

A Scottish Afternoon Book Club

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My Scottish saga continues...when my family arrived in Scotland in the winter of 1958, there was no military housing available so we were “billeted” at the Park Hotel ½ mile from the entrance of Royal Air Force Prestwick aka “RAF Prestwick” where we lived for almost 3 months before we found our temporary lodging in the gatehouse on the Auchendrane estate 4 miles outside of Ayr. The proprietors of the hotel, Mr. and Mrs. Rennie were quite engaging and made us feel most welcome. We enjoyed a “full pension” that included three meals a day + afternoon tea. At that time, those costs were included in our “per diem transfer costs”. And didn’t my mother just love that...no cooking and an opportunity to learn about and enjoy Scottish cuisine!!

My mother especially enjoyed “afternoon tea” in the salon of the hotel and that is where she had time to meet and engage with other hotel guests. My brother Jack and I would arrive from the RAF Prestwick international school just in time to join the group. That is where we met the most engaging gentleman, a Mr. Preston who was delighted to get to know the “Americans” who now stayed at the hotel. We would share experiences of what life was like in the United States and he would tell us stories about life growing up in the British Isles post World War II. When he learned that my father was a veterinarian in the United States Air Force he was quite intrigued and looking forward to meeting him in person. When they met they exchanged many stories about animal care in the small towns and villages. Those exchanges morphed into a quasi Scottish “book club” where Mr Preston shared his strong interest for **Lad: A Dog**, the 1919 American novel written by Albert Payson Terhune. It was composed of twelve short stories first published in magazines and the novel is based on the life of Terhune's real-life Rough Collie, Lad. That became my first required reading for our “book club”. I was hooked; I loved reading about dogs and their adventures! But Mr. Preston’s real passion was the **The Call of the Wild** by Jack London. It is a short adventure novel by Jack London published in 1903. It was set in Yukon, Canada during the 1890s Klondike Gold Rush where strong sled dogs were in high demand. The central character of the novel is a dog named Buck, a pampered St. Bernard-Scotch Collie mix. The story opens at a ranch in Santa Clara Valley, California, when Buck is stolen from his home and sold into service as a sled dog in headed for Alaska. He has many harrowing adventures and to survive becomes progressively primitive and wild in the harsh environment, where he is forced to fight to survive and dominate other dogs. Our next book assignment was the Eric Knight novel **Lassie-Come Home** that was made into a movie in 1943 with Roddy McDowell and Elizabeth Taylor! By the time our “book club” had completed those 3 novels it prepared me to spend many subsequent years reading novels about dogs, cats and horses. My all time favorite remains James Herriot’s “All Creatures Great and Small” series that included several books, a movie and a BBC series. I have devoured many books on military working dogs, the healing power of pets and medical detection dogs. And of course animal themed books do not stop with dogs...there is the “Chicken Soup” series; the marvelous Black Stallion series by Walter Farley and the wonderful book entitled **A Street Cat Named Bob** by James Bowen...sadly “Bob” passed away just this year. There are too many books to name but I thank Mr. Preston for opening that door for me so many years ago.

Dates to Save:

Sept. 29-Oct. 6: Art For Animals On-line at www.Kubarekauction.com

Oct. 8 and 10: Pick up auction items at the NHS Shelter, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Nov. 1: End of this year’s shoe drive