



WSIRN Episode [number]: [Title]
Hosted by Anne Bogel, with guest [name]

[00:00:00]

HOLLI: If Steve Irwin wrote like Jane Austen [ANNE LAUGHS] and have the observations of David Sedaris that would be this book. [ANNE LAUGHS]

[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers. I'm Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 181.

Welcome to the show that's dedicated to answering the question that plagues every reader: What should I read next?

We don't get bossy on this show: What we WILL do here is give you the information you need to choose your next read. Every week we'll talk all things books and reading and do a little literary matchmaking with one guest.

Readers, we're putting together a special What Should I Read Next? episode to gush about all the exciting Summer releases coming down the pipeline... I've said it before, and I will keep saying it: what I love most about What Should I Read Next? is putting the right book in the hands of the right reader, so I want to recommend some of those Summer reads especially to YOU, listening right now! Go to [Patreon.com/whatshouldireadnext/posts](https://patreon.com/whatshouldireadnext/posts) (there's a link in the show notes) to find out how to submit a recommendation request and be part of our upcoming Summer Reading episode.

That's [patreon.com P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com/whatshouldireadnext/posts](https://patreon.com/P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com/whatshouldireadnext/posts).

Today's guest Holli Petersen has created a very special family book club that might inspire you to pick up the phone and call a bookish loved one as soon as the episode is over. She also totally hated one of my favorite titles, but only for the first 100 pages, when a turn of events

totally melted her heart... and I've mentioned this title DOZENS of times on the show. I'm really curious to know if you have any guesses right now on what that title might be.

In today's episode I'm recommending books both for Holli's personal reading, which is a little different from her family-bonding book club, which she's also seeking titles for. Those recommended book club reads include one classic title you may never have heard of, so let's get to it!

Holli, welcome to the show.

[00:02:07]

HOLLI: Well thank you for having me, Anne.

ANNE: It is my pleasure. I'm really looking forward to chatting today. We're chatting today because we got your submission from our guest submission form. That's the one I talk about sometimes on this show and in our newsletter. Listeners, if you would like to be on the show, you can fill that out for yourself at whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/guest.

So Holli, thank you for doing that and thank you for persevering because in the course of preparing for our conversation today, I realized that 2019 was not the first time you submitted it.

HOLLI: No, so I have pretty much tried to submit I think several times. [ANNE LAUGHS] And I tend to do it in January because whenever I'm thinking about my previous year of reading, what I want to do in January, I always set this lofty goal of I want to talk to Anne. Not with any great expectations, but with a lot of hope, because this is really a dream come true.

ANNE: You've heard me say it before and I will keep saying it, really, we could have a fabulous conversation and episode with every single reader. I don't think there's any exceptions who fills out that form.

HOLLI: Oh, I imagine. I imagine everybody has so many interesting things to discuss.

ANNE: Your 2016 submission was great. It was super detailed. I don't know if this good news or bad news to you that we flagged it. I sent emails to our people that said, this would be a great episode! And then you know, we get so many like that, but what I want to know is how much do you remember about your 2016 submission? 'Cause we got a little time capsule situation going on here.

HOLLI: Oh, virtually nothing. [LAUGHS] I don't even know what's ... I can't even imagine what's on it.

ANNE: All right. We'll this is how you described yourself, Holli. You said that you were a mom of three, a lover of animals, you work from home, which you said basically means frazzled.

[00:03:56]

HOLLI: Yes.

ANNE: And you've been a voracious reader since the age of three.

HOLLI: Absolutely. It's true.

ANNE: And then you talked about your podcast listening habits and how you play the Anne Bogel game, tell me three books you love, one book you hate, and what you're reading now with friends and family. And then you shared your favorites at the time.

HOLLI: Well what were they? I'm curious.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] You said something by Kelly Corrigan, like *Glitter and Glue* or *the Middle Place*.

HOLLI: Absolutely love Kelly Corrigan.

ANNE: *My Name is Lucy Barton* by Elizabeth Strout.

HOLLI: Oh, yup. Love that one.

ANNE: And either *Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson or *The Shipping News* by Annie Proulx. Oh, wait, you go on. Or *Call The Midwife* by Jennifer Worth. Or *the Rent Collector* by Camron Wright because it's so hard to decide, which made us know you'd be a great guest.

HOLLI: *The Shipping News* and *Snow Falling on Cedars* are one of my like re-reads that I read all the time. But yeah, I read all those that year. That makes sense.

ANNE: You told me your criteria for picking them. You have a well developed theory of literature here, Holli. So you said books are like food.

HOLLI: Yeah.

ANNE: Some you eat and are quickly digested. They might be delicious, but they don't really contribute to the day's nutrition. Other books are nutrient dense and they stay with you forever, constantly adding value to your well-being. And that's the list you picked from.

HOLLI: Kinda scary how many analogies I make about reading and food. [BOTH LAUGH] But it's very true. I mean, I have some books that I feel like have just shaped my life. The ones that you mentioned are definitely ... They're not the ones I'm talking about today, but they're definitely on that list. Kelly Corrigan for, this is an example, she changed everything I think about my parents. Like I can't think about my parents and not think about Kelly Corrigan and what she

said about her parents and her experiences. So they just shaped my life and kind of form who I am.

[00:05:46]

ANNE: Well I think she would be happy to hear that because we chatted with her in book club earlier this year and I asked, now you go on book tour and you talk to readers about really intimate details of your life, is that - is that hard? How do you feel about that? And she said, my number one goal is to be useful. To help somebody and the fact that you think about her words all the time, I think she'd be happy to hear that.

What's something that she said that really changed the way you looked at things?

HOLLI: Gosh, I have a good relationship with my mom, but it was fraught in my teenage years. That's probably traditional. That's normal. And my relationship with my dad was always easy. And I didn't understand why that was when I was growing up. Like why I could talk to my dad about things easier than I could my mom. Then I read ... Well first I read *The Middle Place*, which was just this gushing tribute to her dad in my opinion. And I was like oh, I totally relate. My dad is greemy. I mean that is my dad. And I remember, I think I gave the book to my dad for father's day one time, and I was like, this is you. You know.

