



ALL NEW EPISODE



Book Gang Podcast Transcript: Best Backlist Books For Summer

Amy Clark (00:00.046)

I'd love to invite you to our May book club chat to discuss *Your House Will Pay* by Steph Cha. This tightly woven crime fiction story unapologetically and unabashedly examines enduring racial tensions between the African-American and Korean-American communities during and after the L.A. riots. Readers are enveloped in the early 1990's as Cha shares the tragic story of Latasha Harlins, a 15 year old girl fatally shot by a convenience store owner. With a critical lens, the author delivers a page-turning reading experience that feels compelling while also simultaneously feeling risk-taking to immerse the reader in both these viewpoints.

This chat will happen on Zoom on May 31st at 8pm Eastern Time. Joining the Patreon is only \$5, it gets you access to this conversation, a story graph read -along together, and a 39 -page newsletter filled with reviews on the latest buzzy books, all the book adaptation news, and a wish list to make your library

reservations for your best summer stack for May. For this month's playlist, we are also celebrating new growth with a garden of beautiful songs that celebrate flowers, blooming, and a new POV, just like you might have after this incredible novel. I can't wait to meet you.

Victoria Ward (01:19)

Hi friends! My name is Victoria Ward, I'm the creator of Biblio Lifestyle, and I also host the Reader's Couch Podcast.

Amy (01:30)

Well, I love having Victoria over in my space. I am so excited to interview you because you and I both do summer reading guides. And I thought it would be fun to talk about the process of creating your guides and how you got into that.

When did your very first summer reading guide come out and what was the initial idea behind that process?

Victoria (01:52)

So the first guide was summer 2020. So I had never produced a reading guide on my own. However, I have been an avid consumer of reading guides, especially from my bookstores. So my local indie bookstores, they would provide reading guides every year. And I thought, how fun.

Booksellers, especially those in the UK when you order books, they'll send you catalogs, but they'd also send you guides as well. So after being asked by members of my community in my space, hey, Victoria, you're always sharing all these guides that you receive. Have you ever thought of making one? I was like, hmm, never thought about it.

So I decided then and there, well, I've read these books already, let me just put them all together. There was no rhyme or reason. I didn't have a process then, but I just put together the very first guide. I hopped on Canva, if I'm being honest. I used a template. I just put things together there. But since that year, the guide has grown. It has become a year-long process, but I've absolutely enjoyed it.

Amy (02:54)

A year-long process. Tell me, how do you begin to cultivate that guide and are you just looking for books that fit during those summer publishing months? How does this actually get developed and what qualifies as a summer book?

Victoria (03:11)

Okay, absolutely. So because I focus so much on the new books that are being released each season and because I also have seasonal reading guides (so in addition to the summer guide, I also have a fall guide, a winter guide, and a spring guide). So in order to provide some structure, because I always need structure, I have divided them according to the months that the books are being released. So the year starts with our winter guide, actually. So that will be the first crop of the new year's books. So in this case, 2024. So the winter '24 guide will have books that are being released from December to February. Spring is our shortest month. It will have some February or January overlap if I missed something, but then that would focus on books being released March and April. And then the summer reading guide, that's the longest period, that would be May. Maybe if I missed something in April, we'll squeeze that in there. But May, June, July and August. So that is the largest span. And then I'll have a fall guide, that's September, October, November.

Amy (04:39)

Where do you discover your books?

Victoria (04:40)

So I review lots of catalogs. So you have the trade catalogs that come straight from the publisher. You'll also have platform catalogs like NetGalley has catalogs, Edelweiss has catalogs. I also get pitched books directly from publicists. Some authors will pitch their books as well. So what I do is I'll sit with the catalogs, I'll look at the emails and I organize everything by date. So if you were to look at my computer, you would see books organized by month, but also by week. And it's from that list that I cultivate myself after reviewing the catalogs. I was like, hmm, this sounds interesting. Let's add that one. Let's add that one. And once I've cultivated a master list, then I'll pull books, I'll start reading and then start deciding, well, maybe this is a good fit for the guide or no, I didn't enjoy this one, so we'll pass. But the master decision maker really starts with the catalogs. I pull books, I start reading, and then I'll kind of stick books in where they fit based on when they'll be released.

Amy (05:44)

Is this a spreadsheet? How are you tracking? I want to know your process. Really only because I'm not particularly organized. So my guide is kind of chaotic, I guess. And I also don't limit just to the summer months because I only do a fall

guide and a summer guide. So a lot of things like the spring books kind of land in there. And sometimes I pull in a few backlist books because I feel like those get overlooked, which we'll get to talk about a few that didn't get enough attention. But I'm always worried about being more inclusive of some under the radar books. So my process is really chaotic. And I love hearing about people's processes of gathering and putting things together. So what does that look like for you? What works with your brain?

Victoria (06:39)

Okay, so my brain is chaos. My husband often says it's a hurricane in there, but there's some sunshine as well. So when I have the catalog, the good news, especially like say a Netgalley or an Edelweiss, you can organize according to month, you can filter. And then I'll pull those books; I'll paste them in my notes. So I'm an Apple user, I have a notes app. I'll put some books in the notes app, especially if it's something that really grabs my attention right away. But I'll also just copy paste into a spreadsheet. So my computer screen, 90% of the time is a split screen. So I have a catalog on one side, spreadsheet on the other. Notes, if it's something I'm like, oh my gosh, yes, I have to read this immediately without giving too much rhyme or reason. The good news with spreadsheets, again, you can organize your data. So I'll organize it according to the time and I'll try to read in that order.

