

Parkdale Book Club

January 2025 – *Two Old Women*

Schedule – 2nd Saturday each month, 10 am, Zoom

2025

Feb. 8	<i>City of Girls</i> by Elizabeth Gilbert	Debbie
Mar. 8	<i>A New Season</i> by Terry Fallis	Janine
Apr. 12	<i>Heaven & Earth Grocery Store</i> by James McBride	Lindsay
May 10	<i>Hello Beautiful</i> by Ann Napolitano	Margaret
Jun. 14	<i>State of Terror</i> by Hilary Rodham Clinton & Louise Penny	Sue

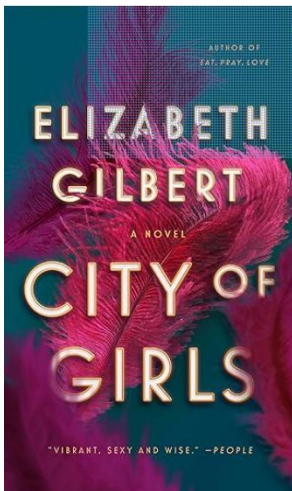
Next Meeting

Saturday, February 8th

10:00 am

City of Girls

by Elizabeth Gilbert



From Amazon: “Author Elizabeth Gilbert returns to fiction with a unique love story set in the New York City theater world during the 1940s. Told from the perspective of an older woman as she looks back on her youth with both pleasure and regret (but mostly pleasure), *City of Girls* explores themes of female sexuality and promiscuity, as well as the idiosyncrasies of true love.

In 1940, nineteen-year-old Vivian Morris has just been kicked out of Vassar College, owing to her lackluster freshman-year performance. Her affluent parents send her to Manhattan to live with her Aunt Peg, who owns a flamboyant, crumbling midtown theater called the Lily Playhouse. There Vivian is introduced to an entire cosmos of unconventional and charismatic characters, from the fun-chasing showgirls to a sexy male actor, a

grand-dame actress, a lady-killer writer, and no-nonsense stage manager. But when Vivian makes a personal mistake that results in professional scandal, it turns her new world upside down in ways that it will take her years to fully understand. Ultimately, though, it leads her to a new understanding of the kind of life she craves - and the kind of freedom it takes to pursue it. It will also lead to the love of her life, a love that stands out from all the rest.

Now eighty-nine years old and telling her story at last, Vivian recalls how the events of those years altered the course of her life - and the gusto and autonomy with which she approached it. "At some point in a woman's life, she just gets tired of being ashamed all the time," she muses. "After that, she is free to become whoever she truly is." Written with a powerful wisdom about human desire and connection, *City of Girls* is a love story like no other." □

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82432011683?pwd=SEgwfSFFIOTRZODVtSmVuYWV1vOXNwdz09>

Meeting ID: 824 3201 1683

Passcode: 284356

If you're not able to join the meeting, you are welcome to send your comments about *City of Girls* to sloanelm@shaw.ca or bethbalshaw@shaw.ca before February 8th so they can be shared with the group and included in our next Book Club Newsletter. □

Jan. 11th Book Club *Two Old Women*

A group of ten of us met to discuss Lynn’s nomination, *Two Old Women* by Velma Wallis. Who do we write off as useless? This book reminds us that every person, young or old, has value. It’s about resilience, courage, survival, resourcefulness, forgiveness and reconciliation. Here are some reflections from the group.



“Stories are gifts given by an elder to a younger person. Unfortunately, this gift is not given, nor received, as often today because many of our youth are occupied by television and the fast pace of modern-day living.”

“The body needs food but the mind needs people.”

“All the chief knew for sure was that in hard times The People should hold together, and last winter they had not done so. They had inflicted an injustice on themselves and the two old women, and he knew that The People had suffered silently since that day.”

It was useful, in our discussion, to be reminded that the story was a teaching story, so making the two old women be complainers who let others do everything for them was part of the lesson.

An interesting find as I looked into this novel was a 147-page novel study of *Two Old Women* by NWT Literacy Council, using the novel to teach every aspect of English language, comprehension, and grammar. [NWT Literacy Council Novel Study](#)



I appreciated the comparison between the legend of the Two Old Women and the story of Joseph and his brothers in the Torah. Like the old women, Joseph was banished from his family. Like the old women, he ended up being the person who saved his family from starvation. In both stories, there was reconciliation. It is interesting that different cultures have stories with similar messages.



