

BOOK THOUGHTS

BATCH 17
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BY LINDSAY WINCHERAUK
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BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

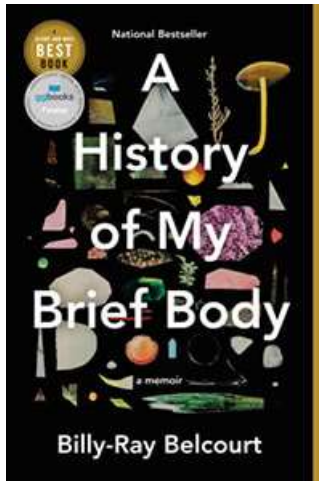
DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

A HISTORY OF MY BRIEF BODY

BILLY-RAY BELCOURT



To be superior you'd have to admit your flaws. Superiority is a ruse.

HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

I'm 61 now. I've walked beside you my whole life – several steps ahead. Why? Because I've been conditioned. I don't remember who conditioned me. The conditioning is flawed. I'm not better than you. I just believed I was. We went to school together. We worked together. I judged you. We all did. We inadvertently participated in the blood lust. We joked when you were barely out of earshot about you. We laughed. We did so to feel superior. Superiority is a ruse. It doesn't exist. To be superior, you'd have to admit your flaws. We're all flawed. Damaged.

I disgusted myself; I participated. I'm complicit. I need to grow, to ask forgiveness in evolution. A question: How would a white father explain residential schools to his brood?

I don't want to feign woke-ness. I need to be better. I need to hear, feel, taste your pain + eradicate the detritus clouding my thoughts. I despise those amongst us who continue to propagate the illusion of being better, more deserving – claiming we had nothing to do with your suffering – telling you to get over yourself. How? We're violent in our inaction. We fester in the silence of not speaking up.

By inviting us into his life and soul, Belcourt, in an exquisite fashion, paints a never-ending reality of how centuries of oppression, both NDN + LBGTQ, destroyed the fabric and perceived pureness of our society. Many, if not most of us, have bought into the grift we somehow deserve more and discounting that the puppeteers working our strings are nothing more than puppets themselves as they attempt to keep life's playing field skewed to their advantage.

We all must be better. Thank you, Belcourt, for your piercing honesty and devastatingly gorgeous lyricism.

I must walk beside you to evolve + to grow.

We may not be able to erase our pasts, but our words and actions can help to heal our futures.

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: August 26, 2021

THE WINTER WIVES

LINDEN MACINTYRE



Unconditional friendship comes with a heavy price.

HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

Who are you? Do I really know you?

You've been in my life for most of its duration; I trusted you. I needed you. Something was amiss. The pegs were square, the holes were round. It didn't matter; we connected – became close, like brothers, inseparable – we fell in love with the same person. I lost. I settled.

Life was easy for you. You were a shining star, destined for greatness—you threw it all away. We remained tight. You chased darkness and prospered beyond your wildest dreams. I knew, but I didn't. My childhood was traumatic. My mom couldn't remember...

You saved me. We loved unconditionally. Your realities came rushing forward in a blistering flow after you died, almost. I stayed unconditional; I became your cleaner; your love, my true love, grifted me alongside my settled love, her sister. My mind started to collapse like my long-gone mothers did. I swallowed youthful traumas – hiding my pain, making it easy for us to bond—you a star—me, an awkwardly brilliant and loyal malleable friend.

Death comes, reality unravels. I needed to stop, to live, to recapture my destiny.

MacIntyre's innate ability to cut through pointless ramblings makes the "Winter Wives" a compelling page-turner. It leaves readers thirsty for page after page, not to unmask who did it (?), but more so because most of us understand life is often shrouded in secrecy bubbling below the surface of our lives, blocking us from becoming who we are meant to be.

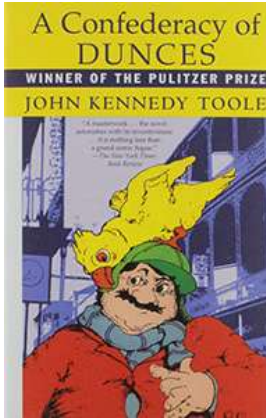
Truth be told I never knew you – your default was to constantly lie.

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: September 9, 2021

A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES

JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE



If you find mental health, poverty, racism, misogyny, alcoholism, funny, well...

HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

An incredibly entitled, privileged Caucasian sits down in front of a typewriter?

I wanted to love this book. I wanted to laugh so hard my sides split open, and my insides poured out.

The experts all agreed (without using their names, hiding behind institutions) this is one of the funniest books ever written. Heck, it won a Pulitzer.