So my biggest, I guess you could say catalog searching through period, really starts around September. So in September, I'll start, you know, gathering books, reviewing the catalogs and you'll usually get sneak peeks into the books that are coming out in the following year. So, that's a good time to gauge those books as well. But then you'll have to circle back at the end of November, which is a very chaotic time because, you know, the holidays are happening, but that's the time when you'll get more insight into the books coming out in the summer. And I found that a lot of books are published between March, April and May. It is a flood. They just come pouring in. So for that reason, I really try to see if I can get a hold of those books over the holiday period, because I also have some downtime then with family. So I try to get as much summer reading in during the holiday period going into the new year.

Amy (08:27)

And it's so funny because that's what I do too with the break because I have a little bit more time to read and I'm already starting to map out.

It is kind of a hard process, I think, for making book recommendations for people because I'm so thrown into like May books. So people are like, what are you reading right now? It's like, oh, it won't be coming out for a few months. I'm trying to get ahead for the summer reading guide. It's always like thinking ahead about that.

I guess what I would be curious about is you and I at times make predictions about what we think people might like or what might be popular. And that can be really tricky. Like, are you basing that on, like, let's say marketing budgets, what people are doing to get copies in your hand, because you have to have some kind of marketing budget to get a little bit of buzz going for a book early.

Victoria (09:21)

Absolutely. I do think marketing budgets dictate what will be a season's biggest book. So summer is a big time, but also the fall is a really big time as well. I often say, the big books that we don't have in the March, April, May period, they tend to come in September; like September is a last hurrah before the end of the year.

And I've often found that the books that are talked about the most tend to have quite a bit of budget behind it. It is a bit sad because I think that sometimes there are those stories that are really good, but for some reason or another, they weren't allocated a larger budget and as a result, you know, not a lot of people know about it. So that's what I try to do as well with the summer guide is that sometimes you'll have a highly anticipated book and I want to read it because I want to know, okay, is this really worth the hype? I'll read it, sometimes it does measure up and other times not so much.

I know a book I was being pushed big time was James by Percival Everett. Now I'm a Percival Everett fan, so I'm going to read whatever this man writes, but I can say it was a really, really phenomenal book. So in the case where it's an author that maybe you have a relationship with or you know their writing style, and even if they have a book that doesn't measure up because not every single book is going to be a winner, I will always give that author a try.

But then I also think a lot about debut authors. I am passionate about debut authors. I think when you look at my podcast catalog, I talk to a lot of debut authors because I think they need a push too. So I am mindful of that. And I am mindful of that when I put together the guide. Sometimes when I have a lot of books in a particular category I try to narrow it. And if I see there's an author

that I know, this has a big budget anyway. Did I enjoy it? Absolutely. Would I have included it in the guide? Yes. But I will sometimes push that book down. I'll add it to the shortlist and say to my community members, hey guys, this was really good. So it is worth the hype. But I would much rather sometimes put a debut author in or maybe an author who had a first book and it was just, but the second book is amazing. I'm like, yes, let's give this person a chance.

So there's a lot of metrics that I try to weigh when making a decision to recommend books to readers.

Amy (12:15)

And if a book fizzles, it does not get on the list. Am I correct in that?

Victoria (12:19)

100%. There are books, I'll start with the best intentions and the book could be really hyped and I'll have a publicist in my inbox once a week telling me about this book. And if it's not working, it's not working. I think it's fair to say to readers because sometimes I'll get asked, especially during book club, because I host a monthly book club with my community and they'll say, oh, hey, Victoria, we've seen this book. Have you read it? And I'm like, yes. And, you know, I hate to, I don't bash books and authors. I never will. I appreciate the work. I'll just say, look, this did not work for me. This is the reason why. And they'll respect that. And I'll never add it on the guide just because I have to read the book. I've had to enjoy it.

And I always try to have, I don't know about you, but I try to have this window of time where I'm not reading anything. And I just really think about the book and the books that come to the top, the books that I'm still thinking about, sometimes after reading them two months later, I'm like, yes, this is worth it. I'm still thinking about this character. I'm still thinking about this situation. And I want people to read it so that... we can have a conversation about the story that we've read. So for sure, I love squeezing in books that are worth it. And if they're just, you know, if I DNF books, do you DNF books? Because I'll start reading and if it's not working, it goes to the side never to see the light of day.

Amy (13:52)

I'm terrible. I will typically still read it. And part of it is that with our Patreon community, I do just give a review on why it didn't work for me. And, I would like to get to a place where I don't care as much, but a lot of times I feel like to be fair,

I want to be sure to read it. So that is just a personal thing and it's usually agonizing and there's absolutely no reason to do it. And when you talk about books that you include because you still think about them, I am totally someone who will pick books that I know have polarizing endings to put in a guide just to be like, this really made me think. And it's also the kind of book that you want to talk about when it gets a little polarizing or a little crazy.

I am thinking Nicola Yoon's book that's coming out is going to have a lot of people talking. I was thinking about it a lot. And my friend and I were talking about it on text Larry, who is my co-host @getbookedwithlarry, I want to mention his account, but he and I were talking about it all night and I was like, this is exactly what Nicola wanted us to do, right? She wanted us to sit here and be like, this ending was so crazy. And those kinds of books will be included on my book club guide, even if endings don't always like perfectly land for me. How do you feel about that?

Victoria (15:07)

I love hearing that because I'm the same way. I also like to include books with unlikable characters, you know? Because I do think those books make the best conversations. And also, you know, I often feel that reading a novel sometimes with unlikable characters is similar to watching a reality TV show. You watch, you judge, you say, oh, why did you do that? You shouldn't have done that. But then I'm the kind of person where I'm stopping, I'm thinking, and I'm saying, hmm, do I always make the best decisions? No.

