



WSIRN Episode 206: How to bypass the book hangover
Hosted by Anne Bogel, with guest Jerrell Everett

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JERRELL: I never was a phone reader, or ebook reader, but now that I have children, I have no choice. [BOTH LAUGH]

[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers. I'm Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 206.

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.

My guest today is Jerrell Everett, a Florida reader who is serious about creating her ideal reading life. When Jerrell had kids and found herself picking up books less and less, she took action to maintain her reading life by enforcing a routine. And when she decided it was time to branch out from her comfort zone of nonfiction and introduce more novels into her rotation, she took action again... by reaching out to What Should I Read Next for help.

Today, Jerrell and I are talking about parenthood, complex family stories, and the tricky task of avoiding book hangovers. Let's get to it!

Jerrell, welcome to the show.

JERRELL: Thank you. I'm so excited to be here.

ANNE: Here on What Should I Read Next, we try to represent a broad variety of readers and when you put in your submission for the show, you hoped that we could focus on a very specific experience you've had. Can you tell me a little about that?

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JERRELL: I was actually listening to an episode, of course I don't remember which one it was. I guess I always assumed that you had like celebrities or like people with big platforms on the show and you mentioned that you had an intake form for listeners, and I was like oh, I'm just going to do it and see what happens. There have been a lot of moms, but I hadn't heard any moms with small children, and I read a lot, and I post a lot of the books that I read on Instagram and people are always asking me, how are you reading with little kids? [BOTH LAUGH] And so I thought oh that might be something really interesting to talk to Anne about.

ANNE: Well I am so glad you did, and I'm glad you mentioned that because a big misconception that listeners have of this show is that we do always talk to professional book people or people with huge platforms. And I think the reason that listeners assume that is when you take a reader and you give them a microphone that makes them sound real good. [JERRELL LAUGHS] And you ask them questions about something that they are completely expert at, that they know backwards and forwards so that they can talk about all day long and that is their reading life. They sound like a pro, but at least half of our episodes are with readers who they're not professional book people.

JERRELL: Right.

ANNE: We want listeners to feel like ah, that person could be my sister. My friend. My teacher. My neighbor. My dog sitter. My ... You know, it could be me and that's how we want people to feel, and so I'm so glad you did.

JERRELL: Me too.

ANNE: And listeners, that form is at whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/guest. So, Jerrell, you have a young child and it sounds like motherhood and parenthood has really changed your reading life.

JERRELL: Yes. I actually have three young children. All girls. Almost four, just turned two and seven months old. So, I am very busy. And for my oldest daughter first year of life, I didn't read anything except for parenting and sleep books. Like no reading for fun. When I was pregnant with her, I read all pregnancy books and then all I read about was sleep after ... I think when I was pregnant with my second or right after she was born, I was like, you know what? I'm going to go back to my normal reading life, maybe not as much as I used to read, but I just missed reading so much. And so I made it a rule, especially after my third was born, I made it a rule that when I was nursing her, I would read. So I would read on my phone or on my iPad. Since she's been born, I've read, like, 15 books or something and she's seven months old.

ANNE: Seven months, fifteen books. So we're all about quality, not quantity around here.

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JERRELL: Right.

ANNE: But if you wanted to read more, it sounds like you're doing it.

JERRELL: Yeah, I've just been making it a priority. Sometimes I will watch Downton Abbey episodes, and sometimes I read, and I always feel better going to bed after I've read 'cause I just feel like ... I don't know, I get so ... I love reading so much and I get so excited to read a good book. And I also, that's a form of self-care for me. Like you know, with the kids all the day, but that kind've takes me out of the mom-space into whatever space, you know, that book is about. I'm very glad I made that a priority again.

ANNE: Yeah, and it's interesting how that can be something that you feel like you're doing for you even if you're doing it while you're, you know, have your child on your lap and are feeding them.

JERRELL: Exactly. [LAUGHS] Exactly.

ANNE: So how do you choose what to read next, Jerrell?

JERRELL: I tend to choose nonfiction books. I love nonfiction. And so, when I was growing up, I always read like celebrity autobiographies. [LAUGHS] Like one of the earliest-

ANNE: Wait, why are you laughing?

JERRELL: Because it's so funny to me to think that as like a 12-year-old I was reading ... One of the earlier books I can remember, I think she was Miss America. She won when I was younger and she was deaf. I should have Googled her name before-

ANNE: Oh, yes, I do ... 'Cause I used to watch the pageant at night. My mom would let me stay up late.

JERRELL: [LAUGHS] Yes. And so I remember after she won, she wrote a book and I could not wait to read it and I read the whole thing. And like it was about her life. I don't remember how old I was. And I just would tear through those books and like, singers' autobiographies. And then all through my life, I always gravitated toward nonfiction but I'm really trying to pick up fiction more now. And I actually really enjoy it, but I'm a little bit picky about fiction.

ANNE: What do you think it is that pulls you towards nonfiction? Does it speak to your natural interests? Is it a safety zone?