Then I read *Glitter and Glue* and that one probably hit me way more than *The Middle Place*. I just remember sobbing through it because I was like, now I get it. My dad was the glitter. My mom was the glue. And I was at a place ... I was at a different place in my life, you know, where I'm a mom now and I get my mom more so now than I did as a teenager and I understand why she was the way that she was. And I admire her and I want to be like her. And it was like a different place, but I was like, it made all those challenging years as a teenager kinda fall into place and I was like, oh, I get it.

So every time I think about my parents, I have that thought, my dad's the glitter, my mom's the glue. Because it's just very much what our dynamic was like growing up.

I feel like a lump of clay as a person and I feel like I'm shaped by the things around me and so much of what shapes me are the books that I read. When I'm hurt about something, I want to read a book about it. When I'm struggling with something, I want to read a book about it. And I'm not just talking like straight forward, self-help kind of things. Like I want to read what somebody else like me is growing through or a great memoir or somebody who's had a different, totally different experience than me and challenges my view points. I really feel like reading has made me more empathetic. I feel like reading has made me have a larger worldview even though I'm not as well-travelled as I'd like to be. I feel well-travelled because I travel everywhere through books.

And I think it also makes me realize that everybody has a story. Kelly Corrigan is a great example. You know, she has so many different stories. She battled breast cancer. She could

have a story about her father fighting cancer. She could have a story about being a nanny in Australia or a friend dying from cancer. I mean, but all of this shapes her and makes her who she is. And because she's willing to share that, it shapes and makes me who I am.

[00:08:53]

ANNE: If you're clay and these books have a significant influence on you, how does that affect the way you decide to read?

HOLLI: That's the challenge. [BOTH LAUGH] I am very much a mood reader and just like I said, if there's something that's bothering me in my life or something in the news like I read *The Boat People* this year and I read it when there was all this stuff going on about the separation of families at the border because I really didn't want the news to tell me how to feel about this. You know, I really wanted experience. Now granted it's a fictional story based on true events, but I really wanted an experience. I wanted to know what this feels like. What this looks like from all different angles, and *The Boat People* really helped me with that.

So I very much try to read books that reflect what I'm grappling with in my life. Whether it's being a mom or whether it's having relationships with friends or my spouse or what's going on in the news or what's going on in the world, when something is kinda just nagging at me, I want to pick up a book and read about it.

ANNE: When you filled out your submission this year, you said you had an interesting development in your life regarding actually family and a book club. I'd love to talk more about it, but first I want to say that in between those two submissions, we got to meet in person in Houston. Though that's not where you live, right? That was several hours away.

HOLLI: Yeah, it's about an hour or so. It's more than an hour away. I live in Beaumont. I'm a writer. A freelance writer and I'm also, I do public affairs for a local nonprofit organization that provides free cancer screenings to people who don't have insurance. I've been there for 11 years and I love it, but one of the hard parts of the job is that obviously you have to fundraise. And so we have like these anchor fundraisers throughout the year and I was actually working on one of those at the time and found out you were coming to Houston and when I'm working on those fundraisers, it kind of like consumes my life, like I work from home, at the office, just all the time. Always working.

I said to my husband, I was like, oh I wish Anne was coming another time because I can't get away. I would love to go hear her in Houston. And my husband knows I'm obsessed with books. Knows I'm obsessed with you. But is not all that interested. [BOTH LAUGHS] In either ... it's kinda like he's just kinda looks the other way and it's like okay. I mean, how many times are you talking to your husband and you're like, absolutely certain they're not even hearing you? [ANNE LAUGHS] So it was kind of like one of those all panic comments, like he's not even listening and didn't matter. Well I was at work, all of a sudden, my husband walks in. I'm in the conference room with my boss, and she's like, you need to go to Houston. I'm like, what is happening?

What's going on? And he had actually called my boss and arranged for me to get this little blissful break to drive to Houston to hear you. And so he picked me up from the office and swept me off to Houston and we got to meet.

[00:11:57]

ANNE: That was so much fun. I'm glad he did. And we got to be at Blue Willow Bookshop together, which I hope I get to get back to, sooner rather than later, and he was a really good sport. It was fun to meet him too.

HOLLI: I was just in awe 'cause I'm like how many things are you actually listening to that I don't even realize you're hearing? [ANNE LAUGHS] But it was awesome ... and he, you know, in spite of not being a huge booklover like I am, he enjoyed it so much. [LAUGHS] He loved your reading. He thought the whole experience was wonderful. So he actually enjoyed it too.

ANNE: I mean, you get a bunch of readers in a room and it's a pretty great room to be in.

HOLLI: It is! I will say that like readers and dog people [ANNE LAUGHS] are just my people. I could just ... any walk of life, if you love books or if you love dogs, or you especially, it's magic if you love both. I can hang.

ANNE: Since then you've had another interesting development in your reading life with your own family. And that was so fun to read about in your submission. So tell me more, Holli.

HOLLI: I have a large family. Relatively large family. I have a brother and three sisters. We're all kind of spread out. My brother and one sister live within, you know, an hour of me. One in Arizona, and one in Virginia. We don't get to see each other all that often and almost never all at the same time. Because you know, one might come in for Thanksgiving and then one comes in for Christmas or you know, somebody's traveling this time or whatever.

So, not very often that we're all together. So my oldest sister, who's also a huge reader and a writer, had come down and I had just finished this book and loved it. And I was like you need to take this home and read it on your travels back home. So she took it and she had really enjoyed it, but hadn't finished it. She was busy. Well a few minutes later, my uncle passed away. And he was like a patriarch in our family. Everybody adored him. All at once, everyone kind of converged in Texas for his services and just to celebrate his life. My two sisters, from out of town, stayed with me.

You know, despite the somber occasion, we just had the best time. Which it feels wrong to say that, but if you knew my uncle, he would love that 'cause he was all about having a good time. And one night we were up really late. They had like a red eye flight, so it was very irresponsible. [ANNE LAUGHS] And we were up very late as sisters just talking about books. And my oldest sister Laurie starts telling my other sister that lives in Arizona that she was like on the last chapter of this book that I gave her and it was so funny, and we were just dy- ... like in tears. Of

course we were tired and emotionally exhausted, so that probably contributed to why everything was so funny, but we were just dying laughing, talking about this book. And so my other sister in Arizona was like, I am taking this book with me, so you need to finish 'cause I'm reading this on the plane.

