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Reader rambles bring like-minded folks together

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A new club has formed in Kittitas, and anyone can join.

But it will help if you like books.

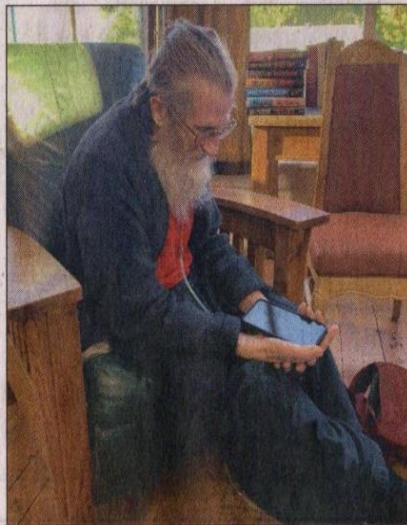
"We started with our favorite fictional character," Sarita Dasgupta said at last Wednesday's group, recalling their first meeting in June. A trio of readers had gathered at Bailey's Bibliomania on Main Street in Kittitas, two sipping paper cups of tea. A cluster of various chairs, some with cobwebs spanning the legs, were gathered around a piano, and a stuffed animal beagle sat in the window. While the meeting was scheduled for 3 p.m., the start time was casual.

Laura Jordan, of Ellensburg, purchased a copy of Dasgupta's latest poetry collection, "Outpouring," at the front counter before taking her seat.

"I had to leave my husband in charge of my grandkids," she said.

It was important for her to carve out this hour for herself, she explained.

Richard Denner, former owner of Four



LAURA JEAN SCHNEIDER / DAILY RECORD

Richard Denner uses his phone for some book-chat-related research during a book club meeting in Kittitas.

Winds Bookstore in Ellensburg and known to the group as Jampa, his title as a Buddhist monk, was settled in a leather Mission-style chair, phone in hand.

The theme of the monthly get-together was food.

Folks came in various stages of preparedness.

Jordan had brought two books — "They both have recipes and indexes with recipes in the back," she said — and began with a synopsis of Brian O'Reilly's "Angelina's Bachelors: A Novel, with Food." The protagonist's mother was a French cook, and her husband's mother was Italian, giving Angelina a real aptitude for culinary prowess. When her husband passes, she cooks as a way to deal with her loss, with surprising results.

"A different way of coping with grief," Dasgupta mused.

The bachelors were followed by "Garlic and Sapphires: The Secret Life of a Critic in Disguise," memoir of food critic Ruth Reichl gone incognito.

"[She] dressed up like an old lady," Jordan said, which prompted the group to reflect on how the elderly are often treated as invisible in the U.S.

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That's happening more in India now, said Dasgupta, who spent most of her life on tea plantations there.

"Previously, it was just everyone looked after each other," she added. "Somehow, old people don't feel that they count anymore."

Jampa said he cared for his aging parents until they died, which was a time of reflection for him. "I was adopted," he added.

Some of his life choices had been perhaps embarrassing to especially his father, he noted, mentioning the shift of authority between father and son as caretaker and caregiver in the final stage of life.

This led Dasgupta to state that her first husband had died in his sleep at the age of 59, an account which rapidly careened into a tale of an old tea chest with far-reaching relations.

"You brought the family together," Jordan said.

"Food, food," Jampa said, trying to steer the conversation back to the topic. His oxygen tank, stashed behind the chair, filled silences with a steady pump-click-hiss.

Dasgupta was prepared with the short story, "Lamb to the

Slaughter," by Roald Dahl. After a pregnant wife is told something the reader isn't, Dasgupta explained, the woman hits her husband, a police officer, on the head with a frozen leg of lamb. It ends up being a fatal blow, and the rest of the tale is in turns creative and macabre, as the murder weapon ends up the centerpiece of a strange feast.

"I like a movie called 'Babette's Feast,'" Jampa said. He told the group he really couldn't read anymore, and looked for movie reviews with his phone.

"It's a movie for people who really like food," he added. In the film, "food is almost religious."

"It's hard to talk metaphysical about it."

A woman wins the lottery and decides to blow it all on an exquisite meal, he summarized.

"She's another person, arranging this marvelous dinner space," he said.

Both Jordan and Dasgupta added thoughts about the auditory nature of preparing food.

There is something intimate about sharing a meal, the trio agreed.

"In some cultures, they all eat together," Dasgupta said, referring to sharing a single dish as she shaped an imaginary bowl with her hands.

Over the years since he'd seen the movie, Jampa had lost some of the some details. The reviews he found helped fill in the gaps. "It was filmed in 1987," he said.

Jordan said she was busy with her two daughters, born in '86 and '87, if that was case. She had not seen the film.

A giant fly buzzed around the windows facing the street as the conversation, perhaps prompted by the idea of appetite, meandered into how religious cultures dealt with food, and then how sex before marriage was handled in similar cultures.

"That's more a societal thing than religious," Dasgupta said.

Jordan looked at the time, and excused herself. The meeting had wandered past 4 p.m.

Making good use of his trip to Kittitas, Jampa transitioned to preparing to interview Dasgupta about her faith for a religion class he was auditing at CWU.

Dasgupta noted that the group hadn't decided on the next theme.

She laughed. They'd figure it out.

Curious folks can check Bailey's Bibliomania page on Facebook for information on the next Midweek Musings, stop by the store in person at 307 N. Main St. in Kittitas, or call 509-962-9195.