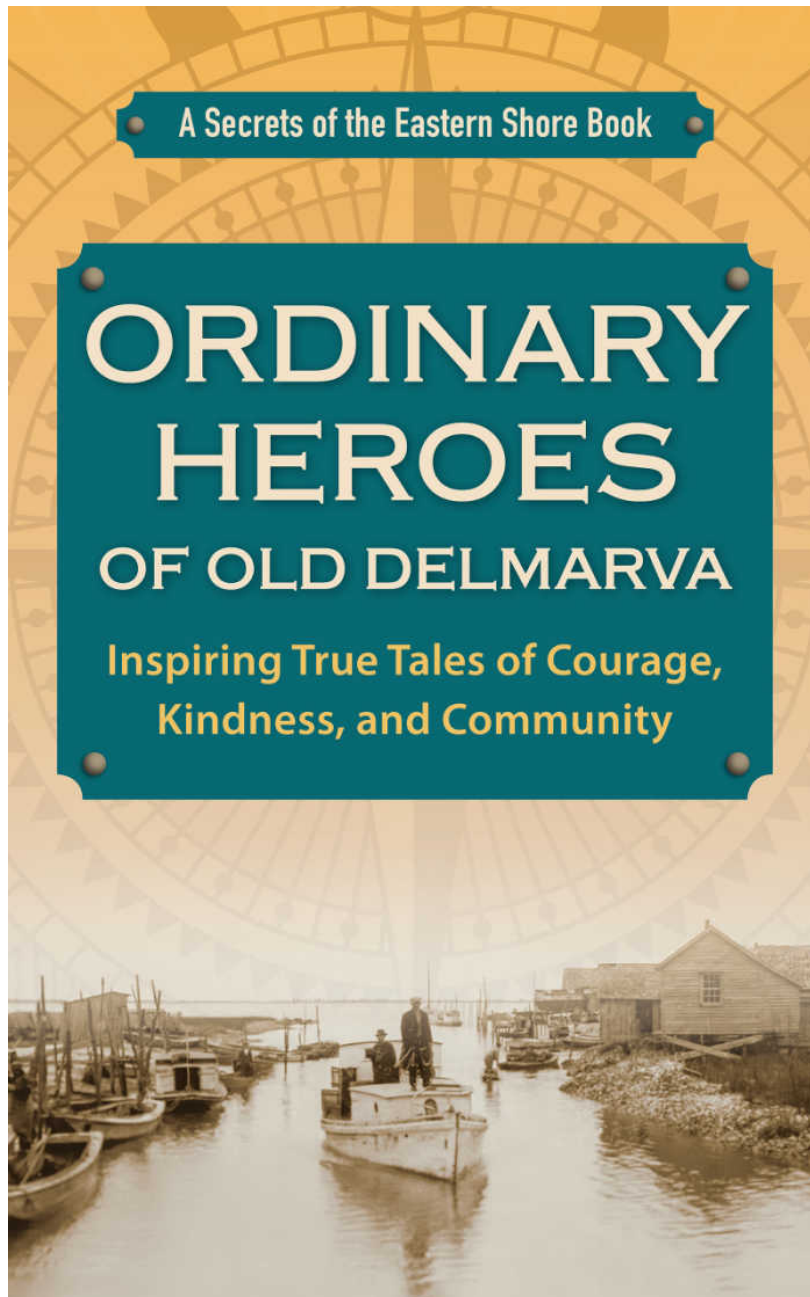


Discussion Guide:

Ordinary Heroes of Old Delmarva



Thanks for your interest in this discussion guide, whether that's to prepare for a book club session or just think more about the book. The pages that follow contain three to five possible discussion topics for each of the 33 chapters in *Ordinary Heroes*.

If you're doing a book club, perhaps it might be helpful to also a list of the author's top 10 recommended chapters for discussion? That way you have the option of assigning certain chapters instead of the whole book. Here goes:

Chapter 2: Thomas Scott Leaps Aboard a Sinking Ship

Chapter 4: The Chinese Laundryman as Toast of the Town

Chapter 7: The Unlikely Hero: How Henry Callister Saved the Refugees

Chapter 10: Meet the Mother of the Century

Chapter 14: Fighting the Devil in Accomack County

Chapter 16: 'It's a Wonderful Life' on Virginia's Eastern Shore

Chapter 21: Across the Great Divide with a Talbot County Socialite

Chapter 24: The Whaleyville Wonder Makes a Difference in the World

Chapter 27: The Mushroom Lady of Talbot County Blazes a Trail

Chapter 32: Should You Hate These Do-Gooder Delaware Women?