So she did. She finished the book. My other sister took it with her to Arizona. Finished the book. Called all of us and was like, I am crying laughing. This book was so great. We had the best time talking about books and so the idea got brought up that we needed a sister book club. So that January, this was December, that January, we formed the Shelf Sisters Book Club.

Each month, one of us picks a book. We all read it and then we discuss it over FaceTime. And it has been the best experience. I have never felt closer to my sisters, particularly the ones that live far away. We all have very, very different lives. Very busy lives. But we have just bonded over this book club, and it gives us a reason to talk every month. Which when you have out of town family, you don't even realize you can go months and not talk to each other. Not only are we talking about books, but we're talking about our lives and what's going on and it's just connected us in so many ways. It's been this huge blessing that came out of this difficult situation of my uncle passing away.

[00:16:08]

ANNE: That sounds amazing and I bet so many readers right now are thinking, oh, I would love to do that. So you take turns choosing the books. How does that go? You all - you all loved this one book. Is that ... do - do you have a common kind of reading taste? Is there a lot of overlap there?

HOLLI: Well, you know, it's new and we're learning. So we've had a few dud books where someone has selected something and midway through the month, we're like hey, this isn't working. Let's do something else. So it's been interesting to learn in that way more about my sisters like, what are their triggers? What do they like to read about? What do they not like to read about? What is a little too close to home? Or a little too depressing for whatever they're going through in their lives at that time. So it's - it's interesting how books ... books open up conversations that you might not be able to have otherwise.

So one sister picks a book each month. We read it. And we don't really have any specifications of like, what are we looking for, what are we going to read this month, or nothing's really picked in advance. In February, we read this book called *A Light In Dark Places* by Jennifer Graves. The reason that we decided on this book is because all of us, unbeknownst to each other, had deep dived into this podcast called Cold. So when we were trying to figure out what we were going to read in February, one of my sisters mentioned, she was like, well I'm kind of interested to read this book and it was written by the sister of the suspect. And it's - it's not in favor of him basically. It's like ... and she was like you know this podcast keeps referencing this book and now I kinda want to read it.

And we're all like we're listening to that podcast. We want to read it, too. So it was just so funny because I don't know if I ever called my sister and been like, hey, are you listening to this podcast? But then we kinda had this nerdy, for the month of February, deep dive into this podcast and this book. And we all loved it. I mean, loved it and you know, it's tragic and sad, but just as ... we were all interested and it's such a departure from the book that originally got us together. We're like, wow. You know, interests that we have kinda span the gambit of what would be a really great read.

[00:18:28]

ANNE: Okay, you said triggers which made me think that some of your sisters are pretty sensitive in what they read, but then you started telling me about a true crime deep dive, so [LAUGHS] tell me more.

HOLLI: So that was surprising too. Some of my sisters have a pretty high threshold for language, sex scenes, kind of highly sensitive. So that was what was surprising about this book. It's not an easy read, but I will say that the way that she handled it was very delicate. She talked about the dysfunction in her family, but she didn't go into the nitty-gritty details. Like she ... there was a few scenes where I'm like, ooh, I gotta hurry up and get past this 'cause it makes me feel uncomfortable. But overall, as she handled it very delicately, which we didn't know going in. And I think that's one of the great things about our book club is even if a book ends up being a dud and we have to abandoned it and do something else, we're willing to try. And it just so happened that we thought, well, we'll try this book, and all of us ... I think every one of us read it in a day. [LAUGHS] That's how interesting it was.

ANNE: Wow.

HOLLI: Yeah. If you've listened to the podcast, it kinda goes along with the book and it was just like taking a magnifying glass to what we were already listening to. It made it really interesting.

ANNE: Holli, you said that you abandoned books mid-month, which I think a lot of people are like [GASP]. How do you know when it's time to do that?

HOLLI: As we've been doing this book club, I've gotten to know, like I said my sisters better, and so one of my book picks that we had tried was *Lily And The Octopus*. And I am a devoted dog lover and I am pretty much the target audience for any kind of sappy, *Marley and Me* type book. I was just kind of in that mood, and picked *Lily And The Octopus* and we got into it and quickly realized that it was just a little too sensitive for some of my sisters. [LAUGHS]

And I was reading it and I could just tell that it was going in a way that would be uncomfortable for them or that probably wasn't what they were needing in their lives at that time. And so we abandoned it. And we picked something else, which ended up being this five-star read for all of us. So it was a lesson to me because I'm kind of a hopeless finisher. Like I finished *Lily And The*

Octopus even though we didn't end up using it for our Shelf Sisters. It was a lesson to me that it's okay to switch gears and do something else if it's not working.

[00:20:59]

ANNE: Okay. So it sounds like you're all willing to try anything and not afraid to change course.

HOLLI: Yes. I think we try to pick books that are fairly PG, PG-13, but yes, we're willing to try anything.

ANNE: Well this will be fun then. Ooh, because today what we want to do is find books that you can all read together. Right?

HOLLI: Yeah. I'd like that. For me at least, I'm a pretty wide reader. I'll read just about anything. Any genre. Any topic. Within reason. You know, when you're working as a book club, you almost have to read the thing that appeals to everyone, so if we can identify some of those books, that'd be awesome.

ANNE: Well this sounds fun. Let's see what we can do.

HOLLI: Yeah.

ANNE: So, Holli, with that in mind, finding books for Shelf Sisters and with your own reading taste, how did you choose your favorites today?

HOLLI: I went back to the books that I know are going to stay with me, that are going to be on my mind for a long time, and I also tried to pick books that I read recently because I have a really hard time, even though like the impressions of books stay with me, sometimes I forget the details. So these books are still books that I remember the details and really remember those feelings that I had while I was reading them.

