

## Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

### Episode 44: What's the Buzz?

(Brief intro music)

Mary: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Mary.

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Mary: Today, we are going to be talking bees!

Rachel: Buzz buzz!

Mary: World Bee Day is coming up on May 20th. This day of awareness and reverence is becoming more and more important each year. Some reasons for bee population decline are habitat loss, single crop farming on a large scale, climate change, pesticides and disease, and invasive species. The books we are recommending today are a mix of novels and nonfiction. Through these titles, we are going to hopefully prove to you that bees are vital to our food supply chain and, more broadly, our global ecosystem. Maybe more importantly, we will also show you some ways you can help. Take it away, Rachel!

Rachel: I promise to refrain from making any "Wicker Man" references for the duration of this episode. (laughs) When I think of bees, I often picture open fields filled with wildflowers swaying in a gentle breeze, fuzzy bodies bumbling hither and tither. However, given that over half of the world's population reside in cities, there aren't as many fields to go around these days. That is why my first recommendation is "Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee" by Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut. The authors get into why bees are essential for human survival. You may have already heard this stat somewhere, but it bears repeating: "One-third of all food on American dining tables depends on the labor of bees. Moore and Kosut travel into the land of urban beekeeping in New York City, where raising bees has become all the rage. We follow them as they climb up on rooftops, attend...workshops and honey festivals, and even put on full-body beekeeping suits and open up the hives. In the process, we meet a passionate, dedicated, and eclectic group of urban beekeepers who tend to their brood with an emotional and ecological connection that many find restorative." This book is all about the ways in which humans and bees intersect, including "media representations of bees, such as children's books, films, and consumer culture. Moore and Kosut argue that how we define, visualize, and interact with bees clearly reflects our changing social and ecological landscape." Which is all to say, bees are beyond

important to our society; they are essential to the world as a whole. Therefore, beekeepers, too, are a necessary cog in the great human machine. It isn't just about honey and wax, it's about pollination and the enduring survival of every species on this planet.

Mary: While Rachel's pick gives you an idea of today's beekeeping scene, my first pick is going to take you from the past, through to a post-bee world—which by now, you know is horribly problematic. You know me, I wouldn't feel right if I didn't put a little historical fiction on this list.

Rachel: (chuckles)

Mary: The title is "The History of Bees," and it's written by Maja Lunde. It follows three families of beekeepers on three different continents in three different time periods: William in 1852 England, George in 2007 United States, and Tao in 2098 China. William is looking for fame and security for his family by attempting to build a new form of beehive—one that will make use of what he knows about the biology of bees and his knowledge of seeds and plants. He is struggling with the pressure of taking care of his large family and the fear that he will not have any lasting achievements that history will remember. Nearly 150 years later, George is trying to fight against the effects of modern farming and what that is doing to the ever-decreasing bee population. He hopes that his son will be able to finally *be(E)...*

Rachel: (laughs)

Mary: ...the savior they need despite him not being interested in continuing his line of work. George's son is more interested in the academic life rather than getting involved in what his father does for a living. Nearly a century after George's struggle, Tao has to take measures into her own hands now that bees have completely vanished. She lives in a world where if you want the plants to be anything besides just a pretty flower, you have to paint the pollen on by hand, a tedious and labor-intensive process. Like the other two protagonists, Tao has feelings that her son has failed her expectations. After a tragic accident, her son is kidnapped and she has to find the strength to find him and the answers. According to the blurb, it is "haunting, illuminating, and deftly written." "The History of Bees" joins 'the past, the present, and a terrifying future in a riveting story as complex as a honeycomb' that is just as much about the powerful bond between children and parents as it is about our very relationship to nature and humanity." Combining the reviews on both Goodreads and Amazon, this book has been translated into many languages from its original Norwegian and has inspired lots of differing opinions in many different

countries. But they all seem to agree on the fact that this is an important topic and the book is a must-read.

Rachel: The next book I have to talk about encourages pollination across the board. It's "New Wild Garden: Natural-style Planting and Practicalities" by Ian Hodgson. I live in a middle-class suburb full of green lawns. It's boring. There is one lot in the entire place that has landscaped its lawn with pretty, yellow-flowering weeds that emerge every summer. My gut reaction when I first saw this was, "Wow, their neighbors must hate them!" But, you know what? Who cares? They're clearly helping the bees and the butterflies. And you can, too! "Meadow and naturalistic-style planting is the most influential new movement in garden design today, championed by some of the world's top designers. Enhanced by a solid scientific understanding, this trend evokes wild and semi-wild landscapes, recognising the importance of gardens as a refuge for wildlife." This edition of "Wild Garden" will help you adapt an "environmentally-conscious style to your own garden, whatever its size" may be. This is an "inspirational and accessible guide to low-maintenance and sustainable wild gardening," with tons of illustrations and prints. Prep yourself for National Pollinators Month in June by being a friend to our fuzzy lil' flower-drunk friends.

Mary: I actually did this on a small scale in my yard! I dug out a little garden, and it is reserved for wildflowers that grow natively in Wisconsin.

Rachel: La de da. (laughs)

Mary: It's a bit unruly, but we definitely see lots of little bumblebees around during the spring and summer. My next pick is "The Music of Bees" by Eileen Garvin. The blurb reads thusly: "Forty-four-year-old Alice Holtzman is stuck in a dead-end job, bereft of family, and now reeling from the unexpected death of her husband. Alice has begun having panic attacks whenever she thinks about how her life hasn't turned out the way she dreamed. Even the beloved honeybees she raises in her spare time aren't helping her feel better these days. In the grip of a panic attack, she nearly collides with Jake—a troubled, paraplegic teenager with the tallest mohawk in Hood River County—while carrying 120,000 honeybees in the back of her pickup truck. Charmed by Jake's sincere interest in her bees and seeking to rescue him from his toxic home life, Alice surprises herself by inviting Jake to her farm. And then there's Harry, a twenty-four-year-old with debilitating social anxiety who is desperate for work. When he applies to Alice's ad for part-time farm help, he's shocked to find himself hired. As an unexpected friendship blossoms among Alice, Jake, and Harry, a nefarious pesticide company moves to town, threatening the local

honeybee population and illuminating deep-seated corruption in the community. The unlikely trio must unite for the sake of the bees—and in the process, they just might forge a new future for themselves.” All in all, “The Music of Bees” is about the power of friendship, compassion in the face of loss, and finding the courage to start over at any age when things don't turn out the way you expect.

Rachel: That’s everything for now, listeners. We hope that you enjoyed this episode, and remember to save the bees! Check out the show notes for a list of everything that we discussed during this recording. You can subscribe and rate the podcast if you like what you hear. Remember to reach us through the Oak Creek Public Library website or Facebook page by sending messages to @OakCreekLibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Mary and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)

Rachel: (quietly) It’s a very loud lawnmower. (laughs) It’s fine, it adds ambience.

Mary: It’s a bee!

Rachel: (laughs)

Mary: Just buzzing in the background.

(censor beep sound effect)

Mary: Like the other two pro...protag. Protagonists.

Rachel: Pr pr pr. Pr pr!

Mary: I am having trouble with words.

Rachel: There’s a lot of P’s in here!

Mary: (sighs) Okay, here we go...

Rachel: Too many P’s, not enough B’s.

Mary: (pauses, then laughs sarcastically)

Rachel and Mary: (laugh)

Mary: Please leave that in there!

Rachel: (laughs harder) I will.

Mary: Bloopers.