

BOOK CLUB KIT

LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Book Clubber,

My mother often told me she had the best book friends ever. And if you've made your way to this book club kit then there's a good chance you have a whole club full of reading friends as well. Lucky you. There's no better way to enjoy books than to share them.

My mother's family settled on Martha's Vineyard in 1891 and *The Martha's Vineyard Beach and Book Club* is based on the stories she told us about growing up there during WWII. She and her book friends were voracious readers and met on the beaches of Martha's Vineyard every summer to play cards, eat egg salad sandwiches and homemade cookies, and share their lives. Watching them in action was enthralling and I've always been envious of her ability to hold her group of friends together with books and beach time. Sitting in low-slung beach chairs, in their cotton floral swimsuits, shoulders and arms tanned red-brown, they talked about everything under the actual sun: books, kids, heartbreak, old times, but mostly I remember the laughter. It was lovely bringing them back to life, however briefly, for one last book club meeting.

I hope you enjoy the book and travelling back to lovely Martha's Vineyard in the 1940s. There's a lot to unpack here—the gut-wrenching choice of whether to choose country over friends, the complicated nature of family bonds, and what really makes a family. And as the title suggests, the book abounds with ideas for book clubs to dig into: How book clubs have changed in eighty years. And how they've stayed the same. The delicate art of choosing a new member. Does a book club need a greater mission or is it mostly to serve as a gathering place for friends to socialize?

I hope this book club kit helps you have the most enjoyable book club gathering ever and makes you feel like you're right there with the Smith sisters, on Martha's Vineyard. And how lucky you are to have the best book friends ever to share it with.

Warmly,

Martha Hall Kelly

BEHIND THE BOOK



This is the farmhouse where my mother Joanne Finnegan Hall grew up and it was the inspiration for Copper Pond Farm in my new novel, *The Martha's Vineyard Beach and Book Club*. It still stands in the town of West Tisbury on the island of Martha's Vineyard, off the coast of Massachusetts. I've long had a strong personal connection to this storied island and a desire to bring its history to life.

My great grandparents William and Emma Smith moved to the Vineyard and this house in 1891, from New Bedford, where they met working at the textile mills, and they started a flower farm here—it was, according to the *Vineyard Gazette*, a local landmark in their day.

Their daughter, also named Emma, Emma Louise, loved tending the flowers, but went to school off-island, became a teacher and married Christopher Finnegan, a grocer from Keene, New Hampshire. They had four children, including my mother Joanne and moved home to take care of her ailing mother during the Depression.

My mother talked a lot about growing up in this house—the round dining room table that her grandfather made, and how Emma Louise would serve Potato Bargain for dinner, just potatoes and onions simmered in water, and would set the table with her red linen tablecloth so the family wouldn't notice how simple the meal was. To make ends meet after her husband died, Emma Louise sold her warm cider doughnuts in front of the house to passersby—something my Aunt Mary, a teen at the time, never got over the embarrassment of—but my mother loved since it brought people to that sleepy part of the island.

Once my mother was ready for high school, she and Emma Louise moved to the nearby harbor town of Vineyard Haven (the big city LOL) and my parents eventually sold the house.

Though I never lived there, the State Road farm still feels like it's ours. My husband took a picture of me with the house in the background as we stood in the adjacent market's parking lot.

As we drove out of the lot, I asked my husband to drive slowly by the house, and I tried to get a glimpse of the dining room, where my mother once sat after driving the cows home at twilight, and ate Potato Bargain at the dining room table with the red linen tablecloth.

My mother as a child and her older sister Mary



My mother's mother, Emma Louise, in the garden behind the State Road house



My mother, Joanne Finnegan and her friend Betty Gale



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *The Martha's Vineyard Beach and Book Club* has a contemporary storyline—set in 2016—framing the story, but the majority of the novel follows the Smith sisters during World War II. Why do you think Martha Hall Kelly chose to add a contemporary thread to the novel? Were you surprised by how the two storylines came together in the end?
2. Many historical fiction novels set during World War II are set in Europe. But *The Martha's Vineyard Beach and Book Club* is set on US shores. Were you aware of war efforts happening off the coast of Martha's Vineyard? Did it change your understanding of American soldiers during this specific time in history?
3. Kelly populates the book with very strong female characters. Which character's journey resonated with you the most? Why?
4. The inspiring power of book clubs and storytelling is a big theme in the narrative. What other overarching themes did you notice?
5. How did the wartime book club that Cadence and Bess prompt change for women in their community? How do you think of the books they chose to read influenced these changes?
6. Bess, Cadence's best friend and her brother Tom's girlfriend, comes from a wealthy family but left that life of privilege behind to work the land and live with the Smith sisters and Gram. Why do you think she did that? What did she learn?
7. How does the arrival of the U.S. Army shake things up for the Smith sisters and their neighbors on the island? What are the consequences of the Smith family hiding the mysterious soldier who washes up on their shores?
8. Cadence's love interest in the novel is a British serviceman, Major Gilbert. What secrets are they both hiding from each other, and how did you feel their story was resolved?
9. Briar has a great interest in submarines and is convinced that she's seeing them offshore even though no one believes her. How does her interest in the war shape her actions and decisions?
10. What are some key moments of growth for the main characters? How do they change throughout the novel?
11. What does the setting of Martha's Vineyard symbolize for the characters in both time periods? How does the island setting influence the story?
12. What message do you think the author is trying to impart about female friendships and family?
13. If you've read Martha Hall Kelly's historical fiction previously, how did this novel compare to her others?

