



BHV NEWSLETTER

# THE VILLAGER

WINTER 2024

## AFFINITY GROUP SPOTLIGHT

# BOOK GROUPS



BY BARBARA CALLAHAN, Program Manager

Readers with a wide range of preferences are all welcome in the affinity book groups at Beacon Hill Village. Diana Crane, who runs BHV Book Group explains to new members, “We read a variety of books – fiction, nonfiction, memoirs, short stories, poetry, whatever you are interested in.” Since members take turns selecting books and leading discussions, this has proven to be true. One list of BHV Book Group’s completed works from the past seven years indicate that about one-third were nonfiction and two-thirds were fiction, including biographies, historical fiction, a few mysteries, and many more genres.

“The books have been so wonderfully diverse. Many of them have been books that I would not have chosen myself,” said book group member Fran Goldberg. Similarly, Diana said of *Grant* by Ron Chernow, a 1,000-page book, “Not in 100 years would I have stuck with that book. But I did read it. and I loved it.”

Instead of something new, sometimes the group dives into Hemmingway, Steinbeck, or Wharton. “Every now and then we say, ‘let’s do an old classic,’” said Diana. “Reading them as adults is a completely different experience.”

When a member suggests a book, the group discusses it and often provides additional details on the author and background. Diana said they try to stay away from the question of, “did you like the book?” but rather use open-ended questions to keep the conversation interesting and flowing. The leader also tries to make sure that all members get to participate in the conversations. They might say, “Okay let’s hear from somebody else now,” then turn to someone quiet and ask another question.

Many of us have heard the numerous benefits of reading, but often those benefits are even more significant when reading with a book group. The cognitive engagement involved, such as reasoning, critical thinking, memory, and concentration, is further strengthened by the deep reading necessary to prepare for a book group meeting. More than reading a book on your own, the preparation for discussion and the discussion itself reinforces what is learned. “I enjoy not only the company but also the conversation. I learn a lot,” said Glenda Tall. Similarly, Fran said, “We have good discussions where we have thoughtful questions and things are brought up that I didn’t think

## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

# FRIENDSHIP WORKS

BY LAURA WILLIS, Marketing & Communications Strategist at FriendshipWorks

ON MAY 2, 2023 THE U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy issued an advisory about the epidemic of loneliness and isolation. He reported that social connection is as critical to health and well-being as food, water and shelter. Through FriendshipWorks, older adults are able to find mutual and meaningful friendships, and that translates to proven healthier outcomes, including lower rates of depression, heart disease and diabetes.



At 92, Brighton resident Peter McIntyre has managed to outlive most of his family and friends. “FriendshipWorks has become my extended family” he says. Since 2015 FriendshipWorks has paired him up with three weekly walking buddies, including Grace. The two have built a friendship that has continued for more than eight years.

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Please continue to page 6. ➤

## HELLO FROM JOY STREET



A WELCOMING START. I was officially welcomed into BHV as the new executive director in October, and I have had the great fortune of meeting many friendly faces in the first few months of my tenure. It is with great excitement that

I formally introduce myself to the broader community of members, neighbors, partners, and supporters.

A bit about me: I am a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker, and I have been in and around aging services for the better part of the last 18 years. Helping people age as they wish with the tools they need to remain in their chosen setting has been central to the work I have done during my career. And I have enjoyed leading staff in that mission as well.

Speaking of staff, I'd like to applaud the work of Jane Bergman, Jen Spring, Stephanie Storey, Barbara Callahan, and Sabrina Carter, who have had more than their fair share of staffing vacancies and added responsibilities over the last year. They handled every challenge that was thrown at them with professionalism and grace. I certainly appreciate stepping into a role that is so well supported by competent and caring staff.

There are many challenges and opportunities that we will face over the next few years, which I expect will bring growth and wisdom to the organization. My priorities for the next year are plentiful and I come to BHV ready to help shape the direction of the next year, and the next decade. I WELCOME your thoughts, greetings, and suggestions as we usher in the new year and a new era of leadership at BHV.

Happy New Year!

