

TUESDAY EVENING BOOK DISCUSSIONS 2010

All discussions take place at 7:00 PM in the library

January 26 *Little Heathens* by **Mildred Armstrong Kalish**

I tell of a time, a place, and a way of life long gone. For many years I have had the urge to describe that treasure trove, lest it vanish forever. So, partly in response to the basic human instinct to share feelings and experiences, and partly for the sheer joy and excitement of it all, I report on my early life. It was quite a romp.

So begins Mildred Kalish's story of growing up on her grandparents' Iowa farm during the depths of the Great Depression. With her father banished from the household for mysterious transgressions, five-year-old Mildred and her family could easily have been overwhelmed by the challenge of simply trying to survive. This, however, is not a tale of suffering.

Kalish counts herself among the lucky of that era. She had caring grandparents who possessed—and valiantly tried to impose—all the pioneer virtues of their forebears, teachers who inspired and befriended her, and a barnyard full of animals ready to be tamed and loved. She and her siblings and their cousins from the farm across the way played as hard as they worked, running barefoot through the fields, as free and wild as they dared.

Filled with recipes and how-tos for everything from catching and skinning a rabbit to preparing homemade skin and hair beautifiers, apple cream pie, and the world's best head cheese (start by scrubbing the head of the pig until it is pink and clean), *Little Heathens* portrays a world of hardship and hard work tempered by simple rewards. There was the unsurpassed flavor of tender new dandelion greens harvested as soon as the snow melted; the taste of crystal clear marble-sized balls of honey robbed from a bumblebee nest; the sweet smell from the body of a lamb sleeping on sun-warmed grass; and the magical quality of oat shocking under the light of a full harvest moon.

February 23 *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* by **Jamie Ford**

In the opening pages of Jamie Ford's stunning debut novel, **Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet**, Henry Lee comes upon a crowd gathered outside the Panama Hotel, once the gateway to Seattle's Japantown. It has been boarded up for decades, but now the new owner has made an incredible discovery: the belongings of Japanese families, left when they were rounded up

and sent to internment camps during World War II. As Henry looks on, the owner opens a Japanese parasol.

This simple act takes old Henry Lee back to the 1940s, at the height of the war, when young Henry's world is a jumble of confusion and excitement, and to his father, who is obsessed with the war in China and having Henry grow up American. While "scholarshipping" at the exclusive Rainier Elementary, where the white kids ignore him, Henry meets Keiko Okabe, a young Japanese American student. Amid the chaos of blackouts, curfews, and FBI raids, Henry and Keiko forge a bond of friendship—and innocent love—that transcends the long-standing prejudices of their Old World ancestors. And after Keiko and her family are swept up in the evacuations to the internment camps, she and Henry are left only with the hope that the war will end, and that their promise to each other will be kept.

Forty years later, Henry Lee is certain that the parasol belonged to Keiko. In the hotel's dark dusty basement he begins looking for signs of the Okabe family's belongings and for a long-lost object whose value he cannot begin to measure. Now a widower, Henry is still trying to find his voice—words that might explain the actions of his nationalistic father; words that might bridge the gap between him and his modern, Chinese American son; words that might help him confront the choices he made many years ago.

Set during one of the most conflicted and volatile times in American history, **Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet** is an extraordinary story of commitment and enduring hope. In Henry and Keiko, Jamie Ford has created an unforgettable duo whose story teaches us of the power of forgiveness and the human heart.

March 30 *Shadowdivers* by Robert Kurson

In the tradition of Jon Krakauer's **Into Thin Air** and Sebastian Junger's **The Perfect Storm** comes a true tale of riveting adventure in which two weekend scuba divers risk everything to solve a great historical mystery—and make history themselves.

For John Chatterton and Richie Kohler, deep wreck diving was more than a sport. Testing themselves against treacherous currents, braving depths that induced hallucinatory effects, navigating through wreckage as perilous as a minefield, they pushed themselves to their limits and beyond, brushing against death more than once in the rusting hulks of sunken ships. But in the fall of 1991, not even these courageous divers were prepared for what they found 230 feet below the surface, in the frigid Atlantic waters sixty miles off the coast of New Jersey:

a World War II German U-boat, its ruined interior a macabre wasteland of twisted metal, tangled wires, and human bones—all buried under decades of accumulated sediment. No identifying marks were visible on the submarine or the few artifacts brought to the surface. No historian, expert, or government had a clue as to which U-boat the men had found. In fact, the official records all agreed that there simply could not be a sunken U-boat and crew at that location.

Over the next six years, an elite team of divers embarked on a quest to solve the mystery. Some of them would not live to see its end. Chatterton and Kohler, at first bitter rivals, would be drawn into a friendship that deepened to an almost mystical sense of brotherhood with each other and with the drowned U-boat sailors—former enemies of their country. As the men’s marriages frayed under the pressure of a shared obsession, their dives grew more daring, and each realized that he was hunting more than the identities of a lost U-boat and its nameless crew.

Author Robert Kurson’s account of this quest is at once thrilling and emotionally complex, and it is written with a vivid sense of what divers actually experience when they meet the dangers of the ocean’s underworld. The story of **Shadow Divers** often seems too amazing to be true, but it all happened, two hundred thirty feet down, in the deep blue sea.