The difference is this person's life is being captured on camera. So we're seeing them make bad decisions. We're seeing them make mistakes. And I think of novels the same way. So actually I gravitate to unlikable characters. And I think I'm an apologist. I'm that person's like, no, no, no, I wouldn't have done that. I understand. But this is what maybe they were thinking or maybe because of this experience, they went down this path.

I think those books are great for conversation. I think they're great book club books. To me, the hallmark of a good book is that you want to talk to someone about it. You want to say, oh my gosh, that ending or oh my gosh, that main character, oh, the mother was horrible or what a terrible father or what an inconsiderate husband. It's just, I want to have those conversations. Yes, I love those thought -provoking and sometimes problematic books. I think they're important because again, they start conversations.

Amy (16:47)

We definitely strive to get a good balance because you and I are almost identical with our reading lives about what we look for. I don't mind an unlikable narrator. I don't mind something that's messy, complicated, ugly at times, things that are complicated. I gravitate towards. Those are the kinds of books I like. Sad books, I like to be a little bit emotionally devastated at times. And as a book club leader, I think what I have to work really hard at is to go against that at times, because not everyone wants to be completely sucked into those kinds of books every single month. It's like, oh my gosh, can I get through her book club? So I'm always trying to be like, okay, try really hard to put in something really sweet and lovely that is also like a really great conversation starter. But it is such a hard balance because I definitely gravitate more towards books like that.

Victoria (17:54)

And I think it's natural to have those books that you gravitate towards. See, if I had to pick a genre, so to say, I think I naturally gravitate towards literary fiction. I don't need a plot to carry me anywhere.

I just want to follow a character to see what is going on because again, I do think art mirrors life, in this case, books, and these characters, they mirror life. I don't always have to like something, you know, action-packed happening or there's something we're trying to resolve and have an ending. Sometimes you're just meandering about life. So I am perfectly happy reading something where I'm simply getting the interior thoughts of a main character.

However, I do recognize that some people are like, no Victoria, I need an ending. So then, you know, you include those books that have very clear beginnings, middle, and end. So, you know, I'll provide those books as well.

Romance is a category I actually gravitated to the least when I objectively looked at my reading life, and I started reading more because of my community. They're like, no, we need those happily ever-afters. I'm like, all right. And now I've actually found quite a few books that have checked the box for me. Now I do recognize I am more of the women's fiction romance reader. I like more than just the spice. I want to know about the characters and their lives. So I think my community has helped to make me an even better reader by challenging me to try certain books here and there. And I have a community member, she actually messaged me and said she wouldn't be able to make it this month, but she

recommended a series, a fantasy series to me. And I said, well, look at the bright side. When I see you next month, I'll be well into this series so we can talk about it. So I'm always challenged and I love that. I love that we challenge each other, we share recommendations, and even just having conversations with you, Amy, I feel challenged and I learn something new.

Amy (20:03)

Yeah, and I think, too, it has challenged my perspective and my view, and how the language I use. I know as someone who is on a podcast, it's really important to use language and identify books that, even if they don't necessarily work for us, that we give them a try and like, try to represent other genres and communities that maybe didn't fit in our reading life previously. Even when we talk about romance, sometimes I cringe a little bit about my reaction to how I talked about romance in the beginning because it wasn't a genre that I felt called to. And my language and how I talk about those kinds of books is completely different because the romance community never let me down. They just were like, we are here when you come around, we will be here for you. And I'm so glad that they were because now I get it. I get it and I didn't before. And I'm so thankful that people have the grace to kind of talk about how they would like me to talk about the romance community and what they see in that too.

Victoria (20:59)

Yes. I've learned so much from the general reading community. I mean, my community as well, but the general community,

I'm so grateful for it. Again, it has expanded my reading and I'm still learning and I'm so open to learning more and discovering different books and different genres and just how to have discussions around them as well.

Amy (21:20)

Well, I'm excited because we asked Victoria to bring some summer books that she had picked from her past reading guides to our show that didn't get enough attention. And I love this assignment because it gives an opportunity for you to grab things at the library. I know we will be talking like this year about buzzy new books, but if you are on a library budget or your library has long wait times, this is a chance for you to get some really great book recommendations that are not brand new. And that is what Victoria is on assignment for today. And she has five selections for us.

So Victoria, tell me about your first book that you think deserved a little bit more love.

Victoria (12:15)

Okay, so I have five books I'd love to share with listeners. And the first thing I want to say is I revisited all my reading guides to date. So from the first guide in 2020, '21, '22 and '23.

Now, I intentionally did not select any books from '23 because they'll be new in paperback this year. So I was like, okay, maybe there'll be another chance for more readers to pick those books up. I went back to 2020 and most of those books did well. And then I looked at 2021. So that's the year I selected because there are quite a few books on this list that I don't think got enough attention. The one thing I will say about these five books is that they tell incredible stories. So if you're looking for great storytelling, then these books are for you.

So the first book on my list is a historical fiction novel, and this one is entitled The Great Mistake by Jonathan Lee. Now this was first published in the United States on June 15th, 2021, and this novel dissects the life and murder of Andrew Haswell Green.

He was shot dead in front of his Park Avenue home in broad daylight on Friday the 13th. Now I know folks often have associations with Friday the 13th, you know, bad luck. This is where it started. This is where it really permeated modern culture. Like does it have historical meanings? Absolutely. But this event was really significant. So it's also part of the Friday the 13th culture.