Melissa Interest

## WELCOME

### BACK BAY

Ann Lovett

### BEACON HILL

Heidi Barasci   Bruce Jacobson   Barbara Pike

### CHARLESTOWN

Sarah Boardman   Frank & Mary Colvario

### DOWNTOWN/WATERFRONT

Sheila Emerson & William Keach  
Liz Goodfellow Zagoroff   Erna Lawrence

### NORTH END

Fran & Hugh Miller   Lynn Roy

### SOUTH END

Patricia Cliff & Karl von Frieling

### WEST END

Joanne Callahan

### Welcome Back

Carol Niemira



## In Memoriam

John Ames   Meredith Clapp   Gary Dunton  
Serena Hatch   Elizabeth Thomson



## THE VILLAGER NEWSLETTER

Editor: Barbara Callahan

Contributors: Barbara Callahan, Melissa Interest, and  
Laura Willis of FriendshipWorks

THE VILLAGER design by Joanne Legge, Legge Graphics



## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

I AM WRITING TO SAY HELLO and introduce myself to those of you who do not already know me. I am Barbara Berkman. I have the honor to tell you that I am the president of BHV, the second woman in the Village's 21 years to hold this position. Susan McWhinney-Morse was the first, serving as president from 2006 to 2008.

I am a gerontologist whose entire career has been devoted to the issues of aging, particularly related to health and well-being so it is no surprise that I became an active member of BHV. Twenty years ago, while I was a professor at Columbia University, School of Social Work, I read an article in *The New York Times* about a new concept that would enable older people to help each other live long and productive lives in their own homes. It was the birth of the Village Model and, of course, it was about BHV. When I retired and returned to Boston, I immediately joined the Village.

BHV is now 21 years old, and we have more than 350 members in 12 neighborhoods of Boston. In the past year: we provided 182 rides to medical appointments and other destinations; 337 grocery lists were filled and delivered; our staff responded to 794 requests for information and referrals for help with personal care, social services, and help in members' homes. Last year 100 volunteers donated their time to make it easier for members to live independently at home.

In addition to these services, each month we offer social, cultural, and educational activities which decrease the risk of social isolation and give us an increased sense of purpose. To support our healthy minds and bodies we must be sure to stay connected with each other and not become isolated.

Together, with all of you, we have made it through the Pandemic and are welcoming new opportunities!



Members Kim Bottomly and Wayne Villemetz chat with Barbara at the 2023 Volunteer Reception.

We are thriving and depend on our members to create and lead our activities. It is our marvelous office staff: Jen, Stephanie, Barbara, Jane and Sabrina, who collaborate with us to make the ideas we plan become reality. This all occurs under the leadership of our new executive director, Melissa Interest, who belongs perfectly in the Village.

It is my plan to keep in touch with all of you over the year in order to keep you up to date on Village activities. In the meantime, enjoy all of the exciting things that BHV has planned. ■

Best wishes,

Barbara Berkman



### BHV OFFICE STAFF

Stephanie, Sabrina,  
Barbara, Jen, Jane,  
and Melissa at  
January's New Year  
Reception.



# VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION PARTY



# NEW YEAR'S PARTY





The BHV Volunteer Appreciation Reception took place last October at the Hampshire House on Beacon Street. The afternoon of high tea and refreshments was a “thank you” to the many members who volunteer their time and effort to make Beacon Hill Village what it is.



Members, staff, and guests brought in the new year with a celebration at the University of Massachusetts Club on January 17th.





*“When we read, we begin to understand”*

*“I like losing myself in a good novel”*

*“Reading brings the world to me and opens up the world. It always has.”*

about.” Reading fiction has been found to improve one’s social cognition and ability to empathize with others (*Psychology Today*). This is compounded in a book group when members share their thoughts on the reading with one another, practicing emotional intelligence and communication skills. “You get to learn a lot about people by listening to the discussions,” Fran said. “There are personal stories that come out when people really relate to something. So you get to know the people in the book group as people.”

Book groups are a great way to read something you may not have chosen on your own, to enjoy the cognitive ben-

efits of reading, and to enjoy the company of others or meet new people. As Fran said, “It’s a wonderful way to both meet members and to keep our brains working.” BHV’s book group split into two groups when it became too large. One, organized by Diana Crane, meets on the second or third Tuesday of each month at 2:00. The other, organized by Joanne Cooper, meets on the last Tuesday of each month at 2:00. They usually meet in a private room at the main branch of the Boston Public Library but sometimes meet over Zoom. Email the leader, or contact the office for their information, if you are interested in joining. ■

## FRIENDSHIPWORKS continued from page 1.



“I came from the west coast and didn’t have family here. Peter has become my ‘adopted grandfather’,” says Grace.

