

MIXED THEME BOOKS TALK (1/23/17)

GERE BRANCH LIBRARY

TRACY T. (From Bennett Martin Public Library)

STRONG WOMEN/POWERFUL MOMS

[Big Little Lies](#) – Liane Moriarty (2015) **AUDIO BOOK**

I first discovered Liane Moriarty when I read The Husband's Secret, as recommended to me by a friend. I really loved it. So then I saw this book, and I snatched it up. Let me clarify: I had listened to the audiobook of The Husband's Secret, and then I listened to the audiobook of Big Little Lies. I have to tell you, Moriarty's writing is absolutely fabulous--and it is PERFECTLY paired with the reading done by Caroline Lee. (She did both.) I am completely in love with the combination of them, and I'm going to get my hands (ears?) on every piece they've done together, no matter what it takes!



I really think this story holds great appeal for mothers, especially those of kindergarten to middle-school age. Many of the things that I've gone through over the years, with my three children, are replayed for me in this story. Well, except for the part where someone DIES at Trivia Night, of course. The fake friendliness, with hidden cattiness underneath, the cliques, the true friendships that develop, etc. It's a whole dynamic that you don't even realize exists until your kiddos begin school. This story takes that to a whole new level, which is hilarious and scary and fun all at once.

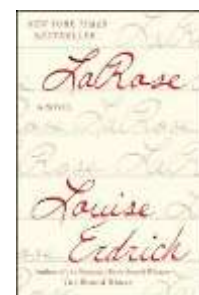
[The Nest](#) – Cynthia D'Aprix Sweeney (2016) **AUDIO BOOK**

I love the dynamic between the Plumb siblings! I can see similarities in the members of my own family, as well as in those of other families I know. Granted, the Plumbs have a far different background from mine, growing up privileged in New York, while I grew up very middle-middle class in the Midwest. Still, there's something about the way these siblings interact with each other and with their mother, in one-on-one situations, in a gathering of just a few, or when they are all together. I've come to notice that in my own relationships, as I've gotten older. Sometimes, it's almost palpable, the tension or strain that is automatically present in certain circumstances. The author, Sweeney, really nails the various personalities of the key characters. I feel like I actually know each person in the story, and I really grew to care about each one individually.



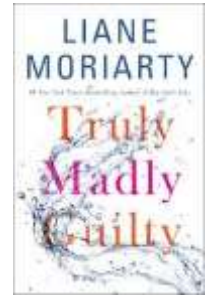
[LaRose](#) – Louise Erdrich (2016) **AUDIO BOOK**

I really found this book to be captivating. It would NEVER occur to me to offer up my child in exchange for a friend's child if I'd accidentally killed theirs. I mean, what the??? But this is apparently common enough practice in at least some Native American tribes. And the fact that the two mothers who end up sharing the child, LaRose, are half-sisters who don't get along... is this the sort of thing that would bring them closer together? Or would it drive that wedge even further between them? And it's not only the mothers affected by this new arrangement, naturally--it's just that that is the point of view I can most easily relate to. But the sister of the boy who was killed, and the sisters and brothers of LaRose, all have their lives MAJORLY affected by this



change. Of all people, I find it most difficult to relate to either of the fathers; and yet, the way this book is written, I'm even able to see their points of view very well... I ache for them--I ache for all people involved. Something I especially enjoyed about this book, as a side note, was how frequently food was mentioned. I love to eat, and they made so many dishes sound fabulous. Before I was done with this book, I spent one afternoon making fry bread for my family, as it's a communal item that is shared very frequently among the Ojibwe tribe. My family loved it!!!

[Truly, Madly, Guilty](#) – Liane Moriarty (2016) **AUDIO BOOK**



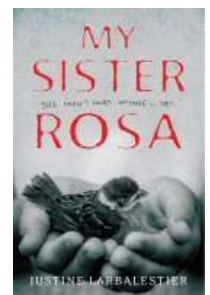
I've said this before: I not only love the way Liane Moriarty writes, I love listening to Caroline Lee read it! The stories are always taking place in Australia, and Lee has the perfect accent. Apparently, Aussies live similar lifestyles to their American counterparts. At least, that's how they're represented in Moriarty's books.