I never found laughter – not even once.

I've been told I have a grand sense of humour.

My wit has been described as. *Dry. Sardonic. When people get me, it is glorious. When they don't, even better!*

5 I don't think rapists who want to be fathers should move to Texas. I don't think rapists who want to be fathers should move to Texas.

Life has repeatedly knocked me down, leaving me floundering with only one way off life's canvas: comedic redemption—often with a hint of self-deprecation. It's called: survival.

WARNING: Some people may find the following passage (and sentence two + three above) offensive. Read at your own...

When an entitled Caucasian uses his advantage to viciously skewer, mental health, dementia, alcoholism, misogyny, race relations, illiteracy, poverty, and on and on and on and on— Never pointing the pen inward and supposedly becoming so despondently mired in ennui because nobody was willing to publish his entitlement-biased-comedy-masked-vitriol (parading as humour), he took his own life.

And then came a Pulitzer.

This reader finds absolutely nothing humorous in entitled writers viciously skewering... while hiding behind the glaring advantage, few are given.

Sadly, he ended his life. This reader (and writer) does not believe his depression warranted him being labelled genius. It's just sad + tragic.

Ask yourself why the praise for this book comes from institutions, not individuals?

If you are a writer, would you hit the streets, find the most addicted or mentally addled person, and base your humour on them?

I would guess that not a single non-Caucasian would call this book funny or genius or anything other than savagely mean.

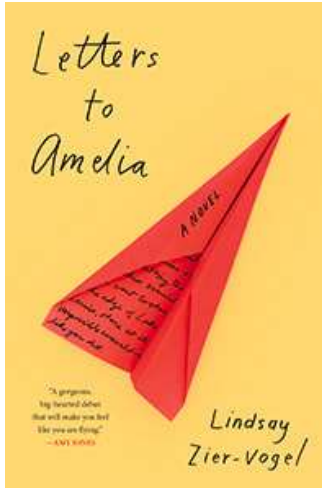
That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: September 9, 2021

O STARS
O STARS

LETTERS TO AMELIA

LINDSAY ZIER-VOGEL



Babies are pauses in the life sentences of adulthood.

HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

Alongside my mother's deathbed, the second time I watched my mother die, she begged and pleaded with my mother | grandmother |, the night before they came to take me away, to keep me.

Society, religion, and community had deemed my mother unfit and unlovable. Her support network only exacerbated her failure. What chance does a newborn have?

For the next 27-years, I acted as a painful reminder of her unworthiness, which manifested in her telling me every time she saw me, I would never amount to more than a miserable failure—until my mother | grandmother | died the first time. I cannot fathom the unrelenting pain she endured. My mother's last words to me were, "I'm never going to see you again, am I?" We hadn't seen each other in 23-years—after I accidentally discovered she was my mother.

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LETTERS TO AMELIA sent me spinning in a heavy fog as I tried to navigate emotions about the ephemeral nature of everything that is life.

I felt like I was about to crash land. Dark. I know.

Why did it elicit such powerful emotions?

Because I came to an understanding most things in life are transitory. Especially birth.

A man could never comprehend the loneliness involved in giving birth + having a new life growing inside you. Especially when men, often absentee, even if they choose to stick around, attempt to take control, often mansplaining their ignorance.

I realized (I like to think I'm self-aware enough to understand, my realization may be flawed), giving birth is the epitome of "new" in a world that craves "new." As much as billions-upon-billions of babies have been born before, the 40 weeks of pregnancy must be the most terrifying, + isolating time women must deal with.

Hearing you are not the only one must strip away an expectant mother's inherent need to feel special, unique. And support networks must have an unknowing capacity to obliterate happiness by their relentless need to relive what was once "new" for them—or worse yet, have their other half, if they stick around, try to impose their will on something they can never possibly understand.

A baby arrives in 40-weeks, giving expectant mothers a short window to dismantle their lives and reinvent who they need to become—as their support networks one by one retreat into their own lives.

LETTERS TO AMELIA is a powerful read about finding support in a place where judgement is replaced with the comfort of kindness.

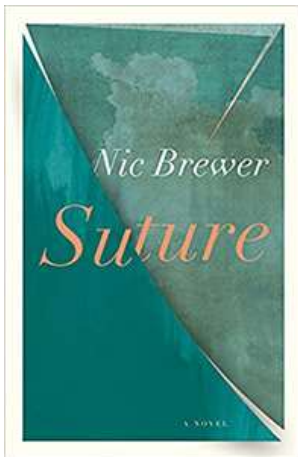
Fortunately for me, the fog lifted, I landed safely. Why? Because I have a burning desire to see what's new!