Friendly Visitor Volunteer Lauren Badalucco, who is a cancer researcher and marathon runner, slows down long enough to focus on her friendship with 88-year-old Cambridge resident Nancy Dodson. She visits Nancy once a week where the two delve into everything from poetry to nature. “I wanted to engage with the community in a meaningful way and FriendshipWorks provided that,” Lauren says. And for Nancy, their friendship feeds her mind, soul and spirit. “I’ve learned so much from Lauren about her

work with cancer research, and I want to continue to learn throughout my life,” Nancy says.

FriendshipWorks Volunteer Elizabeth Alexy says, “The experience of being a Friendly Visitor has allowed me to connect with someone I would otherwise never have known. Also, as a stay-at-home mom, being a Friendly Visitor has been so valuable to me to feel like I have a sense of purpose and allows me to make social connections outside of my immediate family and friends.”

If you’re interested in welcoming a new friend in your life, you may want to check out the Boston nonprofit, FriendshipWorks ([www.fw4elders.org](http://www.fw4elders.org)). To learn more about how you can get involved with FriendshipWorks as a program participant, volunteer, or supporter, visit [www.fw4elders.org](http://www.fw4elders.org). And if walking is your thing, you can join Pete McIntyre and hundreds of other walkers as they raise funds for FriendshipWorks at their Annual Elderbration & Walk to End Elder Isolation on May 19 at the Jamaica Pond. Contact (617) 482-1510 for more info. ■



**About FriendshipWorks** FriendshipWorks ([www.fw4elders.org](http://www.fw4elders.org)) is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to reduce social isolation, enhance the quality of life, and preserve the dignity of older adults in Greater Boston. FriendshipWorks accomplishes this by recruiting and training volunteers of all ages, faiths, and backgrounds who provide friendship, advocacy, education, assistance and emotional support. FriendshipWorks runs five highly personalized core programs: Friendly Visiting, Medical Escorts, Friendly Helpers, PetPals and MusicWorks. All programs are offered at no cost to those over 60 years of age (or over 55 for those with vision or hearing impairments).





