

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)

March 19 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 February meeting.

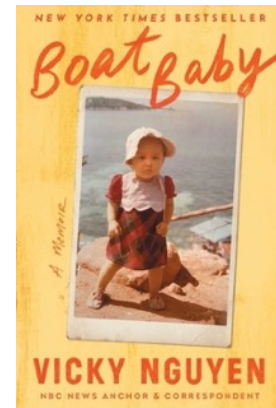
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BOAT BABY: A MEMOIR

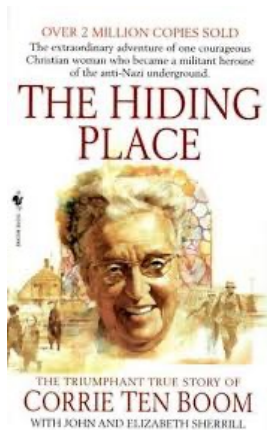
by Vicky Nguyen, nonfiction

Vicky Nguyen is an award-winning investigative journalist, a consumer correspondent, and the co-anchor of *NBC News Daily*. But before all that, she was a "boat baby"—one of the thousands of Vietnamese refugees who made their way to the U.S. in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This book is a memoir of her life, including her earliest years in Saigon, her family's escape to Malaysia, their adjustment to life in the U.S., and Vicky's teen years, balancing her Vietnamese culture with mainstream American expectations. The book is honest without being heavy-handed in its story of one woman's fulfillment of the American dream.



THE HIDING PLACE

By Corrie Ten Boom, nonfiction

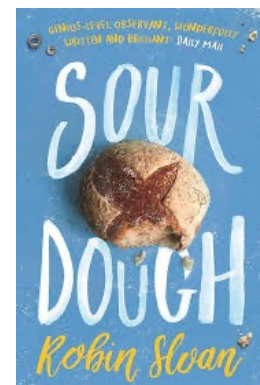


Corrie Ten Boom's Holocaust story has been featured in a previous issue of the *Womonscape Times*. However, this particular version of her memoir merits special consideration. The story is told in the form of a radio drama, with a full cast, sound effects, and music. Our reviewer was pleasantly surprised with the way it portrayed Ms. Ten Boom, her family, and the many important people in her life. Their courage and conviction became more real, and even more impressive.

SOURDOUGH

by Robin Sloan, fiction

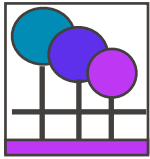
Lois is a San Francisco computer programmer whose life revolves around her work. Not only is her social life pretty much non-existent, her meals have been reduced to either tubes of nauseatingly colored gel-food or take out dinners from a small soup-and-sourdough place run by two brothers. When the brothers' visas expire and they have to depart for Europe, they leave their sourdough starter behind with Lois. Soon, she becomes obsessed with baking bread and finding new places to sell it. Will Lois leave her financially lucrative but demanding job as a programmer for life as an artisan sourdough baker? Check out this book to find out.



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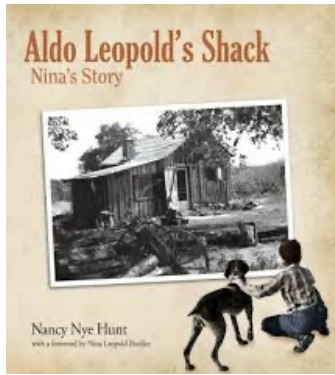
NO-RULES BOOK GROUP (NRBG)

