



January Branch Meeting Pittsburgh, Forged in Steel

Susie Toman

January 11, 2024 10:00 AM

Murrysville Community Library

4130 Sardis Road

Murrysville, PA

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AAUW in cooperation with the Murrysville Community Library presents a program on the industrial age in Pittsburgh history provided by Susie Toman.

Susie Toman is currently an Educator, Docent and Receptive Guide for Rivers of Steel. The Educator position entails teaching environmental science and other river-related programs aboard The Explorer boat that sails the three rivers of Pittsburgh. She also conducts tours of Pittsburgh as seen from the rivers aboard The Explorer. Additionally, Susie presents outreach programs to schools and civic groups.

The Docent position requires Susie to conduct walking tours of the Carrie Blast Furnaces National Historic Landmark, a former iron-producing facility. Susie interprets the story of the mill and the men and women that worked there.

The Receptive position has Susie conducting custom bus tours of the region and charter tours aboard The Explorer.

Susie grew up in Mt. Lebanon and is a graduate of Slippery Rock University with a B.S. in Environmental Sciences and Biology.

Join us to hear Susie Toman for an informative experience – an experience sure to bring our shared history to life.



Snow Policy

If FR Schools are closed, AAUW meetings are canceled.

If FR Schools are delayed, AAUW meetings will be held as scheduled.



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President's Letter

I write this letter in praise of fiction!

No doubt you will find yourself reading these musings sometime during the twelve days of Christmas (December 25th through January 5th) and thus, I do not hesitate to begin with a reference to that most enduring holiday novella, *A Christmas Carol*. I just recently learned that this engaging work of fiction was actually written as an impassioned response to a report on the working conditions endured by children in mid-nineteenth century London.



Dickens, himself a product of a traumatic period of family poverty, found the 1843 report by The Children's Employment Commission a scathing condemnation of child labor and poverty during the Industrial Revolution. Feeling a deep sympathy for the poor, Dickens vowed to write a political tract as an exhortation to those who could – and should – help!

However, in a few short weeks Dickens gave up on this plan for a political plea and decided that a work of fiction would be a more effective tool, indeed a “sledgehammer with twenty thousand times the force” that he could exert with a factual tract. Time has proven the wisdom of this decision. Fiction can change hearts and minds so powerfully. Scrooge and Tiny Tim speak through the ages of the responsibility we have to mankind and social justice.

Not only is fiction a powerful tool for focusing attention on issues requiring our understanding, it is also very good for the brain! Neurologist Dr. Richard Restak, in his book, *The Complete Guide to Memory*, advocates a few simple things that we can do to improve working memory - one of which is to READ FICTION! It seems that an early indicator that a person is experiencing memory issues is the observation that he or she has given up on reading fiction, which requires active engagement with the text from beginning to end. Remembering names of characters, plot details, and the sequence of events helps to stimulate the brain and improve memory. What a bonus that reading fiction is also highly enjoyable!



Thus, I recommend our wonderful book group, Reading for Pleasure, to all of our members. Whether the group is reading fiction or non-fiction, our discussions are always lively and our memories are engaged. We also enjoy the added bonus of connecting with friends! Please join the group as Carol Gezon leads a discussion of Graham Moore's *The Last Days of Night* on January 25th at the Murrysville Community Library.

I hope that these cold January days find you curled up with a good book!