JERRELL: I like to write. I've always loved to write. And so, I write nonfiction though. I've had a blog off and on through college and now into motherhood. And so it speaks to me as a writer,

but it also, I just love to hear other people's stories. I love reading a book and feeling like I can find some of my own story in their story. I have a law degree. I was an English major. I'm a little bit of a researcher type of personality. If I want to learn something about it, I like to read about it, so I think that's what also draws me to nonfiction as well.

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ANNE: Oh, that's interesting. You know, those are qualities of the avid reader profile. That if they want to cook something, they look in a book. If they want to know something, they look in a book.

JERRELL: That's so me. [LAUGHS] To the point that my husband is like, okay, calm down on the research, especially when my first baby was born. [ANNE LAUGHS] I was like reading everything, researching everything. I've had to check - tone it down a little bit. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Okay, so when you said that you were reading nonfiction just for ... you were reading about sleep and was it parenting and sleep, is that what you said?

JERRELL: Yeah, like mostly sleep. [LAUGHS] She doesn't sleep that well.

ANNE: Okay. Oh, my heart goes out to you.

JERRELL: Yeah. I've gotten better.

ANNE: Been there.

JERRELL: They've gotten better and I've gotten better as I've had more children. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: I'm glad to hear it. So in that early period of motherhood, when you were just reading about parenting and sleep, did you enjoy that? Did that get you what you were looking for?

JERRELL: I actually did because I feel like when you have a baby and you go home, even if you are ... Like I nannied through college. I went home with that baby and felt like I knew nothing. So reading about, like, *What to Expect When You're Expecting* and *What To Expect*, I think it's called *What To Expect During Your Baby's First Year*. Like even if it was just like at six months, your baby will start to sit up. Like I didn't know [LAUGHS] I had no idea. So it gave me comfort to read those things and think, oh, that's normal 'cause I was — especially with her — I had some postpartum anxiety, so like, every little thing that she would do, I would be, is she sick? Is something wrong with her? [LAUGHS] So it helped me to read about okay, it's normal if your child is still waking up two or three times at this age, and then at this age, then it's okay to you know, kinda stretch them a little bit. So it just gave me a lot of comfort and helped me to not feel like I was alone and unprepared to parent this little human.

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ANNE: Yeah, it's funny when we talk about how a good book can make you feel not alone. I love hearing how they're many different ways that statement can apply to all of us in our reading lives.

JERRELL: Yes.

ANNE: And yet here you are now wanting to read more fiction. What prompted that ... is goal the right word?

JERRELL: Yeah, it was a goal. Partly because like I said, I do love to write and I want to start to write more. I'm actually in the very beginning stages of writing a, I call it like a mini memoir. Not really a memoir of my life, but memoir of like my transition into motherhood. My tendency is to just say okay, I'm going to read all the nonfiction books about motherhood, but I think to be a well rounded writer, I need to read fiction as well.

On the flip side of that, I think just in my personal reading life, I love that fiction can give me a complete escape. Like I can just really immerse myself in the story, and when I finish it, I'm sad that it's over. I don't always feel that with nonfiction. [LAUGHS] There are some nonfiction writers like Kelly Corrigan, when her books are over, I'm sad. But a lot of times it's like okay, that was good and then you're on to the next thing, but with fiction, sometimes when you read that last chapter you're like, ugh, is it over? Like I just want to read more and more. [ANNE LAUGHS] I want to hear more of the story. So I love that about fiction, but I just ... I have to kinda push myself to get into it and then once I'm in it, I'm like, ugh, this is so good. Why don't I read more of this?

ANNE: Yeah. How do you talk yourself into picking up a novel?

JERRELL: First from your show, I have heard a lot of descriptions of books on your show that I'm like oh, that sounds really good. And so that's one, and also Goodreads. I love to read other people's reviews and also Bookstagram. Bookstagram and Goodreads kinda prompt me to pick up books, especially if you find like a bookish twin they say. [BOTH LAUGH] And you're like okay, I know that person and I like a lot of the same books, so if they said this is good, then I'm going to go read it.

ANNE: Right.

JERRELL: And I've also found that reviewing books myself has really helped me to kinda hone what I like and what I feel about books. I think before-

ANNE: Yes.

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JERRELL: I didn't really understand — like I would read book and eh, and I wouldn't think about it as much, but now I'm like okay, this is what I did like about that book. This is what I didn't and I want to read more books that have this in it, you know?

ANNE: I think it's so interesting how when you are forced to articulate what resonates with you and what does not, it-it really does help you pick your next read.

JERRELL: It really does.

ANNE: With-with greater care and yeah, hopefully it'll make you happier. Not that being happy is the only reason to pick up a good novel, but I mean-

JERRELL: I think you'll find I actually like books that are sad. [BOTH LAUGH] I've learned that about myself. I like heavy reads.

