

# WOMONSCAPE TIMES

~A monthly publication by the Womonscape Center Inc.~



## W O M O N S C A P E C E N T E R



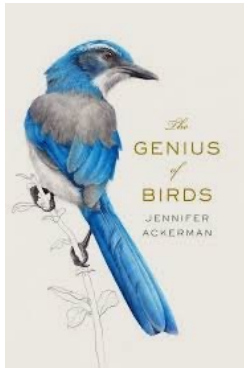
### No-RULES BOOK GROUP (NRBG)

April 16 is our next Womonscape No-Rules Book Group. Meet at the Richland County Courthouse at 10:30am in Conference Room #1 on the main level. Bring what you've been reading or simply bring *you*. Here are some of the highlights from our March meeting.

### What's Inside

NRBG Reviews	1-5
Have you Heard?	6-9
March Puzzle Answers	6
Quotes	10
Next Meeting Date	1, 10

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### THE GENIUS OF BIRDS

by Jennifer Ackerman, nonfiction

It's time to rethink the term "bird brain" and respect birds for their incredible intelligence. Science writer Jennifer Ackerman has organized recent research on the intelligence of birds into highly readable, fascinating chapters. Birds featured include the New Caledonia Crow, the English Sparrow, and the Black-Capped Chickadee who will impress the reader with their problem-solving skills, their use of tools, their adaptability, and their highly-detailed memory. This book will definitely make you rethink the so-called superiority of human intelligence.

### THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL

#### RECOMMEND

by Katarina Bivald, fiction



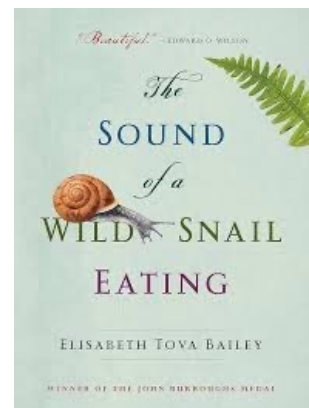
Swedish writer Katarina Bivald has given us a light-hearted debut novel that quite accurately describes life in a small midwestern town. The main character is Sara Lindqvist, who decides to travel from her native Sweden to visit a penpal in Broken Wheel, Iowa. Broken Wheel is definitely a town that has seen a better day, with a

small population of long-term residents who have entrenched habits and opinions. Sara brings a welcome bit of light to the town and its inhabitants who, in turn, bring a sense of family to Sara. Our reviewer enjoyed spending time with the many eccentric but lovable characters in this little book.

### THE SOUND OF A WILD SNAIL EATING

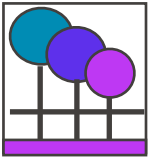
by Elisabeth Tova Bailey, nonfiction

In this unusual memoir, Elisabeth Tova Bailey tells how a snail helped her survive a year-long bout with a mysterious illness. One day while she was bedridden, Elisabeth noticed that a common woodland snail had somehow ended up on her nightstand. Rather than have the snail removed, she chose to observe and study it, finding a comforting distraction in watching the small animal and reflecting on the natural world and her own place in it.



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***NO-RULES BOOK GROUP (NRBG)***

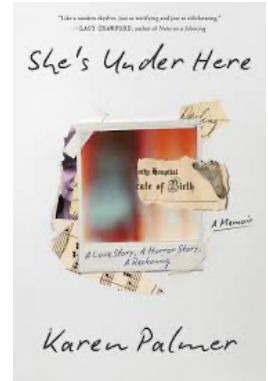
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**SHE’S UNDER HERE: A LOVE STORY, A HORROR STORY, A RECKONING**

by Karen Palmer, nonfiction

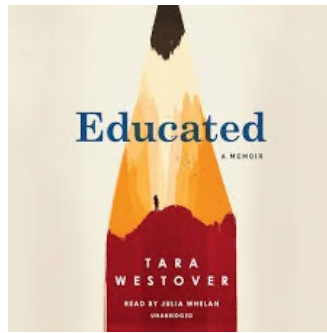
This memoir begins with a chilling sentence: “Once upon a time, I disappeared.” Karen did, indeed, disappear in 1989, along with her second husband and her two daughters, in an effort to escape the continuing threats of violence from her first husband. Here she relates the situations and choices that led to this dramatic choice, and the repercussions in the years since: a powerful story.