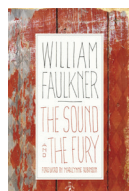
BOOKS MENTIONED IN THE MARTHA'S VINEYARD BEACH AND BOOK CLUB



The Valley of the Dolls



The Song of Bernadette*



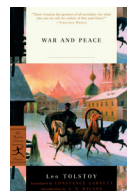
The Sound and the Fury



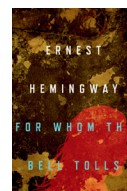
The Grapes of Wrath



Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm



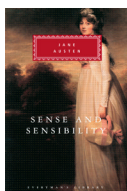
War and Peace



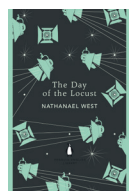
For Whom the Bell Tolls



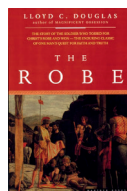
Frankenstein



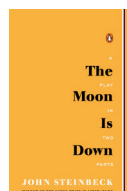
Sense and Sensibility



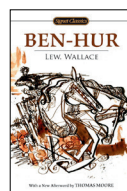
The Day of the Locust



The Robe



The Moon is Down



Ben-Hur



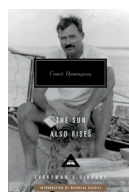
The Heart is a Lonely Hunter



The Great Gatsby



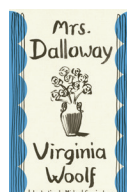
The Beautiful and Damned



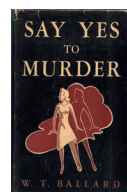
The Sun Also Rises



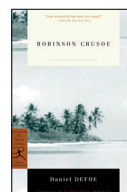
Madeline



Mrs. Dalloway



Say Yes to Murder



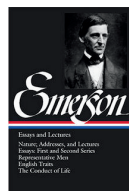
Robinson Crusoe



Anna Karenina



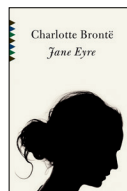
Zaynab



Emerson's Essays



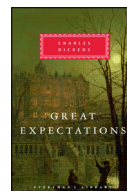
Madame Bovary



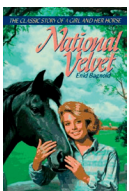
Jane Eyre



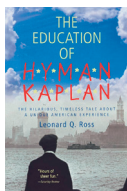
Joan of Arc*



Great Expectations



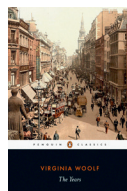
National Velvet



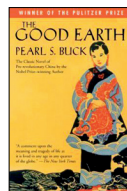
The Education of Hyman Kaplan



The African Queen



The Years



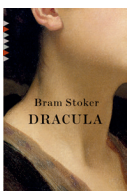
The Good Earth



Rebecca



Ethan Frome



Dracula



Brideshead Revisited*

*Considered by the book club for monthly reading pick

RECIPES

Grandma's Rocks

Thanks to Emma Finnegan

Ingredients:

- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups brown sugar
- 1 cup shortening
- 3 eggs
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 cup nut meats
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour
- 1 tsp. soda
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- Salt

Directions: Drop from spoon.

Hermits

Thanks to Mrs. Herman Noyes

Ingredients:

- 1 egg
- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup molasses
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. cloves
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. nutmeg

Directions: Add 1 tsp. of soda dissolved in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of tepid water. Add 3 cups of flour, 1 cup of raisins and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup nut meats. Drop by teaspoon on butter sheet. Bake at 375°.

Surprise cookies

Credit by Effie Littlefield

Ingredients:

- 3 cups sifted flour
- 1 tsp. soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt
- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup brown sugar, packed
- 1 cup butter, $\frac{1}{2}$ other shortening
- 2 eggs
- 2 tbsp. water
- 1 nine oz. chocolate wafers
- 1 tsp. vanilla

Directions: Cream the butter with the sugar. Blend in the unbeaten eggs, water, and vanilla and beat well. Sift the dry ingredients together and add. Mix thoroughly. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours. Open package of wafers and enclose each wafer in about 1 tbs. of dough. Place on greased cookie sheet about 2" apart and bake at 375° for 10 to 12 minutes. Each may be topped with a walnut half if desired.