ANNE: We can go there. We can go there, Jerrell. [JERRELL LAUGHS] Okay, I want to time out to address a listener frequently asked question.

JERRELL: Okay.

ANNE: And that is bookstagram is not a special app. It's not a special website. We're talking about the book and reading community on Instagram.

JERRELL: Yes.

ANNE: And I'm so excited that that's working for you. So I imagine that on Goodreads, on Bookstagram, on the show, your ears are perking up at like oh, that title sounds interesting. That cover looks pretty. Let me add it to my list.

JERRELL: Yes. My list is never ending. [BOTH LAUGH] It's never ending.

ANNE: Has it always been the case?

JERRELL: I think it's worse now. My husband, if he listens to this, he's going to laugh. I've always been a compulsive shopper [LAUGHS] so I will go to the bookstore and say I'm going to buy one book and I will leave with ten. I've always been like that, but it's gotten so much worse I think since Bookstagram and Goodreads because I hear about so many more books. You know, like if I go to Barnes & Noble or a smaller bookstore, I'm just looking at what they have on display, but with Bookstagram, I'm seeing things that I have never heard of, authors I have never heard of, so that just makes my list, my want-to-read list on Goodreads is out of control.

ANNE: And yet we're looking for new titles for your to-be-read list.

[00:11:43]

JERRELL: I know. [BOTH LAUGH] I know.

ANNE: Are you okay with this plan?

JERRELL: Yes, I'm fine. I'm actually ... Another thing that your show did for me was to send me back to the library. I had kinda gotten out of the habit. I guess when I graduated from college, I just kinda forgot about the library and so now I go and I use ... What's it called? Overdrive, Libby on my phone which I never was a phone reader, ebook reader, but now that I have children, I have no choice. [BOTH LAUGH] I use that app through my library a lot to read books. So I am saving money that way. But it still doesn't help the length of my to-be-read list. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: It balances out the compulsive shopping with books.

JERRELL: Yes.

ANNE: Tell me a little bit about the library where you are in Orlando, 'cause you're pretty new to that community, aren't you?

JERRELL: I am. We've been here for about a year and a half. I'm from northern Virginia area. To be honest, I'm not - I haven't found my right location for the libraries here. I go and it's kinda hard for me to find things. They do have a lot of great digital books, but I haven't found a branch that, like, really speaks to me. But there is Winterpark, Florida, it's like a little bit north of Orlando. It's like a smaller community. I actually got a reciprocal card from their library 'cause I was able to find things a little bit better and it just, it's one location so it's ... I don't know what the word is, but it's just more like homey or comforting when you go in there. [LAUGHS] I don't know if that makes sense, but trying to find my location feels like my library. I haven't found it yet.

ANNE: Okay. Listeners, if you have recommendations for Orlando-area libraries, we need to hear about them in comments. But you found the audiobooks.

JERRELL: Yes, I did. I've only listened to a few audiobooks. I - for some reason, I can't ... I can listen to a podcast, but I feel like I miss things when I listen to an audiobook, so I'm still trying to find my perfect audiobook type. But I do a lot of kindle reading in the kindle app on my phone through the library.

ANNE: All right, well I can't wait to hear what you found that has worked for you. Are you ready to talk about your books, Jerrell?

JERRELL: I am. I'm very excited.

Readers, having talked to literally hundreds of you I know you're a curious bunch. You read broadly whether that's non-fiction titles on a variety of subjects or historical fiction in different time periods or translated works to access stories from other countries and cultures. To feed that curiosity further, try The Great Courses Plus.

The Great Courses Plus is the streaming service that allows you to get curious about different time periods, different cultures and all kinds of different subjects like psychology, space, music, and literature. These are not just basic introductions either, these are truly in-depth courses by renowned professors who are experts in their fields.

And you can do all of this when and wherever you want with The Great Courses Plus App for your mobile phone, Roku or Apple TV.

If you're curious about the writing process and how to become a better communicator, let me recommend the course How to Engage and Write About Anything. This course starts by asking the question what makes a piece of writing "good"? And then helps you both become a better reader and writer, whether you're writing plays and poems, persuasive emails at work, or inspirational and motivational thoughts as the leader of an organization.

Become a better reader and writer and get that feeling of pride that comes with knowledge by signing up for The Great Courses Plus. What Should I Read Next listeners get a full month of unlimited access—for FREE! To get your Free Month, sign up today using my special URL: Sign up now at thegreatcoursesplus.com/READNEXT

That's thegreatcoursesplus.com/READNEXT.

Readers, ThirdLove is dedicated to helping you find the perfect fitting bra right at home—no matter your size or shape. In 60 seconds, you can answer a few simple questions with their Fit Finder Quiz and they will point you to the one perfectly fitting size for you out of their more than 80 different sizes.

And if you love the idea of staying home and not venturing out to the mall, but aren't sure about buying a bra without trying it on first, you can rest easy because of ThirdLove's Perfect Fit Promise. You'll have 60 days to wear it, wash it, and put it to the test, and if you don't love it, return it and ThirdLove will wash it and donate it to a woman in need.