But the novel itself, The Great Mistake by Jonathan Lee, like I said, it dissects the life and murder of Andrew Haswell Green. Now you might be wondering, who is Andrew Green? Now I don't want to say too much because that's what you'll find out in the novel. But what I will say is he was a self-made man and without him there would be no Central Park, no Metropolitan Museum of Art, no Museum of Natural History, and no New York Public Library.

None of this would have existed had this man not lived. He was also essential to the establishment of many New York City parks, museums and bridges and just linking all the boroughs together. So he's a pretty big deal. And like I said, unfortunately, he was shot dead and this occurred Friday, November 13th, 1903. So we're really going all the way back.

The novel is organized, I would say in two parts. It tells two stories. One, we see the life of Green prior to the murder. So we see his upbringing and he grew up on a farm, really poor. And we see how he kind of made his way to New York City and how he got involved in the development of all these places. And then we see his life after the murder. So we see what happens with the police investigation and just everything afterwards. So this is a book that explores his achievements, his unfortunate and tragic death, but we also see a web of characters that are all involved in the case. So we see past and present narratives. And I think the author did a great job of just painting a picture of this man's life, his legacy, things that are particular to that timeframe, which I won't say, there were a lot of assumptions that were made about him and how he got to where he got to, and some negative associations with some strong men of the time.

But I think it really, it was a really great historical account of what I think is a very important man, because prior to this book, I had no idea who Andrew Haswell Green was. So I was grateful to The Great Mistake by Jonathan Lee.

Amy (25:57)

Okay, I can't even picture the cover of this in my head. And typically, when people bring books, I'm like, oh, yes, I know exactly. Even if I haven't read it, I do not have this book cataloged. So you are starting out so strong with this. I love kind of learning a little bit about all the other places that he has like intersected with, you know, things that we may have visited or, you know, live with every day and don't even know. But the Friday the 13th spin, at least for me, is really surprising. Like, I had no idea.

Victoria (26:30)

Yes, I was very surprised when I saw, wait, Friday the 13th. Oh no. And then diving in, I realized, okay, yes. And because this was something that happened in broad daylight. And even back then, Park Avenue, you know, was a place. So for something like that to occur, you know, in such an iconic place at the time was very troubling for the people at the time.

But also, especially for us readers, you know, New York Public Library is a destination. So just to imagine this probably wouldn't exist without this man. But also, he's just a very important figure in New York City history. And when I chat to friends, I have some friends who were born and raised in New York, never left. I've had neighbors who lived in New York for 20-something years. They had no

idea who this man was. So I think Jonathan Lee, the author, did a great job at just, you know, digging up this historical figure and bringing him to life. And I enjoyed it. It was very compelling.

So you get the historical fiction based on a true story and part true crime narrative as well. So, you know, I think it was a perfect mashup and it was a great book I felt for Summer.

Amy (27:40)

Yeah. And I think too, like for our Fiona Davis fans, because she always does a New York City landmark, this might be another like adjacent book or even could do a book flight. I know we have a lot of listeners that love her historical fiction because she acquaints us with NYC landmarks that we didn't know about. So this is just tying in perfectly with that.

Victoria (28:11)

Yes, yes, absolutely.

Okay, the second book I'm recommending is a novel of friendship. Now, Amy and I did an episode on my podcast about friendship and friendship is something I'm incredibly passionate about. I think it's an underrated relationship. And while I know it's hard to maintain, I think it's very important. And the book I'm talking about is All the Lonely People by Mike Gayle.

Now this book you might be familiar with. This one was first released July 13th, 2021 and the novel centers a black immigrant man from Jamaica. He's living in South London and he has lost touch with all of his friends after a traumatic event occurred. You'll discover it occurred five years before. His daughter is worried about him, but he reassures her. Oh, no need to worry. You know, I have friends. I have these three friends and all is good.

He had an opportunity to have a friend with his next door neighbor. She introduces herself and he's just like, no, he shut her out. He didn't want anything to essentially do with her. But when his daughter, who he's been lying to saying he has friends, decides that, well, I'm coming to visit, he now has to hatch up a plan to find these friends in order to keep up his charade.

So begins the story. So we see a narrative unfolding of one, what happened, why this man lost touch with his friends. We get to see the UK, England specifically in

a different light. So this goes back to the 1950's. We see this man kind of facing a lot of hardship. He experienced a lot of racism. We also see him fall in love with a woman named Joyce. She was a white woman working at a department store.

You know, they really hit it off; had a great relationship. We see her get pregnant and they make plans to marry. We see her family disown her and, you know, just the toll that took not just on her, but also him. And we see years later in the future when his son is struggling with addiction and we see Joyce facing early onset dementia.

So it really is a full circle story. It's a story about friendship, but it's also a story about family. We see him have a bridge with his next door neighbor after all, through babysitting for her and helping her on a project to end loneliness in their town, of which he becomes a spokesperson, which was quite interesting.

So I really enjoyed this book. It's not perfect, but I think it really does a good job at portraying this man's life, both with his family and what happened with his friendship. And especially the 1950's in England, it was a very pivotal time. It was a time of mass immigration as well. So I think the author portrayed that as well.

My family's Caribbean, and we were known, especially for immigrants of that time, we were known as the Windrush generation. Windrush is the name of a ship that brought immigrants from the Caribbean, the former colonies, none of which were independent at the time, to the UK. So I felt it did a good job at highlighting those folks who immigrated at that time and just essentially their struggles. But this is a story of family and friendship and it has a feel good ending, right? So I hope readers will give this one a go. So yes, this one is All the Lonely People by Mike Gayle.

