



Celebrating Ten Years of Speaking Volumes by Carol Sarafconn

This month we celebrate the tenth anniversary of “Speaking Volumes,” the radio book club. For ten years we have been meeting monthly to discuss the books we have read. The credit for creating, launching—and naming—“Speaking Volumes” goes to Valerie Clapham, a former staff member at Audio Journal. Valerie recruited a group of volunteers who like to read and talk about books and “Speaking Volumes” was off and running.

Altogether we have read 108 books. Our very first book, in April 2011, was “The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society” by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows. Since then, our selections have been varied and wide-ranging. We have read many novels, including quite a few historical fiction titles; but our reading list has not been limited to fiction. We have explored non-fiction (14) including several biographies and memoirs. Occasionally we have taken on a science fiction title (3) and, once, a vampire story. We have discussed classics by Dickens, Hemingway, Hawthorne, and others. And the places we have visited! From our start in Guernsey, “Speaking Volumes” has taken us to Kenya (“Assegai”), Nazi Germany (“The Book Thief”), Australia (“The Light Between Oceans” and “The Lost Man”), China (“The Bonesetter’s Daughter”), Canada (“The Tenderness of Wolves”), Amsterdam (“The Dinner”), Russia (“A Gentleman in Moscow”), Afghanistan (“And the Mountains Echoed”), Greece (“Eleni”), occupied France (“All the Light We Cannot See”), Peru (“Bel Canto”), Nigeria (Half a Yellow Sun), England (“The Cuckoo’s Calling”) Japan (“Memoirs of a Geisha”), Ghana (“Homegoing”), India (“The Widows of Malabar Hill”), Sweden (“Bear Town”) and several Indian nations (“Round House”, “Killers of the Flower Moon”, “Rez Life”).

The format of our program is simple and essentially unchanged since its inception by Valerie. We agree on a book to read before we meet, choosing only titles that are available from the Talking Book Library. Four to six of us gather in the studio (or more recently, on Zoom). We begin by reading a summary of the book, we each share our reaction to the book,

and then we enjoy an unstructured discussion. We encourage listeners to call the studio to join in with their comments or, currently, to email us their thoughts. Four times over the years we have been fortunate to have the book's author call in to join our discussion and take our questions. At the conclusion of the hour, we announce the next few upcoming books. Credit for the success of the program goes to both to Valerie Clapham for her original concept and to the dedicated volunteer participants who come every month prepared to share their thoughts, reactions, insights, and feelings about each book. We do not always agree and that is half the fun.