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ALDO LEOPOLD’S SHACK: NINA’S STORY

by Nancy Nye Hunt, nonfiction

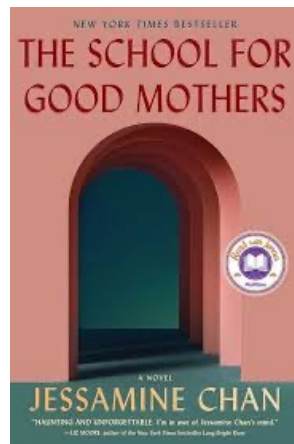


Wisconsin readers of this publication may be acquainted with the work of Aldo Leopold, the celebrated conservationist and author of *A Sand County Almanac*. For many years the Leopold family spent weekends at an old, worn-out farmstead along the Wisconsin River in Sauk County, Wisconsin. They camped out in a refurbished chicken coop, which they referred to as “The Shack.” While their father was making notes and sketches that would be the basis for his theory of *The Land Ethic*, the rest of his family was exploring the landscape and getting to know its wild inhabitants, building a fireplace, and learning their mother’s New Mexican folk songs. This lovely book is told from the point of view of the Leopold children, and paints an idyllic portrait of their days in Sauk County.

THE SCHOOL FOR GOOD MOTHERS

by Jessamine Chan, fiction

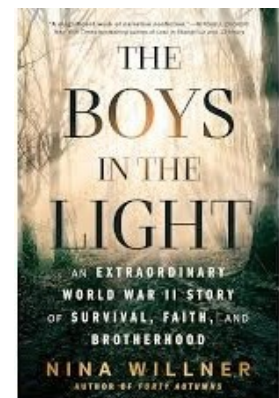
This dystopian novel is more than a little disturbing, mostly because its premise lies squarely within the realm of the possible. The story is centered around the life of Frida, a single mother of a toddler named Harriet. Frida shares custody of her daughter with her ex-husband and his new girlfriend. Like far too many mothers, Frida feels stretched thin, between the demands of work and parenting, as well as her own needs for understanding and companionship. One particularly bad day, Frida leaves Harriet alone and unsupervised for too long, and her parenting abilities come under scrutiny by the department of child protective services. Even though the little girl is completely unharmed, Frida must successfully complete a very involved parenting program in order to show she is no longer a bad mother or she may never be allowed to see Harriet again.



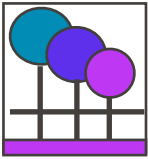
THE BOYS IN THE LIGHT

by Nina Willner, nonfiction

The Boys in the Light is the true story of two Jewish teenagers, Eddie Willner and his best friend, Mike, who managed to escape from a concentration camp during World War II. They then hid out in the woods until they decided to surrender themselves and their futures to a company of U.S. soldiers, including Elmer Hovland and Samy De Cola (a.k.a. “Pepsi”). Elmer and Pepsi encouraged their company to have Eddie and Mike to join them, offering food and protection to the emaciated teens. In return, Eddie and Mike became valuable assets to the soldiers. The teens’ knowledge of German and local culture proved essential to tear benefactors. The book was written by Eddie’s daughter, Nina, and has been praised for its readability and highly engaging writing.



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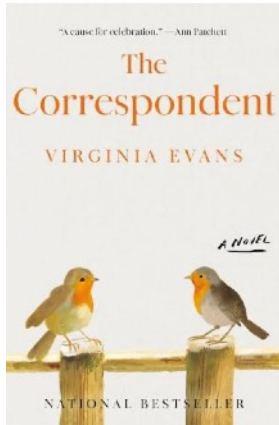
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THE CORRESPONDENT

by Virginia Evans, fiction



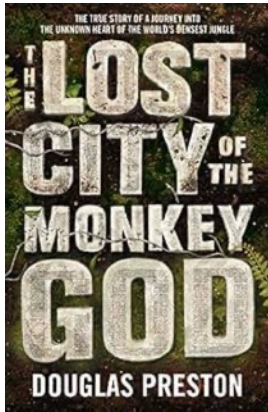
This lovely book is written completely in the form of letters. Most are written by the protagonist, Sybil Van Antwerp, a retired lawyer and legal clerk who lives in Maryland. Sybil has been a letter-writer all her life but now, in her 70s, letters are definitely the most important part of her life. She writes to friends, relatives, businesses, authors, and even to a mysterious stalker. Sybil is highly opinionated and at times maddeningly stubborn, but she is also self-reflective, often asking herself the kinds of questions each of us asks about the value of our lives and our relationships with the passing of years. The Correspondent was nominated for several readers' favorite awards for 2025, including Readers' Favorite Debut Novel.



