

Dear Book Club Friends,

Don't you wish it would get hot this summer? If it would just get **good and hot** and stay that way, we would have every excuse to snuggle into a comfortable chair, in a cool room, with maybe a fan turning the air and some ice tinkling in our glass. Well, maybe there's still a chance. August in Bloomington has never exactly been a refuge from heat in the past!

I'm setting you up for a good summer read, really a pretty good read even if you're not at the beach! It's taken me a while to sift through some options, but I have taken it upon myself, - this time, - to make a selection for our group. And I really didn't do it alone. It was recommended by Sharon Pugh, and after looking at a half dozen novels that didn't seem to match our mood, I picked up this one. Our next book will be **A First Rate Madness: Uncovering the Links between Leadership and Mental Illness**, by Nassir Ghaemi, Penguin Press, 2011

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, August 21, 2013 at the First Christian Church in Bloomington in the Sanctuary/Gathering Room from 7:00 – 8:30 pm.

A First Rate Madness, published in 2011, is a good departure from the intensity of first person accounts that have punctuated our reading thus far. They have been remarkably successful in describing the pain of coping with mental illness. Even though I think every book we read revealed a ribbon of courage, a thread of victory, they took us on hard journeys. The selection this month is simply interesting; some have even called it “fascinating”. Read this excerpt:

“When our world is in tumult, mentally ill leaders function best”.

WHAT???

The author argues that in at least one vitally important circumstance *insanity* produces good results and *sanity* is a problem. Now, isn't that an idea intriguing enough to read on? Dr. Ghaemi, the author, is the director of the Mood Disorders Program at Tufts Medical Center in Boston. He has a medical degree and a Masters of Public Health, is a psychiatry professor, and is a practitioner of what he calls “psychological history”. This is going to be an entertaining book, regardless of whether you subscribe to the idea that we are better off being led by mentally ill leaders than by mentally normal ones.

Ghaemi illustrates his thesis with profiles of eight extraordinary leaders, and a control group of “normal” leaders. He has chosen high profile (of course) men, and he's collected a lot of evidence. Some of the ones he's chosen are John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Neville Chamberlain and Gandhi. I'm not going to tell you who was “normal” and who wasn't! What a good time we'll have discussing whether his evidence was so selective to be pointless, or whether it is persuasive enough to be compelling.

I found an interview of Ghaemi on NPR if you'd like to check it out:

<http://www.npr.org/2011/08/20/139681339/madness-and-leadership-hand-in-hand>

Apart from the pleasure of reading and comparing notes with one another, one other reason for book clubs is to ponder the claims people make in the light of our *own* knowledge, experience, and training to think critically. When we read memoirs we could relate to the authors but we weren't challenging their story. In this book I think we'll have fun deciding whether the author has convinced us whether there is a link between leadership and mental illness.

See you next month!

Janet