

Book club talks history and politics



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By Nate Smelle

On the third Thursday of every month Hastings Highlands Public Library Book Club gathers in the library's lounge to discuss a different piece of literature. Once they have finished with the book they are reading, HHPL librarian and club member Nancy Wimbush said the group decides together what book they are going to read next.

On the club's reading list for May was the historical fiction novel *The Nightingale*, by bestselling author Kristin Hannah. Based on a true story, Hannah's book captures a seldom seen part of history during the Second World War – the women's war. *The Nightingale* shines a light on the role of women during the Second World War, from the perspectives of two sisters separated by years, experience, ideals, passion and circumstance, living in France while it was under German occupation.

Book club member, Lorraine Franck said Hannah's novel reminded her of the fear she experienced as a child living with her family in Holland while it was occupied by the Nazis. She said the author did an excellent job of portraying what it was like to live through such difficult and dangerous times.

‘It was very accurate with regard to what was going on and what we couldn't do in Holland during the Second World War,’ said Franck.

‘Everybody had to have shades on their windows and we weren't allowed to have any lights showing. We would hear all this racket in the night, and there would be a whole colony of German soldiers stomping along, so we would peek out from behind the curtains. Our father would tell us, don't look, don't look. It was really scary.’

Remarking on how the books they read often inspire conversations of a political nature, Wimbush said she enjoys exploring literature and history with her friends in the group. Acknowledging that the number of club members fluctuates month to month, she said until recently they have often depended on Southern Ontario Library Services' inter-library loans. Noting the Ford government's recent decision to cut funding by 50 per cent, and cancel the inter-library loan service, Wimbush said she does not know how they will be able to ensure everyone in the club has a copy to of the book that they are reading. Highlighting the value of the discussions and the social benefits clubs like theirs' provide the community, she said they are disappointed in the current government's lack of support for libraries, literacy and public education.

‘We are just one tiny example of what is going on in libraries all over Ontario,’ said Wimbush.

‘The hardest hit people are people in rural communities, and that is so unfair. We have a large-print pool and a DVD pool that are shared between libraries, so we don't know what is happening with that either.’