**EDUCATED**

by Tara Westover, nonfiction

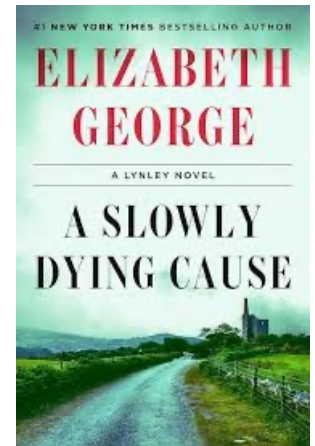
Tara Westover was raised by highly religious, survivalist parents in rural Idaho. She was homeschooled which, in her case, meant spending her days stewing herbs for her midwife/healer mother and working in her father’s salvage yard. She taught herself enough math and grammar to attend *Brigham Young, Harvard, and Cambridge* Universities. But Tara’s self-reliance and educational choices also distanced her from her family. In this book, Westover considers the choices she made and how they shaped her sense of identity and perception of home.



**A SLOWLY DYING CAUSE**

by Elizabeth George, fiction

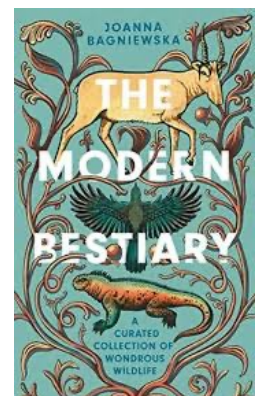
This is the latest book in a series of detective novels featuring Detective Inspector Thomas Lynley and his sidekick, Sergeant Barbara Havers. Set in Cornwall, England, Lynley and Havers must solve the murder of tin miner Michael Lobb, who was found dead in his workshop. Greed, power, and family dynamics point to a number of possible suspects. Elizabeth George is known for her excellent characterizations and engrossing plot lines. Our reviewer is a big fan of Ms. George’s work.



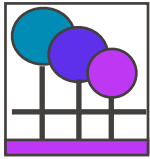
**THE MODERN BESTIARY: A CURATED COLLECTION OF WONDROUS CREATURES**

by Joanna Bagniewska, nonfiction

Zoologist Joanna Bagniewska earned a PhD. from the *University of Oxford* and works as a senior lecturer in Environmental Sciences at *Brunel University* in London. In this book she shares her knowledge and interest in animals by focusing on one hundred real but strange creatures, from the albatross to the grasshopper mouse to the pearl fish. The chapters are short, cleverly written, and highly interesting, with beautiful illustrations, created in the style of an old-fashioned encyclopedia of nature.



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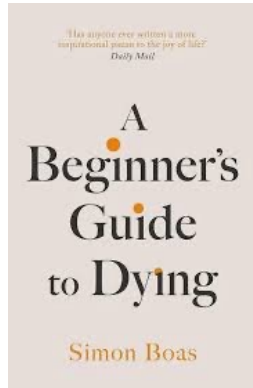
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**A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO DYING**  
by Simon Boaz, nonfiction

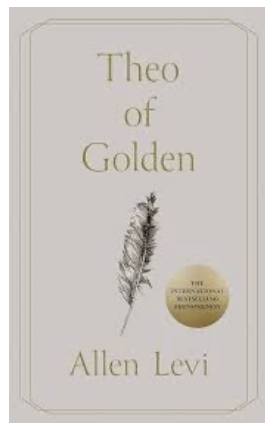


This book is a memoir, but with a very specific focus. English writer and international aid worker Simon Boaz discovered that he had incurable cancer when he was in his mid-40s, and decided to write an essay about getting the news. An eternal optimist, he was able to find humor and joy in his last months, and projected this in his writing. Simon's essay was quickly shared on the internet, becoming so popular that he continued to write about his experiences and perspectives, producing several essays and turning them into this book. The result has been deemed "a hymn to the joy and preciousness of life," and has important lessons for all, regardless of health status.

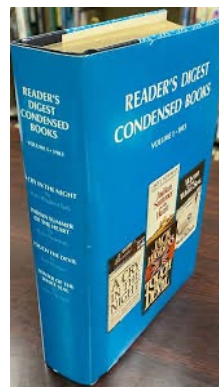


**THEO OF GOLDEN**  
by Allen Levi, fiction

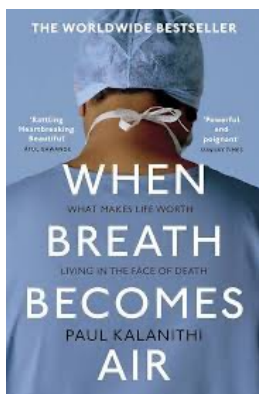
The title character of Allen Levi's novel is an older man who visits a coffee house in the small southern town of Golden, where some ninety-two portraits hang on the walls. Each portrait was completed by a local artist, and each depicts one of the Golden residents. Theo decides to purchase each portrait and deliver it to the person it portrays. With each delivery, a story is uncovered. This simple premise has produced a beautiful, thoughtful novel that is rightfully a national bestseller.



