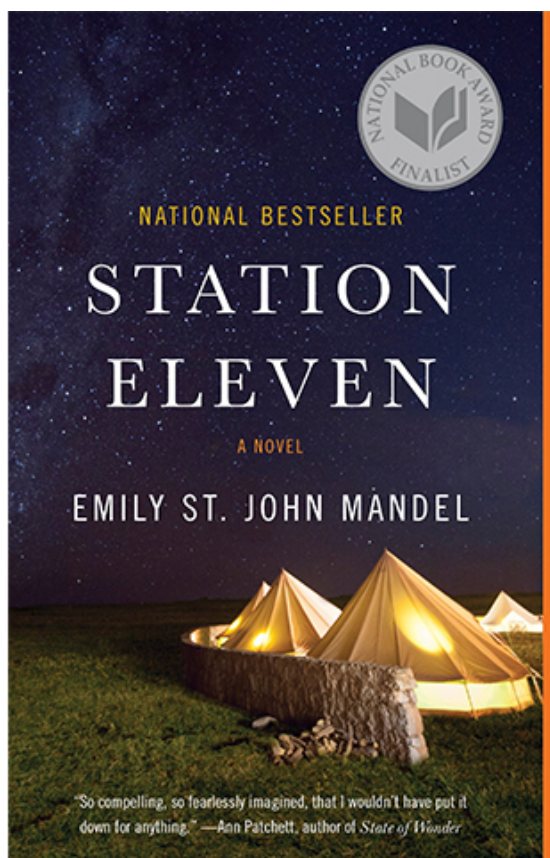
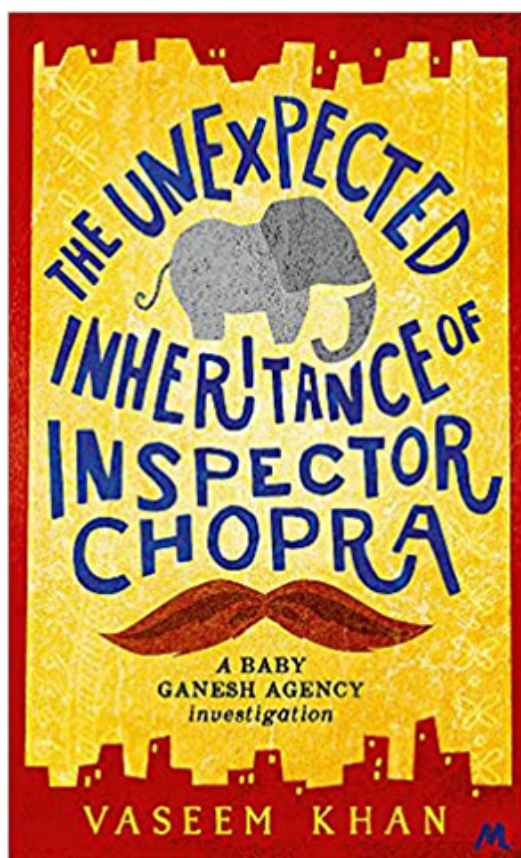


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## What some of our neighbors are reading to 'escape' the pandemic

Posted on May 21, 2020 (<https://www.chestnuthilllocal.com/2020/05/21/what-some-of-our-neighbors-are-reading-to-escape-the-pandemic/>), updated on May 21, 2020 (<https://www.chestnuthilllocal.com/2020/05/21/what-some-of-our-neighbors-are-reading-to-escape-the-pandemic/>) by Pete Mazzaccaro (<https://www.chestnuthilllocal.com/author/pete/>)



Vaseem Khan's Baby Ganesh Agency Investigation series and "Station Eleven" by Emily St. John Mandel are two of many books recommended by local readers to escape the pandemic.

by **Hugh Gilmore**

As you might imagine, several of our contributors today are frustrated travelers who read a lot and dream of faraway places. For example, **Linda Cherkas**, a recently retired psychiatric social worker who lives in west Mount Airy, writes, "Hi Hugh, I'm glad to join this survey of what people are reading these days." Her reading, she says, is a combination of escapism and virtual travel since her three favorite mystery writers all set their books in a different country than their own.