THE LOST CITY OF THE MONKEY GOD

by Douglas Preston, nonfiction

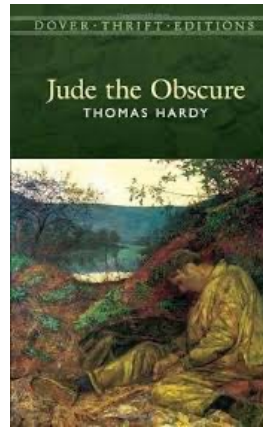
For some five hundred years, there have been legends and rumors about the existence of *La Ciudad Blanca*, a rich and sacred place in the jungle of Honduras that was once the center of a large and powerful civilization. But exploring the Honduran jungle comes with exceptional challenges: insects, snakes, diseases, jaguars, and gangs of criminals. In addition, Indigenous tribes in the area caution would-be modern explorers that anyone who finds and enters the city will fall ill and die. Nevertheless, writer Doug Preston and a team of scientists set out to find *La Ciudad Blanca* in 2015. This is the story of their journey. (Also a 2018 movie, Apple TV)



JUDE THE OBSCURE

by Thomas Hardy, fiction

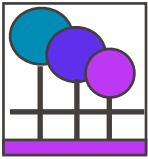
Our reviewer is quite the fan of Thomas Hardy's writing, and makes it a point to re-read this particular favorite every few years. Like many books of the late 1800s, this one was first published as a magazine serial. Jude, the title character, begins the novel as hard-working and ambitious young stonemason. Despite his humble, working class background, Jude yearns to attend the university and make something more of his life. Sadly, Jude is beset by



one tragic circumstance after another, coming into conflict with class boundaries, religious mandates, and societal expectations. The novel is number 23 on the BBC's list of "The 100 greatest British novels." It is the last novel he wrote: his fourteenth.



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TELEVISION/FILM REVIEWS

(Continued from page 3)

WHAT MAISEY KNEW

drama/romance, feature film, Prime

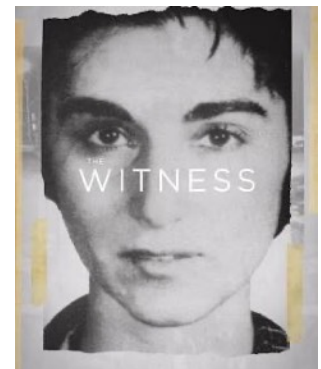


Our reviewer summed up this film with the following comment: “Some parents don’t deserve their kids.” The story is based on a novel by Henry James of the same name that was written in 1897. Maisie is the six-year-old daughter of neglectful parents Susanna, a singer in a rock band, and Beale, an art dealer. Early in the story, the parent split up and each remarries: Susanna to Lincoln and Beale to Margo. Maisie’s time is divided between the two couples. Who is the better parent? Where should Maisie really spend her time? The story examines the answers to all of these questions as Maisie figures out for herself what really makes an ideal family. Stars include Julianne Moore, Onata Aprile and Joanna Vanderham.

THE WITNESS

documentary film, (by Kitty Genovese’s brother), Netflix

The troubling murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964 has become a standard example of bystanders whose refusal to get involved in a neighbor’s business led to her tragic murder. But some decades after her death, Kitty’s younger brother, Bill, was still deeply bothered by media coverage at the time and by the event’s long-term effects on himself, his family, and on society in general. In an effort to find out what really happened and to gain some sense of closure on his sister’s death, Bill pursued his own investigation forty years later. This academy award-nominated film documents his efforts.



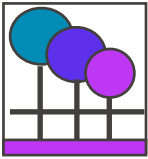
IF I HAD LEGS I'D KICK YOU

feature film, comedy-drama, Apple TV



This rather unusual film tells the story of Linda, a psychotherapist who is exhausted in her role as a mostly-single parent caring for a daughter with a pediatric eating disorder while her husband (the child’s father) is away at work as a sea captain. Linda is an increasingly neglectful parent as her client load and her parenting load begin to become unbearably heavy. The film was written and directed by Mary Bronstein who reported that she wrote the script while taking care of her severely ill seven-year-old daughter under very trying circumstances. Rose Byrne is exceptional as Linda, and won a number of high profile awards for her work.