**READER'S DIGEST CONDENSED BOOKS**  
various titles, fiction and nonfiction



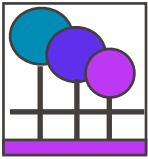
From 1950 to 1997, *Reader's Digest* magazine produced a series of anthologies of general interest books. Some were nonfiction, some were fiction, but all were carefully edited to assure consistent storytelling, even if shortened from the original versions. Our reviewer recently picked up a thrift store volume focused on classic horror stories, such as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and The Uninvited, and found it highly readable. She encourages others to check out thrift store or library book sale copies and see for yourselves what fun this sort of reading can be.



**WHEN BREATH BECOMES AIR**  
by Paul Kalanithi, nonfiction

The writer of this memoir was a neurosurgeon who went from treating patients to becoming a patient himself within a matter of days. He devoted the final months of his life to writing this reflection on life and the relationship between doctor and patient. The book was a 2017 finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

(Continued on page 4)



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## FILM/TELEVISION REVIEWS

(Continued from page 3)

### **MISGIVINGS**

feature film, 2024, Prime Video

Joanne Connor stars in this Australian Independent film about a woman who takes a surprising solo road trip. Along the way she gradually discovers shocking truths about her life and her husband. The story starts out slowly, building to an interesting and twisted conclusion.



### **RENTAL FAMILY**

feature film, 2025, Hulu

Living in urban areas of Japan can be incredibly lonely: you are surrounded by millions of people, each in their own isolated world. In order to fill the companionship gap and save face in cultural gatherings, rental family services began hiring professional actors to portray friends, family members, or coworkers for social events or general companionship. *Rental Family* is based on this real-life concept, although the story is fictional. An American actor based in Tokyo is hired by a rental family agency and discovers what it means to be the “token white guy” as a wedding guest, a funeral mourner, a biographer for an ailing filmmaker, and even a long lost father. Our reviewers highly recommended this gentle, empathic, multicultural story.



### **COME SEE ME IN THE GOOD LIGHT**

documentary, 2025, Apple TV

This acclaimed film is the story of poet and activist Andrea Gibson, from her early childhood until her terminal cancer diagnosis. While Gibson does not shy away from discussing their life’s challenges and their struggles with identity, they also retain a genuine warmth and sense of humor. The film was nominated for an Academy Award and was the Festival Favorite at the 2025 *Sundance Film Festival*.



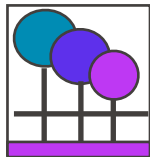
### **CALL HER DADDY—MICHELLE OBAMA: WE STILL GO HIGH**

podcast, 2026, YouTube

*Call Her Daddy* is an interview show hosted by Alex Cooper that currently focuses on issues and topics of interest to women. In January, former First Lady Michelle Obama was the show’s guest. She discussed her latest book, *The Look*, and talked about society’s obsession with women’s appearance. Michelle believes that all generations of women can move beyond objectification toward a more equitable world.



(Continued on page 5)



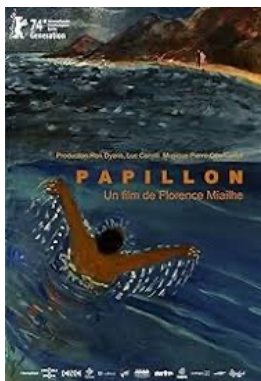
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**FILM/TELEVISION REVIEWS**



**PAPILLON (BUTTERFLY)**

Oscar-nominated drama/animated short film, nonfiction, 2024, YouTube

This beautiful 15-minute film tells the story of Jewish French swimmer Alfred Nakache, who participated in the 1936 Olympics, was held captive at Auschwitz during World War II, and managed to return to swim at the 1948 Olympic Games. Alfred was one of the pioneers of the butterfly stroke. The film is in French with English subtitles.

**JANE AUSTEN'S PERIOD DRAMA**

Oscar-nominated comedy/short film, fiction, 2024, YouTube

This film is a wonderful comedy that is well worth the thirteen minutes it takes to view it. Our reviewers were happily surprised by how much fun it was. Enough said! We don't want to ruin the surprise effect of this film for others.



