

A Family That Reads Together

By Laura Stoll

When I need a book recommendation, I know I can rely on my extended family for great suggestions. My grandparents loved to read and they had five children and eight grandchildren who inherited their love of books. Although we are spread out all over the country and have a wide variety of careers and interests, we share a curious nature and love of learning. When I sent out an email requesting suggestions for this column, they did not disappoint. Here are some choices they shared.

The first person to reply to my question was my Uncle Jim, who recommends anything by Jill Lepore. Lepore's recent pieces in the *New York Times* and *The New Yorker* address the effects of the Coronavirus crisis on relationships. Her books, *These Truths: A History of the United States*, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, and *Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin*, are all available at the Kirkland Town Library.

Also in the nonfiction section, *The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz* by Erik Larson, suggested by my Aunt Betsy, recalls Winston Churchill's leadership during the Blitz of World War II.

My Aunt Barby says *Bad Blood: Secrets and Lies in a Silicon Valley Startup* is a must-read. John Carreyrou, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, wrote this award-winner about the rise and fall of Theranos, the multibillion-dollar startup headed by Elizabeth Holmes.

Betsy also recommends the compelling book *Hidden Valley Road: Inside the Mind of an American Family* by Robert Kolker. The Galvin family had twelve children; how six of them came to be diagnosed with schizophrenia provided researchers important insights into the disease.

My mom enjoyed Michelle Obama's *Becoming*. She said the book and the Netflix documentary have an inspiring message for these difficult times.

If fiction is more your taste, my dad recommends *Bringing Up The Bodies* by Hilary Mantel. This is the second book in a trilogy about Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell. The third book in the trilogy, *The Mirror and the Light*, was published earlier this year to rave reviews. The first book, *Wolf Hall*, was adapted for a Masterpiece Theater miniseries and is available on DVD.

Barby recommends the novel *Nothing To See Here* by Kevin Wilson. This original, funny tale is about two children who spontaneously combust.

The Great Believers by Rebecca Makkai came suggested by my Aunt Cathy with a second by my Cousin Charlie. This novel weaves the AIDS epidemic of the 90's into a current day setting.

Charlie also recommends *The Great Alone* by Kristin Hannah. This popular novel is about a family seeking a new beginning in the Alaskan wilderness. However, they discover that the savage wilderness can be as frightening as human nature.

A Woman Is No Man by Etaf Rum, recommended by Cathy, is about a young woman growing up in a strict Muslim family in Brooklyn who wants to find out about the outside world.

Along a similar subject line, a book that was highly recommended by multiple family members is Deborah Feldman's *Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots*. The book (as well as the Netflix series) tell of Feldman's attempted escape from her orthodox Jewish community.

Even though my grandparents are no longer with us, I like to think of what they would be reading and recommending now. My grandmother's favorite book was *Pride and Prejudice*. I wonder what she would have thought of modern Austen-inspired books like *Longbourn* or *Death Comes to Pemberly*. My grandfather told me his favorite book was *A Tale of Two Cities*. Like my dad, I imagine he would have also enjoyed books by Hilary Mantel.

No matter what their tastes, I'm grateful for my book-loving family!