This story centers on three different couples and their families. All three families gather for a barbecue one Sunday afternoon--and the events that unfold change the dynamics of each couples' relationships. Sam and Clementine have two daughters and, by all appearances, a fully and happy, fun-filled life. He's working at a new, *fun* job in advertising (for an energy drink), and she is a famous cellist, approaching an audition for her dream gig. Erika and Oliver are a DINK (Dual Income No Kids) family who love to exercise, do things for the environment, etc. They live in a wealthier neighborhood, having their finances VERY much in order. Clementine and Erika have been friends since childhood, though there are definitely strains on the relationship at this point. Vid and Tiffany are next-door neighbors to Erika and Oliver--they are quite wealthy, indeed. They have one child together, as well as a small dog. They both love to entertain, and it is at their house (?mansion, maybe?) that the barbecue is held.

The story is told in pieces, going from mostly each of the three women's points of view (occasionally adding in Vid's, as well). As is fairly typical for Moriarty, you don't find out, until nearly the end, what this big event was that took place at The Barbecue. It was obviously something quite major, as each person in the story continually refers back to that day.

THRILLERS

[My Sister Rosa](#) -- Justine Larbalestier (2016)



I didn't know what to expect of this book when I first received a free ARC (Advanced Reader Copy). I assumed it was for young kids, maybe a YA book. After having read it, I'm thinking it could be for an older YA, or maybe just adults in general. There are some sort of explicit scenes where (only when I think of them from a youth's perspective), discussing a 17 year old's nocturnal emissions and first sexual encounter. Beyond that, the book is a bit dark. That being said, I definitely think this would appeal to young adults and even (sexual content aside) older teens. Seventeen-year-old Che and his sister, Rosa, and their family, have moved around a lot. His parents (whom he calls by name, or he calls them 'the parentals', as they're sort of hippies who feel that the titles of 'Mom' and 'Dad' imply a sort of ownership) often start up new businesses whose aim is always helping the less fortunate. Coming originally from Australia, Che's family lands in New York City. Che does NOT want to be there; and he's not only sick of moving around, but he's also sick of having to look after his ten-year-old sister. It's not just that Rosa is reckless or that she wanders off or gets into the same kind of trouble a free-spirited child might get into. Rather, Rosa is much more dangerous. She's actually a psychopath--Che has studied a check-list of characteristics, and Rosa has all but one of them. The problem is, Che's parents don't believe him.

They know Che never lies, but they just think Rosa is spirited. How can Che protect the NYC (and the world, really) from his dangerous sister and still have a life of his own?

[The Couple Next Door](#) -- Shari Lapena (2016)

I really enjoyed this book, which I received free as an ARC (Advanced Reader Copy) in return for an honest review. A young couple is due at their neighbors' house (another young couple) for a dinner date, but the babysitter canceled at the last minute. Rather than blow off the neighbors, the new parents decide to leave the sleeping baby at home alone, taking a baby monitor with them to the neighbors' and taking turns checking on her each half hour. What could go wrong? Oh nothing, except that when they return home for the night, the baby is missing!



As a mother, myself, I could totally put myself in Anne's position--sleep deprived, feeling fat and frumpy, and bored being stuck at home all day with a baby. There's no doubt that she loves the baby and is thrilled to have her, but sometimes, it just gets to be a little overwhelming. Her insecurities over the way her husband acts around the hottie neighbor, who *used* to be her BFF, until the baby came. Seems like everyone's got something to hide in this story, which is perfect story-telling. You just don't know who did what when....

[Sweet Lamb of Heaven](#) -- Lydia Millet (2016) **AUDIO BOOK**

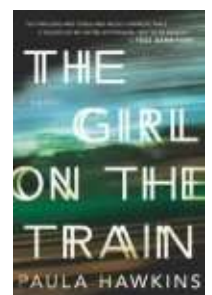
There were many things about this book that I really enjoyed and found interesting. The concept of a wife leaving her husband with their daughter--he never loved the wife, only used her for money, and openly claimed not to even want the daughter--only to have him come back after them when he decides they'll serve a purpose in his attempt at political success.... That's pretty cool/interesting. The fact that he's able to pull all sorts of strings to follow her around, manipulate things to work in his favor, etc., is pleasantly creepy. What I don't understand is the added bonus of the ?supernatural? or whatever... Anna (our protagonist) heard voices after her daughter was born. She's drawn to a place where, it turns out, others have heard voices as well. What THAT has to do with the rest of the story is never clear....



