

## **First Congregational Church UCC of Burlington**

### **Women's Book Group**

**March thru June 2025**

**For more information contact:**

**Coordinator – Janice Clements: [janclem25@gmail.com](mailto:janclem25@gmail.com)**

**March 24, 2025 1:30 PM** in person home of Penny Rieley

154 Lakewood Parkway

Burlington, VT

802-658-1506

Women's History Month

Inclement weather plan = Zoom

**The Road from Coorain** by Jill Ker Conway 238 pages library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.

NANCY MCCLELLAN, discussion facilitator

In a memoir that pierces and delights us, Jill Ker Conway tells the story of her astonishing journey into adulthood—a journey that would ultimately span immense distances and encompass worlds, ideas, and ways of life that seem a century apart.

She was seven before she ever saw another girl child. At eight, still too small to mount her horse unaided, she was galloping miles, alone, across Coorain, her parents' thirty thousand windswept, drought-haunted acres in the Australian outback, doing a "man's job" of helping herd the sheep because World War II had taken away the able-bodied men. She loved (and makes us see and feel) the vast unpeopled landscape, beautiful and hostile, whose uncertain weathers tormented the sheep ranchers with conflicting promises of riches and inescapable disaster. She adored (and makes us know) her large-visioned father and her strong, radiant mother, who had gone willingly with him into a pioneering life of loneliness and bone-breaking toil, who seemed miraculously to succeed in creating a warmly sheltering home in the harsh outback, and who, upon her husband's sudden death when Jill was ten, began to slide—bereft of the partnership of work and love that had so utterly fulfilled her—into depression and dependency.

We see Jill, staggered by the loss of her father, catapulted to what seemed another planet—the suburban Sydney of the 1950s and its crowded, noisy, cliquish school life. Then the heady excitement of the University, but with it a yet more demanding course of lessons—Jill embracing new ideas, new possibilities, while at the same time trying to be mother to her

mother and resenting it, escaping into drink, pulling herself back, striking a balance. We see her slowly gaining strength, coming into her own emotionally and intellectually and beginning the joyous love affair that gave wings to her newfound self.

Worlds away from Coorain, in America, Jill Conway became a historian and the first woman president of Smith College. Her story of Coorain and the road from Coorain startles by its passion and evocative power, by its understanding of the ways in which a total, deep-rooted commitment to place—or to a dream—can at once liberate and imprison. It is a story of childhood as both Eden and anguish, and of growing up as a journey toward the difficult life of the free.

**April 28 1:30 PM** in person home of Joan Goodell:

Juniper House Library, 35 Cambrian Way, Burlington, Vermont

CARPOOLING PLEASE/limited parking/detailed directions available on request

**Remarkably Bright Creatures** by Shelby Van Pelt 368 Pages. library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.

JOAN GOODELL discussion facilitator & host

After Tova Sullivan's husband died, she began working the night shift at the Sowell Bay Aquarium, mopping floors and tidying up. Keeping busy has always helped her cope, which she's been doing since her eighteen-year-old son, Erik, mysteriously vanished on a boat in Puget Sound over thirty years ago.

Tova becomes acquainted with curmudgeonly Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus living at the aquarium. Marcellus knows more than anyone can imagine but wouldn't dream of lifting one of his eight arms for his human captors—until he forms a remarkable friendship with Tova.

Ever the detective, Marcellus deduces what happened the night Tova's son disappeared. And now Marcellus must use every trick his old invertebrate body can muster to unearth the truth for her before it's too late.

Shelby Van Pelt's debut novel is a gentle reminder that sometimes taking a hard look at the past can help uncover a future that once felt impossible.

**May 26 1:30 PM** in person home of Judy Gerber 33 Summit Ridge, Burlington

**James** by Percival Everett 320 pages library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.

DONNA LEE discussion facilitator

When the enslaved Jim overhears that he is about to be sold to a man in New Orleans, separated from his wife and daughter forever, he decides to hide on nearby Jackson Island until he can formulate a plan. Meanwhile, Huck Finn has faked his own death to escape his violent father, recently returned to town. As all readers of American literature know, thus begins the dangerous and transcendent journey by raft down the Mississippi River toward the elusive and too-often-unreliable promise of the Free States and beyond.

While many narrative set pieces of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* remain in place (floods and storms, stumbling across both unexpected death and unexpected treasure in the myriad stopping points along the river's banks, encountering the scam artists posing as the Duke and Dauphin...), Jim's agency, intelligence and compassion are shown in a radically new light.

Brimming with the electrifying humor and lacerating observations that have made Everett a "literary icon" (*Oprah Daily*), and one of the most decorated writers of our lifetime, James is destined to be a major publishing event and a cornerstone of twenty-first century American literature.

**June 23 5:30 PM** In person Location TBD: Annual Pot Luck and Book Pitch Gathering