

HAA OF ZTA NIGHT BOOK CLUB – READING LIST FOR 2012

January 2012: Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand

From Laura Hillenbrand, the bestselling author of *Seabiscuit*, comes *Unbroken*, the inspiring true story of a man who lived through a series of catastrophes almost too incredible to be believed. In evocative, immediate descriptions, Hillenbrand unfurls the story of Louie Zamperini—a juvenile delinquent-turned-Olympic runner-turned-Army hero. During a routine search mission over the Pacific, Louie's plane crashed into the ocean, and what happened to him over the next three years of his life is a story that will keep you glued to the pages, eagerly awaiting the next turn in the story and fearing it at the same time. You'll cheer for the man who somehow maintained his selfhood and humanity despite the monumental degradations he suffered, and you'll want to share this book with everyone you know. (*Amazon.com*)

February 2012: A Great and Terrible Beauty by Libba Bray

An interesting combination of fantasy, light horror, and historical fiction, with a dash of romance thrown in for good measure. On her 16th birthday, Gemma Doyle fights with her mother. She wants to leave India where her family is living, runs off when her mother refuses to send her to London to school, has a dreadful vision and witnesses her mother's death. Two months later, Gemma is enrolled in London's Spence School, still troubled by visions, and unable to share her grief and guilt over her loss. She gradually learns to control her vision and enter the "realms" where magical powers can make anything happen and where her mother waits to instruct her. Gradually she and her new friends learn about the Order, an ancient group of women who maintained the realms and regulated their power, and how two students unleashed an evil creature from the realms by killing a Gypsy girl. Gemma uncovers her mother's connection to those events and learns what she now must do. The fantasy element is obvious, and the boarding-school setting gives a glimpse into a time when girls were taught gentility and the importance of appearances. The author also makes a point about the position of women in Victorian society. Bray's characters are types—Felicity, clever and powerful; Ann, plain and timid; Pippa, beautiful and occasionally thoughtless; Gemma, spirited and chafing under society's rules—but not offensively so, and they do change as the story progresses. © Reed Business Information

March 2012: The Girl Who Fell From the Sky by Heidi W. Durrow

Rachel, the daughter of a Danish mother and a black G.I., becomes the sole survivor of a family tragedy after a fateful morning on their Chicago rooftop. Forced to move to a new city, with her strict African American grandmother as her guardian, Rachel is thrust for the first time into a mostly black community, where her light brown skin, blue eyes, and beauty bring a constant stream of attention her way. It's there, as she grows up and tries to swallow her grief, that she comes to understand how the mystery and tragedy of her mother might be connected to her own uncertain identity. This searing and heartwrenching portrait of a young biracial girl dealing with society's ideas of race and class is the winner of the Bellwether Prize for best fiction manuscript addressing issues of social justice.

April 2012: Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness by Alexandra Fuller

In *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* Alexandra Fuller braids a multilayered narrative around the perfectly lit, Happy Valley-era Africa of her mother's childhood; the boiled cabbage grimness of her father's English childhood; and the darker, civil war-torn Africa of her own childhood. At its heart, this is the story of Fuller's mother, Nicola. Born on the Scottish Isle of Skye and raised in Kenya, Nicola holds dear the kinds of values most likely to get you hurt or killed in Africa: loyalty to blood, passion for land, and a holy belief in the restorative power of all animals. Fuller interviewed her mother at length and has captured her inimitable voice with remarkable precision. *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* is as funny, terrifying, exotic, and unselfconscious as Nicola herself.

We see Nicola and Tim Fuller in their lavender-colored honeymoon period, when east Africa lies before them with all the promise of its liquid equatorial light, even as the British empire in which they both believe wanes. But in short order, an accumulation of mishaps and tragedies bump up against history until the couple finds themselves in a world they hardly recognize. We follow the Fullers as they hopscotch the continent, running

from war and unspeakable heartbreak, from Kenya to Rhodesia to Zambia, even returning to England briefly. But just when it seems that Nicola has been broken entirely by Africa, it is the African earth itself that revives her.

A story of survival and madness, love and war, loyalty and forgiveness, *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* is an intimate exploration of the author's family. In the end we find Nicola and Tim at a coffee table under their Tree of Forgetfulness on the banana and fish farm where they plan to spend their final days. In local custom, the Tree of Forgetfulness is where villagers meet to resolve disputes and it is here that the Fullers at last find an African kind of peace. Following the ghosts and dreams of memory, *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* is Alexandra Fuller at her very best.