I like the message, “Let us die trying.” At first, the old women felt defeated when they were left behind to die. But the younger one gave her friend a pep talk and reminded her that they both had skills and had earned the right to live. She didn’t buy into the message from the others that they were old and useless. That gave both of them hope to keep on keeping on. As they overcame challenges throughout the year, they discovered their own power, resiliency and inner strength. I was encouraged by this message.



The women considered that they might have taught the others to dismiss them and think of them as old and useless. They complained a lot about their aches and pains, they let the younger people build their shelters and carry their load. It left me wondering, how do we teach other people to treat us?



How to Grow Old – When we were talking about resources on aging, one of the first resources that occurred to me was a book we’ve read in book club, Atul Gawande’s *Being Mortal*. And *Women Rowing North* by Mary Pipher, which I’ve nominated in the past but did not make the grade.



Advice on aging from Virginia Woolf:

- “Whatever happens, stay alive.
- Don't die before you're dead.
- Don't lose yourself, don't lose hope, don't lose direction.
- Stay alive, with yourself, with every cell of your body, with every fiber of your skin.
- Stay alive, learn, study, think, read, build, invent, create, speak, write, dream, design.
- Stay alive, stay alive inside you, stay alive also outside, fill yourself with colors of the world, fill yourself with peace, fill yourself with hope.
- Stay alive with joy.
- There is only one thing you should not waste in life, and that's life itself.”



Read more about *Two Old Women* on p. 6.

BOOKS ON AGING

This Chair Rocks: A Manifest Against Ageism, by Ashton Applewhite

Elderhood: Redefining Aging, Transforming Medicine, Reimagining Life by Louise Aronson

I Feel Bad About My Neck: And Other Thoughts on Being a Woman by Nora Ephron

The Fountain of Age by Betty Friedan

I Feel Great About My Hands: And Other Unexpected Joys of Aging by Shari Graydon

Old in Art School, Nell Painter. Historian Nell Painter was in her 60s when she went to art school, earning a BFA and then an MFA after already having had a full career. In her memoir (triple threat!), she tackles ageism, sexism, racism, and identity in telling the tale of how, post-retirement, she decided to start over.

A Spool of Blue Thread, by Anne Tyler. Tyler recently told The Baltimore Sun that she's "been interested in death as one of the quintessential human experiences, having long comforted myself with the thought that if everyone else can do it, I can do it, too." We all go through death; this is an important and beautiful novel about the one thing we all have in common.

Two Old Broads by Dr. M. E. Hecht and Whoopi Goldberg.



One of the challenges of any age, but increasingly as we grow older, is coping with loss. Here are some books on grieving recommended to Lynn.

After That, Lorna Crozier.

It's OK That You're Not OK, Megan Devine.

What's Your Grief, Eleanor Haley & Litsa Williams.

Resilient Grieving: How to Find Your Way Through a Devastating Loss, Lucy Hone.

Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief, David Kessler.

Grief One Day At a Time, Alan Wolfelt.

TWO BOOKS ABOUT ADVENTUROUS AGING

The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out The Window And Disappeared by Jonas Jonasson -- After a long and eventful life, Allan Karlsson ends up in a nursing home, believing it to be his last stop. The only problem is that he's still in good health, and in one day, he turns 100. A big celebration is in the works, but Allan really isn't interested. So, he decides to escape.

And the sequel: *The Accidental Further Adventures of the Hundred-Year-Old Man* by Jonas Jonasson. Another hilarious, witty, and entertaining novel about the escapades of hero Allan Karlsson. □

HEALTH RESOURCES FOR SENIORS

In-Home Restorative Care

One in four older adults falls each year, and falls are a leading cause of injury for this age group. Bev mentioned a valuable resource to keep in mind, should you ever experience a fall and need assistance at home: In-Home Restorative Care, through AHS and CBI Health.

Bev says, "An AHS Case Manager assesses your health care needs and ensures you receive the supports you need while in the program which can be 90+ days. CBI provides home care services. I have received home care services from an occupational therapist, physiotherapist, licensed practical nurse and a health care aid. There are only 25 spots in the program and there are stringent requirements to qualify. It has been a fabulous program for me and I am confident it will greatly speed my recovery."

