

Intro

Hello everyone, and welcome to Novel-Tea from the North Scituate Library. I'm your host Katherine, and every month I review a couple books and give you a look behind the shelves at the secret and sometimes, maybe, not-very, scandalous lives of library workers.

Review of *Mutual Aid*

I don't have a fiction review for you this month, because it has been one heck of a month. However, I did read a new work of nonfiction that I can review for you. [*Mutual Aid: building solidarity during this crisis \(and the next\)*](#) by Dean Spade is all about what mutual aid movements are, why they're important, and how to start and maintain one.

I ordered this book for our collection because there has been a lot of talk about and need for mutual aid in the past year, during the pandemic, and I wanted to know more, and I wanted us to have a no-nonsense guide to starting a mutual aid project available for anyone who might be interested, or struggling to get something going. Spade defines mutual aid as survival work that ordinary people do in their communities. They are, by their nature, tied to social movements looking to change things.

The book covers why mutual aid is important, what it looks like, how to do it, talks about the theory of grassroots organizing, and gives some great tools to help people address decision-making, conflict, and burnout in their mutual aid organizations.

On the whole I'm really pleased with this purchase. It's written in plain language, explains things thoroughly, and it uses examples of historical mutual aid projects like the Black Panther Party's free breakfast and ambulance programs, and contemporary projects like the Sylvia Rivera Law Project which provides free legal help to trans and gender-nonconforming people. It talks about the difference between mutual aid and charity, and has great tools and examples of how things can work - how to run a meeting using consensus-based voting, leadership skills, and how to handle conflicts within a group or between groups.

One drawback of this book is that it is coming from a strongly leftist perspective. I very much enjoyed it as an individual, and found the advice and the information extremely useful in my personal life and also to a certain extent in my work. But, it doesn't have the broad appeal I was hoping for, for a library audience.

Spade's view of mutual aid is very tied to his activism. He sees it as a way that communities are supporting each other where the government has failed, and as a stepping stone to mobilize people into progressive activism. However, I can imagine how upset my conservative patrons

might be as they read the idea that forming an organization to deliver groceries to our neighbors is something they would be opposed to because of their political beliefs. I understand, after reading, that Spade is writing for a targeted audience, so I don't exactly fault the book for that. But it does mean I probably need to find an additional source that will be less polarizing.

The library has *Mutual Aid* available in print. I recommend it to anyone who wants to learn a bit more about what people are talking about when they say "mutual aid" or to anyone who is interested in starting a group in their community to do some sort of work to help people survive.

Youth Services Corner

Hi everyone, happy spring! This is Miss Alyce bringing you the April update for what's happening here at the library for children and teens. Before I tell you about our events, I want to let you know a little bit about a great picture book I just read. It's called [May Saves the Day](#) and it's written by Laura Gehl and illustrated by Serena Lombardo.

May is the founder of Word Saver Inc. She is almost like a superhero. When she gets a call for help, she uses her bag of letters to avert disaster. With one letter T she saves the kids from angry bees when she turns them into beets. Stu is an expert at the lasso and wants to be May's sidekick, but she doesn't think she needs a sidekick. But when a huge tornado touches down, she may need a teammate. This is a really fun book! May and Stu are great heroes. This book has bright and colorful illustrations along with some super characters. I think kiddos in kindergarten to around 2nd grade will really enjoy, and I would definitely recommend it to fans of shows like Super Why, Hero Elementary, and Word Girl. You can find *May Saves the Day* here at the library with our new picture books.

Now I want to tell you about a fun event that is coming up over April vacation. You have been asking, so just in time for beautiful weather and in celebration of Earth Day, we will be having an in-person craft outside at the gazebo. We will be making tote bags from recycled bird seed bags. The craft will be on Wednesday April 22nd at 12 noon at the gazebo across the street from the library. It is for ages 8 and up and there is a limit of 15 kids so registration is required. You can sign up with me or at the circulation desk. You can call 647-5133 or email me if it's more convenient alyce@scituatelibrary.org. In case of rain, we'll have the craft on Friday April 23rd at noon. If there is bad weather, I'll call everyone who's registered to let them know if there is a date change. I just ask that everyone wears a mask for safety.

I hope to see some of you at the craft or over April vacation. I hope all of the kiddos enjoy their vacation, hopefully the weather will be nice so there can be some outdoor fun. Have a great rest of the month I'll see you soon. Bye everyone!

Behind the Shelves

Now for our little peek Behind the Shelves - oh and I know you've been waiting for this one, dear listeners. After much anticipation and much postponement, New Guy Bill took over the cook book club to do his demo this month. Since I'm technically the host, even though it's a multi-library project, I signed on early to help him get set up and make sure all the technical stuff was working right on Zoom. Mics working, cameras working, finding a good camera angle...

There were about 15 minutes with just us signed in - we didn't find much to talk about? But that's not too weird. I know this is a podcast, so you might be surprised to learn that... I'm not a great talker! And I guess neither is he. We said a few pleasantries, but mostly he just got set up and after we were sure the tech side was working, focused on our own business. I can't afford to hold a grudge.

I did notice that his kitchen is AMAZING, like, I am seriously envious. He has a 5-burner gas range, a huge fridge, an extra oven in an island with a butcher block. He had a green Le Creuset stock pot set up for his recipe, and he didn't have doors on his cabinets, so I also got a really good view of all his dishes and gear. Everything was painstakingly organized.