She recommends: (1) "Vaseem Khan and his 'Baby Ganesh Agency Investigation Series,' beautifully set in Mumbai, India, featuring a retired police officer and a baby elephant, Ganesha, who helps him solve cases. (2) David Casarett (an American Palliative Care doctor at Duke University) whose "Ethical Chiang Mai Detective Agency" series spotlights Ladarat Patalung, a nurse ethicist in a very realistic Chang Mai, Thailand setting, and (3) Deborah Crombie, a Texan, whose "Duncan Kincaid and Gemma James" series follows a Scotland Yard superintendent and his wife, who solve murders thought to be unsolvable together.

Linda is amazed that she's read 16 books during the lockdown. "They transport me to another place during this crazy time," she says.

Author and fiber artist **Janet Gilmore** pursues a similar trail. She writes, "I love visiting Montreal every year and fantasize about living there some day. Can't go this year, so I'm re-reading the mystery novels (there are 15) of Louise Penny, a spellbinding Canadian writer who sets her stories in Québec province. Her wonderful series is set around the life of Chief Homicide Inspector Armand Gamache of Sûreté du Québec ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%BBret%C3%A9\\_du\\_Qu%C3%A9bec](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%BBret%C3%A9_du_Qu%C3%A9bec)), the provincial police ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law\\_enforcement\\_in\\_Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_enforcement_in_Canada)) force for Québec. The books are set in the imaginary village of Three Pines, Canada, where the houses and gardens are beautiful, the neighbors are lovely and the food is great – a perfect place, except for the murders that happen annually. The winters are awful in Three Pines – snowy and very cold – but the books are great reading while being shut inside during a snowstorm or a pandemic."

After 50 years spent pursuing careers from policeman, to builder, to nurse practitioner, **Mark Rivinus**, raised on Rex Avenue, recently returned to live in Philadelphia. Mark writes "I usually am reading at least two books at a time. Number one right now is James Thomas Flexner's 'Washington: The Indispensable Man.' (This is the one-volume distillation of his four-volume, Pulitzer-winning 'George Washington') It is beautifully written. It's wonderful to see how the USA was born from such inspired, honest leadership." Mark's other book is John Kelly's 'The Great Morality, An Intimate History of the Black Death.' This is a wonderful epidemiological, sociological history of the bubonic plague that ravaged Europe during the middle 14th century. It would hard to imagine a better-written book on such a complex, devastating subject. We think that all things are new, but it is amazing how often mankind relives past collapses."

In a timely way, **Greg Welsh**, recently retired co-proprietor of the Chestnut Grill checked in to recommend a pair of dystopian novels that suggest our times: "The Circle," by Dave Eggers – "about a frightening future created by our technologies," and (2) "Station Eleven," by Emily St John Mandel. "It's about life 20 years after civilization's collapse due to a pandemic. Both are quite intelligent, perceptive, and gripping."

**Liz Jarvis**, curator/archivist of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy, slipped and fell on April 6 during a heavy rainstorm and had to be ambulated to Chestnut Hill Hospital with a broken hip. After a scary five nights in modern-day isolation away from her family, Liz is home and on the mend now. Recently, she enjoyed "The Yellow House," by Sarah M. Broom (2019 National Book Award winner for memoir). "It's a memoir about a woman who grew up in east New Orleans in her mother's yellow house in a neighborhood that tourists do not visit. There were good and bad times there, including the devastating effects of the hurricane Katrina. We meet Ms. Broom's interesting, diverse family and see their relationships to the city, and each other. It's a compelling read."