**THE DEVIL IS BUSY**

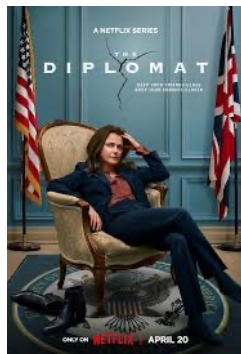
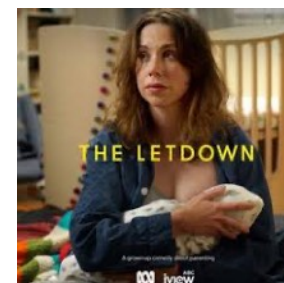
Oscar-nominated short documentary, nonfiction, 2024, YouTube

*The Devil is Busy* is a simple but powerful recording of a day in the life of an Atlanta abortion clinic. Tracii, the clinic's head of security, is the focus of most of the film as she works to provide safe healthcare to women. The film also includes interviews with one of the clinic's phone receptionists and with one of its physicians, who give details of the importance and limitations of their work. The film received major awards at the Palm Springs International Festival of Short Films in 2025. Our reviewers found it informative and tastefully done.

**THE LETDOWN**

television series, 2016, Netflix

Alison Bell stars as Audrey, the parent of a 2-month-old baby who joins a support group for new parents. There she makes some interesting and quirky friends. The show has been lauded as a brilliant, realistic comedy.

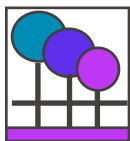


**THE DIPLOMAT**

television series, 2023, Netflix

This award-winning show is a political thriller focusing on a woman named Kate Wyler, the U.S. ambassador to the United Kingdom. Kate's work involves helping to forge alliances and defuse tensions in the modern world. The series has been praised for its story-telling, acting, and realistic portrayal of the world of diplomacy. Actors include Keri Russell and Allison Janney; the series was created by Debora Cahn.

(Continued on page 6)



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## HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?

### KATALIN KARIKO

**F**or some of us, March 13, 2020 was a particularly memorable Friday. It was the last day many schools and businesses were open before the U.S. joined other parts of the world in shutting down during the Covid-19 pandemic. The overwhelming sense of fear—of illness, misinformation, and death—is hard to forget. We may remember many of the political, medical, and media leaders of the time as well. But few of us are likely to have heard much about the people who were instrumental in helping us fight this illness through vaccination: people like Katalin Kariko.



Katalin was born in a rural Hungarian town in 1955. She grew up in a one-room house that was heated by a single stove and had no running water, no refrigerator, and no television. Her father was a master butcher, but he was relegated to working as a laborer after he had a falling out with the local Communist party for participating in the Hungarian revolt of 1956. Her mother was a bookkeeper. In her memoir, Breaking Through: My Life in Science, Katalin notes that she did not receive much in the way of warmth or nurturing during her childhood. But she did have plenty of time and energy for scientific inquiry.

Katalin's interest in science started at an early age. She was fascinated by the plants and animals around her and, as a teenager, was recognized as one of the top biology students in the country. She credits her science teachers with being an important influence on her life. One of these teachers gave her a book called The Stress of Life, by Hungarian endocrinologist Hans Selye. Selye's advice that

“adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one” has been a guiding principle of Katalin's professional life.

After completing high school, Katalin enrolled at Szeged University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in 1978 and a PhD. in 1982. She studied biology, and became especially interested in messenger RNA (mRNA) which is used by the body to translate DNA into proteins. Along the way she met and fell in love with Bela Franca, a mechanic. The couple eventually married and had a daughter, Susan, also in 1982. Being a good parent to Susan was very important to Katalin. She described her approach in Breaking Through.

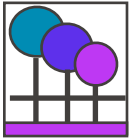
*“...I'd lean in and I'd hug Susan, and I'd tell her everything I once longed to hear: Can I kiss where it hurts? Can I give you a hug? Here, my love, let me comfort you now, let me give you everything I didn't get when I felt bad. Sometimes, I think, that is the best we can do: to learn from the world we've been handed and then try to leave things a little bit better for the next generation.”*

Katalin worked as a biochemical researcher in Hungary, but her lab's funding dried up leading her to look for work outside of her native country. She was offered a research position at *Temple University* in Philadelphia, so, in 1984, the young family moved to the United States, taking along their entire life savings (900 pounds, the equivalent of about \$4000 today) sewn into Susan's teddy bear to avoid Hungary's currency restrictions.