Chapter 1:

The ‘Houseboy’ and the President

What was your reaction to the term “houseboy”—and to John Moaney’s decision to apply for that job? Did General Eisenhower’s early instructions to Moaney (e.g., no saluting, getting help with maintaining a "regular life" while running an army in wartime) challenge or confirm your expectations about what that word “” would mean in their relationship?

Several "divides" (race, class, rank) separated Moaney and Eisenhower, yet the two men crossed them with ease, bonding over shared values and experiences as rural Americans. Fast forward to today: Do we underestimate our ability to find such common ground?

“If it’s all the same with you, General, I’d rather stay by your side.” What does Moaney’s loyalty say about his character? Did his determination to stay by Eisenhower’s side make you question his character, especially where it concerns his devotion to his wife and her daughter?

To one degree or another all the main characters here placed a high value on simpler, quieter times amid a stable, relaxing home life. Did that surprise you, considering their proximity to immense power and world-changing events?

How can the friendship between the Eisenhowers and the Moaneys inspire us to create connections across the “divides” in our communities today?

Chapter 2:

Thomas Scott Jumps Aboard a Sinking Ship

How does the Mongolian notion of "baatar"—in which heroism arises in selfless, instinctive, instantaneous responses to crisis—differ from our modern American conception of heroism. Identify a person in contemporary life regarded as heroic whose actions fit the baatar category--and another whose actions don't fit.

Do you think Thomas Scott's upbringing on the Delmarva Peninsula, perhaps especially his early maritime experiences there, helped shape his character? If so, how can families and communities today give young people a set of experiences that will have a comparable kind of impact?

The tale of Captain Scott and his wife navigating a storm together is a powerful depiction of partnership under duress. How did the image of "four hands on the tiller, two big and strong and two warm and helping" strike you? Can that image inspire us to think about how to cultivate that quality of deep partnership in our modern lives?

A defining moment in this chapter comes with Captain Scott's outrage at the notion the ferry boat's owner should pay for Scott's life-saving actions. "Do you think I [would have gone] into that hellhole if it hadn't been for them women cryin' and the babies a-hollerin'? And you want 'em to pay for it?" What does his outrage at the idea of profiting from selfless acts say about his personal code of ethics? How does his code differ from the way things work in our modern times?

What aspect of Captain Scott's character do you find most inspiring? Quick thinking? Physical bravery? Moral integrity? Perhaps even his modesty, as shown by that comically brief account of the rescue he put in his ship's log?

Chapter 3:

Elizabeth Fulton Plays the Role of Superhero in the Storm of 1936

Do you think Elizabeth Fulton had any idea in advance of this crisis that she might be capable of the heroism she displayed during the storm?

It's easy to marvel over the strength and physical endurance Mrs. Fulton displayed in this crisis. But just as important was the way she managed keep her head about her as well. Do you have strategies for trying to keep your head straight during times of stress and crisis?

Are there ways in which Elizabeth Fulton's display of courage, ingenuity, and determination during the Storm of 1936 can serve as inspiration when we face personal challenges or difficult situations?

How does her story—along with that of the survival of the fishermen in Lewes—fit in with your feelings about the balance between fate, luck, and individual human agency in times of crisis?

Chapter 4:

The Chinese Laundryman as Toast of the Town

Lee Fong must have been aware of the intense anti-Chinese sentiment that characterized much of American society in his day. He probably had his share of direct experience with prejudice and discrimination. What does the way he behaved in Cambridge say about his qualities of resilience, optimism, and self-confidence?

Lee Fong did not live in the isolated, lonely manner of so many other Chinese laundrymen in small-town America during that era? What specific personal qualities, business practices, or community engagement strategies do you suspect were instrumental in the way he gained broad acceptance in Cambridge?

The “society set” of Cambridge during the early 1900s must have had members who harbored their share of prejudices against various ethnic groups and minorities, in the same way those prejudices existed in towns and cities across the country. What do you think happened on that side of the aisle, to open up the possibility of friendship and camaraderie with a “lowly” laundryman?

Does the image of Lee Fong leading the opening-day baseball parade through the streets of Cambridge say anything of importance about that community? Or is this just one of those “exceptions that proves the rule.”

Does the mutual love affair that unfolded between Lee Fong and Cambridge society point toward any steps we might take today to build more trust and acceptance across cultural or social divides?

Chapter 5:

The Journey of a Dedicated Husband

Sometimes we look back on days gone by and see (with justification) a culture full of oppression. Women denied opportunities. Men relegating wives to subservient roles. Does Rev. Briscoe's show of loving dedication present any challenges to that notion? Can it make us think about how true love might flourish even amid the sexism of those times?