May 2012: Moloka'i by Allan Brennert

Compellingly original in its conceit, Brennert's sweeping debut novel tracks the grim struggle of a Hawaiian woman who contracts leprosy as a child in Honolulu during the 1890s and is deported to the island of Moloka'i, where she grows to adulthood at the quarantined settlement of Kalaupapa. Rachel Kalama is the plucky, seven-year-old heroine whose family is devastated when first her uncle Pono and then she develop leprous sores and are quarantined with the disease. While Rachel's symptoms remain mild during her youth, she watches others her age dying from the disease in near total isolation from family and friends. Rachel finds happiness when she meets Kenji Utagawa, a fellow leprosy victim whose illness brings shame on his Japanese family. After a tender courtship, Rachel and Kenji marry and have a daughter, but the birth of their healthy baby brings as much grief as joy, when they must give her up for adoption to prevent infection. The couple cope with the loss of their daughter and settle into a productive working life until Kenji tries to stop a quarantined U.S. soldier from beating up his girlfriend and is tragically killed in the subsequent fight. The poignant concluding chapters portray Rachel's final years after sulfa drugs are discovered as a cure, leaving her free to abandon Moloka'i and seek out her family and daughter. Brennert's compassion makes Rachel a memorable character, and his smooth storytelling vividly brings early 20th-century Hawaii to life. Leprosy may seem a macabre subject, but Brennert transforms the material into a touching, lovely account of a woman's journey as she rises above the limitations of a devastating illness. © 2003 Reed Business Information

No Meetings June-July-August

September 2012: Aftertaste: A Novel in 5 Courses by Meredith Milet

Mira Rinaldi lives life at a rolling boil. Co-owner of Grappa, a chic New York City trattoria, she has an enviable apartment, a brand-new baby, and a frenzied schedule befitting her success. Everything changes the night she catches her husband, Jake, "wielding his whisk" with Grappa's new waitress. Mira's fiery response earns her a court-ordered stint in anger management and the beginning of legal and personal predicaments as she battles to save her restaurant and pick up the pieces of her life. Mira falls back on family and friends in Pittsburgh as she struggles to find a recipe for happiness. But the heat is really on when some surprising developments in New York present her with a high stakes opportunity to win back what she thought she had lost forever. For Mira, cooking isn't just about delicious flavors and textures, but about the pleasure found in filling others' needs. And the time has come to decide where her own fulfillment lies - even if the answers are unexpected.

October 2012: Wrecker by Summer Wood

After foster-parenting four young siblings a decade ago, Summer Wood tried to imagine a place where kids who are left alone or taken from their families would find the love and the family they deserve. For her, fiction was the tool to realize that world, and *Wrecker*, the central character in her second novel, is the abandoned child for whom life turns around in most unexpected ways. It's June of 1965 when *Wrecker* enters the world. The war is raging in Vietnam, San Francisco is tripping toward flower power, and Lisa Fay, *Wrecker*'s birth mother, is knocked nearly sideways by life as a single parent in a city she can barely manage to navigate on her own. Three years later, she's in prison, and *Wrecker* is left to bounce around in the system before he's shipped off to live with distant relatives in the wilds of Humboldt County, California. When he arrives he's scared and angry, exploding at the least thing, and quick to flee. *Wrecker* is the story of this boy and the motley group of isolated eccentrics who come together to raise him and become a family along the way.

November 2012: Lost December by Richard Paul Evans

“It has been said that sometimes the greatest hope in our lives is just a second chance to do what we should have done right in the first place. This is the story of my second chance.” —Prologue of Lost December

When Luke Crisp graduates from business school, his father, CEO and co-founder of Fortune 500 Crisp’s Copy Centers, is ready to share some good news: he wants to turn the family business over to his son. But Luke has other plans. Taking control of his trust fund, Luke leaves home to pursue a life of reckless indulgence. But when his funds run out, so do his friends. Humbled, alone, and too ashamed to ask his father for help, Luke secretly takes a lowly job at one of his father’s copy centers. There he falls in love with a struggling single mother and begins to understand the greatest source of personal joy. Lost December is Richard Paul Evans’s modern-day holiday version of the biblical story of the prodigal son, a powerful tale of redemption, hope, and the true meaning of love. (Amazon.com)

No meeting in December.