Diane Kaufmann

Reading for Pleasure

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season. It's with great joy that I welcome 2024! I'm hoping it will be much better year than 2023 for me and my family. With the mind-set of looking to the future, I have immersed myself in reading lots of science fiction. I thoroughly enjoyed listening to *Terry Pratchett: A Life with Footnotes* by Rob Wilkins. Pratchett was recommended to me many years ago by my nephew Caleb McCall (today a neurologist/neurohospitalist at Thomas Jefferson Hospital in Philadelphia). Caleb knew what he was talking about when he told me I would enjoy Pratchett's *Discworld* series. I was hooked immediately and subsequently showed up at a close book store on the first day that any Pratchett book was released. When I learned of Terry's announcing that he had an aggressive form of Alzheimer's, I felt as if a family member had been so diagnosed. Rob Wilkins was Terry's personal assistant and was asked by Terry to write his official biography. It is a fascinating life! As I finished the biography and Pratchett's posthumously published *A Stroke of the Pen: The Lost Stories* (20 unearthed short stories Terry wrote under a pseudonym for British newspapers during the 1970's and 1980's), I vowed to go back to *DiscWorld* and reread these imaginative, satirical books. Unfortunately I have gotten sidetracked by several other SF and Fantasy books: Rebecca Yarros's *Fourth Wing* and *Iron Flame* and John Scalzi's wonderful series beginning with *Old Man's War*, *The Ghost Brigades*, etc., (I just finished the fourth in the series and look forward to the next two).

But back to reality and the historical novel we will be discussing in January. Our RFP book selected for January, 2024, is *The Last Days of Night* by Graham Moore. It will be reviewed by Carol Gezon in the Murrysville Community Library Meeting Room on Thursday, January 25, 2024, at 10 AM. The author acknowledges that the book is a work of historical fiction but “the bulk of the events depicted in the book did happen and every major character did exist”. Read about Thomas Edison, George Westinghouse, Nikola Tesla, and many others as the battle to electrify America is played out in the courtroom and behind the scenes. The billion-dollar question is “who invented the light bulb and holds the right to power the country?” Enjoy the book and come and discuss.



Annie S. Rivers
RFP Chair



Meet New Member Anne Brendel

I was born and raised in Princeton New Jersey. I went to college at Lehigh University and earned a BS in Civil Engineering. I moved to Monroeville after graduation for my first job at GAI Consultants. That is where I met my husband, Gary. We moved to Murrysville in 1992, where our two kids attended Franklin Regional from K - 12. I was a stay-at-home mom for most of that time and active with the PTO, school district committees, the library and our kids' activities. In 2008, when our youngest was a junior in high school I went back to work part time at Streamline Engineering. My husband and I are now both retired.

In February, my mother and her cat moved from Annapolis to Redstone Highlands in Murrysville. Both of our kids live in the greater Pittsburgh area and between them we have 3 grand-cats. Feeling like we were missing out, in April, my husband and I adopted Ginger, our first-ever cat.

This year I set a goal to get re-involved in the community. I have resumed volunteering at the library and I also recently enrolled in a quilting class. I thought joining AAUW was a great choice towards furthering my goal. I look forward to meeting members and appreciate the organization's focus on women and girls issues and promoting further strides towards equality.


Photos from December



Presentation of Donation Check to Murrysville Community Library



Catherine Westendorf, Annie Rivers, Amy Riegner, Jane Kerr and Diane Kaufmann

January 2024			
1	Mon.		
4	Thurs.	9:45 AM	Board Meeting — in the Murrysville Library Meeting Room†. Board members please let Diane know if unable to attend.
11	Thurs.	10:00 AM	Branch Meeting — TechNook† in the Murrysville Community Library
15	Mon.		Martin Luther King Day
			Deadline to email Focus articles to Donna Beard
24	Wed.	1:00 PM	Duplicate Bridge — at the home of Dodie Hagan, 3667 Blue Sage Court.
25	Thurs.	10:00 AM	Reading for Pleasure — in the Murrysville Community Library Meeting Room†

† The Murrysville Community Library (MCL) Meeting Room is located at the entrance to the Murrysville Community Library, 4130 Sardis Road. The TechNook is located in the main library room just before the main stacks.



The FOCUS is published monthly, except in July and August, by the Murrysville Area Branch of the American Association of University Women. President: Diane Kaufmann, Editor: Donna Beard, Email: MurrysvilleAAUW@gmail.com. The American Association of University Women, founded in 1881, is open to all graduates who hold an associate degree or equivalent, or baccalaureate or higher degree from a college or university or academically accredited institution. In principle and practice AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability or class. Membership is not by invitation. AAUW advances equity for all women and girls through advocacy, education and research. The Murrysville Area AAUW has an affiliate membership available to anyone who does not hold an associate or baccalaureate degree.