ANNE: Hey readers, this weekend I'm headed to Magic City Books in Tulsa for Independent Bookstore Day. I am so excited to visit the bookstore, AND the city for the first time. And though the logistics of travel stress me out sometimes, it's reassuring to know that at least some things about the trip will be a piece of cake. Packing in my Away suitcase is always a joy and a pleasure, whether I'm packing for two nights or twelve, I can fit it all into my Away carry-on, and not only that, I can maneuver it through the airport. And that's saying something.

Away's approach to travel is simple, they create objects designed to be resilient, resourceful, and essential to the way you travel. And my Away suitcase is essential to how I now travel.

Away suitcases come in four sizes: you can get the Carry-On, the Bigger Carry-On, the Medium, and the Large. Each has four 360-degree spinner wheels that roll smoothly on any surface, a patent-pending compression system and a USB battery pack on the carry ons.

I have a blush pink Carry-On and between the compression system and battery pack I can't imagine traveling by car OR by plane in any of my old suitcases that I now make my kids use.

Away gives you a 100-Day trial to live with it and travel with it. At any point you can you can return it for a full refund.

They also offer free shipping on any Away order within the lower 48 states and a lifetime warranty where anything that breaks they will fix or replace it for you for life.

Give Away a try the next time you go away.

For \$20 off a suitcase, visit awaytravel.com/READNEXT and use promo code READNEXT during checkout!

That's awaytravel.com/READNEXT with the code READNEXT for \$20 off a suitcase.

ANNE: Okay, well you know how this works. You're going to tell me three books you love, one book you don't, and what you're reading now, and we will talk about what we can add to your either personal or Shelf Sisters reading list.

[00:24:15]

HOLLI: Wonderful.

ANNE: Holli, tell me about your first favorite.

HOLLI: My first favorite is the book that started it all: *My Family And Other Animals* by Gerald Durrell. This book ... I think I actually found it in the comments section of one of your podcast blog posts. I picked up this book kinda randomly. I'm an animal lover, so just to get that out there, I'm shameless, so any book that features animals [ANNE LAUGHS] I want to read about it. And so I read some funny books and it's not often that I'm laughing out loud to tears. And I was laughing so hard during this book. It's a memoir written by the youngest Durrell, Gerry. And his family which is just made up of the most quirky individuals. They decide to move to the Greek island of Corfu. And his mom's a widow. He's got adult siblings. They all move.

Each chapter is him reflecting on the animals, including his family around him. And he tells the funniest stories about his family. He tells the funniest stories about the nature. He tells the funniest stories about the characters that are around them and it is just a phenomenal book. I

think in my review of it, after I read it, I said, if Steve Irwin wrote like Jane Austen [ANNE LAUGHS] and had the observations of David Sedaris, that would be this book. And that's really it. I mean that sums it up.

[00:25:52]

ANNE: What a review.

HOLLI: Yeah. I think the thing that made me laugh the most is the mom in the book. Like the youngest son is like always bringing in animals that he's captured into the house. Like owls and bats and insects. Geese and always bringing these animals and she - she has virtually no reaction. [LAUGHS] She's just like okay, whatever. You know, like, let's eat dinner. You can let the scorpions in. It's not a big deal. [ANNE LAUGHS] It's just so funny to me.

ANNE: Okay, so you like a dry wit, is what I'm hearing.

HOLLI: I love a dry wit. One I knew this would be a good book for my sisters is that is how we communicate in our family. [LAUGHS] That's how we interact is this dry wit, and so, I knew they would appreciate the humor. And then I would say similarly, we have a large family and we are all very different and quirky and unique. It's interesting because if you saw it written out on paper, you'd said well these people couldn't possibly get along. And then we come together and we work.

It was really reflected in this book. You have these people who are very quirky, very unique, all different, all interested in different things, all very strong personalities, in very different ways, and they come together and they're just a total blast. And it works.

ANNE: Oh. Okay. So now immediately I want to think about all the snappy books with droll family dialogue. [HOLLI LAUGHS] That's a tall order. Tell me your next favorite. I need more to go on. [LAUGHS]

HOLLI: Okay, so my next favorite is *The Blue Castle* by L.M. Montgomery. And this is the book that I selected after *Lily And The Octopus*. The main character, her name is Valancy and she has this, in the total opposite way, crazy family. They're very conventional. Very controlling. Judgmental about everyone and everything. And she's just kind of languishing in this family.

Something happens. I don't want to spoil it even though it's a very old book. It changes her perspective and she's like, I'm not going to do this anymore. I'm going to make my own way. I'm going to do my own thing. What happens from there is just this coming-of-age story. She finds out who she is, what she likes, where she belongs in the world. And it's funny at times. It's romantic at times. There's this like kind of background, slow burn romance set that's kind of developing. So it's romantic at times. It's funny at times, but the benefit of this is that L.M. Montgomery just writes the best female characters.

She's nuance. She's complex. She has big feelings. Big thoughts. She has a lot going on in her life and you just fall in love with her. And by the end of the book, you are so invested in her happiness, you don't want it to end.

[00:28:42]

ANNE: Well that's always a good sign. What did the sisters think about this one?

HOLLI: We all loved it. And it was interesting because all of us ended up reading this book over spring break. That was one of the things that was really appealing is that the setting in the book, Montgomery just has a sense of place. It's just beautiful writing about the environment that Valancy is in. Then we're all on these spring break vacations and in these beautiful places. I was at a cabin in the woods and I'm reading about the woods. And it was just the ... the experience of that was just lovely ... I'm sitting on a front porch and I don't know where the book ends and the outdoors begin. It was wonderful.

ANNE: All right, Holli. What is your third favorite book?

HOLLI: Okay so my next book is *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles. I - We did not read as Shelf Sisters, although I have one other sister that read it after I raved about it and also loved it. This book is why I am a hopeless finisher of books as much as I'd like to abandon books, this is the reason why. And it's because of *A Gentleman in Moscow*. Because this book I hated until about halfway through. I mean, I hated it, and I was irritated at every single person that recommended this book to me. [ANNE LAUGHS] 'Cause I'm like they don't get me at all. They don't care about me. They don't love me. I couldn't understand why this book was so hyped. For me, why I hated it in the beginning.