I am one of the 14 million women who have taken the Fit Finder Quiz and they did point me to the perfect fitting bra. They're so comfortable that I have several different colors and styles and each one feels amazing.

ThirdLove knows there's a perfect bra for everyone, so right now they are offering WSIRN listeners 15% off your first order! Go to ThirdLove.com/READNEXT now to find your perfect-fitting bra... and get 15% off your first purchase!

That's ThirdLove.com/READNEXT for 15% off today!

ANNE: Well you know how this works. You are going to tell me three books you love, one book you don't, and what you've been reading lately and we will talk about what you may enjoy reading next. So how did you choose these books?

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JERRELL: I decided to choose one that I read a long time ago that I loved, and then two more recent just because they were more fresh in my mind. So do you want me to just go straight into them?

ANNE: Sure. What did you choose for your first book?

JERRELL: Okay. So my first book was *A Woman Is No Man* by I think it's Etaf Rum. I actually read it as a part of the Read With Jenna bookclub from the Today show.

ANNE: Ohh, okay.

JERRELL: And I loved this book so much I hugged it when I was finished. [LAUGHS] And I ran into the kitchen and I told my husband the whole story and he was like, why are you reading these sad stories? [BOTH LAUGH] But it's a book about a Palenstian-American family, it's three generations that ... and it focuses on the women in the family. The second generation they move from Palestine to America and it just talks about the cultural differences and their marriages in their family. I don't want to give too much away but it is a heartbreaking story, but it's also beautiful and just ... the writing was so good. I just loved it. I couldn't put it down. I just loved it so much. And that is one of those books that's like okay, this is fiction. I loved it and now I want to read more like this.

ANNE: I'm guessing, okay I haven't seen the Today Show in like a bazillion years [JERRELL LAUGHS], but I do like the books that I know Jenna Bush Hager has been picking so far, so what did she say about it that made you think oh yeah, I'm going to give that a try?

JERRELL: Oh, man, what did she say? I think she talked about the family ... She, I've noticed, she picks, she's very close with her family, so she always picks books that are about family dynamics. She's also picked *The Last Romantics*.

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ANNE: She chose the *Dearly, Beloved*, didn't she?

JERRELL: Yes, that was, I think, the last one, and now she's doing *The Dutch House* by Ann Patchett.

ANNE: Mm-hmm.

JERRELL: And so she just really loves family novels. So I think it was that, and also the fact that it was about the Palenstinian-American family and about Muslim culture. I don't really know that much about that, so I found really interesting. I was intrigued. I loved that she loves to read and I love that she talks about reading on the show, so I was really excited to just support ... I mean, the little bit of support I, one person, give by reading with her.

ANNE: So Jenna loves family stories and you are on board with that.

JERRELL: I love family stories. I come from a very close family. I have two siblings. My grandmother and I talk on the phone every single day.

ANNE: Aw.

JERRELL: Like my cousins, we all went to school together, so that, it really speaks to me because that's the kind of family, just a close-knit family is what I came from. So I love to read about that.

ANNE: Yeah. All right, what did you choose for book two?

JERRELL: Book two is *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion and this book, I don't want to sound dramatic but I think this book really changed my life. This was one of the first books that I read after I graduated from college just purely for pleasure. I was an English major, so I read a lot in college. [LAUGHS] And I read a lot of good things, but this was the first thing I picked up just for myself, just to read, and I read this book in I think one day. I think I just sat down and read it.

I love Joan Didion's writing and I love that this was a memoir, even though it's a memoir about grief, about ... I don't think this is a spoiler 'cause you know, if you've read the back of it, but it's about her husband's sudden death and the period after and just her grief. But I love that, even though she's a huge writer and she's so famous, it was just like a normal wife mourning her husband and how she went through the day. And it made me realize that memoirs don't always have to be a glass castle or an educated, which are fantastic books, but there's also something about a book that's about something that nearly everyone will experience. I just loved it. Her writing is amazing. Everybody should read it.

And then the last book is *And Now We Have Everything* by Meaghan O'Connell and this is another nonfiction pick, probably not as well-known, but I loved it. It's a memoir about Meaghan O'Connell's unexpected pregnancy and then kinda her postpartum period. It's like a nonfiction book that's just kinda about everyday life, something that most people experience. But just told from her point of view and I don't think it's for everyone. [LAUGHS] I have to say that, but it's just-

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ANNE: Why do you say that?

JERRELL: Because it's very, number one, it's very raw. So if you haven't had a child, you're not looking to hear the nitty-gritty details, you might want to skip this until after. [LAUGHS] Like I don't think I would recommend this to a pregnant woman. [LAUGHS] Not because it's traumatic, it just definitely talks about some of the not so beautiful parts of birth and postpartum.