Amy (31:44)

Victoria, would you call this an uplift book? You know, is it following those kinds of beats? Do you know what I'm talking about where, you know, there's things that they struggle with, but then at the end, it's like, it's truly an uplifting story.

Victoria (32:06)

No, this is a bit uplifting because we see, I like the trajectory. So we see this man with no friends lying to his daughter about having friends because she is genuinely worried about him. We do get his backstory. I think that just more informs the reason he is the way he is; why he's a bit abrasive. But we really see a

turn when he becomes a spokesperson for his Next Door Neighbors project, which is essentially to end what she calls a loneliness epidemic. Because I think lots of people are lonely, and I think that's also what the author was kind of trying to highlight as well. So him becoming the spokesperson for this campaign while at first, a bit reluctant to do so. It was like a full circle moment. So it is uplifting. It's sentimental, right? So you might have those moments where it does feel a bit sad, but it's also a very sweet and charming story. So yeah, it might start in a place that isn't so happy, but eventually we get there.

Amy (33:10)

Yeah. I was getting the Secret Life of Albert Entwistle vibes because they have so many overlaps in that sense that he has to overcome something and find community and, you know, it's about the trauma that he went through when he was young. And so, and I guess when Matt Cain came to do the podcast, he was talking about that they do have to hit certain beats with Uplit, meaning you can't start from like this amazing place, right? Cause then there's no trajectory with the story. You have to have something for readers to latch onto. And it makes sense that these two would sit so perfectly in the same uplift packet. So I'm so happy you brought this one.

Victoria (33:49)

Yes, it was so good. And I love Mike Gayle. So see, that's another thing. I'm the first person to say this book isn't perfect, but it's good.

And again, I was thinking about the character long afterwards. He really stuck with me. So yes, you might get like grumpy old man vibes, but he does come around and I love seeing him connect with his neighbor, Ashley, who is a young mom. So that really kind of helped to bridge the gap.

Okay, the third book on my list is non-fiction. Now I know sometimes people might be non-fiction for summer? But yes. And this one tells a really great story.

Now, I might be biased because I love stories about life at sea. So, disclaimer, I do gravitate to those books. Maybe it's because my husband's a mariner, my boys love fishing, you know, they're water people. Me, not so much. I enjoy it, but I'm not in love with it as much as they are. The book I'm talking about is The Lost Boys of Montauk by Amanda M. Fairbanks.

Now, Amanda M. Fairbanks is a journalist and this is a deep dive report that she

did on how a particular tragedy affected a Long Island fishing community. So in March, 1984, there were four men aboard a commercial fishing boat. The name of the boat is Wind Blown and it disappeared in a northeaster that happened between Montauk Point and Block Island. So essentially this boat disappears during the storm.

Unfortunately, this is something that happens, you know, even to this day, sometimes our fishing boats do go missing. And fishing is a hazard prone profession. So even if the boat doesn't disappear, you'll have accidents aboard, not just with the operation of the vessel, and the equipment to catch the fish, but it's just, it's incredibly accident prone. And for people who know the industry they know.

So anyway, like I said, this boat disappears. And what Amanda does is she does a report on what happened. And also she tells a history of fishing and the fact that fatalities are high in comparison to other professions. The toll that this takes, the psychological toll it takes, not just on the family members of the men who went missing, but also on the local community. Because again, fishermen support their economies. I mean, basically they're getting the food that we eat, but it also supports restaurants as well, processing facilities because you catch the fish, but then you have to process the fish and so on. So it's a ripple effect. So essentially we get to see the ripple effect that it has on the communities. The author did a great job of doing interviews with relatives and friends of the crew, which by the way, their bodies were never recovered. So there's that added element to that as well.

We also learn the story about these men and how some of them had troubled relationships with their families, which of course then compounds the grief. And then we also get a socioeconomic story, which is essentially how Montauk was a historical fishing village, but how it has become like a haven and a playground for wealthy New York families and wealthy Americans and just wealthy people from across the world who have homes there and they go there and they summer there. And it just shows how life has changed since that accident in the 80's, because this occurred in the 80's and how soaring property rates have pushed commercial fishermen to go out further. Because again, it's like it's a ripple effect.

You can't fish close to land anymore because of the population. So it pushes them out further to sea, which again, you know, if something happens, it becomes hard for them to recover. And it also makes it hard for them to be profitable in their

business. So essentially, this is a narrative that tells a story of grief of this fishing boat that disappeared, but it also tells the story of how it affects their loved ones, but also how it has changed the community once you lose fishermen.

So I know it sounds like, ah, this is a bit heavy, but I promise you, you will be turning the pages, you'll be invested in these fishermen, you'll be invested in their families because you're hearing from them directly. And then also the author just basically doing a report on Montauk. So you get a history of that particular area.

And I've been fortunate. I've been to Montauk. It's beautiful. I just love Long Island in general. I haven't been to Block Island. My husband's been, he loves it. And yeah, it's quite a history of the area. And the reason I think this will also be good for summer is because this is a big summer destination. So even if you've never been there before, maybe one day you might end up there or you know someone who's visited. Having this knowledge of this town ahead of time really changes your view on things. So it's set in a summer destination. It's a bit of a tragedy, but it's again a history and an eye opening account of just the people that live there. And it's a page turner. I know it's nonfiction, but I promise you it's a page turner.

Amy (39:20)

You have sold that idea to me that I will like this. I do love nonfiction and I especially love nonfiction that makes me rethink something that I had not thought about before.