It's about this Count Rostov. It's this politically precarious time. People are getting executed. People are going to jail. And he gets sentenced to life at a luxury hotel. [LAUGHS] And I was kind of like ... when that happened ... I was kinda like, okay wah. Like I know that it's not great that you're stuck in this hotel. Not ideal, but you're at a luxury hotel. It has a fabulous restaurant inside. You know, wonderful people in and out. I was like, eh, I - I don't care about this guy. And even though he was witty and entertaining and I thought that the things that were going on in Russia at the time were interesting, I was kinda like, I didn't get it. And it was very slow because he's in a hotel. I mean, what can he do?

So it was just like this book is awful. And I've still got hundreds and hundreds of pages left. And then something happens. This character is introduced. He totally changed. He just ... I fell in love with Count Rostov. I fell in love with everything about him. I was so invested. I finished this book in the bathtub. I was sobbing and hugging this book. [ANNE LAUGHS] Because I was like, this is the perfect ending. This is the ... he's the best man, and I wanted to read the book again. I didn't, but I wanted to re-read it just to apologize for all my negative feelings in the beginning and all the internal ugly things I was thinking about him because I was like you're just the most wonderful person in the world. It was just lovely.

And so I finished that book, and I was like, this is why I can't abandon books because I am always hoping for that moment when things are going to change and I'm going to fall in love with it. And so I recommend *A Gentleman In Moscow* with the caveat that you might get halfway through and not understand why it's so great until a little later.

[00:32:15]

ANNE: So when did it kick into gear for you? What page?

HOLLI: It was one-something. It was one hundred something. I can't remember what exact page. It was far into it, and I remember my husband, I was reading this book in bed at night and I would just be like, I hate this book. And turn another page. I hate this book. And he was like, why are you reading this? And I was like oh, all these people recommended it and I'm just going to read it as if ... you know, if only to tell them that I finished it. And then like ... the next few nights later, I was like, I love this book! I love this book. And my husband's like, what is going on with you? Because I mean, he thought I was reading a different book 'cause I was just in tears over it.

ANNE: So Holli, you did keep reading, but it sounded like you had good reason to and that was what I assume is the encouragement of people whose bookish taste you trusted.

HOLLI: Yeah.

ANNE: Not just his place on the bestseller list. Am I right?

HOLLI: Yes. So I have some good bookish friends in my life that give me recommendations I can trust. You're one of them, Anne. Even though you didn't know.

ANNE: Oh, thank you. [LAUGHS]

HOLLI: But you're one of my bookish friends that I take recommendations from and you had recommended this book and then I have another friend name Stephanie, and she had raved about this book. And I was like, well, if Stephanie liked it, there's gotta be something. There's gotta be something to it. And so I just ... I - I had to keep going, but I really thought I was even phrasing in my mind what I was going to say when I finished this book. Like what's a tactful way of saying, you hurt my feelings recommending this terrible book to me? [BOTH LAUGH] But it didn't work out that way. It was perfect.

ANNE: Is there anything anyone could have told you about the beginning to frame it differently for you that might've helped? Because it is slow to kick into gear.

HOLLI: I think if I felt like Count Rostov would be redeemed in the end, that would be appealing. And it's not that he's a bad guy in the beginning. He's not a bad guy. He's likeable enough. I

don't know. Maybe it's one of those books that you really can't frame. You just have to experience it because truly the delight of having that change of opinion was part of the appeal to me. That moment where it shifted and I was like, I am in love with this character, was worth the grumblings that I had at the beginning.

[00:34:30]

ANNE: I do want to probe this a little more because I am terrified a whole bunch of readers are going to think now I can never set down a book again because what if I end up clutching it to my chest in the bathtub?

HOLLI: Yes.

ANNE: 400 pages after I first wanted to set it down. So based on your favorites and the - the kind of books you said you really enjoy, it seems like you really like likeable characters. You like people you can relate to. You like people who show you something about human nature, and I wonder if it's important here that in the beginning of the book, you have a man in the situation, but you don't know who that man is, how he ended up there or what his motivations are. And as that became clear, you came to see that he was in fact someone you could root for. Readers, if you didn't want to know that about *A Gentleman In Moscow*, I'm sorry, but we're not going to count that as a real spoiler.

HOLLI: Yeah.

ANNE: Is there something there maybe?

HOLLI: Yes. Absolutely. I think for me, understanding someone's motivations, even if they did something wrong. If I can understand where they were or where they were coming from, I can sometimes, most of the time, find that thread of humanity and think okay, well, I might have done that in that situation or you know that line, but for the grace of God, go I. You know, it kinda puts you in that perspective of like that could have been me.

ANNE: So you don't want to read about rich people problems. And you thought maybe that's what you got into?

HOLLI: Yes. I think that's it.

ANNE: Okay.

HOLLI: I really don't want to read about rich people's problems. I've kinda ... Yeah, like I just can't feel sorry for you when I am reading other books like *The Boat People*. I'm thinking, Count Rostov, don't you know that there's people in these ... languishing? They're separated from their families and even though Count Rostov had nothing to do with that, at the time, I'm like, jeez Louise, pull it together. You know? It's not that bad.

[00:36:14]

ANNE: Okay. So you wanted to find the humanity in the situation and not what seemed like a bunch of whining before you understood who he was. Okay.

HOLLI: Yeah.

ANNE: All right. That's interesting. Okay, so Holli, we're not going to count the first 100 pages of *A Gentleman In Moscow* as the book that wasn't working for you. Tell me about one that actually didn't work for you.

HOLLI: One book that I personally hated was *Sharp Objects* by Gillian Flynn. This was a book that had been recommended to me, not by Stephanie, but by some other people. I read it and I think I was physically ill from beginning to end. It was not just twisted. It was crimped and braided. It was [ANNE LAUGHS]

It really was. And I felt like the author did things just for the sake of being provocative or for the sake of being sinister. And I didn't appreciate that. I didn't want my emotions toyed with just to make something a little more thrilling. I finished it because it was one of those books like you have to know what happens, but at the end of it, I was like, I just want to throw this book across the room. Get rid of it. Burn it. Do ... Get ... I just never want to see it again. 'Cause it just made me literally feel sick from beginning to end.