(Continued on page 5)



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TELEVISION/FILM REVIEWS

SONG SUNG BLUE

feature film, musical/drama (theatre)

This film is based on the true story of the Milwaukee-based Neil Diamond Tribute Band known as *Lightning and Thunder*, a.k.a. Mike and Claire Sardina. The Sardinas' story is part romantic triumph and part troubling tragedy, as the couple experienced the highs and lows often associated with life as entertainers, as well as some truly unexpected and unfortunate accidents and health problems. Our reviewer thought Kate Hudson was especially good in her portrayal of Claire Sardina. The related documentary by the same name gives an even clearer picture of the difficulties the couple faced over their storied career.



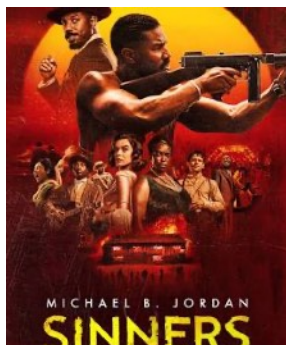
HAMNET

feature film, drama, Apple TV

Hamnet is the story of William Shakespeare and Agnes Hathaway as they grieve the death of their eleven-year-old son, Hamnet. The film is based on the novel of the same name by Maggie O'Farrell. Our reviewer found Jessie Buckley's performance phenomenal; the story sad, but ok; and the cinematography beautiful. The role of Mary Shakespeare, William's mother, is played by Emily Watson.

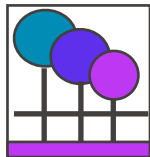
SINNERS

feature film, drama, Netflix



Part horror film, part allegory, Sinners is the story of identical twins and World War I veterans Elijah and Elias Moore, as they try to establish a blues club juke joint in their hometown of Clarksdale, Mississippi. The twins face much in the way of Jim Crow racism along the way, but after having lived in Chicago for the last seven years, they seem to prefer the open injustices of the South to the less obvious but just as troublesome Northern ones. Since this is a horror film, a number of the White supremacists who try to get in the twins' way also happen to be vampires. The film is disturbing and violent (after all, we're dealing with vampires here) but it is also a commentary on the appropriation of Black music and culture by mainstream society. It received a record sixteen academy award nominations. The film includes exceptional performances by Wunmi Mosaku, Li Jun Li, Jayme Lawson, and Hailee Steinfeld.

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NO-RULES BOOK GROUP (NRBG)



TELEVISION/FILM REVIEWS

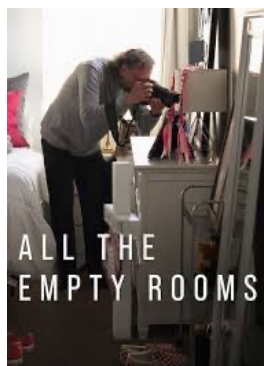
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THE CLOSER

television series, Netflix

Brenda Johnson has just been hired as a deputy police chief in charge of investigating high-profile crimes in Los Angeles. Although she has excellent references, Brenda faces an uphill battle in trying to convince her new coworkers that she knows the best way to obtain confessions that lead to convictions, thereby “closing” a case. The series ran successfully for seven years, from 2005-2012, and is so well-acted that it is still well worth watching. Kyra Sedgwick is excellent as Brenda.