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: September 24, 2021

SUTURE

NIC BREWER



Does our greatest art come from darkness?

HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

I crack open my chest and rip out my heart, releasing its blood onto the canvas—so you can grasp my unrelenting pain as I desperately try to feel loved. I need you to understand my anguish; it is my way of letting you know I'm alive.

I can barely breathe, so I cut out my lungs, adding them to the canvas; your love is all I have, yet I'm afraid of it + your closeness, I don't think I'm worthy, I add my suffocating lungs to the canvas. I become relevant. Inspirational. Relatable.

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I tear out my eyes so you can see what I see. You never will. Eventually, my life grows black as I immerse you in my opaque suffering. You love me. But my insatiable insanity only brings you sorrow.

I drip blood onto the page. Always thirsting for more. You love me unconditionally; you bring kindness. I return rage + my unworthiness. I need to be unlovable. I need to cry onto every page in a dark plasma. If I lose my agony, I will no longer be accepted for my art. I will become stale, repetitive, unreadable. I must bleed.

I stitch over my insecurities, again and again, and again, until they become manageable, constant reminders of who I am and who I never will be. Or I will die.

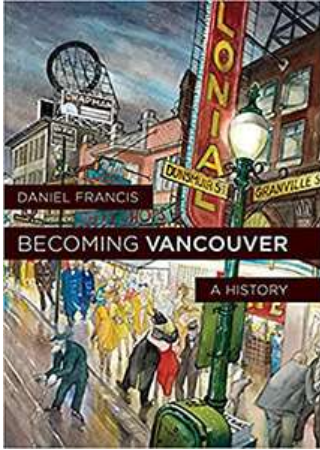
I think that is what I've consumed. I'm not sure. I will return to my beginning, with my heart + lungs, + eyes sutured back where they are meant to be.

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: September 29, 2021

BECOMING VANCOUVER

DANIEL FRANCIS



It feels like the past is chasing the present preparing to repeat itself.

HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

Some rich man came and raped the land, nobody caught him. Put up a bunch of ugly boxes and Jesus' people bought them. - The Eagles | The Last Resort |

"Becoming Vancouver" is a fabulous essential read with a spectacular cover. Anyone residing in or visiting Vancouver would gain a deep understanding of how this stunning natural canvas came to be, where it's at, and perhaps where it may be going. It's not all rosy. History has a propensity to repeat itself. Only in the current world version, everything is perilously amplified as humanity races toward...

Vancouver is like the perfect Instagram shot if only you crop out the unavoidable suffering of those who are being left behind. Those falling into the throes of addiction, or with mental health issues, and the abject misery of not being born into wealth or coming from a family that staked the first claims to their slice of paradise. Being born into wealth or a construction family is not a qualification. Instead, it reeks of entitlement and privilege often laced in xenophobia and racism, coupled with a tremendous lack of self-awareness. The first inhabitants of Vancouver tried desperately, and succeeded, for the most part, to maintain their advantage by demeaning others and keeping voting rights to themselves. Or starting predatory businesses preying on those less fortunate.

Vancouver has always been a city in constant flux between those who want to exploit its beauty by pushing unfettered development and those who believe Vancouver's pristine beauty should be preserved for all of its citizens to enjoy.

In the wake of the many battles for the city's soul, Vancouver, like many cities in the world, is leaving behind human destruction as the have-not's trip into addiction, alcohol abuse, mental health issues, and basically hopelessness. One hundred years ago, homeless men (primarily men) wanted a job. In today's Vancouver, the homeless appear to have lost all hope, and what they seem to quest is to manage their addictions to control the pain of being left behind. You can't walk a block without...

A shiny tower goes up, we look the other way; the city sure is beautiful. But is it? Is Vancouver at a crossroads? Vancouver needs solid leadership, open to listening before Vancouver becomes nothing more than a playground for the super-rich as more and more people fall into despair.

I think it would be fantastic if "Becoming Vancouver" was in every hotel room in the city or offered as a purchase option to everyone visiting the city when they booked their rooms. "Becoming Vancouver" is a captivating read, where, for me, the more I read, the more history I thirsted for.

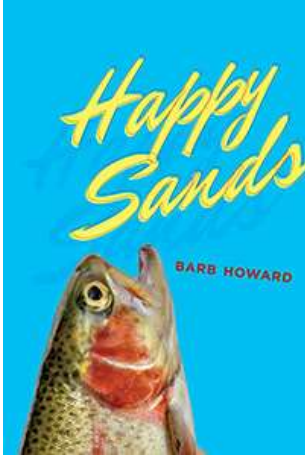
It is vitally important to study the past if we hope to make the future better for all.

