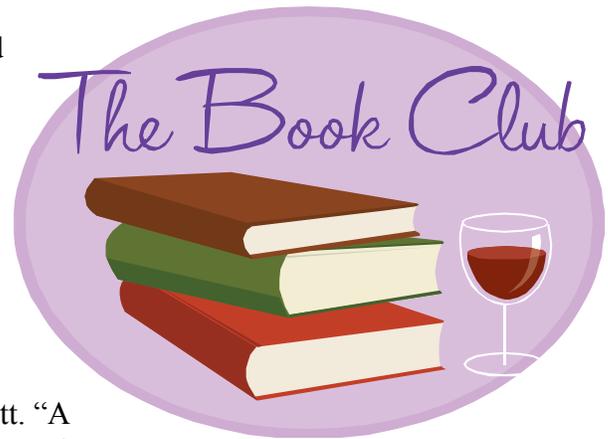


## Book club prepares for another chapter (07, 09, 13)

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Well book lovers, the Men's Book Club which started back in 2003, is gearing up for another season of monthly reads, each title chosen by the host as we rotate from Welland to St. Catharines to Niagara on the Lake homes in search of truth, wisdom, cold beer and increasingly large amounts of rich food, which is not really good for people of our age. I will guide you through our previous selections, and perhaps you will be inspired to read some picks.



We started with *The Sisters Brothers* by Patrick deWitt. “A gorgeous, wise, riveting work of, among other things, cowboy noir...Honestly, I can't recall ever being this fond of a pair of psychopaths.” This quote is from David Wroblewski, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle*. Everyone enjoyed this novel except me. Perhaps I am not fond of cowboy psychopaths. I don't think you can do much better than Clint Eastwood in the movie, *The Unforgiven*.

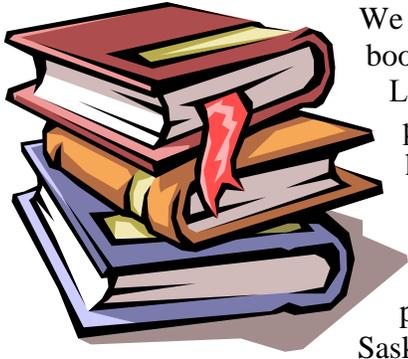
Next we examined *Eating Dirt - Deep Forests, Big Timber and Life with the Tree-Planting Tribe* by Charlotte Gill, a vivid portrayal of one woman's life planting trees, her insights into the forest industry and its environmental implications, and a celebration of the wonder of trees. Charlotte Gill spent almost twenty years working as a tree planter in the forests of Canada. During her million-tree career, she encountered hundreds of clear-cuts, each one a collision site between human civilization and the natural world. Charged with sowing the new forest in these clear-cuts, tree planters are a tribe caught between the stumps and the virgin timber, between environmentalists and loggers. We all liked this book which left actual grit in our teeth.

Following clear-cuts, we ventured into the realm of *In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin* by Erik Larson who uses diaries to document 1933 Berlin when William E. Dodd becomes America's first ambassador to Hitler's Germany in a year that proved to be a turning point in history. Everyone seemed to enjoy this book which outlined Dodd's daughter's sexual prowess with every diplomat she encountered in Berlin. Again, I was a dissenter. I just do not like psychopaths.

We followed with *419* by humorist Will Ferguson, who captured Canada's most lucrative literary prize winning the \$50,000 Scotiabank Giller Prize. No humor here; it's about foreign email scams, and we enjoyed it.

Robertson Davies has become a regular for us, and you really can't go wrong selecting his books so we read *The Rebel Angels* which is the first of the three connected novels of Davies' *Cornish Trilogy* followed by *What's Bred in the Bone* (1985), and *The Lyre of Orpheus* (1988). This one gets quite academic as it follows several faculty and staff of the fictional College of St. John and Holy Ghost. But with Davies, you hang in because he is masterful in storytelling and his characters are always memorable.

*Empire of Illusion - The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* by New York Times bestseller, Pulitzer Prizewinning journalist Chris Hedges was our next selection, and this piece of non-fiction was truly depressing, a “shattering meditation on American obsession with celebrity and the epidemic of illiteracy that threatens our cultural integrity” from such phenomena as professional wrestling, the pornographic film industry, and unchecked casino capitalism, the mechanisms used to divert us from confronting the economic, political, and moral collapse around us.



We concluded that sadly, Canada is merely a lite version of the US. This book was so dispiriting that our next host deliberately chose Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* to help cheer us up. First published in 1912, it's one of the most enduring classics of Canadian humorous literature set in fictional Mariposa.

Unfortunately, in the past few years, we have "lost" a few of our book club readers. My daughter reminds me that we are of that perilous age. However, we have recently added a retired Saskatchewan professor of politics which just goes to show that we are either desperate for new blood or that we are a rather inclusive bunch of readers.