AHS: 403-944-9984, CBI: 1-888-383-0251

More information online:

[AHS Restorative Care](#),
[CBI Health Restorative Care](#) □

Fit and Friendship at Parkdale United

We all do our best to stay as healthy as possible and *prevent* falls or other injuries! There is a great free program for seniors offered at Parkdale United Church – Fit and Friendship. There are two 45-minute classes each week, Wednesdays at 1:30 pm and Fridays at 11:15. The instructor, Diana Korpan, is a fitness trainer who focuses on strengthening core muscles and working on balance. There is no registration required, no equipment required (Diana provides everything you need), and no fee. You can attend either or both classes each week. Just show up at Parkdale United Church at the designated time and join in the class. On Wednesdays, you are welcome to stay after the class for tea and visiting with other participants. Read more about [Fit and Friendship](#). ☐

Keeping Pelvically Fit

On a lighter note (although a serious issue), Lindsay reminded us of the importance of doing kegel exercises as we age! She submitted this assortment of exercises to ensure tight muscles. Who knew you could strengthen pelvic floor muscles with video games! Here is a sampling of Kegel games available through the Perifit device phone app:

Games – Work on all your contraction patterns.

- Cloud Gate
- Space Odyssey
- Golden Lotus
- Flappy Bird
- Under the Sea
- Dragon Ride
- Jetpack Pug
- Between the Lines

Focused Exercises – Focus on a specific dimension (e.g., Quality).

- Picasso (Quality)
- Pong (Agility)

Seriously, if you're interested in reading more about Perifit, here is the website: [Perifit Canada](#). ☐

Senior Priorities in the E.R.!

Our discussion of *Two Old Women* brought up many issues around aging and how older people can be dismissed and undervalued.

Putting things into perspective, Lindsay remembered a scene from the *Baroness Von Sketch Show* that featured a mutual concern of two friends. Watch this short clip on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpOJOEMoA18> ☐

“Favourite Things” About Aging!

Thanks to Deb for sending in this fun story about Julie Andrews. There is a story that, to commemorate her 79th birthday (now 10 years ago), actress/singer Julie Andrews made a special appearance at Manhattan's Radio City Music Hall for the benefit of the AARP. One of the musical numbers she allegedly performed was 'My Favorite Things' from the legendary movie *Sound of Music*. It turns out that didn't actually happen but here are the fun lyrics some creative person wrote, to the tune of Andrews' famous song.

Botox and nose-drops and needles for knitting,
Walkers and handrails and new dental fittings,
Bundles of magazines tied up in string,
These are a few of my favorite things.

Cadillacs and cataracts, hearing aids and glasses,
Polident and Fixodent and false teeth in glasses,
Pacemakers, golf carts and porches with swings,
These are a few of my favorite things.

When the pipes leak,
When the bones creak,
When the knees go bad,
I simply remember my favorite things,
And then I don't feel so bad.

Hot tea and crumpets and corn pads for bunions,
No spicy hot food or food cooked with onions,
Bathrobes and heating pads and
hot meals they bring,
These are a few of my favorite things.

Back pain, confused brains and
no need for sinnin',
Thin bones and fractures and hair that is thinnin',
And we won't mention our
short shrunken frames,
When we remember our favorite things.

When the joints ache,
When the hips break,
When the eyes grow dim,
Then I remember the great life I've had,
And then I don't feel so bad.



Whatever Julie Andrews and *Mary Poppins* co-star Dick Van Dyke are doing, they seem to be aging successfully. Humour, movement and music seem to play a role in their wellbeing. Here is a photo taken two years ago in December 2022, when Van Dyke was turning 97. Ten years his junior, the pair are now 99 and 89 years old. Oh, to look like Julie when I'm 89! The risk is I'll look more like Dick if I don't keep my chin hairs plucked!



Books Read, and Possible Nominations

Thanks, Lynn, for compiling this great list of books!

