

Our Book Club In Loveland, Colorado, meeting weekly at the Village Inn Diner

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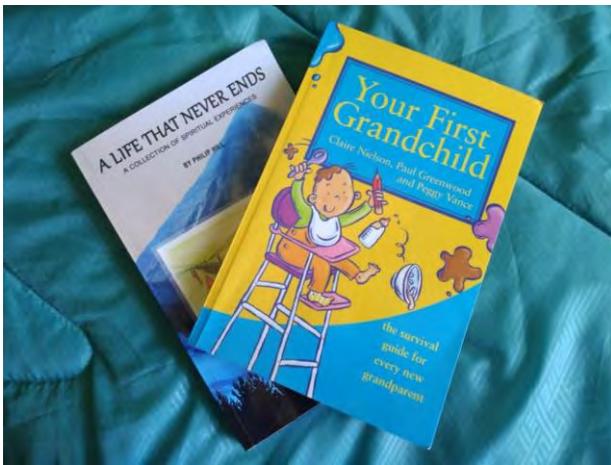


When I went to study abroad in Rouen, France in 1968, the books I read for my French history and literature classes came alive on my walks around the city. In my French history classes at l'Université de Rouen, we studied about famous philosophes, artistes, and écrivains of the 17th and 18th centuries who met together in cafés and private homes to share their views about philosophy, art, literature, and politics.

These gatherings were known as salons. Now that I was seeing firsthand some of these historical places, I imagined the lively conversations that took place among friends and acquaintances back then.

Three decades later, when my husband and I started a book club with some other couples in our northern California neighborhood, I was reminded of this experience in France. Our weekly hour-and-a-half meeting with hot drinks and snacks revived memories of my walks past cafes, patisseries, and nineteenth century homes in Rouen, when I wondered what it might be like to visit a famous French salon in the 1800s.

I realized that what we were doing in our book club wasn't that different from the salons in France - the concept was similar; we wanted to gather, inspire one another, and build friendships. Once a week, we met in our home to share our ideas, opinions and experiences, based on the chapters we had read the previous week. This was stimulating for us all, and we continued reading and discussing books for around 10 years, until my husband and I moved to Colorado in 2019.



In Loveland, Colorado, Jim and I started a new book club. It consisted of the two of us, meeting weekly at the Village Inn Diner, where we splurged and ate sumptuous breakfasts while discussing the books we were reading. Of course we missed our small group back in California, but it wasn't long before we were joined by Nancy and Paul Bulow, and a few months later, Richard and Marjorie Buessing. We were all transplants from other places, brand new to Colorado, so the first book we decided to read was James Michener's Centennial, about the history of our new state. It was more than 800 pages long, the longest book Jim and I had ever read in our book clubs.

What I like about our gatherings are the discussions. We talk about the chapters we read that week, and how the content connects with our life experiences. As we share stories, we get to know one another, and this builds a bond of love and mutual appreciation. What's present is honesty and authenticity, humor and, on rare occasions, tears.

If you've never experienced a book club, you may want to give it a try because it's very easy to set up and maintain. Our group uses a democratic method of choosing books. When we're on the last chapter, we bring up ideas for our next reading adventure. Then we vote to pick one.

What sort of books do we read? Here's a short list of some we've chosen in the past year: Ikigai by Francisc Miralles and Hector Garcia, Stroke of Insight by Jill Bolte Taylor, Memory Rescue by Dr. Daniel Amen, and Your First Grandchild by Claire Nielson, Paul Greenwood, and Peggy Vance. These are all non-fiction, which is what our group prefers so far. The only outlier was Centennial, which is historical fiction. Even though it took us months to get through all those pages, we now have an in-depth understanding of Colorado's history. All of these books have given rise to very stimulating discussions, and we have no regrets about our choices.

A new book is a grand adventure - it always has been that way for me from the time I learned to read. Book clubs have added a new dimension to my literary experience. I now enjoy rich discussions through which I can extend my understanding of the content. We all have so much to learn from one another's experiences, just as folks did in the salons of the past. This is especially true now in the golden years of our lives, when we can talk about and value the decades we've lived through!