

DGC Book Club: Unnatural Selection: A Memoir of Adoption and Wilderness.

By Andrea Ross - Nonfiction. 2021

April 5, 2026 @ 12:30 pm

Brown bag lunch 12:30

Book discussion begins 1:00 Genealogy library

This is the 17th selected book for the DGC Book Club.

Suggested books from our DGC members

Evans, Virginia. *The Correspondent*. **Fiction**. 2025.

Filled with knowledge that only comes from a life fully lived, *The Correspondent* is a gem of a novel about the power of finding solace in literature and connection with people we might never meet in person. Sybil Van Antwerp has throughout her life used letters to make sense of the world and her place in it. Most mornings, around half past ten, Sybil sits down to write letters—to her brother, to her best friend, to the president of the university who will not allow her to audit a class she desperately wants to take, to Joan Didion and Larry McMurtry to tell them what she thinks of their latest books, and to one person to whom she writes often yet never sends the letter. Sybil Van Antwerp is adopted, and her son gives her a DNA test, which prompts her to get curious about her ancestry. That adoption/birth-family background also ties into why letter-writing matters so much to her.

Recommended by Suzanne Peterson

Franklin, Tom. *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter*. **Fiction**. 2010.

In the 1970s, Larry Ott and Silas Jones were boyhood pals in a small town in rural Mississippi. Their worlds were as different as night and day: Larry was the child of lower-middle-class white parents, and Silas, the son of a poor, black single mother. But then Larry took a girl to a drive-in movie and she was never seen or heard from again. He never confessed . . . and was never charged. More than twenty years have passed. Larry lives a solitary, shunned existence, never able to rise above the whispers of suspicion. Silas has become the town constable. And now another girl has disappeared, forcing two men who once called each other friend to confront a past they've buried for decades. "A ripping good mystery, this novel also has depth and a subtle literary side, as the local area comes to life through the writer's cinematic descriptive phrases and a large and colorful cast of supporting characters. Highly recommended." — *Library Journal* (starred review)

Recommended by Mary Dobosz

Hill, Richard. *Finding Family: My search for roots and the secrets in my DNA*. **Nonfiction**. 2012

Finding Family is the suspenseful account of an adoptee trying to reclaim the biological family denied him by sealed birth records. This fascinating quest, including the author's landmark use of

DNA testing, takes readers on an exhilarating roller-coaster ride and concludes with a twist that rivals anything Hollywood has to offer.

Recommended by Mary Dobosz

Ito, Susan Kiyo. *I Would Meet You Anywhere: A Memoir*. **Nonfiction**. 2023

Growing up with adoptive nisei parents, Susan Kiyo Ito knew only that her birth mother was Japanese American and her father white. But finding and meeting her birth mother in her early twenties was only the beginning of her search for answers, history, and identity. Though the two share a physical likeness, an affinity for ice cream, and a relationship that sometimes even feels familial, there is an ever-present tension between them, as a decades-long tug-of-war pits her birth mother's desire for anonymity against Ito's need to know her origins, to see and be seen. Along the way, Ito grapples with her own reproductive choices, the legacy of the Japanese American incarceration experience during World War II, and the true meaning of family. A *Library Journal* best memoir of 2023 • Finalist, William Saroyan International Prize for Writing
Recommended by Cindy Scott

Jerkis, Morgan. *Wandering in Strange Lands, A Daughter of the Great Migration Reclaims her Roots*. **Nonfiction**. 2022

Between 1916 and 1970, six million black Americans left their rural homes in the South for jobs in cities in the North, West, and Midwest in a movement known as The Great Migration. But while this event transformed the complexion of America and provided black people with new economic opportunities, it also disconnected them from their roots, their land, and their sense of identity, argues Morgan Jerkins. In this fascinating and deeply personal exploration, she recreates her ancestors' journeys across America, following the migratory routes they took from Georgia to Louisiana, Oklahoma and California.

Recommended by Suzanne Peterson

Jones, M.K. *Maze Investigation Series* (6 titles) *The Curiosity Club of St. Foy* series. (2 titles so far). **Fiction**

M. K. Jones is a family history researcher, genealogist and author of the “Maze Investigations” series and “The Curiosity Club of St. Foy”

Recommended by Michael Bowling

King, Laurie R. *The Lantern's Dance: A Novel of Suspense Featuring Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes* (Mary Russell Mysteries, Book 18). **Fiction**. 2024

Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes, hoping for a respite in the French countryside, are instead caught up in a case that turns both bewildering and intensely personal

The secrets of the past appear to be reaching into the present. And it seems increasingly urgent that Russell figure out how a journal and lantern are related to Damian—and possibly to Sherlock Holmes himself. Could there be things about his own history that even the master detective does not perceive?