ANNE: I can work with that.

HOLLI: And then the other book ... The book that my sisters and I didn't like ... is was actually our first book in January. We read *The Sun* by Lois Lowry. We had all been fans of *The Giver* series. One sister, her very, very all-time favorite is *Gathering Blue*, and this was the last book in that series. None of us had read it. And so we thought, oh, it'll be great to read it.

It was so flat. I don't think it was a good book by any stretch of the imagination, but when you have a book like that with a name on the cover like Lois Lowry, it's even more disappointing because you know what she can do. You know what a true talent she is. And you ... got to the end of the book, and I was just like, really? Really, Lois? This is what we've got? It was just very disappointing.

ANNE: Holli, I was thinking that was so interesting how disappointing I never finished *The Giver* series myself. I just can't imagine what you're talking about. But I just looked it up on my GoodReads and sure enough, despite the overall rating being 3.98. I mean GoodReads reviews and star ratings, I have opinions about those. I've talked about them before. I don't think they're the best.

However, the average rating is 3.98, but I gave it two-stars on January 30th, 2013. And said I was surprised and disappointed at the world Lowry created in this follow up. I am completely

willing to suspend disbelief for a fantasy book, but the direction she took this one made no sense to me.

I do not remember the details, but apparently, you're not alone.

[00:39:00]

HOLLI: Oh, wow, I'm glad we share the same opinion because I felt guilty not giving it good writing 'cause I'm like, I love Lois Lowry, but I couldn't believe this book. There's a whole middle section where the one thing the main character does is work out. [LAUGHS] I was just -

ANNE: Yeah, I really do not remember that. [LAUGHS]

HOLLI: I don't know. It was disappointing.

ANNE: Holli, what do you want to be different in your reading life?

HOLLI: A couple things. I have a really hard time ... I call it like a book FOMO. I can be loving a book, but I'll be looking at my TBR pile, and I'm like, I cannot wait for this book to be over 'cause I can't wait to read XYZ. So I want to be more present in the books that I read and then I'd love to have some great books that I can bring back to my sisters.

ANNE: All right. Let's give it a try. Are you ready?

HOLLI: I'm ready.

ANNE: Readers, I'm reading a great summer read right now in which the plot hinges on preserving old family memories—specifically, photos, letters, and newspaper clippings—before they degrade to the point where the photos can barely be seen, and the old letters and newspapers aren't legible anymore because they won't be able to solve the puzzle that is the family's history.

This race-against-time plot makes for fun reading ... but I keep thinking, this sure would be easier if they just used LegacyBox!

LegacyBox takes all your old analog memories and preserves them so you can share the joy and nostalgia of all those old VHS tapes, film reels, photos, negatives and newspaper clippings.

At my house, not only have we cleaned up boxes in our basement of old memories, but we thought Legacybox was so worthwhile and so easy that we sent a box to my parents so they could preserve the family memories in their keeping.

When you get your box, just fill it with old tech you want to digitize and then get a thumbdrive, DVD or digital download in return.

You'll get piece of mind knowing you haven't lost any of those old memories and a great sense of accomplishment cleaning up that closet, attic, or basement shelf.

There's never been a better time to digitally preserve your memories. Visit LegacyBox.com today to get started.

Plus, for a limited time they're offering What Should I Read Next? listeners an exclusive discount. Go to LegacyBox.com/READNEXT to get 40% off your first order.

Go to LegacyBox.com/READNEXT and save 40% today!

Get started preserving your past!

Readers, It's now springtime, which means hibernation season is thankfully over. All of a sudden, everyone's talking about making "better choices" and of course, getting ready for summer. Well, here's a better choice that'll actually get you ready for those sweaty days of come: aluminum-free Coconut Deodorant from Kopari!

Kopari's Coconut Deodorant is a cleaner alternative to traditional deodorants. It's aluminum-free, vegan, and does not contain silicones, sulfates, parabens, GMOs, or baking soda. Instead this deodorant keeps you fresh with plant-based actives like sage oil and coconut oil.

Last week a friend and I were swapping terrible stories about how we loved the way our old deodorants worked ... until they made us break out in horrible rashes. I'm happy to say that hasn't been an issue since I made the switch to Kopari. It's great if you've got sensitive skin, like I do, or if you're looking for a deodorant with a scent that's not overpowering... or if you just don't want a bunch of questionable ingredients on your body.

*Go to KopariBeauty.com/READNEXT to save five-dollars off your first deodorant order when you subscribe! That's KOPARI, K-O-P-A-R-I BEAUTY dot com slash READNEXT.
KopariBeauty.com/READNEXT*

*ANNE: The books you love are *My Family And Other Animals* by Gerald Durrell, *The Blue Castle* by L.M. Montgomery, and *A Gentleman In Moscow* by Amor Towles. Which I touch on*

briefly in a recent episode of One Great Book, so that's fun. And the books that were not for you were *Sharp Objects* by Gillian Flynn and *Son* by Lois Lowry.

We talked about what you like for you. You like books that probe human nature, that take you places you've never been, that let you experience the world through someone else's eyes. And likeable characters. I think strong moral compass is something I'm seeing that you enjoy reading about. Strong sense of place is a common theme through your likes and dislikes, actually. And you wouldn't object to something with a dry wit. Family stories and dogs get bonus points.

[00:43:26]

HOLLI: Yes.

ANNE: Okay. We're going to start with a pick that I think may be good for the sisters. I'm pivoting hard especially off *The Blue Castle*. And this is a 1912 classic called *Daddy-Long-Legs* by Jean Webster. Do you know it?

HOLLI: I don't.

ANNE: Okay. This is a classic that if you mention it to circles of readers, half the people will say, I love that book! And half will say, what are you talking about? [HOLLI LAUGHS] Because it's not in bookstores these days or at least I've never seen it in one. It was published in 1912. It's really easy to find an ebook version inexpensively because it is in the public domain.

This is an epistolary novel, which means it consists perhaps entirely of letters. Here's the set up. We have our protagonist. Her name is Jerusha. She's an orphan. She lives in an orphanage. She is a budding writer and in her last year of high school, she writes this piece that the orphanage's trustees are really unhappy about because it is witty and pokes fun at them in a gentle way. And they are not amused.

