

**June 2004**

**The Book Talk Series  
at The Kensington Park Library**

**by Sara Phang**

The Kensington Park Library is famous for a Book Talk Series, in which library users and community members read and meet to discuss books chosen by current or retired librarians. Local authors may also be invited to discuss their latest books.

The Book Talks tradition began as an opportunity to involve current and retired librarians with the local community. After a lifetime reading and recommending books, and assisting readers to expand their knowledge and enjoy literature, it's hard to give that up.

The Book Talk program existed in the 1960s, but was discontinued due to budget constraints and was revived by Patricia Teller in the 1990s. Priscilla Tapley, one of the Montgomery County Public Library system's best known and most devoted adult librarians, started giving Book Talks at Chevy Chase Library. Now retired, she remains a very popular leader of Book Talks. Similar Book Talk programs have been created at other Montgomery County public libraries.

Book Talk attendees comprise an ever-changing audience, depending on the book, ranging from 20 to 60 members. Books to be read may be reserved ahead of time through the library.

Every chair of a Book Talk has a different teaching style — discussion, lecture, question and answer, informal conversation. Priscilla Tapley prefers the lecture format, since anyone can join the group, with or without having read the book, so it's an informal way of passing on information about interesting books.

However, each leader of a Book Talk handles the event in their own way.

Preparing for a Book Talk is no easy task, as the leader must read the book several times and explore its reviews and critics. Tapley says that if you know the book well, you can relax in front of your audience and make them enjoy it too. The atmosphere is informal and friendly — there are no tests, and refreshments are served.

Books chosen have been published within the last five years and reflect current literary top picks, the librarian's own interests, and current events and issues, such as the recent choice of Marilyn

Goldstein, Reading Lolita in Tehran by Azar Nafisi, “an inspired blend of memoir and literary criticism” which relates how the female students of the woman university professor Nafisi gathered in secret to read classic Western novels banned by the government.

Angela Pearlstein’s choice of Joan London’s Gilgamesh relates the post-war experiences of World War I veterans who travel to Australia, and the women in their lives. Priscilla Tapley selected and chaired the talk about Bonnie Angelo’s First Mothers: The Women Who Shaped the Presidents. This book is full of interesting and inspiring details about the mothers of (for example) Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan.

Recent Book Talks have included Life of Pi, a literary best-selling novel by Martel Yann, chaired by Mike Marx; Don’t Let’s Go To The Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood, a memoir by Alexandra Fuller, chaired by KP manager Kenneth Lewis; Seabiscuit: An American Dream, by Laura Hillenbrand, chaired by Hazel Cushing; and Equal Music, by the poet and novelist Vikram Seth, chaired by Kenneth Lewis. All Book Talks are held at 11 a.m.

For more information, visit the Kensington Park Community Library, 4201 Knowles Avenue, Kensington, MD 20895. Phone (301) 897-2211 or check the web site [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/libraries](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/libraries).

(Author’s note: Information on the Talks was kindly provided by Patricia Teller, Adult Librarian at the Kensington Park Library, and by Priscilla Tapley.)

#### More About Book Talks

Notes from

Priscilla Tapley

- I got involved with book talks when I started at Chevy Chase Library as a Children’s Librarian. Each participating library’s Readers Adviser set up a regular book talk schedule (for instance 4th Tuesdays) at her own branch, and then filled up the slots with staff volunteers, local authors discussing their latest book, or librarians from the central offices in Rockville or other branches.
- If I prepared a book talk for Chevy Chase, I might be asked to repeat it at Silver Spring, Aspen Hill, etc., and when I became a Readers Adviser I would get their staff members to give book talks for me.
- Librarians are all readers. Librarians like to talk about books. Each of us giving Book Talks enjoys doing it in his/her own way.
- I hope I’ve given people nudges toward good books they might have missed; I haven’t focused on special interests in the community.
- I try to choose a book that is owned by a number of library branches. Pat Teller gathers those copies at Kensington Park, and may buy paperback copies as well.
- There are quite a few “regulars” at the Kensington Park Book Talks,

some bringing along their friends or neighbors. And there are always others who come because of their interest in the particular book.

• As a former librarian, and an enthusiastic Book Talker, I hope Kensington Park will continue to offer this program series.