Is there a message here about dedication and perseverance in personal relationships? How can Rev. Briscoe's example resonate in our own relationships—what does following his example look like today?

Did the fact that Rev. Briscoe endured all that hardship only to find out that his wife was fine and perhaps his journey wasn't really necessary lessen the significance of what he did in any way?

Maybe think about a proud moment, when you went the extra mile for a loved one. Think about a not-so-proud moment, when you feel like failed to do that.

Chapter 6:

A Perfect Stranger Along the Underground Railroad

The setbacks Harriet Tubman endured on this journey—the death of her sister, a terrible winter storm, a compromised Underground Railroad station—get described here as "a run of misfortune out of the Book of Job." How did Tubman's reaction to these challenges, particularly her decision to retreat into hiding and rely on prayer, strike you?

Tubman biographer Sarah Bradford: "These sudden deliverances never seemed to strike her as at all strange or mysterious. Her prayer was the prayer of faith, and she expected an answer." What do you make of Tubman's unwavering belief that a good outcome was ahead? Should we, too, try to cultivate a mindset that expects some measure of success, even in the face of daunting challenges and long odds?

Can religious faith play the same kind of role in our modern lives as it did for Harriet Tubman? Are there other tools available to us that might help build up our capacity of inner resolve and ability to deal with setbacks?

The chapter heading refers to the "Good Samaritan." How do the actions of Harriet Tubman's anonymous "angel" resemble that Biblical parable? How do they differ?

Think of an example from your own life of a modern-day "Good Samaritan."

Does this story make you think about how we might step more often into that Good Samaritan role here in modern times?

Chapter 7:

The Unlikely Hero: How Henry Callister Saved the Refugees.

When the Fundy French refugees arrived, many locals in Oxford felt these poor foreigners wasn't their responsibility and that the colonial government needed to intervene. Is this reaction any different from the way our modern communities might react? If so, how?

The chapter draws a parallel between the arrival of the refugees in Oxford in 1755 and recent events involving busloads of migrants who crossed into the country illegally getting transported to places like New York City and Martha's Vineyard. Did you find this comparison fair and appropriate?

The chapter introduces Henry Callister as an egotistical snob, a rumored "womanizer," and someone who had "done some petty, underhanded things in his business dealings." How did this Callister's previous failings affect your reaction to his later actions? Did his flawed character make his subsequent kindness more or less impactful?

What do you think Henry Callister meant by "the seeds of our humanity?"

Callister employed some deceptive tactics to find aid for the refugees, such as instructing Jeremiah Banning to drop them off at the estates of wealthy landowners, "apparently without asking permission." Did the ends justify his means in this situation? When, if ever, is it acceptable to throw a problem on someone else's doorstep in such unannounced fashion?

In answering the above question, maybe make it a little harder: Think about how you'd react if someone dropped needy refugees on your doorstep without asking permission?

Chapter 8

‘Be Kind to All Living Creatures’.

Can you think of modern-day equivalents of the old Bands of Mercy? Are there enough groups today that seek to help teach young people about ethical issues like animal welfare by having them roll up sleeves and act as a team to do good works?

How does the “Band of Mercy” emphasis on simple, consistent acts of kindness resonate in our more complex modern world? Can focusing on small, targeted kindnesses still make a difference?

The chapter mentions that the Band of Mercy movement "went into a slow, steady decline" and was "pretty much dead by the 1950s." Why do you think such movements lose momentum? How can we make sure that the spirit of community service endures across generations?

The chapter mentions details from a Halloween party fundraiser that included elements that will be uncomfortable for some modern readers, such as costume prizes for an "Indian squaw" and a colored "mammy." How do we approach historical accounts that contain elements reflecting past societal norms we now find problematic, while still recognizing and drawing inspiration from the positive actions within the story?

The historic marker in Ridgely notes that before the fountain, strangers had to get water for their animals from "backyards and other private places." The schoolgirls identified a public need and created a community solution. What are some "public needs" in your own community today that might be overlooked, and how can the story of these schoolgirls inspire individuals or groups to address them?

Chapter 9:

A Delaware Man Shovels His Way to Riches.

What, if anything, does Harbeson Hickman's insight that he'd be better off selling shovels than panning for gold say about his character?

Can you think of modern equivalents that demonstrate the truth of the economic adage about "selling shovels during a gold rush"?