But one of the trustees who comes to visit, this is about the fun thing. So once a year they come to visit and it's a really big deal, and the girls hate it. Jerusha lampoons this in her little essay, but one of the trustees thinks it's really funny and thinks that she has such promise that he offers to pay for education if she wants to go to college to be a writer.

This was not in the cards for her. So she is thrilled and jumps at the chance, but there is one condition and that is she needs to send him regular letters. So he will pay for her college education if she sends him one letter a month. This is the only payment he wants and so she starts writing to Daddy-Long-Legs, which is where the title of the book comes from. And the reason she calls him Daddy-Long-legs is she's never actually met the man. She's seen his shadow. He's tall and he had arms and legs and it's ... so that - that's where the name comes from, His shadow looked kinda like a spider.

Make sure you get a version of the book that has her drawings in it because she sends these really funny, silly little drawings illustrating what she's been doing every month. Because of the way the story develops, we are in Jerusha's head. We can see how she's developing. It's a coming-of-age story. It becomes a love story at a certain point.

Jerusha goes to college and she promptly re-christens herself Judy. She introduces herself to every as I am Judy, so you can leave that, you know, early-20th century name behind. [HOLLI LAUGHS] And then we go through her freshman year as she makes friends. Her sophomore year, she develops ... she begins to assert herself. She begins to push back against Daddy-Long-Legs a little bit and in the meantime, as a college girl in the early 20th century, she's making friends. She's playing basketball. I didn't know girls would've played that in 1911. She's going on visits and she's starting to meet men that seem interesting and as potential future partners.

Let me just say that this is a coming-of-age story. It's a really sweet love story and I think it's the kind of book that the sisters would enjoy reading together. If they enjoyed reading *The Blue Castle*, and were great with that content, then I think this one would be a great follow up. It's not the same but it has enough similarities that I think this would be a win for your Shelf Sisters.

[00:46:42]

HOLLI: I love it. I can't wait to read it with them.

ANNE: Okay. Now can we do one for you?

HOLLI: Please.

ANNE: Coincidentally, we have another orphan book, but I didn't realize that until just a second ago. I want to get you a book that really has that droll wit that I often think of as a droll British wit. And Kate Atkinson is a contemporary writer who gets that tone so well. I think she's really rattling around in my mind right now because I just finished her new Jackson Brodie novel, *Big Sky*, but that's not where I would recommend you would start if you haven't read Atkinson before. Have you read Atkinson before?

HOLLI: I feel like I have. I know she has *Transcription*, right?

ANNE: Yes. And that's the one I would recommend you start with. She's been doing historicals the past few years, so *Life After Life* and *The God in Ruins* are the ones that have been out these past seven, eight years.

HOLLI: I'm trying to see if I've read her before. I - I am familiar with her, so I want to say that I have. And I want to say *Transcription* was on my list, but okay. So I've read the Jackson Brodie novels. That's what I've read.

[00:47:44]

ANNE: Did you enjoy the Jackson Brodie novels?

HOLLI: Yes. I did. I'm looking. I gave it four and five stars. Yeah.

ANNE: Well if you enjoyed Jackson Brodie, she is going back to that series after a long gap. *Big Sky* is the fifth book in that series. It's coming out on June 18th, so put that on your list. Because Jackson Brodie also has these ... huh, there are people shooting around me and I'm going to make just a little witty comment in my own head.

HOLLI: Yes. Yes.

ANNE: And he also has an old yellow lab that is his companion for most of the book. Actually dogs are a really big thing in this book. I'm trying to think if that is a Kate Atkinson common thread.

HOLLI: I love it.

ANNE: Okay, well, definitely add *Big Sky* to the list. And between now and June 18th, I think you might enjoy *Transcription*. I want to point out to you what's going on in this book though because it's a spy novel. But you mentioned that you like the way L.M. Montgomery writes great female characters. I'm not about to say that L.M. Montgomery and Kate Atkinson are just, you know, mix and match kind of authors, not at all. But Kate Atkinson also writes really great female characters. And in this book, there's a young woman. She was an orphan. She's 18. She has no-one and she needs a job.

The job she takes is in the secretarial pool of MI5, which is the British counter intelligence agency. So this is during the war, early in World War II. She quickly goes from being a secretary to doing actual espionage. Getting inside her head ... I mean her inner running commentary is so great in this book. At least I think it is for a reader like you. Because at first, I mean, doesn't that sound important? She is a spy for MI5, but actually most of it turns out to be completely boring. Totally mundane and everyone knows it's not very exciting.

There's one meetup early on where she's supposed to meet someone and use a code word and Juliet's inner monologue is ridiculous in the best way. In this novel, there's also a lot of women grappling with their identity and shifting their identity and changing their identity. And at one point, Juliet gets in a bit of trouble. Her commentary on that is ugh, I have been too many people in my life and now it's coming back to bite me. With that mix of a sense of humour that I think you would enjoy. A serious story. Any time you talk about war, I think you have to be talking about human nature. I think this could check your boxes. I wouldn't read it with the Shelf Sisters, but I think it would be comfortable on your war shelf.

[00:50:15]

HOLLI: That sounds perfect. It's kinda reminding me of *The Nightingale*, which was another five-star from me.

ANNE: Similar setting, very different tone.

HOLLI; That's perfect. It sounds like maybe the lighter version. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: You're - you're getting the raised-eyebrow version. And there were not a lot of raised-eyebrows in Kristin Hannah's book.

HOLLI: [LAUGHS] No. No, no. I love it.

ANNE: There are a couple different directions we can go with another pick for the Shelf Sisters, but knowing that you all do read broadly, how do you feel about going with maybe another family memoir?

HOLLI: I love that. I was thinking of reading ... It would be a re-read for me, but I was thinking of doing Kelly Corrigan with them just 'cause I know they would all love to hear about the mom and dad so that would be great to have a memoir.

ANNE: I think if anyone could sell them on giving Kelly Corrigan a try, you could.