My biggest problem with this book is not that it doesn't seem to perfectly fit together. (Does life ever?) My problem is that, in the audio version, Lydia Millet reads the book herself. Normally I prefer when an author reads their work, because they get the tone right, they pronounce certain unique words properly, etc. But in this case, Millet has a few idiosyncrasies that just drove me bananas!!! I can only think of one at the moment: the way she pronounced the word "been", like "I had been hoping to settle down by now," or whatever..... She always pronounced it "bean", like a green bean. She's not British, she has no accent that I can detect, and she pronounces most everything else the way a midwestern American would.... but the way she'd say "BEEN" (to rhyme with "green") sent me up the wall. I seriously almost counted every time she said it and kept a tally. Have you ever selected one commonly used word in the English language and then honed in on how many times a person says it? Ugh! (My apologies to Millet--she has a soothing voice, and as I'd hoped, she clearly knew the tone of the story.... I just couldn't stand that one word, in particular.)

[The Girl on the Train](#) -- Paula Hawkins (2015) **AUDIO BOOK**

I was told not to waste my time on this book, that it was stupid and not well written, etc. This was months ago... I eventually realized that the person who told me that also happens to like multiple authors who tend to write misogynistic works.... so I decided to make up my own

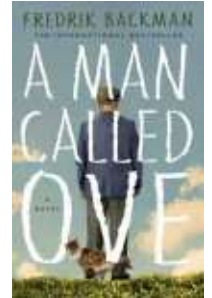


mind about the book. Y'know what? I LOVED it!!! I absolutely, positively LOVED this book!!! I listened to the audiobook, which was especially fun, hearing three different women reading the key women's roles... But I could actually see myself buying this book in print and re-reading it again and again. It was fabulous!!! I related to parts of each of the three women (Rachel, Meghan, and Anna). I feel like this author did a great job of creating three separate characters that still had enough similarities that made them each appealing.

GRUMPY OLD MEN

[A Man Called Ove](#) – Fredrik Backman (2012) **AUDIO BOOK**

Ove: He's a grumpy old man who is set in his ways, who really doesn't want to be bothered with other people, and who can't understand people who drive poorly or just don't buy decent cars. He, for example, drives a Saab. He's ALWAYS driven a Saab. If driving is to be done, it should be done in a Saab.



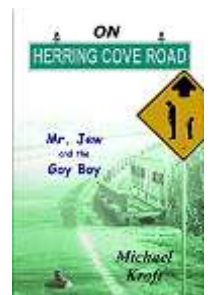
Sonja: Ove's wife, somehow she's the complete and total opposite of Ove. She's sweet, considerate, and easily warms to just about everyone she ever meets. Quote: "He was a man of black and white. And she was color. All the color he had." (p. 58 in LT edition). Parvaneh: The Arab wife of the white man (The Lanky One) who lives across the street. She's pregnant with their third child, and she has no time for the shenanigans of her husband, nor does she acknowledge Ove's constant impatience with every single encounter she and her family has with him.

Ove is the quintessential racist, uptight, grumpy old man. He's impatient, he's rude, and he yells a lot. He does everything in his power to put people off, to scare them away, to NOT make friends.... and yet, much to his chagrin, that is exactly what he ends up doing.

[On Herring Cove Road: Mr. Jew and the Goy Boy](#) -- Michael Kroft

I received a digital copy of this book as an ARC (Advanced Reader Copy) in return for an honest review.