(Continued on page 7)

### CRYPTOQUOTE ANSWERS FROM MARCH

*What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make. —Jane Goodall*



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**HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?**



**KATALIN KARIKO**

(Continued from page 6)

Katalin's work at Temple focused on her favorite topic: mRNA. In this case she was involved in a clinical trial in which patients with AIDS and chronic fatigue syndrome were treated with double-stranded RNA in what was considered groundbreaking research. Unfortunately, her colleagues soon began calling her "the crazy mRNA lady" and her boss, who had initially supported her, tried to have her deported when she looked for work at a another university.

Katalin moved on to a position at *Bethesda Naval Hospital* and then the *University of Pennsylvania*. At the university things went well for awhile, but once again she was criticized for spending too much time on mRNA research and for failing to attract grants. She was demoted, refused tenure, and, after several decades with the university, she came to work one day to find herself kicked out for not bringing in "sufficient dollars per net square footage" to support her tiny lab space. Katalin recalled the scene: "There were my binders, my posters, my boxes of test tubes." A lab technician was tossing all of it into a trash bin.

Fortunately, her years at the University of Pennsylvania had introduced her to a kindred scientific spirit, a professor of immunology named Drew Weissman. The two began collaborating, using mRNA research to solve scientific and medical problems. Together they formed the company RNARx, and in 2006 and 2013 they received patents for some of their work. Scientists in other parts of the world began to take notice. By the time the University of Pennsylvania officially refused to support her work, Katalin was quickly offered a job working for a German company called *BioNTech* where she was assigned to work on mRNA medicines.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, Katalin and her BioNTech colleagues realized that they could use the mRNA research and its applications to help. They joined forces with the Pfizer pharmaceutical company to create a vaccine that played a key role in protecting people around the world from severe illness and death. Ironically, Katalin returned to the University of Pennsylvania, the very institution that had discouraged her work, to be given one of the first Covid shots administered in the US. Her visit was met with cheers, bringing tears to her eyes.



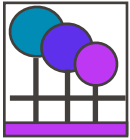
Katalin left BioNTech in 2022 to devote more time to research, and in 2023 she and her fellow mRNA researcher, Drew Weissman, were awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine for their contribution to developing the Covid vaccine.

Katalin and her husband live in Pennsylvania. Their daughter, Susan, is an Olympic rower who has won two gold medals and five world championships. Katalin describes her remarkable life this way.

*"Life is like the path of scientific discoveries...never a straight line with twists and turns at every juncture. Work hard and stay on track no matter how winding that road may be, it will be the most rewarding journey you never expected."*

**DONATIONS WELCOMED**

Thank you to all of you who donated to the *Womonscape Center* in March. Your donations directly help us print and publish this newsletter. Because the *Womonscape Center, Inc.* is a 501(c)(3) organization, all donations are tax-deductible. They can be sent by mail to *Womonscape Center, Inc.*, PO Box 335, Richland Center WI 53581; they can also be sent online via our website: [www.womonscapecenter.org](http://www.womonscapecenter.org).



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**HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?**



## HARRIET POWERS

**H**ave you checked out the newest stamps at your local post office lately? If so, you may have noticed a set of stamps featuring designs by a highly talented American quilter: Harriet Powers.



Harriet is known as the mother of the African American story quilt tradition. She was born into slavery in 1837 near Athens, Georgia, and spent most of her early life on the plantation of John and Nancy Lester. She and her mother learned to spin cotton into thread, which was later made into cloth. She also learned to sew, either from other enslaved women or from the mistress of the house.

Harriet married at the age of eighteen and had nine children. She had a limited education, but she could read and write and learned much of what she knew about the Bible from reading it directly. However, she also preserved the oral story-telling traditions and the West African fabric design traditions through quilting. Two of her quilts have survived to this day, and show how she was able to incorporate her religious beliefs and some of the natural phenomena of American history into her work.

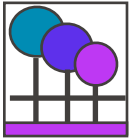
Harriet's exceptional quilting skills were introduced to the public in 1886, when she exhibited her "Bible Quilt" at the *Clarke County Cotton Fair* in Athens. The quilt combined African-style appliqué with European style stitching to create an eleven-panel story quilt. Harriet was able to use a sewing machine for some of the stitching, as well as traditional hand stitching. The quilt's story panels illustrate stories that were familiar to Harriet and other African-Americans through song and oral story-telling, and included one panel featuring Adam and Eve, another depicting Jacob's dream about a ladder to heaven, and several panels showing scenes from the life of Jesus.