HOLLI: Well Kelly Corrigan can sell herself, my goodness.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] The book I am thinking about is ... you know, I think if I were shelving it, I'd probably put it with the food memoirs. It's by Kathleen Flinn, and I know we've talked about her on the podcast before, specifically *The Kitchen Counter Cooking School*. But the one I think you may enjoy reading with your family is a 2014 memoir called *Burnt Toast Makes You Sing Good*. And it as a memoir. It does have recipes from *An American Family*.

The first line is really great. She says, I'm Swedish, which makes me sexy, and I'm Irish, which makes me want to talk about it. So I think she has a sense of humor that you might be comfortable with. This is a really warm, reflected memoir that I think what Kathleen Flinn does really well here is she wants to talk about how great her parents were. And how food infiltrated their whole lives and how that shaped her as a person and as a cook. And it goes through many generations. It's about her family's heritage, and also their culinary heritage, thus the recipes.

She grew up in the Midwest, in Michigan, and she says that everybody thinks of the midwest as being like the home with three-bean salad and nothing else cooking wise. But what she wanted to do here was really emphasize the richness of the region and especially in her family's life. A little bit because they wanted to and a little bit because of necessity, they fished, they hunted

deer, they canned all the things in summer. They tended a garden. They had chickens, does that count as an animal component, Holli?

[00:52:32]

HOLLI: I love chickens.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Okay. [HOLLI LAUGHS] They grew fruit in their orchid, so she says that they never had much growing up, but because they wanted to and because they had to, they had good food and they also had each other.

This book had a fun personal connection for me because her family vacationed and found a home at long last in a Florida locale that I went to as a kid on spring break, so that was really fun. But I'm sure other readers reading with their own history will also find things that they share in common in the pages of the book. Like I remember one really sweet story where she says, she was quiet old before she realized that it wasn't like a normal thing for your parents to go like lock themselves in the bedroom with a bottle of wine on a Sunday afternoon every week so they could spend time together away from the rest of their big family. [HOLLI LAUGHS] You know, there's just little sweet details like that that make you think ah, this was a really nurturing environment to grow up in and I think that she wants to show that her family's relationship with each other and also with her parents specifically was something really special.

But food is over and through the book and the way you like your food metaphors to go with your reading, I think this will work for you. At one point, the grandmother says something like, I don't have to tell you I love you. I fed you pancakes.

HOLLI: That is so true of our family. Where our family is quintessentially southern family, although we've all lived all different places. When my dad retired, he built a house on some family land in Texas, so he's not too far from me. They can, they garden, they have orchid. They fish. I mean, it's very, very similar because at their heart, no matter where we lived, whether it was a big city or where in the United States we lived 'cause we moved around a lot, they were always these very basic, simple people at heart.

My dad even had a pet cow for a while.

ANNE: Ohh.

HOLLI: Like a literal pet. Like come when you call and hug and love all over pet cow. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: I didn't know a cow would come when you call it. I grew up in the city, so this would be fun to read about. Well if you know that you have that in your own family history, then I think this might be really fun for you and your sisters to read together.

[00:54:43]

HOLLI: It'll be perfect because even though ... you know, I have a sister in Virginia, I have a sister in Arizona. I think we all have that in us, of this basic love of nature, love of being outside, love of animals, love of simple, family experiences that kind of draw the heart together.

ANNE: What a great common ground to have.

HOLLI: Yeah. That's pretty perfect.

ANNE: So Holli, of the books we talked about today, *Daddy-Long-Legs* by Jean Webster, *Transcription* and also *Big Sky* coming June 18th from Kate Atkinson, and *Burnt Toast Makes You Sing Good* by Kathleen Flinn. Of those three books, what do you think you'll read next?

HOLLI: Well I think that I'm going to read *Transcription* next and I think I'm going to recommend *Burnt Toast* for my sisters to read next. And I think that will knock two birds out with one stone.

ANNE: I can't wait to hear how it goes over with you and with your sisters. Thanks so much for talking books today.

HOLLI: Thank you! It was wonderful.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Holli, and I'd love to hear what YOU think she should read next. That page is at whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/181 and it's where you'll find the full list of titles we talked about today.

Don't forget to visit Patreon.com/whatshouldireadnext/posts (that link is in the show notes as well so don't worry if you didn't jot it down quick enough) and you can be a part of our Summer Reading Guide celebration.

Next week I'm chatting with an audio industry insider about summer reading, audiobook listening trends, the genres I prefer for my own audiobooks, and which titles I should read next. Here's a sneak peek:

[00:56:47]

GUEST: And it's very fun for me, as someone who's been in the industry for 20 years now, to see audiobooks referenced on television all the time and things like that. Whereas when I started I would always have to explain "oh, an audiobook, it's like a book on tape that you got from the library..." Now I say audiobook and someone gives me the list of what they've listened to over the last six month. So it's, it's a fun change.

ANNE: When you say you see them mentioned on TV like do you mean like characters in TV shows?

GUEST: Exactly, so I was watching a medical show the other day and a patient was asking a nurse to leave her room so that she could get back into her juicy audiobook.

ANNE: [ANNE LAUGHING] Now that I can relate to.

GUEST: Yeah.

ANNE: So it really is becoming part of public consciousness.

GUEST: Absolutely.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

[00:57:36]

ANNE: Subscribe now so you don't miss next week's episode in Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, and more. We will see you next week!

If you're on twitter, let me know there @AnneBogel. That is Anne with an E, B as in books -O-G-E-L. Tag us on instagram to share what YOU are reading. You can find me there at [annebogel](#) and at [whatshouldireadnext](#). Our newsletter subscribers are the first to know all the What Should I Read Next news and happenings; if you're not on the list you can fix that now by visiting [whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/newsletter](#) to sign up for our free weekly delivery.

For more book love, check out our sister show, One Great Book, releasing on Fridays, where every week I pull one stand out selection off my personal bookshelves and tell you all about it. In 10 minutes or less. Don't miss our next episode coming this Friday.

Thanks to the people who make this show happen! What Should I Read Next is produced by Brenna Frederick, with sound design by Kellen Pechacek.

Readers, that's it for this episode. Thanks so much for listening. And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading." Happy reading, everyone.