And it's also just ... I don't want to say it's heavy, but it's not one of those feel good, when I finish this I'm going to be saying oh, motherhood is so beautiful. And it is and you do feel that, but you also ... She also talks about the hard stuff and the, you know, feeling trapped when you're nursing your baby and nobody else can feed the baby or feeling that push and pull between career and motherhood. And I loved it, but I just read some reviews that some people thought it was a little bit too dark. I wouldn't call it dark, but I just read some reviews about that.

ANNE: All right, well that sounds really interesting. So it sounds like that was well-written and also very relatable for you. Was that a right book at the right time? Or just the right book?

JERRELL: Definitely. I think I read that book while I was pregnant with my third child and I ended up being on bedrest with her, it was a really tough pregnancy for me. And so I think it was ... There were a lot of things that weren't the same for me. Like she was not married, so hers was really unexpected and so it was part of her relationship and motherhood. So there were some things I couldn't relate to, but there were some things that it was like she pulled it right out of my head and put it on to the page. And so I just loved that. I went through it so quickly and I'm planning to read it again 'cause I just really, really enjoyed it.

ANNE: Okay. That's high praise.

JERRELL: Yeah.

ANNE: Jerrell, tell me about a book that was not for you.

JERRELL: Okay, this one I did not hate this book, but I also didn't love it. [LAUGHS] So it's called *The Care And Feeding of Ravenously Hungry Girls* by Anissa Gray. And I ... Like I said, I like heavy reads and I also like character development. Like an example of this would be *Ask Again, Yes*, that I felt like really delved into the characters. And the reason why I did not love

this book is because I feel like a lot of the characters were ... Is the right word shallow? Like I didn't feel like we got enough with them. I felt that she focused on one character in particular ... Well, let me tell what it's about. So, in the book, it's another kinda siblings story. One of the siblings and her husband are sent to prison. It's kinda about how the whole family deals with that situation without giving too much away. And so there were three sisters and brother. One of the sisters I felt the book should've been about her and she wasn't the character that I felt was the main character though when I started it. But I felt that she was the only one that was well-developed. I don't know how to explain it. I just felt like she didn't, she didn't dig in enough so I felt ... I finished the story feeling like so many things were unanswered and not like an ending where you feel like it's unanswered and it's okay. [LAUGHS] To me, it felt like it's unanswered and I don't understand why I just read that.

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ANNE: So you're okay with ambiguity but you felt like the needed information wasn't there.

JERRELL: Yeah.

ANNE: Okay.

JERRELL: I felt like, and I don't ... I mean, I think it was well-written and I think, I actually read that it was going to be a story about that character and then she changed it and broaden it and I kinda wish she had stuck with the original story that she had because that's where I felt the writing was the best. It's hard to say because I don't want to give it away. [ANNE LAUGHS] That's where her writing shined and everything else felt like she put it there because she felt like she needed a more well-rounded book. I feel like if people read it, they'll understand. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: So if we do look for a good family novel for you, we want one that shows the whole picture.

JERRELL: Yeah, and nothing that ... I don't like it when a book throws things in and I don't understand. Like one book, I think you mentioned that you did like this book, I can't remember, *The Last Romantics*.

ANNE: Mm-hmm.

JERRELL: There were things in that I loved. I loved the sibling dynamic but there were things in that book where I was like why is this in here? [BOTH LAUGH] I felt like it took away from the story and I mean, maybe somebody else will read it and think, oh, I understand why that was in there, but to me I was just like that's unnecessary.

ANNE: Oh, to be an editor.

JERRELL: Right. [LAUGHS] Right. I can't imagine.

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ANNE: Sometimes do you find yourself thinking or is it just me? You know, this book was good but I wish the publisher had sent this manuscript my way first. I would have had some suggestions.

JERRELL: [LAUGHS] Yes. Especially when it's a book that's really hyped and then I read it and I'm like mm, it was okay. [BOTH LAUGH] And I'm like, well what's wrong with me? Am I just crazy? I think that's the beauty of reading. I can read something and you can read something and we can both love it, we can both hate it, or we can have gotten two totally different experiences out of it.

ANNE: Well and sometimes I'll have a reading experience like that and I'll go to book club and I will be educated as to why it was done the way it was done, and I'm ohhh! I get it. And sometimes you go and everybody else is like, uh-huh. Yup. [JERRELL LAUGHS] Jerrell, what are you reading right now?

JERRELL: I just finished *I Miss You When I Blink* By Mary Laura Philpott and I really loved that. It reminded me of a Kelly Corrigan, kinda like *Tell Me More*.

ANNE: Oh, yeah.

JERRELL: I really enjoyed that one. I also finished *Where The Crawdads Sing* not that long ago, and that was one of those that was hyped and I did enjoy it, but I didn't love it the way that everybody else did.

ANNE: I have not read that one.

JERRELL: I mean, it was ... [LAUGHS] I don't even know how to describe it to be honest. I did love the story. There was a lot of nature writing that wasn't my thing, but I think that's just because I'm not really into that. It's not on my top ten or anything.

ANNE: Gotcha. And then at the time you sent in your submission, you had just finished *Ask Again, Yes*, and you said it was so good that you hadn't been able to get through anything since.

JERRELL: Oh my gosh, yes. I loved that book so much. I never ... Whenever I heard people say that they had a book hangover, I was like what does that mean? This book gave me a book hangover. I couldn't get into anything afterwards because it's just everything fell flat for me for like a while. [LAUGHS] After I read it. It was just so, so well-written, so ... all the characters were deep and rich and just recommended it to my friend and she didn't like it because I think she felt like there wasn't enough action, but that's what I loved about it because she spent her time

developing those characters and their relationships and just talking about life in a way that I just thought was beautiful. I loved that book so much.

[00:27:12]

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

JERRELL: I want to diversify my reading list. I've been working on that like trying to read more books by women. I actually have mainly all books by women recently and more diverse books like *A Woman Is No Man* and more fiction, more different kinds of fiction. I've actually never read a historical fiction novel I don't think. I've never read ... I just like I said, I focus a lot on nonfiction and so I'm just trying to broaden my reading scope.

And the other thing, I find that I kinda go ... There's some months where I read a ton and then there's like long stretches where I don't read anything. Actually I didn't even finish a book from January to May of this year, and then in May, I started reading a ton and I've read a ton since then, but when I get busy with my kids which I guess is normal. [LAUGHS] But reading like I said is a self-care thing for me, so I want to become more consistent, even if it's just five minutes right before I fall asleep, making sure that I'm getting that reading in every day 'cause it just makes me feel so much better. Helps me to use my brain in a different way. And gets me away from the TV.

ANNE: Okay. We can work with that.

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ANNE: So the books you loved were *A Woman Is No Man* by Etaf Rum, *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion, and *And Now We Have Everything: On Motherhood Before I Was Ready* by Meaghan O'Connell. Not for you was *The Care And Feeding of Ravenously Hungry Girls* by Anissa Gray, and you have several titles you're reading right now. Okay. And we're looking to diversify for your personal library in both genre and author background perspective identity. And to build some consistency into your reading life. What format do you read books in right now?

[00:30:24]

JERRELL: I think I mostly read on my phone and my iPad because I read you know, before preschool pickup, if they fall asleep in the car. I don't have as much time to read a physical book. Does that make sense? A lot of my reading time is like nap time in the car, so it's a lot of ebooks right now.

ANNE: Do you do any audiobooks?

JERRELL: I want to, but I'm very picky about the narrator. That is something that I want to do too because I do like it. I just finished, oh goodness, *You Are The Girl For The Job* by Jess Connolly. I actually bought the book and I got it on audiobook and I loved it. She narrated it herself and she was so passionate with her reading that I loved. But then I actually tried *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott and I couldn't listen to, even though I love that book, I couldn't listen to because I couldn't focus. I kept zoning out and then I'm like wait, where am I? I've already gone through half the book and I don't even remember what I read. So I just want to find the right audiobook with the right narrator.

ANNE: The reason I was wondering is that there's a real tricky point when you finish one book and haven't yet begun another. And I was thinking about how we could bridge that gap between the last page and the first page. So there's a couple things you could do, and I'm just going to toss out things that other listeners have found successful and if your ears perk up at one of these, fantastic.

JERRELL: Okay.

[00:31:47]

ANNE: Now some people read multiple books at once. Some people say, like, I cannot do that, but a lot of listeners say I can read one nonfiction, one fiction at the same time. Like two books that are totally different.

JERRELL: Yes, that's me.

ANNE: One like fact-based, research driven book, and one escapist novel. But not like two novels both set in 1960s about messy families in Brazil.

JERRELL: Right.

ANNE: Like that's too similar. If you're able to do that, what it does is it leaves you never without a book in progress. And the same is true for audio. Like that can also be a format that you can build into your repertoire perhaps because that way the odds of you finishing two or three books at the same time are very small.

But then something else that it sounds like you're doing is to have a nice stack of books that you are excited about reading next. Whether they're loaded on your iPad ready to listen to, whether they're already downloaded, whether you have them requested from the library so they're going to trickle in, you know, one every couple of weeks right when you expect to be ready for them. Whether you have physical books actually stacked on your nightstand if you want to read before bed like you mentioned, just five minutes. It keeps you reading every day. And that's another thing that works for readers is to just set a goal to read a little bit every day, even for five minutes because then whatever you are doing [LAUGHS] going back to childhood sleep. Something that was a real surprise to me when I became a parent is you think an exhausted child can sleep really well.

JERRELL: Right.

ANNE: Or an exhausted you know, 30-something woman depending on the situation, it turns out it's good sleep that begets more sleep. It's not bad sleep that begets good sleep. And the same is true for the reading life, like reading begets more reading. And a reading droughts begets more of the same.

JERRELL: So true.

ANNE: So we want to keep you reading.