## MEMBER PROFILE

# ALAN & DORENE NEMETH

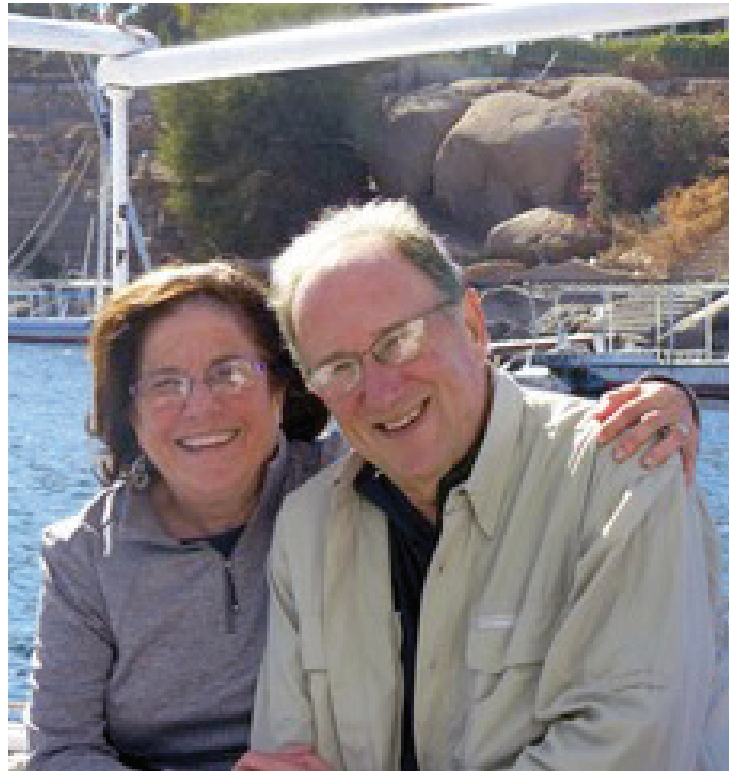
BY MELISSA INTERESS

**S**ICILY. LONDON. EGYPT. GREECE. COSTA Rica. Japan. New Zealand. Australia. Africa. These are just a few of the many destinations that Alan and Dorene Nemeth have visited over the years. New members to Beacon Hill Village, the Nemeths have known about BHV since its inception but only recently joined, first with an introductory membership, then making it official last month with an annual membership. Alan and Dorene both grew up in Brooklyn, NY, and came to the Boston area when Alan attended graduate school at Harvard. They raised their two sons in Sudbury and moved to Boston about 22 years ago after their sons went off on their own – one lives in New Hampshire and the other in Houston, Texas. Alan and Dorene have four grandchildren – two boys and two girls, ranging in age from 3 to 23 – who keep them on the go!

Alan and Dorene both worked up to retirement. Alan spent much of his career as a Senior Technologist at HP, providing support and guidance on technology projects and mentoring staff all over the world. Dorene was an educator and tutor. She finished her career as the Regional SHINE (Serving the Health Information Needs of Everyone) Director for the Metrowest area. SHINE is a program that provides health insurance information and counseling free of charge to Medicare-eligible and enrolled individuals.

*Through their BHV membership they have discovered that they are participating in programs and events that they normally wouldn't have found on their own.*

What made the Nemeths join BHV? They cited social reasons as the main driver. After retirement, they remained active and independent in terms of needs and services but craved opportunities to socialize and meet new people, especially as their suburban friendships evolved, given their physical distance. Through their BHV membership they have discovered that they are participating in programs and events that they normally wouldn't have found on their own. They were very impressed with a program they recently attended at the Museum of African American History that celebrated the work and legacy of Susan Paul, 19th century educator and abolitionist. The Nemeths also thoroughly enjoyed the *BHV Walks* program, as they were able to see parts of the city that they wouldn't have normally frequented.



Dorene and Alan on the Nile river near Aswan in January 2020.

With the amount of time the Nemeths spend on travel, it's hard to believe they have time for much else. They average about one week per month away from home, regularly visiting their family in Houston as well as going to Florida to visit Alan's mother, who will turn 100 in April! In addition, they have plans to visit Africa again and really want to get to Norway, Sweden and Denmark, places in the world in which they haven't spent much time. They'd also love to spend some time domestically, visiting our national parks. They are no strangers to road trips, either, having recently completed one to Houston and back, over the course of about six weeks. If you have a question related to travel planning, contact the Nemeths. They are a wealth of suggestions and information!

The Nemeths also find time to give back to BHV. Dorene is on the Member Services Committee, and Alan helps with member technology needs. Despite their busy travel schedules, the Nemeths have taken advantage of the wealth of BHV offerings, which have kept them connected and engaged while they are at home. Make sure to introduce yourself to them at the next BHV program you attend. ■





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VILLAGE

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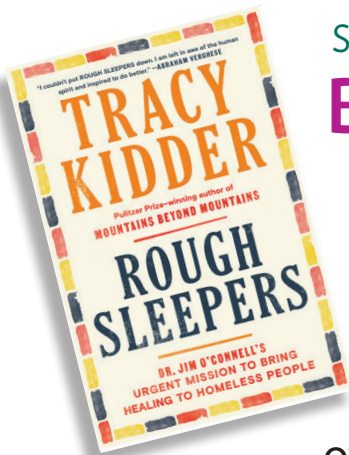
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# A Warm Winter with BHV Welcome



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SEE AFFINITY GROUP SPOTLIGHT ON PAGE 1

## BHV BOOK GROUP SELECTIONS

### SUGGESTED READ

*Rough Sleepers* by Tracy Kidder

"A fascinating book. I wouldn't have read [it] on my own but it was wonderful to read it." —DIANA CRANE

"It gave us a totally different picture on what being homeless was all about." —JOANNE COOPER

### OTHER SUGGESTED READS BY BOOK GROUP MEMBERS

*Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov

*Grant* by Ron Chernow

*Lincoln on the Verge* by Edward L. Widmer

*The Light We Carry* by Michelle Obama

*Trees* by Percival Everett

*Covered with Night* by Nicole Eustace

*The Last Kings of Shanghai* by Jonathan Kaufman

*When the Emperor was Divine* by Julie Otsuka

*Songbirds* by Christy Lefteri

*Lucy by the Sea* by Elizabeth Strout

*All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr