

Recipe for a Happy Book Club

Submitted by Jennifer Becker

As anyone who has been in a book club knows, its success or failure depends on the interest of the membership. Three years ago I invited a group of nine women to form a book club in Moraga. I had been invited to join book clubs in Berkeley and San Francisco over the years, but my interest never lasted after the first few meetings, no matter how interesting the book or lively the discussion. After a day of working inside or outside the home, venturing outside the neighborhood on a weeknight is not an attractive option. Moraga is full of readers whose interest in discussion is high, but whose time is short.

The rules of the club are fluid by design: books are chosen more or less by consensus not vote; future dates are set at the meet-



L-R: Jennifer Becker, Sophie Braccini, Anita Wood, Betty Chen (in hiding) and Nancy Resnick
ings to accommodate as many people as possible; and no "book-club-killer" books allowed (we will not be reading Moby Dick under any circumstances.)

While a discussion of the book is the purpose and focus of any meeting, meandering into other topics is allowed. Some members have dropped out and others have joined, but I like to think the club will still be around even after I pack my daughter off to college and have all the time in the world to read and discuss books.

Our most recent book was Irene Nemirovsky's *Suite Francaise*. Ms. Nemirovsky was a Russian Jew living in wartime France, who wrote about the effect on her characters of the German victory and then occupation of France. Her characters are complex, some undertaking acts of compassion for selfish reasons; others finding themselves admiring individual German soldiers while hating the enemy on a philosophical level. Ms. Nemirovsky does not focus on historical events, but writes of both the dehumanizing and humanizing effect on people standing on the sidelines. Never far from the reader's mind is Ms. Nemirovsky's own tragic end in Auschwitz in 1942.

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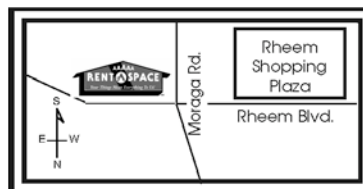
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