I haven't been to that area, but maybe this might inspire a trip someday. I'm so excited that you brought something that was nonfiction because I tend to only focus on fiction books in the summer reading guides and it's nice to have some nonfiction to break it up.

Also, like just speaking to other people in my house, it's a good dad book too. It's maybe something I could share with my dad, right? My dad and I like to read nonfiction books together and I think this sounds like it would be right up his alley as well.

Victoria (40:05)

It's a great dad book. It's a great husband book. I think, you know, I'm not a stereotype because women do fish, right? I know some amazing women in my

area because my area where I live now was a historical fishing village. Is it more touristy now? You know, the South Florida area. But there are still many fishing families still there today and there are women who are amazing at it. But I know men tend to gravitate towards fishing. So I think this is also a great gift. So if you have someone in your life who is interested in fishing, I think this would be great. I promise it's not gonna turn them off from it. It gives you more awareness.

My husband has been a mariner his entire life. He's been in love with the water since he was like 10. And what this book does, I think, is it makes you respect the people who really go out there and risk their lives.

So it's like you love this for fun, because my husband did work on a commercial fishing boat at one point in his career. He doesn't now. But it really is a different life, I'm telling you. And the family men that you meet on there, you know, people with their families, they leave their families for weeks on end because they can't come back in if they don't have a certain amount of catch aboard because then they have to pay the owner of the boat.

Then the captain gets paid, then the crew gets paid. It's a whole thing. So I think it makes you respect the profession in a different light. And I love seafood very, very much. And this just makes me respect them even more.

Amy (41:41)

Well, I'm really glad you brought this. I'm really excited. I feel like I was trying to get out of craving backlist books so I can get done with this summer reading guide. But maybe this will have to be my stack after I get done reading all of that.

Victoria (41:54)

Yes. Let's do that, let's do that. Okay, the next book, this is a family book. So I gave you a friendship book earlier. This one is heavy on family. And the book I'm recommending is Morningside Heights by Joshua Henkin. Now this book came out June 15th, 2021.

And in the novel, we meet a man named Spence. He's a Shakespearean scholar, but unfortunately, when we meet him, he has just been diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's. And his wife, Prue, is struggling to care for him. And in the Mike Gayle story, his wife had early onset dementia. Morningside Heights, it's the reverse. It's the husband who has it now, and the wife has to care for him.

And I do gravitate to these kinds of stories, full transparency. My grandmother had Alzheimer's. I know what it's like living with someone with it full time because I was home with her that entire time. So I do gravitate to these stories. And we see the wife who is the primary caregiver start to feel isolated. And we also see her meeting someone new. She starts leaning on this man first, it's friendship, but then you realize there's a possibility for a romance there. I'm not gonna spoil it, I'm just leaving that there. They have a daughter together, her name is Sarah. She's a medical student, she's away in Los Angeles. We see her come home to kind of help her mom care for her dad, which again is something I can relate to wholeheartedly. We also then see Spencer's estranged son, his name is Arlo, and we see him come back into their lives as well.

Now he's a son from a previous marriage and him coming into the family picture at that point, he has some baggage he's carrying, so to say. He knows what life is like with his mom and that side of the family and kind of coming in, we see him seeing the contrast with life with his father, but also with his stepmom, who is kind of upbeat and the sister and that dynamic.

So this really is a novel about the complexities of family. It's about the complexities of marriage because like I said, you know, this woman now has a possibility of a romance with someone else. So clearly this marriage is going through something. So it's a marriage surviving. It's a marriage trying to survive this hardship. It's also a story about the children and the love between siblings, but then also between their parents as well. But also it's about the things that we give up when our family is going through something because, again, if any of our listeners have or know of a family member who is dealing with Alzheimer's and dementia, it can be a struggle.

Actually, not even just Alzheimer's and dementia, just anything health related that requires the family showing up and providing care, but it also - so this is a hopeful part - how we survive when life turns out differently than we thought. Because I know for me, first time, I'm always, you know, you have this vision of your life, but life takes you in different directions. And we see how we come out on the other side. So we see this family coming out on the other side. They obviously love and care for each other. So it's really a character study. See, this is one of those books where you're following the people, but I was just incredibly invested in them. And I think the author just, gave us really beautifully drawn characters. And that's Morningside Heights by Joshua Henkin.

Amy (45:26)

This is my kind of book. I love a family drama; and I love character driven stories. So, and this sounds like that's what this is. And I love hearing more about this one. I actually have heard nothing about this. So I'm really, really excited that you brought this one to the show.

You nailed it. Like I truly, I'm only familiar with Mike's book. I wasn't familiar with anybody else's. So that was so cool.

Victoria (45:51)

Yay.

Okay well, tell me if you're familiar with the last book. So book five is another nonfiction. So I gave you two nonfiction, one family, one friendship, one historical fiction. Okay.

This nonfiction book is entitled Home Made by Liz Hauck. Now, this is a very interesting book. It's a memoir about a woman who came up with the idea to do a particular project with her father. Unfortunately, her father passes away, but she still sees the project through. I'll get into detail with this book. But have you heard of Home Made by Liz Hauck?

Amy (46:56)

No. I haven't.

Victoria (46:57)

Okay. Well, I really gravitated to this book because I'm a firm believer in showing up for your local community. So I know we talked a lot about our online community and the book community and I absolutely love this space and I'm so grateful for books and readers and being able to connect on that level. But I'm also very passionate about showing up for the people in my community. Like I want to be that person who knows more about the people in my community, you know, what are we doing right? But also what are we doing wrong? How can we be better? How can we show up for people?