Oyster Cracker Snacks

Thanks to Bibi Nichols

Ingredients:

- 2 pkg. oyster crackers
- 1 pkg. ranch dressing
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp dill
- Garlic salt
- Lemon pepper
- 1 c. peanut oil

Directions: Add seasonings to crackers, mix, pour in oil, mix. Spread on waxed paper—leave 1 hour.

RECIPES

Emma's Potato Bargain (Crusty and Good)

Ingredients:

Onions, sliced
Potatoes, thinly sliced
Salt and pepper, to taste
Salt pork, cubed

Directions: Butter the bottom of a baking dish well and line with onions, then line with thin sliced raw potatoes. Salt and pepper, add water almost to cover. Put cubes of salt pork on top. Cook in slow oven at 250 degrees for 3 hours.

Grandma's Slunguleon

Ingredients:

16 oz. package shell macaroni
1 lb. lean ground beef
1 large onion, chopped
2 small cans tomato soup
2 teaspoons minced garlic
Salt and pepper, to taste

Directions: Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Add pasta and cook for 8 to 10 minutes or until al dente; drain and place in large saucepan. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, brown beef over medium heat; just before beef is browned, stir in onion. Add beef mixture to pasta, and stir in tomato soup, garlic, salt, and pepper. Cook over low heat, 10 to 15 minutes, or until heated through.

Cracker Pie

Ingredients:

3 egg whites
1 cup sugar
1 tsp. baking powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. vanilla
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped nuts
(walnuts or pecans)
1 cup cracker crumbs
(Ritz crackers or
Waverly wafers)
Ice cream (vanilla)

Directions: Beat egg whites until stiff.

Add sugar, baking powder, and vanilla.

Mix each in well. Fold in nuts. Add

cracker crumbs (crumbs are easily

obtained by using a rolling pin). Mix

all carefully and pour into well-greased

8" pie plate. Bake 30 minutes at 350°F.

Let cool in its plate but outside oven.

Cut in wedges, top with ice cream and

serve to 6 happy dessert lovers! Pie

freezes well, too.

Beetlebug Honey Wine

As seen in *The Martha's*
Vineyard Beach and Book Club

Ingredients:

1 oz. strawberry citrus syrup
4 oz. rose
4 oz. soda water

Directions: In a glass, combine all ingredients over ice and stir. Garnish with a lime wheel, rosemary, or fresh mint and enjoy!

Beacon Hill Cookies

Thanks to Mrs. Arthur Stewart

Ingredients:

1 cup semi-sweet chocolate bits
2 egg whites
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. vanilla
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. vinegar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped nuts
Dash salt

Directions: Melt one cup (6 oz.) semi-sweet chocolate bits over hot water. Beat egg whites with a dash of salt until foamy. Gradually add sugar and beat until it stands in stiff peaks. Beat in vanilla and vinegar. Fold in chocolate and chopped nuts. Drop by teaspoon on greased cookie sheet. Place half nut on top of each. Bake at 350°F for 10 minutes. Remove immediately.

RECIPES

Apple Cider Donuts

Ingredients:

2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups apple cider or unfiltered apple juice
6 tbsp. unsalted butter
3 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
3 tsp. ground cinnamon, divided
2 or 4 teaspoons baking powder
1 tsp. kosher salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking soda
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground nutmeg, preferably freshly grated
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup packed light or dark brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup unsweetened applesauce
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cold buttermilk or kefir
2 cold large eggs
1 cup granulated sugar
2 quarts vegetable, canola,
or peanut oil for deep frying

Directions: Bring the apple cider to a boil in a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Boil until reduced to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup and syrupy. Remove from the heat, add the butter, then whisk until melted and combined. Add the brown sugar and whisk until melted. Scrape the mixture into a medium bowl.

Mix the wet ingredients. Add the applesauce, buttermilk, and eggs to the bowl with the apple cider mixture. Whisk until smooth.

Place the all-purpose flour, ground cinnamon, baking powder, kosher salt, baking soda, and ground nutmeg in a large bowl and whisk to combine.

Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients. Scrape the cider mixture into the flour mixture. Stir with a rubber spatula until a sticky dough forms. Do not overmix.

Chill the dough and make the cinnamon sugar. Cover the bowl and refrigerate 1 hour. Meanwhile, place the remaining ground cinnamon and granulated sugar in a wide, shallow bowl, or pie plate and stir to combine.

Roll the dough out until $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick. Cut donuts out with a floured donut cutter.

Fry in batches of 4 donuts. Gently place the donuts in the oil and fry, flipping once, until puffed and golden brown. Drain off the excess oil and place on the wire rack.

Immediately place the donuts one at a time in the reserved cinnamon sugar and toss until well-coated, sprinkling some of the sugar over the donut and making sure the sides are well coated. Return to the wire rack.

Fry the donut holes in 2 batches and coat in cinnamon sugar.

For more from Martha Hall Kelly
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