JERRELL: Yes. And the other problem is ... Well, it's not a problem. But I'm a very fast reader, so I can finish a book in a day or two and then especially if it's a good week with my kids. [LAUGHS] And if I don't have something right there to go to next, you know, I'm like oh, and

then I'll pick and it's too many choices and then you know, next thing I know it's been two weeks and I haven't started a new book, so.

[00:33:52]

ANNE: Right, right, right, and I'm sure a lot of listeners are like oh, you read fast, cry me a river. [JERRELL LAUGHS] But really that means you have, you face that gap potentially more often and you have to choose how to feel it and we all know that's not easy. I mean, it can totally be a problem of abundance but it still, it still is tricky.

JERRELL: It is. It's definitely tricky. Especially because you have so many good options and you're like oh, well, maybe I'll do the ... You know, it just becomes too many options and I finish one and I just, I don't know, it's like paralyzed with - with reading choices. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: All right. Well we're going to try to find you a few good books to break through that paralyses and give you something good to read.

JERRELL: Sounds good.

ANNE: Several somethings I hope. Okay. Keeping in mind what you are looking for, I've got three family stories in mind. Do you want to double down on that? Triple down?

JERRELL: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that sounds great.

ANNE: And two are historical.

JERRELL: Oh, okay, good. I'm excited.

ANNE: And only one is not really well heard of, so we'll see ... I feel - I feel pretty good that this will be new to you, but maybe I'm wrong.

JERRELL: Okay.

ANNE: I'm thinking of the book *Honor* by Elif Shafak. Do you know this one?

JERRELL: No, I don't.

ANNE: Okay. She is probably best known for a fairly recent release called *Three Daughters of Eve*, but for you I want to go back to this one. It's historical. Elif Shafak is a Turkish-British novelist. She writes literary fiction in English. The themes that you mentioned in your books especially *A Woman Is No Man* really made me think like oh, this could be an interesting story for you.

The novel spans many years. It's mostly set in the '70s, but we go back in time all the way to the '40s to tell the history of this complicated family. It's a Muslim family. The parents are from Turkey, as is Shafak herself. It's a story that explores the tension between doing what you know you should, doing what you have been brought up to do, doing what your religion tells you you should do, and doing what you believe to be good and doing what you believe is right for your own life. And this is a high-stakes, complicated family novel and I think this is one of those stories where you don't want to know too much going in, but I don't think I can go too wrong telling you the opening lines. So, this story begins, "My mother died twice." And it's spoken by one twin sister who grew up in Turkey with her twin and with a brother. She left the country with her husband to make a life for herself in London, but in 1992, she is on her way to get her brother out of prison. He's been incarcerated there for almost 15 years for murder.

[00:36:24]

JERRELL: Okay.

ANNE: So at the very beginning you know that this horrible thing happened but you have no idea what brought this family to that point. And to understand you go all the way back through the history of these sisters and their brother and their parents and why she left and what happened. And the title is significant. I think some listeners will know immediately when they pick up this book what it means. For others, it will dawn on you more slowly, but I think this family story set thoroughly in its time and place and culture and the way people are constrained by and fight against those bonds, those rules, and those family ties could be really fascinating to someone with your interests. How does that sound?

JERRELL: So good.

ANNE: Okay. That is *Honor* by Elif Shafak.

JERRELL: Okay.

ANNE: The next novel is newer and might not be unfamiliar to you. This is *The Most Fun We Ever Had* by Claire Lombardo. Do you know it?

JERRELL: I have heard of it. I haven't read it, but I have heard of it.

ANNE: Well I think this might be up your alley because it's a multi-generational, you know, I almost called it a dysfunctional family novel, but the dysfunctional is not quite the right description here. So it's about a married couple. This couple, they have four daughters, and the moment in time where the book opens they are each like deeply in embroiled in personal crisis, and we get an up close and personal look at what exactly each one is going through. And I said it's not dysfunctional exactly because something that I didn't expect that I thought was kinda, a weird kinda fun, was the book talks about how their parents happy marriage was almost like oppressively happy because because they grew up watching their parents' relationship and

thought that eh, can't do better than that. We're screwed. [JERRELL LAUGHS] Don't even bother trying. It's totally dysfunctional, but it's not - it's not like *Ask Again, Yes*.

[00:38:08]

JERRELL: Okay.

ANNE: Because they're going through their own crisis, but you also see them supporting each other as they all deal with their own junk and not like in a real sappy or melodramatic way, but in a way that is just very human, but also really interesting to read about. And I said that these daughters are each dealing with their own crisis, and that is true. It's not necessarily true when the story opens because the inciting incident here is that of the four sisters, two who were born very, very close together have always been particularly close. But one who has gone through an epic amount of personal grief and loss, which makes me think, like, the themes in Didion, the themes in the O'Connell book about unexpected motherhood, like oh my goodness, so you would be reading a novel that is hitting those themes so hard. Because one of the daughters, at the very beginning of the story, two sisters come to lunch. They've always been close. They haven't talked as much lately. And one of the sisters brings an unexpected guest and that guest is the son, the other sister gave up in a closed adoption 15 years prior. She never thought she'd see this boy again and her sister shows up with him. She's like, what are you doing to my life?