ALL THE EMPTY ROOMS

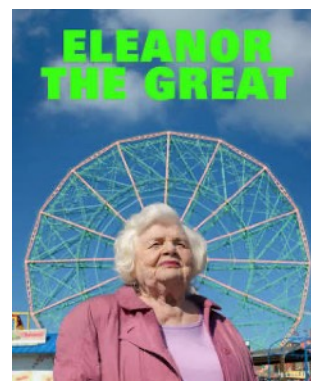
documentary film, Netflix

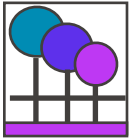
This deeply moving film takes a simple but effective approach to looking at the long-term effects of school shootings in the United States. Reporter Steve Hartman was tired of trying to put a positive spin on such tragedies so he joined photographer Lou Bopp to travel across the U.S. in order to look at the untouched bedrooms of children lost to school shootings and to interview the grieving friends and families left behind. The film is nominated for a 2026 academy award for *Best Documentary Short Film*.

ELEANOR THE GREAT

feature film, comedy-drama, Netflix

Eleanor, the protagonist of this film, is a 94-year-old woman who is enjoying life with her friend Bessie in a retirement community in Florida. But when Bessie dies, Eleanor moves in with her daughter, Lisa, and her grandson, Max, who live in New York City. Lisa and Max are busy; Eleanor is lonely and adrift. One day, when Lisa drops her off at the local Jewish Community Center in the hopes that she will find something to do, Eleanor wanders into a support group for Holocaust survivors. Instead of explaining her mistake, she shares Bessie’s actual Holocaust survival story as if it were her own. The lie quickly gets away from her, particularly as it affects the life of a young woman who wants to document “Eleanor’s” story for a university project. The story is tastefully told with the support of the *Shoah Foundation*, to ensure authenticity of the Holocaust narrative. Our reviewers were quite moved by the film. Outstanding acting by June Squibb, Jessica Hecht, Erin Kellyman, and Rita Zohar.





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HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?



LAURA AMY SCHLITZ

Sometimes you come across a person who seems to be living life exactly the way she wants to. How she managed to do this is probably a combination of determination, independence and a good dose of luck; but the result is nonetheless refreshing. Laura Amy Schlitz is one such person.

Laura has spent her life in a world of books, fairy tales, and children's theater. As a child, she and her brother were fortunate to have parents who gave them plenty of time to play. They pretended to be everything from horses to spies, ruled over a kingdom of stuffed animals, and took the messages in fairy tales to heart. "I gathered bread crusts and hid them under the dining-room table—people in fairy tales were often described as 'not having a crust to eat,' and I was determined to save my family from this fate." Laura also taught herself to sleep on her stomach in a sort of flying-leap pose like the one Peter Pan used on the cover of one of her favorite fairy tale books. She wanted to be ready to fly off with Peter to Neverland in case he happened to stop by. "He has yet to turn up, but I still sleep in that position, although I wake with a stiff back."



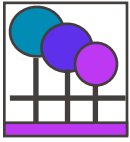
Laura attended *Goucher College* in Maryland, graduating with a degree in aesthetics in 1977. After graduation she worked for the *Enoch Pratt Library* in Baltimore, part of the Baltimore Public Library system. She became a children's librarian at *The Park School of Baltimore* in 1991, and has worked there pretty much ever since. Well...except for taking a couple of years off to work in children's theater and to become an award-winning playwright and

children's author. As for the years in children's theater, Laura reflected, "It was a gloriously free and disorganized life, but eventually, I had no money at all." She returned to library work without regrets: "I am so grateful that I work with children—they make me laugh and their energy reminds me to enjoy life."

Although her writing career began with a 1993 romance for adults (using the pseudonym Chloe Cheshire), *A Gypsy at Almack's*, Laura's real success came from her work with children's literature. She often combines characters and concepts from classic fairy tales with historical fiction in her writing. She enjoys telling stories and writing plays for the children she sees in her work as a school librarian. In fact, Laura began writing one of her most successful books, *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!: Voices from a Medieval Village* as a way to help students with a school project. The book is a series of monologues to be performed by students. The characters include a lord's daughter, a doctor's son, and a plowboy, and won a *Newberry Medal*. Other awards have come for *The Hired Girl*, *Splendors and Glooms*, and *Amber and Clay*.

