

Ladies of the Club

by Kerrie More, Montana

About 15 years ago, as a young, new teacher in a small town, I found myself a little lonely—searching to replace the strong female friendships that had been left behind in high school and college. Connecting with a few other female teachers that first year provided a safe haven as we quickly bonded over our careers, not to mention our shared love of reading. While socializing one evening, we marveled at the success of a new book club featured on a popular talk show, and one of my friends exclaimed, “We should start our own book club!”



We never could have imagined the story that would eventually unfold as we made our plans that fall night.

The book club's first chapter opened on a wintery December evening. Despite the cold outside, the evening hummed with warmth and energy. Among others, a music teacher, a principal, a school psychologist—education was our common bond. These were strong and determined women. One starting a doctoral program and planning a new career; an administrator at a school for at-risk teens with a brilliantly decorated home; a first-grade teacher, bold and funny, yearning for adventure; a newly divorced empty-nester spreading her wings. It was an eclectic mix, but our group bonded immediately.

Everything seemed to fall into place. “Once a month?” Okay. “Who will host next time?” I will. “Does this date work?” Yes! “What should we read?” I heard this was good. “May I borrow your copy?”

Year after year, we gathered for our book club, each month a new chapter in our story. Snacks were served, beverages flowed, and we never stopped talking. We learned about families; we shared heartaches and joys; we trusted each other with our deepest secrets. From the beginning, it's been about so much more than the book of the month, which simply served as a catalyst for talking about our lives. (In fact, if we talk about the book for at least five minutes, we consider it a successful meeting!) I certainly cannot recall all of the books we've read, although some of them stand out for reasons beyond the literary.

I remember the controversial book that was strongly debated right before one of our members announced to us that she was taking an overseas teaching position. Her absence was a void, but a few years later, she returned home, comforted to be back among familiar friends. (She tells of briefly joining another book group while she was away. Apparently, they were much too serious and prone to “shushing.”) I vividly recall the book we were discussing the night we learned that one of our own had just been diagnosed with breast cancer. Casseroles were baked, flowers delivered, cards sent. She rose victorious from that battle, and we all cried tears of joy. I also won't forget the book we barely discussed one spring evening upon hearing that a long-awaited baby was finally on the way after years of waiting and trying.

We've lost parents, spouses, and beloved pets. We've had babies and adopted puppies. Some have moved away, and new faces have joined us. There have been retirements and job changes. There have been illnesses, surgeries, and recoveries. Weddings, showers, funerals, and 40th birthday parties—we've mourned and celebrated. Our tale is far from over, and next month, we may or may not talk about the book, but in the years to come, we will be getting together—talking, sharing, and supporting. Through it all, I am especially thankful for the books. The classics, the “fluff,” the bestsellers, and the duds—they have provided the vehicle with which to turn the pages, and years, of our lives—together.

Kerrie More is a school librarian from Kalispell, Montana. She wonders if she will ever get to the bottom of her stack of books to read, but is secretly excited each time she adds a new one to the pile. She blogs about good books, creative projects, and the beauty of northwest Montana at kerriemore.com.

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