**James Hill**, describing himself as "a citizen of Chestnut Hill," writes: "During the past eight weeks I've read two books I can highly recommend: 'War Doctor,' by David Nott (Picador 2019) is the memoir of a London-based vascular surgeon who volunteered (via Red Cross and/or Doctors Without Borders) to operate in such war-torn countries as Syria, the Congo, Haiti, and Iraq. Inspiring and heart-rending, it's a memorable book. The second book, a fast-paced thriller, 'Winnabow,' by David Langfitt (Director of Palliative Care at Duke U.) is a legal thriller about a female lawyer entangled in a hijacked drug shipment that goes missing in North Carolina's low country. Like 'War Doctor,' it's chilling and compelling."

Readers may remember **Linda Baldwin's** friendly and competent manner behind the counter of Kilian's hardware, but she is also a musician, handyman, and neighborhood organizer/socializer. She says, "I am currently finishing up the book, 'Our Fathers, Ourselves' by psychiatrist, author and scholar Peggy Drexler. I had known Peggy when, at the age of 3 1/2, her father died suddenly of a heart attack. Our families were spending the summer together in Harvey Cedars, NJ, when it happened. Not having grown up with a father, Peggy is searching to learn how it feels to relate to a father, by interviewing many women about their father-daughter relationships. It makes me wish that my father were still alive. There are so many questions, and it's too late to ask. I hope you are well and bearing up under the pandemic."

Next we hear from an antiques dealer who specializes in old buttons, **Gilly Phipps** of Wyndmoor. She writes, "My brain is out of shape and I'm overeating, but I have read many of the books I checked out of the library before they closed 'until further notice.' The book I most want to recommend is already well known, but I must say I really was inspired by 'Becoming,' Michelle Obama's memoir. It's a beautifully smooth read. The former First Lady opens up about her personal life, from growing up with loving parents, to marrying the charismatic man who would become the first African American president of the United States. I came away feeling she let us get to know her better while sharing her internal struggle to believe in herself. A very uplifting read."

Quite touching is the tale of yet-another disappointed would-be traveler, **Mary Ann Domanska**. Mary Ann teaches 2nd grade at Chestnut Hill Academy, acts for Stagecrafters, and is the author of a wonderful young adult novel (titled "Emic Rizzle, Tinkerer") whose heroine is enthralled by Nikola Tesla. She writes, "I bought Peter Swanson's 'The Kind Worth Killing' to take on board what was to be my very first cruise over spring break together with my mom and my sister - a trip we had long talked about and put off for many years. The ship, called The Legend (yes, the same Royal Caribbean ship that was in the accident earlier in the year and all over the news), was heading for the Caribbean and Peter Swanson's psychological suspense book sounded like the perfect bit of escapism to take along."

Right now it rests neatly on my bedside table collecting dust as I check over this week's student work submitted online. I sigh each time I see that book. I had pictured myself lounging decadently in the sun on the balcony to our stateroom (for which I had worked several side jobs for many months to save up for), a tangy, frosty, salt-rimmed margarita in one hand, wearing my cheap reading sunglasses, and immersing myself in the suspense of a exciting tale.

Instead, I lean over my laptop, taking it one day at a time. Perhaps when summer officially begins I will feel relaxed enough to sink into the other world of a good book. Right now reality is just too raw, and I need to be ever-present for my students.

Finally, a dedicated traveler, Chestnut Hill resident **Tom Tarantino** bought all the books he recommends here as background research for a trip he intends to take to the Corbett Tiger Reserve in Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand, north-central India. It was scheduled for January, then postponed to March, and now is on hold for "whenever." Tom writes, "I have just finished reading the works of Jim Corbett, the great killer of man-eating tigers and leopards. In later life he became their greatest champion and conservationist. He wrote six books. Among them are 'Man-Eaters of Kumaon,' which features the Champawat Man Eater, the most prolific man-killer in history, and 'The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag,' the most famous leopard in the world. He also wrote a very informative book, 'Jungle Lore.'

"We all need an escape...but now there is nowhere to go except to our books."

*Amen. Stay safe, everyone. Hope you found something to read here, whatever your motive or need.*

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