Recommended by Lisa Henderson

Mason, Daniel. *North Woods: A Novel* **Fiction**. 2023.

It begins with a pair of young lovers in colonial New England escaping wrathful judgment in their Puritan village. They flee to a house in the wilds of western Massachusetts. The rest of this impossible-to-summarize novel introduces us to inhabitants of that house over the ensuing three-plus centuries. *North Woods* is a hodgepodge narrative, brazenly disjointed in time, perspective and form. Letters, poems and song lyrics, diary entries, medical case notes, real-estate listings, vintage botanical illustrations, pages of an almanac, modern-day nature photographs, a true-crime detective story, and an address to a historical society.

Recommended by Suzanne Peterson

Parthasarathy, Raghuvier. *So Simple a Beginning: How Four Physical Principles Shape Our Living World*. **Nonfiction**. 2022

A biophysicist reveals the hidden unity behind nature's breathtaking complexity - The form and function of a sprinting cheetah are quite unlike those of a rooted tree. A human being is very different from a bacterium or a zebra. The living world is a realm of dazzling variety, yet a shared set of physical principles shapes the forms and behaviors of every creature in it. *So Simple a Beginning* shows how the emerging new science of biophysics is transforming our understanding of life on Earth and enabling potentially lifesaving but controversial technologies such as gene editing, artificial organ growth, and ecosystem engineering.

Recommended by Cyndi Young

Robinson, Eugene. *Freedom Lost, Freedom Won: A Personal History of America*. **Nonfiction**. 2026

Pulitzer Prize-winning former *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson tells our nation's torturous racial history through his own family's story, starting with his great-grandfather's freedom from slavery and threading his way to his own narrative and reaching today's Black Lives Matter movement, asking whether this time will be different.

From his great-great-grandfather's achievement in becoming a "free person of color" before emancipation to his great-grandfather's Reconstruction-era success, from his father's odyssey of the Great Migration to his own coming-of-age during the civil rights movement, Robinson delves into a rich archive of Black narratives, arguing that we still have a long way to go before it is possible to speak of a "post-racial America."

Recommended by Ann Burrows

Shorto, Russell. *Smalltime: a story of my family and the mob*. **Nonfiction**. 2021

Smalltime is an American immigrant story that travels back to Risorgimento Sicily, home of Antonino Sciotto, the author's great-grandfather, who leaves his wife and children in grinding poverty for a new life—and wife—in a Pennsylvania mining town. *Smalltime* draws an intimate portrait of a mobster and his wife, sudden riches, and the toll a lawless life takes on one family.

Recommended by Suzanne Peterson

Vowel, Sarah. *The Wordy Shipmates* by Sarah Vowell (2008) *The Wordy Shipmates* is a nonfiction account of the Puritan settlers that founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony and subsequent "spin-off" colonies, including the "anything goes," rogue colony of Rhode Island. When she relates the famous sermon preached to the colonists by John Cotton as they departed Southampton in 1630, she notes that having the famous preacher at the ship launching is "like scoring Nelson Mandela to deliver the commencement address at the neighbor kid's eighth grade graduation."

Recommended by Suzanne Peterson

Books read by the Davis Genealogy Book Club

Hiding the Past, The Lost Ancestor by Nathan Dylan Goodwin-Fiction

The Pirate's Wife: The Remarkable True Story of Sarah Kidd by Daphne Palmer- Nonfiction

Inheritance: A memoir of genealogy, paternity, and love by Dani Shapiro-Nonfiction

Genealogy: a novel by Mae Wood-Fiction

The Lost Family: How DNA Testing is Upending Who We Are by Libby Copeland-Nonfiction

The Rosie Project: a novel by Samson, Graeme. Fiction

Secret Harvests: A Hidden Story of Separation and the Resilience of a Family Farm-Nonfiction

Three Times Removed by M.K. Jones Fiction

The Stranger in my Genes: A Memoir by Bill Griffeth -Nonfiction

The Orange Lilies by Nathan Dylan Goodwin-Fiction

*The Foundling: the true story of a kidnapping, a family secret...*by Paul Fronczak and Alex Tresniowski-Nonfiction

The Widow Spy By Megan Campisi. Fiction

The Forever Witness: How DNA and Genealogy Solved a Cold Case Double Murder by Edward Humes

The Baby Thief: The Untold Story of Georgia Tann, the Baby Seller Who Corrupted Adoption.
By Barbara Raymond Nonfiction

All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake. By Tiya Miles-
Nonfiction

The Seven Sisters by Lucinda Riley. Fiction.

Unnatural Selection: A Memoir of Adoption and Wilderness. By Andrea Ross. Nonfiction