Hickman's story involves aspects that might be viewed differently by modern standards than it was in his time. As a much older man, he fell in love with a 13-year-old girl and then "waited" until she was 16 or 17 for marriage. He profited by buying land from farmers who had "mismanaged their land and worn out their soils." Do these details affect your perception of him as an "ordinary hero" or a model of ingenuity? How should we approach historical figures whose stories unfold in different times with different social norms?

The central theme of this chapter is "ingenuity." In what ways did Harbeson Hickman demonstrate this quality? How can we, too, cultivate a mindset of creative problem-solving, whether in business or in life?

Chapter 10:

Meet the Mother of the Century

Think about the role played in this story by individuals who helped escaping slaves—like Thomas Garrett in Delaware, William Still in Philadelphia, and the Blackburns in Toronto. Do our modern communities possess the same level of commitment to offering compassionate help to people in need as some communities did back in slavery times? If yes, give examples. If not, why not?

What do you think it was like for people like Ann Maria and her children, to make an incredibly brave escape from slavery and then find themselves living in Canadian “freedom,” but still hemmed in by prejudice, oppression, and limited job opportunities?

The author proposes that Ann Maria Jackson be honored with a U.S. stamp as the “Mother of the Century.” Based on her story of resilience, determination, and the successful lives she nurtured for her children against all odds, do you agree with this sentiment? What can the life story of this “slave” and then “laundress” teach us about the qualities of an ideal mother?

The legacy of Ann Maria Jackson (through the accomplishments of her son) is still being celebrated more than 150 years after her escape. How does Ann Maria's story inspire you to think about the long-term impact of your own actions or the actions of “ordinary heroes” in your own life or community?

Despite her own lack of formal education, Ann Maria prioritized schooling for her children in Canada, instilling in them a “deep regard for the importance of learning.” What does the history-making success of her children say about the potential long-term impact of parents’ values on their children's lives and potential?

Chapter 11:

The Teenager's Romantic Innovation

Young Charles had a lot of competition for Ruth. Her first impression of him as “bashful” seems less than ideal for his prospects. But Charles persevered and won her hand. Can you think of times in your life or the life of a loved one when that sort of persistence paid off.

In what ways do people show creativity and determination in courtship today? Can we learn anything about building relationships in our modern, tech-happy world from Charles's old-fashioned, hands-on approach to romance?

Do you think the qualities Charles demonstrated as a lovestruck teenager were signs pointing toward his later success in business? Are there things you or your children did in adolescence that in retrospect pointed the way toward your own future success and prosperity?

Chapter 12

An Auto Mechanic Leaves Footprints on the Sands of Time

The chapter opens with lines from Longfellow's poem about leaving "Footprints on the sands of time." How does Clarence Spear's story exemplify this idea? In what ways, big or small, do you think ordinary people today can leave such lasting "footprints"?

The story of Clarence Spear's heroism was unknown to his own granddaughter until she researched her family history. What does this suggest about how acts of bravery or significance can be forgotten? Can/should families and communities do a better job of preserving and sharing such stories?

Oneita's many descendants are the "footprints on the sands of time" in the chapter title—they would not have entered the world without Spear's heroics. Can you think of instances from your life or the life of a loved one where one person's actions either had or might have multi-generational consequences?

The chapter details not only the rescue of Oneita Hubbard and Mildred Lyons but also the tragic death of young Benjamin Lyons. Does the inclusion of Benjamin's story, and of a heartbreaking description of a father's search for his son's body, add to the emotional depth and realism of Clarence Spear's story?

The internet and social media are what brought the incident on Cambridge Creek to the attention of Spear descendants, Oneita Hubbard, and Mildred Lyons decades after the event. Pretty much everyone complains about social media, but here is an example of that technology helping strangers to connect with and understand the past in more personal and emotional ways than would be possible by way of dusty books and documents. Discuss.

Chapter 13

From Grief to Grace: A Marydel Whodunnit"

The Desmond Tutu quote: "Forgiveness is not weak. It takes courage to face and overcome powerful emotions." In what ways did the actions of the poisoning victim's family and the Marydel community demonstrate this courage? In what ways did they fall short?

Three acts of forgiveness unfold here—Maude Pippin's self-forgiveness; the Marydel community's forgiveness of Maude and her husband; and the forgiveness Maude and her husband received from the late Charles Pippin's family. Which of these do you find most remarkable or inspiring? Why?

Can this 1909 story influence how we approach situations requiring forgiveness in our modern lives?

In the aftermath of Charles Pippin's death, rumors ran rampant in Marydel. Fingers of suspicion were point even at his fiancée and fellow actors. How does the "grapevine" in this early 1900s small town compare to the spread of rumor in today's digital age?

