy it, especially if you have a young reader in the house. Buy an extra copy to give to a young reader niece or nephew or grand-daughter...

84, *Charing Cross Road* by Helene Hanff.

This book was delightful. I enjoy the genre of books about books and reading, and I enjoy letter-writing, and this little epistle combines these. Letters spanning 20 years reveal the development of relationships and also provide a peek at the history. Writing that leads the reader to laughing out loud and also to crying is a gift indeed.