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: October 8, 2021

HAPPY SANDS

BARB HOWARD



Like reading a country song playing out in stream-of-consciousness on hyperdrive.

HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

I go for a walk. I need to hold onto who I am. My mind wanders. Say what you feel. Nah. Keep it inside. I'm losing it. No, you are not. You're human. Why am I laughing?

Look what that person is doing over there. OMG, hilarious. I must let others know. Don't.

The best comedy is what plays in my head, only for me. I don't need television, movies, social media – holding onto who I am is the only story I need to watch.

Barb Howard's "Happy Sands" is like reading a country song playing out in stream-of-consciousness on hyperdrive.

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Howard is a deftly talented writer with a lightning sharp wit, whose comedic chops left me gasping, mouth agape. I drooled a little.

I need a drink. Why not.

As much as this is a comedic ride, it is also a captivating story, opening a screen door into what it must be like for mothers when they feel they are on the cusp of losing everything. A husband to depression. Children who are outgrowing families. A life slipping from the shallows of youth into the deep end of whatever the heck is next?

Mothers are often the family rocks. The nurturers. The encouragers. The...

It must be awful to feel alone and underappreciated.

Thankfully, for readers, Howard makes us laugh – and hopefully, while we guffaw, some tenderness is returned her way as a life preserver is tossed into the deep end just before she...

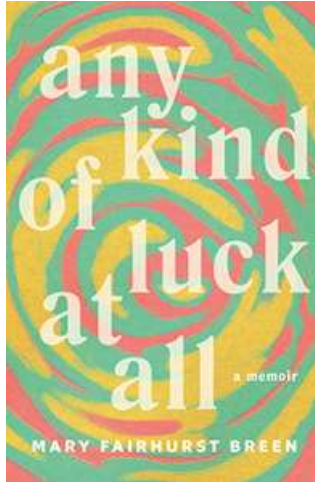
OMG. Is that plastic pink flamingo's neck snapped?

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: October 13, 2021

ANY KIND OF LUCK AT ALL

MARY FAIRHURST BREEN



Unflinchingly honest. Unapologetic. Humanizing. Comforting.

HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

“They” say what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. “They, whoever “They” are (?) also suggest traumatic events build character.

I think a laundry list of traumatic events assaulting an individual (in this case, Breen) reveals the character lying within. Mary Fairhurst Breen has heaps of character.

We are fortunate Breen found the strength and unbounded courage to share her heartache in *“Any Kind of Luck at All.”*

Breen’s ability to reveal devastating heartache and sorrow in a soul-shaking manner is unfathomable. Breen lays herself bare as she invites readers into the throes of the unrelenting assaults of mental health + addiction. Breen unapologetically, despite the horrific cards she’s been dealt, doesn’t wallow. But instead sheds light on the need to cauterize the horrendous challenges humanity faces as we meander the rocky roads of life. And then humanize those of us who are struggling.

Breen understands the limitations of privilege. Instilling deep-rooted honesty in her children.

“Emma happens to be tall and blond and is well aware of the advantages she enjoys as a result. Fortunately, she uses her power for good, and when she walks through doors that open automatically for her, she holds them open for others.”

What hit home most for me is her unflinching honesty (and sense of humour) + ability to understand life, addiction, entitlement...everything, is ephemeral. If we don’t come together and realize we matter more than what we desperately try to project, the world will continue to spin in judgement.

Breen’s unbridled love for her family and her amazing daughters is crystal clear. And while facing unbearable grief, Breen, in all of life’s flawed glory, lets others know what everyone needs: love and understanding without the shackles and shallowness of judgment.

“Any Kind of Luck at All” will resonate strongly with anyone suffering loss.

I feel Breen was destined to tell this story. The world is a better place because she did.

Breen’s sexuality is uncovered subtly; it should only matter to her, not me, you, or anyone else. Because as much as it is a vital part of who she is – the only thing truly mattering is, she’s human, struggles, and somehow found the strength to offer comfort to the rest of us.

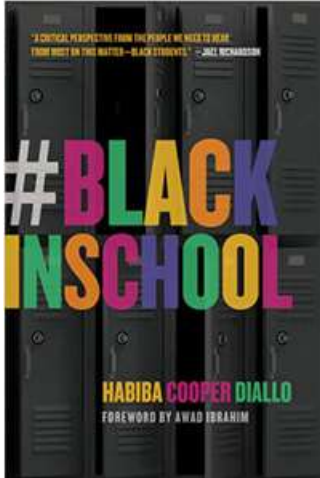
Thank You.