Most recently, Laura has published her tenth book for children, *The Winter of the Dollhouse*, to rave reviews. Once again, she's brought the joy of childhood imagination right along with her as she writes. This book tells the story of a young girl who is trying to figure out her place in the world with the help of a woman who has a dollhouse with a secret past. Laura herself has a dollhouse that her father made for her when she was a child. In between writing and promoting the book, she enjoyed restoring the dollhouse, much like the characters in her story.

In her free time, Laura also likes to make things: bread, marionettes, quilts, watercolors, origami animals, continuing to set an example for all of us in how to live your best life.



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PUZZLE FOR MARCH

In this cryptoquote, each letter below stands for a completely different letter.
The decoded quotation comes from one of the women mentioned in this newsletter.
The solution will be available in next month's *Womonscape Times*. HINTS: B = F, L = W

LGRM JKD XK SRFNH

R XPBBNZNCYN,

RCX JKD GRTN MK

XNYPXN LGRM FPCX

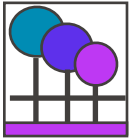
KB XPBBNZNCYN JKD

LRCM MK SRFN.

—ERCN QKKXRAA

DONATIONS WELCOMED

Thank you to all of you who donated to the *Womonscape Center* in February. 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.



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HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?



SAALUMARADA THIMMAKKA

When Saalumarada Thimmakka died on November 14 of last year at the age of 113, her obituary noted that she was the mother to thousands—thousands of trees.

When she was born, in 1912, it was customary for children to be given only one name; hers was Thimmakka. She and her five siblings helped support the family by collecting leaves to make and sell disposable plates and bowls in local villages. Her parents were too poor to send the children to school.

At sixteen, Thimmakka married Bikkalu Chikkaiah, who worked at various jobs, including cattle herder, quarry worker, and agricultural laborer. The couple remained childless, which caused them not only personal grief but also social stigma. In 1948, twenty years after their marriage, they had resigned themselves to being without heirs and Thimmakka in particular was a social outcast. She was taunted by her mother-in-law and others in her village for not bearing children, and even attempted suicide.



One day, however, Bikkalu brought home a cart loaded with some Banyan tree saplings and asked Thimmakka to follow him with earthenware pots filled with water. Together they planted and watered the young trees, and Bikkalu used thorny branches to fashion cattle-proof protective fencing around the young plants. They continued to water the trees every morning before work. After about ten years, a local politician noticed them watering and asked what they were doing. When he learned about their tree project, he presented them with a medal at the village fair.

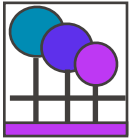
Thimmakka and Bikkalu kept watering their original trees and planting new saplings until Bikkalu's death in 1991; afterwards, Thimmakka continued the work on her own. In 1994 a local newspaper published an article about Thimmakka and the trees; in 1995 an English-language national paper translated the article under the title "Thimmakka and her 284 children."

The resulting attention brought other awards and many other trees to plant. And Thimmakka kept right on planting. Somewhere along the way she began being called Saalumarada, which means "row of trees." And in 2003 her story found its way to a man named Umesh. At the time, Umesh was an 18-year-old whose hobby was planting trees in open places around his village and its school. He sought out Thimmakka and the two developed an important bond. In 2012, when she was 100, Thimmakka legally adopted the 27-year-old Umesh. Umesh now distributes thousands of saplings each year and organized regular tree-planting drives.

Up until a few years ago, Thimmakka traveled some 200 days each year to attend public function and speaking engagements. She especially enjoyed working with school children, with the hopes that they would be inspired to plant at least ten trees in their lifetime. She often repeated this message in her talks: "May there be rain, may there be a good harvest, may you never be a burden on this land. The country will then thrive. That's all."

At the time of Thimmakka's death, India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, wrote a letter of condolence to Umesh, which included these words.

The thousands of trees planted by her stand as living symbols of her dedication and willingness to think beyond herself. These trees will continue to remind generations to come that real change begins with simple actions and that impact can be gentle yet profound.



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HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS WOMAN?