Because I feel that a part of what is wrong with the world today, to be quite frank, is that people don't feel seen, people don't feel heard, people don't feel understood. So when I realized that this author was sharing a story about her experience, of course, this is a memoir of a particular experience, but it had to do

with her showing up for people in her community, I was like, okay, I'm signing up.

So this book is set in 2006 and the author Liz, Liz Hauck, she decided to be a volunteer at a group home for adolescent boys. Now these boys are in state care. She came up with this idea with her father to volunteer. And her father, by the way, is a social worker, so he has that background. And he is also the co-founder of the nonprofit that supports the residents, right? So her father clearly is very involved with people. And they came up with this idea for this project. What is the project, you might ask?

It's her and her dad were going to start a weekly cooking program for the teenage boys in this state home. Like I said, unfortunately, her father passed away, but she decided to trudge along with it and make this a reality. Now her background is she's a Spanish teacher, by the way. She had no clear plans for her future. You know, sometimes when you get to that crossroads in your life, it was clear that she was there. She was of course grieving the passing of her father, but she decided, you know, I'm going to do this anyway. I'm going to see this through.

You're probably going to think it's a way for her to kind of, you know, connect with her dad in some way. And you'd be right to assume that. But it was also to understand his work as well. So anyway, she shows up to the home, and this was the shtick. She'd get eight boys together at any one given time. They would pick the menus, and she would show up once a week with the groceries, which by the way, she paid for her groceries herself. This wasn't like being subsidized or provided for. And she would show up, and they would cook together, and they would eat together. And they did this for three years. Right, and I was kind of sad that the home closed because of lack of funding, but she was going along and going along and doing this.

And you know, like teenage boys would do, you know, they want pizza, like quesadillas, just, you know, stir fry, all the things that you, you know, you'd think of a teenage boy wanting, but then they asked for fried chicken one day.

And some of these recipes she's never made before in her life. And fried chicken in particular, she had never made herself. You know, you go out, you get food, but she's never made it herself. And I know it sounds crazy, but her not making fried chicken before and connecting with the boys over fried chicken was kind of a very interesting shift because she kind of realized that some of the foods these boys were selecting, were tied to like their race and their culture and they never

really addressed this conversation.

So just imagine this woman just showing up, you know, unfortunately these boys are from marginalized communities and groups, by her showing up and participating and them cooking and them eating, they were able to like bridge gaps and bridge divides and have meaningful conversations in a way that I thought were just very insightful. Some of these boys were carrying traumas from their childhood.

Yeah, so it was just very interesting how they would have really meaningful conversations around food. I mean, there are lots of fun, light, beautiful moments, but there were also just some incredibly eye-opening, tear-jerking stories as well. Some of them have traumas from their childhood. Some of them are angry that they are here and in this position. It was a very eye-opening conversation to have.

I think many people, myself included, are so removed from children who are in state care and who sometimes can't even have opportunities to be in foster homes. Like being in a foster home is a privilege for some of these children. Of course, that in itself has its baggage, you know, just like children who go through adoption, but these children who are in the state home, it was just, it was, it was very eye-opening for me just to see them, and, and then be so vulnerable with the author and seeing her show up week after week, just cooking and engaging in this activity and just having conversations and showing up for them.

The sad part, like I said earlier, unfortunately, she was only able to do this for three years because the residence closed due to lack of funding. And the director at the time encouraged the author, hey, you should tell this story because otherwise it's like this experience would have never existed.

Essentially, yeah, this is what she did in this book - her sharing just the conversations that we have over food. I think essentially that's what it is. I have lots of meaningful conversations with friends and family over food. You know, come over, let's have lunch, let's have dinner, let's have coffee. You know, sometimes it's these little simple things. So yeah, essentially this is a memoir of the conversations that happen over food. It's people being vulnerable.

There's also grief because again, she is essentially doing this project, doing this idea that she had concocted with her dad, her dad passed away, her dad was a

part of this facility. So we see her kind of dealing with that. So I know again, sounds like a grief memoir, it kind of is, but it is joyful in the sense of how she showed up in this space. And you get to discover at the end, which I won't say what she ended up doing after the fact.

So yeah, I really enjoy this memoir. I think it makes her a good summer read because I think summer and reading is all about connection. You know, when you think about going on family holidays and trips and so on, in this book, you kind of get the connection of a family that you never knew you needed or had in the pages. So you're gonna get the grief, you're gonna get the food, but you see what happens when people come together over dinner. And I just want to think about it that way. Yes, they're in state care, but it's like showing up for a dinner party and getting to know the people that you're having dinner with.

Amy (54:14)

Are there recipes in this book, Victoria, or no recipes?

Victoria (54:17)

I don't remember recipes, no. I do remember, though, that she did get a recipe because, again, many of the things these boys were asking for, she never made them herself. I remember in particular that she got a recipe from a friend's mother. I think so, because this is how the conversation came up. She didn't know how to make fried chicken. She got a recipe. She showed up with these ingredients to make it. And the boys are looking at her like, that's how you make fried chicken? Like, no, ma'am. I don't remember specific recipes, but I just remember that specific dynamic about this really bad fried chicken recipe that she got.

Amy (54:57)

I have to say going along with the summer book theme, like this would be a great one for our book club to do together and have a dinner party and talk about how food, you know, acted in this, this setting and ways that they could get involved in the community and other things that they could be doing. This is incredibly inspiring. It sounds heartwarming. It sounds like a good book for people that love books about food themes, but I think more importantly, you know, acknowledging the connections that are made around food and how that can often be, I feel like a building block for connection with people that are outside of our communities and give us an opportunity to experience new dishes and culinary experiences because of other cultures and learning about that. So the fact that fried chicken

is such an important part of this story that. is really inspiring, maybe you guys could host something around fried chicken gatherings. I feel like that would be a great summer picnic kind of dish.