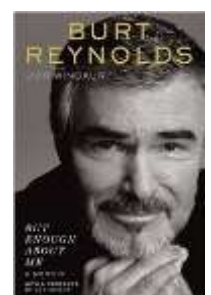
Mr. and Mrs. Rosen, an older Jewish couple, moved into a new neighborhood and quickly met the 9-year-old boy who lived next door with his mother and (racist, bigoted, alcoholic) father. Dewey (the boy) and his mother get to know the elderly, childless pair, quite well. While Mr. Rosen maintains a rather gruff exterior and acts as though he would prefer to spend his time alone (or at least with only his wife as company), he ends up spending more and more time with Dewey, who has grown on him. The story takes place in the 70's in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada--the time period is somewhat evident to me when Dewey and Mr. Rosen play various board games (the ones I played when I was a kid in the 70's)! While it's heart-warming to see Mrs. Rosen take Dewey's mother, Lisa, under her wing, what impresses me most is the way Dewey and Mr. Rosen end up bringing each other out of their respective shells.



MEMOIRS

[But Enough About Me](#) -- Burt Reynolds (2015) **AUDIO BOOK**

While I've never been what you would call a "huge" Burt Reynolds fan, I've definitely seen my share of his movies--being a child of the 70's. I can remember watching "Smokey & the



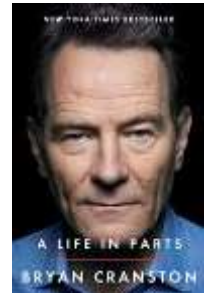
Bandit”, along with just about every other living human I knew...there was something free, uninhibited about Burt’s laugh during that movie—I always remembered it and felt like he must really know how to have fun! Years later, when he was in “Boogie Nights”, I was impressed that he had such a serious side (despite the often funny, hokey parts of the film). He proved himself to me as a solid actor.

So when I saw that Burt had written a memoir, I knew I had to read it at some point. I saw the opportunity to check out the audiobook (read by Burt himself) and I seized it! It must first be pointed out that Burt Reynolds is now 80 years old, and you can hear it in his voice. But I loved this book all the more because it was read by him!

I am constantly amazed and impressed by the vast amount of people Burt has worked with and made friends with over the years. Of course, I knew about Dinah Shore, Angie Dickinson, Sally Field, Loni Anderson, and Jon Voigt, etc. But there are so many other famous people that he knows or knew, well. Johnny Carson, Frank Sinatra, Bette Davis, Ossie Davis, Dom DeLouise and many more. After describing his childhood and his relationship with his parents, Reynolds spends the rest of the book going over his many friendships, as they evolved and as he evolved as an actor. He mentions movies he’s grateful he was a part of, as well as films he passed on or was passed over for. He dishes on a few celebrities that he does not respect or just never got along with (think Joan Crawford, Raquel Welch, Marlon Brando). I suppose the whole book reads like a “Who’s Who” of Hollywood, but because many of the people mentioned are from a time when I was growing up, it appeals greatly to me.

[A Life In Parts](#) -- Bryan Cranston (2016) **AUDIO BOOK**

I remember the first time I encountered Bryan Cranston was when he played Tim Whatley on "Seinfeld". He was hilarious, I thought--he stole the few scenes he was in! Then, I remember when he played the Dad in the show "Malcolm in the Middle." At that point, I had my own kids, so I really connected with the Mom (Jane Kaczmarek) on the show. I do recall, though, that his character (Hal) was typically the person who could calm the chaos in the family, or at least provide a good laugh. So when "Breaking Bad" came along, although I had never watched it (well, the first episode of the first season), I was intrigued by the idea of this *funny guy* playing such a serious, heavy role.



Listening to Cranston read his own book was a delight! He details his upbringing, his childhood in California with his brother and sister and his parents. He became interested in criminal justice when, as a teen, he saw his brother get a chance to travel, as a reward, for time spent in a sort of Junior Police Academy. Once Bryan was old enough, he joined that academy, as well. He and his brother did, indeed, get to go on some amazing trips. Moreover, they both realized that crime-fighting was what they wanted to do. Bryan was quite good at the various tasks he was charged with doing while studying criminal justice... but there was no real passion there. Deciding he needed to add some electives to his class-load, he took some acting classes, recalling how he’d enjoyed acting as a child. He came to a realization: “I will pursue something that I love -- and hopefully become good at it, instead of pursuing something that I'm good at -- but don't love.” I feel that he has definitely become good at the thing he loves!