Eventually everyone signed on, and Bill started doing his demo. That thing I said about him "not being a talker" was not an exaggeration - starting out, he gave, like... the bare minimum. Reminded us he was making Caramelized Fennel and Chickpea Soup with Saffron, and started prepping his ingredients in near silence. "2 bulbs of fennel, diced small" - he held up the fennel for the camera, and started finely chopping. Good knife skills, but kind of a dull demo.

As the silence stretched on, Jenn piped in - "Could you please tell us what made you choose this recipe?" she said. I could tell she was annoyed that he wasn't engaging the club.

He paused in his chopping and looked up at the camera, like it never crossed his mind to chat about such a deep and arcane topic. He said "Oh, well - when I was first trying recipes for the book, I was cooking for a vegetarian." He started peeling garlic with his fingers while he talked. "So I knew I would want something that used one of the vegetarian broths. And there was really nice fennel at the market, even though it's not peak season. So... I guess this is just how it worked out? I decided to demonstrate it because it was well-received, and one of my favorites from the book."

He turned his head back down to his work, but Jenn basically ran the demo from that point. She kept asking helpful? Ish? questions. She asked to tell us about his kitchen, and we learned he's actually a professional chef, who writes and tests recipes for books and magazines, which is why it's worth it for him to maintain such a nice kitchen. She asked why he was using chicken broth if he made it with mineral broth the first time, and he responded "Because I am NOT vegetarian."

The next question he deflected, clearly a little flustered. His veggies were slowly caramelizing and he used his phone to show how brown they were getting, but looked into his main camera. "You have so many questions for me, Jenn. Are you following a script?"

She laughed, and said "Not exactly, but these are some things we commonly discuss in the club. One must speak a little, you know. It would be a bit odd to silently watch you for an hour."

"I see," he said, a thoughtful look on his face as he added carrots to the stock pot. "Odd for you, or for me?"

She raised her eyebrow. "For both, I think! Even though I'd much prefer to only speak when I have something really amazing to say, it's better to be polite, isn't it?" That, he didn't have an answer for, but he did allow her to keep asking questions as he finished making his soup.

After the meeting was over, I got a text from Sue - "DUDE. This is the soup that Carlo brought me when I got hurt!"

"What." I replied.

"I didn't recognize it until like halfway through making it, but - definitely the same soup. Did HE make that soup for me? What's going on??"

I could only reply with a shruggy emoji. A mystery to be solved at a later date, dear listeners!

Review of *One Pot Feeds All*

This month's cook book is [*One Pot Feeds All*](#) by Darina Allen

This is a book of one-pot or one-pan recipes by a chef who founded the Ballymaloe Cookery School in Ireland.

I want to start this review with something really basic that many cook books don't do, that I think they should all do. This might be an unpopular opinion, I'm not sure. But I want a cookbook to have a listing of the recipes! In the table of contents, or in an appendix. The Table of Contents for this book reads "Introduction - page 6, Eggs - page 10, Poultry - page 28, Meat - page 60..." etc. I'm not sure this is a hill I'll die on, but I'm out here saying, in frustration - what recipes are in your book, and what page is each recipe on??

My first look through this book, I kept laughing at all the titles. They aren't funny, they're actually intentionally simple, I think. But they used a weird design strategy where they mixed italicized and standard text in each title, and it gives a very strange emphasis. Here are some of my favorites...

- A spring chicken IN A POT

- Chicken POACHED IN MILK
- Pork taco PARTY
- MERMAID'S fish pie
- Spicy tomato fondue WITH MANY GOOD THINGS

I grabbed this book because I thought it would help me make some quick meals that didn't require a lot of dishes, and while technically that's true, it also was not a book "for me?" Like, it's got some pretensions that I don't have the money to follow through on. As an example, the description on that poached chicken recipe includes the sentence "There is honestly no point in attempting this recipe if you cannot find a really good free-range bird." I love local food movements as much as the next guy, but a recipe that tells me not to make it unless I have the best possible ingredients turns me off a little. I am more interested in recipes that can make dollar-a-pound chicken quarters taste delicious.

I give this book an average rating! There's not much more to say about it. The recipes are interesting, but nothing really stood out except for how it was a little pretentious.

Closing

Thank you for listening to Novel-Tea. Please note that the opinions in this podcast are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the North Scituate Public Library. The Behind the Shelves segment is a work of fiction, and any similarities to real people is unintentional.

Today we mentioned...

- [Mutual Aid](#) by Dean Spade
- [May Saves the Day](#) by Laura Gehl
- Our Earth Day craft on April 22
- A recipe for Caramelized Fennel and Chickpea Soup with Saffron from [Clean Soups](#) by Rachel Katz
- [One Pot Feeds All](#) by Darina Allen

I'm including links to all of the books we discussed in the show notes, as well as a link to a transcript of the episode, and to all our social media. If you can't get enough library content, visit scituatelibrary.org to learn about all our services and programs. Also, please send us feedback on this show! Leave us reviews wherever you can do that, or even just drop us an email. I'm at katherine@scituatelibrary.org and Alyce is alyce@scituatelibrary.org. We'd love to hear from you!