One reason that we know as much as we do about this quilt is because it was bought by a White woman named Jennie Smith. Jennie was an artist and art teacher at the *Lucy Cobb Institute* for young women in Athens. She saw the quilt displayed at the fair and told Harriet she was interested in buying it. At the time Harriet declined, but a few years later, in 1891, she and her family were going through some financial difficulties, and Harriet brought the quilt back to Athens and sold it to Jennie for \$5 (the equivalent of \$173 today). It must have been difficult for Harriet to part with the quilt because she returned to Jennie's house to see it several times. During these visits Harriet told Jennie more details about the meaning of each panel, which Jennie recorded on paper.

In 1894, Harriet left her husband. She never remarried, and likely supported herself as a seamstress. Only one photo of Harriet has survived, taken in 1901 (above). In it, she is wearing an apron which features appliqué designs similar to those on her quilts (page 9).

In 1895 Jennie entered The Bible Quilt in the *Cotton States and International Exposition* in Atlanta, where it caught the eye of a group of White faculty wives from Atlanta University. These women commissioned Harriet to create a second narrative quilt which became known as The Pictorial Quilt (1895-1898).

(Continued on page 9)



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## HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?



### HARRIET POWERS

(Continued from page 8)

The Pictorial Quilt contains fifteen story panels, some of which have religious themes, and others that depict natural phenomena events of the era. The new USPS stamps show details of four of these panels. Two of the stamp panels have religious themes: the first depicts the creation of animals; the other tells a story of rich people who did not believe in God and were doomed to everlasting punishment when their clock struck one.

The other stamp panels are based on natural phenomena that occurred before Harriet was born, but were significant enough to have been discussed for years afterward, and may have been used as a warning about human behavior. For example, the panel that depicts the “Dark Day” of May 19, 1780 represents an event that was frightening at the time. At noon on that day, citizens of the New England states and parts of Canada became terrified when the sky suddenly darkened. The sun diminished to a small spot and then was covered by darkness completely. Cattle and chickens settled down to sleep and the stars were visible; daylight did not return until the following morning. The cause of the event was a combination of smoke from Canadian forest fires, thick fog, and heavy cloud cover, but at the time it seemed supernatural.

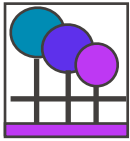


The other stamp panel depicts the “Night of Falling Stars” of November 13, 1833. For nearly four hours on that night, the sky was so bright with shooting stars that apparently a newspaper could be read on the street. Again, the general public found the event frightening, and some enslavers believed that it was caused by their sin of holding people as slaves. The event was later explained as the Leonid meteor shower of 1833.

From letters that Harriet wrote in the 1890s, it is clear that she made other appliqué style quilts in her lifetime, but there is no record of what happened to them. Harriet’s two surviving quilts were eventually donated to museums for preservation. The Bible Quilt is now with the *Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History* in Washington, DC and The Pictorial Quilt is at the *Boston Museum of Fine Arts*.



Harriet died on January 1, 1910 according to the *Athens Banner*, who described her as “an aged Negro woman who held the esteem of many Athens people.” She was buried in the *Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery* in Athens. But even though she led a very humble life, Harriet was one of an incredibly strong group of American women. She managed to survive a childhood born into slavery. She gave birth to and raised nine children. She supported herself in the American South, through the chaos of the Reconstruction era and the perils of the Jim Crow laws. She expressed herself and her beliefs through her creative work, and, in the process, preserved important cultural history.



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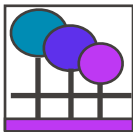
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APRIL 16 is our next  
scheduled  
*No-Rules Book Group*  
in Richland Center.  
See Page 1 for details.

**Womonscape  
Times**

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**QUOTES BY WOMEN**

~ Before I die, I want to be somebody's favorite hiding place, the place they can put everything they know they need to survive, every secret, every solitude, every nervous prayer, and be absolutely certain I will keep it safe. I will keep it safe.



Andrea Gibson (See p.4)

~ I thought of going somewhere else, or doing something else. I also thought maybe I'm not good enough, not smart enough. I tried to imagine: Everything is here, and I just have to do better experiments. ~

Katalin Kariko (See p.6-7)



***Suffs is coming!!!! May 8 on PBS***

*Suffs*, the Tony-award winning Broadway musical will be broadcast free on PBS. *Suffs* is the story of the 1910-1920 era suffragist struggle to win voting rights for American women, as told from the perspective of Alice Paul, Ida B. Wells, and others. The May 8 broadcast is scheduled for 9pm Eastern Time, 8pm Central Time. Check local listings.