RUBY BRADLEY

Recently there have been some new attempts to rewrite U.S. history by deleting the stories of people that didn't meet some sort of social expectation for their race or gender. While this is certainly not the first time such erasures have been made, it's important to remember that many of the most significant accomplishments in human history have been achieved by people who dared to be take risks in the service of others. Ruby Bradley was one of those people.



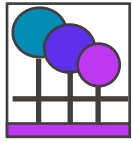
Ruby was born in 1907 in Spencer, West Virginia. She attended *Glennville State Teachers College*, graduating in 1926. For four years she taught in one-room school houses in rural areas near her home. Then, in 1930, she moved to Philadelphia to attend the *Philadelphia General Hospital School of Nursing*, graduating as a surgical nurse in 1933. Ruby got her first major nursing job as a surgical nurse in the *Army Nurse Corps* in 1934, working at *Walter Reed General Hospital* in Washington, DC. Ruby recalled the army recruiter who hired her saying, "Now don't worry, you won't be in a war!" Little did he know.

Ruby stayed at Walter Reed until early 1940, when she was assigned to *Station Hospital* at Fort Mills in the Philippines. At the time, the Philippines was in the process of transitioning from being a United States commonwealth to its current status as an independent nation, and the military presence was winding down. This turned out to be unfortunate, since Japan wanted to control all of Asia, and attacked Manila just nine hours after Pearl Harbor in December of 1941.

Three weeks later, Ruby was captured, and became a prisoner of war (POW) for the next three years, moving between three prison camps. This is when Ruby was able to show what a truly exceptional person she was. Conditions at the prison camps were terrible, and grew even worse as the war continued. Not only soldiers were imprisoned but civilians, including women and children. Ruby and her fellow nurses continued to care for the sick and wounded while surviving on rations of only ½ cup of rice twice a day. But as time went on, Ruby began to save some of these meager rations in order to feed it to hungry children. She became a clever and effective thief—smuggling surgical instruments into the camps under her uniform and stuffing extra food into her pockets for the children. Ruby and her fellow nurses became great improvisers as they performed over 230 surgeries and delivered 13 babies under very primitive conditions. Once Bradley even used a tea strainer and some gauze to anesthetize a patient. The nurses were referred to as the *Angels in Fatigues*.

In February of 1945, Ruby and her fellow prisoners were liberated by U.S. forces. Ruby weighed only 85 pounds. She went home to West Virginia to recover and work stateside, but went back on active overseas duty during the Korean War, just five years later. There she was put in charge of supervising over 500 army nurses in various parts of Korea, but she still was directly involved in patient care. Most notably, during an evacuation of wounded soldiers in November of 1950, she refused to get on the plane herself until the last of the wounded were loaded, even though that plane was surrounded by 100,000 Chinese soldiers. When she left Korea for the last time in 1953, Ruby became the first woman to receive a full dress honor guard ceremony.

Back in the U.S. Ruby continued to work for the military until 1963. She then continued as a nurse until 1980, working in a private nursing facility back in West Virginia. After her death at 94, in 2002, Ruby was buried with full military honors in *Arlington National Cemetery*. During her lifetimes she received 34 different medals and citations of bravery. But she remained humble about her accomplishments. "It was just all in a day's work."



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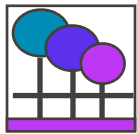
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MARCH 19 is our
next scheduled
No-Rules Book Group
in Richland Center.
See Page 1 for details.

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QUOTES BY WOMEN

~ Let us develop a respect for all living things. Let us try to replace violence and intolerance with understanding and compassion. And love. ~ Jane Goodall

~ A tree is a symbol of strength, resilience, and growth. Let us learn from them and be like them. ~ Saalumarada Thimmakka (see p. 9)



~ In the shade of a tree, we find peace, solace, and connection to the earth. Let us plant more trees and create a better world for all. ~ Saalumarada Thimmakka

~ Even though there were too many feelings, it strikes me that having them all at once, all tangled together, is one of the most interesting things that's ever happened to *me*. ~

Laura Amy Schlitz (see p. 7)

~ I'd rather be impetuous than placid any day. ~ Laura Amy Schlitz