The book follows one tumultuous year in the life of this family beginning when that poor boy walks into the restaurant and his presence really shakes up the family and brings back long buried secrets. I want to tell you who knew what about what happened when but I can't because that's part of the mystery of the book. Something that you should know about this is that a lot of readers have read it and been like, eh, it's over 500 pages. Couldn't you have trimmed a few characters? And trimmed a 100 pages? But it didn't read as long to me. It went really fast and I think that's because the story keeps moving and because I really enjoyed the way she was able to fully explore every character.

JERRELL: That's perfect for me. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: That's what I'm thinking. So that is *The Most Fun We Ever Had* by Claire Lombardo.

JERRELL: Oh, man, these are all so good. I'm so excited. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Oh, I'm happy to hear it. And another one I think up your alley is another recent release. This is *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz. Is this one you're familiar with?

JERRELL: No, I don't think I've heard of this one.

ANNE: Well I think this could also be a really good pick for you, and this is historical fiction. It's not set in the distant past. It mostly takes place in 1965, but you're a researcher by nature. You like that direction. The author, Angie Cruz, based much of this story on her mother's own

experience and she did her own great amounts of research interviewing all her family members about what their life is like in the '60s and about her family history and what happened and she began to see that what you're telling me is interesting but there's a story here that you're not telling me, that also came to be significant in the story.

At the heart of this story is a young girl named Ana. She's 15. She lives in the Dominican Republic. Her family of course wants great things for her and they want to survive as a family. Literally and economically. And to do so, they decide to marry their daughter off to a 32-year-old business man. They began discussing this relationship when she's 11. The man is very interested in the young girl, of course that should make you go, hmm. But at the time they marry, he's 32, she's 15, it's a business arrangement. It's made by her parents and the point is survival. The mother says like I promise you, nothing bad will happen to you. You're going to go to New York because Juan is always going back and forth to New York for business and you'll clean and you'll cook and you will be such a good wife he'll want to come home every night and you'll take good care of him and you'll iron his clothes. And as soon as we can, we will come to New York when you send for us and we can be together again.

So there's this interesting tension here again. Lots of tension in these family sagas because at first it seems so clear that her family is valuing their needs over Ana's, but as the story unfolds you see that the parents have so much to fear for her future at home were she to stay there too. But of course she goes to New York and it turns out Juan is not much of a man and he's a terrible husband. But he travels back and forth between the D.R. and New York often enough that she flounders at first. She's naive. She doesn't know how the world works. She doesn't know that much about herself, but she's strong and spirited and that makes her really fun to read about. And especially as he does leave often and recurrently, she is able to find her way and make a life for herself on her own, independent of her family and independent of him. And I think this could be a really good fit for you. What do you think?

[00:43:01]

JERRELL: That reminds me a lot of *A Woman Is No Man*. Different, but it's very reminiscent of it. So that sounds really great.

ANNE: Okay. That is *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz. Okay, Jerrell, of those three books we discussed *Honor* by Elif Shafak, which is the oldest of the books we talked about today. So that could be - that could be a good choice to investigate getting from your library.

JERRELL: Yeah.

ANNE: *The Most Fun We Ever Had* by Claire Lombardo, and that came out in May of 2019. And *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz, this is a more recent, Fall 2019 release. Of those three books, what do you think you'll read next?

[00:43:35]

JERRELL: Oh my goodness, that's so hard because I want to read all three of them and I probably get them all as soon as we stop talking. [BOTH LAUGH] Oh, man. I don't know. They all sound so good. But I think I might start with *Honor*. Like you said, it's the oldest. I'm going to see if I can find it at the library. I think I might start with that, but I'm definitely going to read all three of them before the end of the year. I'm super excited.

ANNE: Well *Honor* is not long, so maybe we can get that reading snowball going.

JERRELL: Yes.

ANNE: And you can just roll on through into the next reads.

JERRELL: Yes, that sounds good. I like, actually that what is it, *The Most Fun We Ever Had?*

ANNE: Uh-huh.

JERRELL: I actually like that that's a longer book so maybe I will save that for when we go visit family for Thanksgiving and I can hide, sit in a room and read. [BOTH LAUGH] Very, very excited. These are all great recommendations.

ANNE: I'm so happy to hear it. Well I can't wait to hear what you choose and what you think and thank you so much for talking books with me today.

JERRELL: Thank you.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Jerrell, and I'd love to hear what YOU think she should read next. That page is at whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/206 and it's where you'll find the full list of titles we talked about today. You can follow today's guest Jerrell on Instagram @jerralleverett. That's J-E-R-R-E-L-L E-V-E-R-E-T-T. Jerrell Everett.

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And 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.