From recent newsletters: here are possible or sure nominations for next year:

- *Bad Cree* by Jessica Johns
- *The Cemetery of Untold Stories*, Julia Alvarez
- *The Marrow Thieves*, Cherie Dimaline
- *Orbital*, Samantha Harvey
- *Sipsworth* by Simon Van Booy

Here are some possible nominations for next year:

1. *She Rode Shotgun*, Jordan Harper. A 2017 debut novel. Interesting. I wonder about how likely it is that an 11-year-old girl would take to a life of crime? But maybe her already feeling like an outcast helped that transition along. The bear was great, or rather, Polly's puppeteering with the bear was great.
2. *The Woman Who Married a Bear*, John Straley. Different kind of bear! The author has an interesting knack for putting the reader into the same mindset as the main character – I have no idea what is going on. This is one in a series featuring investigator Cecil Younger, set in Alaska.
3. *Sleeping Giants*, Rene Denfeld. A good partner for *The Shoe on the Roof* in documenting mental health treatment abuse. Horrible. Two story lines that seem unconnected, so the peripheral one seems redundant, but then they are brought together. Sibling connection even when raised apart. One character is neurodivergent, and that is handled well, I think. Nice set up for a second in the series.
4. DNF *New York 2140*, Kim Stanley Robinson. Climate change, stock exchange – but I gave up at 13% of the 21 hours.
5. *This is Happiness*, Niall Williams. Barely into this one, I wanted to buy 10 copies to give to friends. Beautiful poetic writing. An ode to rain, and the clearing of rain. Then I began to have thoughts like, omg, get on with it; the thoughts you have when an uncle at a holiday gathering who's had one too many drinks – or six – hems you in and starts an endless story Then I thought, ahh, a story about the power of story. A story about the arrival of electricity in small towns. A coming-of-age story. A reminiscence, with a focus on the relationship between the narrator and narrator as callow youth. Well worth the time.
6. *Fire Exit*, Morgan Talty. I read this because of Talty's brilliant collection, *Night of the Living Rez*. Like most books, this is about many things,

including blood quantum, a policy that reduces identity to a percentage in order to restrict who can belong to a tribe or live on a reservation and how that passes along to offspring. *'I knew and still know what it was like to both not belong and belong,' 'To think that the reservation is what makes an Indian an Indian is to massacre all over again the Natives who do not populate it.'*

7. *The Last Gifts of the Universe* by Riley August. Two siblings and their cat fly through space questing for answers to why planets have died. "Hundreds of once-civilized systems, all absent of life. Not destroyed, not nuked, or glassed, or buried beneath volcanic residue so completely that it would justify a whole world gone dark. Just ... lifeless. Dead. And we don't know why." They retrieve and catalogue data, technology, anything useful they can find, competing with the big corporation that has bigger, better faster tech and knowledge ...
8. *Hunting by Stars*, Cherie Dimaline. This is a sequel to *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline, and I enjoyed it even more than *TMT* which I determined was a for-sure nomination for next year. Indigenous survival in a post-apocalyptic Canada.
9. *Dept. of Speculation*, Jenny Offill. I started this audiobook at the beginning of a walk and would have stopped after a few minutes if I had a different book easily accessible. Then I began to enjoy it. And then I wished I'd gone with my first thought. If I want a book where cleverness > plot, I'll read non-fiction. These quotations will give you a taste: "The Buddhists say there are 121 states of consciousness. Of these, only three involve misery or suffering. Most of us spend our time moving back and forth between these three." "... she signed away the right to self-destruct years ago. The fine print on the birth certificate, her friend calls it."

Jan. 11th Book Club

Two Old Women

(Continued from p. 2)

Here are Sue's comments *after* reading the book.

I read this book in just a couple of hours. Since I hadn't read it yet when we met, I would like to share some of my insights.

It seemed pretty harsh when The People's chief decided that in the hard times the best way to survive was to leave behind the oldest, which in this case were the two old women. It appeared that they were mere acquaintances at first but, as time went on, they were very close. Sa decided they could die if they did nothing, or they could move on and try to survive. Once they agreed to move on, it was evident that things they learned in their early lives helped them to survive. Nothing seemed to be too big to overcome, which I believe is true even today for many elders, old people. It was their survival ways that ultimately brought them back together with The People. As times got more difficult for The People, the chief realized that maybe they made a big mistake leaving the two women behind. Once they turned back and found them, it was clear that the two women were survivors, they were not going to die without a fight.

Another thing that I noticed was their resilience to whatever they encountered. They were not going to give in.

When The People got to see how they managed, I think they realized the mistake they had made.

I loved how the encounter with the grandson was so intimate when he went to see them and ultimately when the daughter finally went. A mother's love is forever, no matter what has happened.

I loved the book and was glad I participated in the conversation prior to reading it.

Setting: Bookstore

Customer: Do you have any books on turtles? **Staff:** Hard-back? **Customer:** Yeah, with little heads ...