Victoria (56:05)

Right, you know what I was thinking as you were just talking just now is if we were to invite everyone in our book club to bring a dish, we would have such a variety, like your favorite dish. Let's be specific, if everyone were to bring their favorite dish, it would be so wildly different because for me, the food I would eat absolutely every day is a good curry, like a chicken curry, even like chickpeas if you want, like an alternative to meat. I just love curry. Like curry is such a big thing for me growing up. It was a big part of my family's culture. So, you know, I would have curry. Or if it was like my dad, whose family they're very Jamaican, he'd come with some jerk chicken.

You know, he wouldn't do fried chicken, like we have fried chicken, but it would be like more of a jerk chicken. And I was thinking of one of my community members, she loves dumplings. Like her family, they'll sit, and they'll make dumplings. But the thing is, if, and she loves dumplings and she would eat dumplings every day. So if we all brought a meal to book club, that was our favorite, like family meal, favorite thing that you loved growing up, we would have so many different things. Some people would bring pies, some people would bring pasta. I love Italian food too.

So it's like, you know, I think that's the conversation at the heart of this book is she was doing an amazing thing showing up at this place. But what we realized is just how much food is tied to tradition and culture, and that how we can be introduced to and have a conversation about race and culture over food, because that's what happened essentially. They never talked about like, you know, their socioeconomic background or the fact that, okay, this person is white, this person is brown, this person is black. No, it never came up. But in that moment about the fried chicken, you know, some of them were like, no, that's not how, you know, my family is Southern; this is how we cook fried chicken. Which is just very, very interesting.

And I know that I'm a black woman, but the way my mom cooks fried chicken is very different from the fried chicken I've had here in the States. So a whole conversation would be had about it. And I can see my mom, cause she's a cook in our family just going on and on, oh, this is why I do this. Or this is why I do that.

And then someone would say, well, this is what I had growing up. We didn't have access to. So it really opens up conversation. It really, really does. And I think food can fix a lot of problems. We can learn so much from each other at a dinner party about food. All we need is to have open minds and hungry bellies.

Amy (58:52)

I have to say, I would rather go to your picnic with curry and jerk chicken than my Midwestern picnic, which would include tuna noodle casserole. I'm thinking of like some of the things I grew up on. Your jerk chicken sounds awesome for a cookout. I would need to work on what I would bring that would represent my childhood and what I grew up with that would be a great picnic dish.

Victoria (59:18)

For me, it would have to be something chicken-based. Sunday dinner was a huge thing in my family growing up. We would try to eat together during the week, but if it didn't work out, life happens. But Sunday, that was a non-negotiable. So Sunday dinner was a big thing. So we would have rice and peas.

And I found out, like, I have this Bahamian friend, we say rice and peas, she says peas and rice, which was very interesting. I'm like, okay. So yes, rice and peas was a staple. We'd probably have some chicken something. And my mom loved fish, like fish was just, we just loved fish. So if it was a special Sunday, we'd have fish, then you have your vegetables, then you'd have some potato, even though you have the rice and you choose, or you just have a little of each and we'd all sit down and we'd eat. That was just like Sunday. So I know to be true to my childhood, it would have to be some chicken, whether it's a jerk chicken or a stewed chicken or my mom's version of fried chicken, which is very different from Southern fried chicken in the States. But yeah, it would be some chicken dinner, but we would learn so much from each other.

Amy (1:00:32)

We really would; we would.

Victoria, this is wonderful. I loved all of the books that you brought to our show. They were not on my radar. And it's hard to fool me. And I liked being fooled today that you had such a great stack. I didn't want to see them early because I figured I would, you know, try to figure out everything before you got here. And it was so nice just to let you be a storyteller. And clearly, you're a great one. You have a wonderful podcast. I'd love for our listeners to hear. How they can connect

with you and learn more about your Summer Reading Guide and the work that you do.

Victoria (1:00:59)

Thank you so much, Amy. It's been a joy chatting with you and four out of five. I mean, I think I did incredibly well with bringing very different books to the show. So if listeners are interested, you can get the Summer Reading Guide by visiting thesummerreadingguide.com. So you have to put the word T -H -Esummerreadingguide com. You can get access to the latest Summer Reading Guide. The 2024 Summer Reading Guide will be available at the end of May. Already working on it, which is really exciting. But if you scroll down on the page, you will find links to the previous guides. So you can see all the books that were on each guide's list. If you want the PDF guide, you can join my community. So bibliolifestyle.com/community.

And if you want to hear more from me, listen to the Reader's Couch podcast on your favorite platforms or on Apple, we're on Google, Spotify, any way you listen, you can get the show to get even more recommendations.

Amy (1:01:45)

Such a treat. I'm so glad that you got to be over here in this space. It's been such a wonderful friendship and I'm so grateful that I get to share books with you, my friend.

Victoria (1:01:50)

I'm so grateful that we connected and I love chatting books with you and until next time, my friend, see you soon.

This transcript is provided for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, errors and omissions may occur. The content of this transcript may not be comprehensive and should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional advice or judgment. The views and opinions expressed by individuals in this transcript are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the transcriber or any associated entities. Furthermore, this transcript may be subject to copyright protection. Any

reproduction, distribution, or other use of this transcript without the express permission of the copyright owner is strictly prohibited.