That’s how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: October 13, 2021

#BLACKINSCHOOL

HABIBA COOPER DIALLO



I've never once said, "I have a white friend."

HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

I'm Caucasian. I've been meandering around on this rock a long time. I grew up in insular Saskatchewan. During my meandering, I've been conditioned. Conditioned. Conditioned. Conditioned. *Don't say it five times, or the Candyman will show up.*

MY CONDITIONING: Books, movies, television, music, news reports... everything, told me who and what to be afraid of, where not to go, and most importantly, it cemented my privilege. Why would I not believe my conditioning, buying in entirely? I didn't, but I did. Who wouldn't want privilege?

Then, I travelled, moved to a different city, and slowly, my attitudes changed. *Crap, the things I do and say can cause others pain; who knew?* I'd express my newfound discoveries to friends, and my peers refuted my findings in true privilege fashion, suggesting the conditioning is accurate. I resisted. I read more. I realized we all have a responsibility, and what we think isn't necessarily another person's experience. We weren't all born white.

#BLACKINSCHOOL is an exquisite look into the life of an intelligent girl in high school who happens to be black. It is not meant to awaken Caucasians, but it is intended to help break the *bleeping* conditioning.

Every day, I want to be a better person; reading #BLACKINSCHOOL helps.

I have no desire to be *woke*, but I strongly want to learn.

Asking where are you from? Which, in my opinion, is quotidian small talk and a question not worth answering?

When a white asks another white, it's an attempt (?) to find commonality – still pointless, because really, who cares? Is the inquisitor taking notes?

When a white asks a non-white, the question takes on a different bent. If the answer is "*from here*" – it's rarely accepted, something more exotic is desired, preferably where the inquisitor can flex a micro-aggression-fueled sense of superiority.

I didn't believe this. I thought perhaps if someone got upset, it was an overreaction. But then, the night after reading #BLACKINSCHOOL, I was sitting at a bar stool in a local watering hole. Next to me sat a Black Man; his Caucasian date arrived; I believe it was the first time they met. The Black Man's date asked, "*Where are you from?*" He replied, "*I'm from here.*" His answer didn't satisfy his date, "*I mean, where are you really from?*" He fired back, "*Aren't all white people from the same village?*"

Fortunately, Sandra Bullock entered the watering hole and saved the day.

For me at least, my conditioning is breaking. Thank You, Habiba!

WRITTEN: October 17, 2021

UMBILICAL CORD

HASAN NAMIR



Love prevails.

HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

A heartwarming love story. Acceptance of who you are while at the same time understanding an evolving world evolves at the pace of a snail. What do you do? Do you fight? Do you resist? Do you run away? No. You love more. And you share all of your joyful glorious love with the world. Proudly. Loudly. Without apology. Those struggling to accept, one day, they'll change + see profoundness and beauty in kindness and love.

Hasan Namir in *Umbilical Cord* deserves a rousing applause line for sharing his joy and giving the rest of us the permission to love.

The rapture in his son Malek's eyes show us all what is possible!

I will leave you with a love story. I hope you don't mind.

April 25, 2010.

14 *Love. Do I think he is a good man? What if he is mean or dislikes me? Should I text him? Yes, or No? Should I buzz or turn around? Oh. He texted me: Where are you? Should I lie that I'm still home? And just leave? I'm almost there. Why not! Let's see. He might be a good guy. He seems very nervous! He may be a good person. He may be considerate. Okay, I'm way more comfortable than expected! Do I think he likes me? I like him. He is a good person. I want to know him. We're having – I like it, but is it just one night, or – He is not texting me, oh well – Oh it's, his text. I guess he likes me. Happy! When do I get to see him next? Would he be thinking about me? I think about him all the time. I can't stop thinking about him. He asked me to meet again. Em – Should I? Or should I not? I don't want him to feel awkward around me. I like him. I want to see his friends. He's introducing me to his friends. They're nice, but I feel doubt in them. Well – Why would I care what other people think. I just need to stay with him. All I need is his love. I want to stay with him all the time. I want to see him. What is it? I can't stop thinking of him. Never felt this feeling before. Confused. What if he is not really into me? He is an amazing person. He is good. I like him. I want to stay with him. I want to embrace him. I want to give him my love. Is this love? I don't know what love is. What is love? Is this love? I want to see him. Take care of him. I want to give him everything. Good health. Love. Joy. I'm confused. I miss him. He seems to like me. I feel comfortable. Is this normal? Or just me? I want to see his mind: what is he thinking about me? Whatever. I think I made up my mind. I know what's going on. I love him. That's what this is. Love!*

October 19, 2021

Love prevails.

WRITTEN: October 19, 2021