In admitting that she and her husband were responsible for the accidental poisoning, Maude Pippin initially found her "only consolation" in the notion that "none of us is infallible." In what ways does Maude's journey from shame to self-forgiveness and then to receiving forgiveness from others help to illuminate the path through guilt and shame that unfolds in our own lives?

Chapter 14

Fighting the Devil in Accomack County

Do you agree that heroes who rack up “miraculous accomplishments” on a "gargantuan, world-changing" scale like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass can be poor inspirational figures because their achievements look impossible to match?

Was Rev. Adam Wallace more relatable in that inspirational sense, because he aimed for something that seems closer to achievable, even if it, too, involved risking physical danger and social ostracism?

Use those first two questions to discuss how you set out to make a difference in your community or in the broader world, especially when it comes to navigating the gulf between what you can do and what you’d like to do.

“Fight the devil” became something of a motto for Rev. Wallace. What might "fighting the devil" look like in our modern lives and communities?

When Rev. Wallace invited black worshippers down from the balcony for communion, half the white congregation walked out in protest. What does this relatively small act reveal about the deeply embedded racial attitude of his times? Can you think of any modern parallels, where seemingly small challenges to convention might provoke significant reactions?

Uncle Sammy's freedom was ultimately secured with the help of a local white farmer and a "greedy hustler" of a judge who everyone expected the worst of. Did this aspect of the story challenge any preconceived notions about who is likely to stand up for what is right?

Chapter 15

May Roe Roberts: A Trooper in Sudlersville

May Roe Roberts was a college-educated athlete in an era when this was uncommon for women. Do you think that background influenced her approach to leading the Girl Scout troop and her determination to push “her” girls beyond traditional activities?

Robbie's guiding principle for her scouts was, "If you can mount one obstacle, you can mount another." How did the activities she organized, particularly the "gypsy trips," embody this philosophy? What modern "obstacles" do young people face, and how can mentors help them develop that same mindset?

Robbie: "You have to make your wonderful life. It won't come to you naturally." How did her actions with the Girl Scouts over four decades reflect this belief? How can this sentiment inspire people today to take more initiative in their own lives or communities?

The author draws a parallel between the impact of Robbie on her scouts and the joyful memories his own mother had of an inspiring gym teacher. Can you share an example of someone who played a similar role in your life or the life of someone you know?

What type of mentor today might create the same sort of powerful and enduring legacy Mary Roe Roberts did? Can scouting programs still accomplish that? What other activities/programs might be needed in the 21st century?

Chapter 16

‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ on Virginia’s Eastern Shore

The chapter draws a parallel between the Eastern Shore Produce Exchange and the story of George Bailey in "It’s a Wonderful Life". In what ways did the farmers of Virginia's Eastern Shore embody the spirit of that famous movie?

The Eastern Shore Produce Exchange implemented several innovative strategies, such as creating the "Red Star" brand, establishing its own sales network, and using telegraphs for market intelligence. Which of their innovations do you find most impressive?

What does this story suggest about the potential of ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results through collective effort and determination? How might the Eastern Shore Produce Exchange’s brand of problem-solving and ingenuity be applied by communities today?

The chapter concludes by noting a significant failure of the Exchange: Black farmers were denied full membership and its benefits due to racial prejudice. How does this "Afternote" complicate the otherwise inspiring story of the Exchange? Is it important to acknowledge such shortcomings when drawing inspiration from historical accounts?

Chapter 17

‘The Innate Goodness of the Creek Folks’

The "Creek folks" ate simple, cheap foods like playcake and beans while harvesting valuable seafood to be sold as a commodity. How do you think this day-to-day contrast shaped the life of the community?

How does the simple act of sharing valuable seafood with a neighbor in need stack up in this book? Can small acts of neighborly kindness reach the level of “heroes” and “heroism.”

The "Creek folks" detested formal "charity" but valued gifts given out of "Christian charity." What is the difference between these two concepts? Is that different still relevant in modern discussions about helping people in need?

Can focusing on smaller, practical acts of kindness in our own communities actually be a powerful way to demonstrate support for and solidarity with neighbors?

The Creek community was a small, isolated group. In what ways do you think that isolation might have contributed to their strong sense of interdependence and neighborliness? What, if anything, is lost in today's more connected but perhaps less tightly knit communities, and what can be learned from the "Creek folks" example?

Chapter 18:

Storm of '39: 'This Life Is Worth Fighting For'

Years after the storm of '39, George Wheatley said, "I figured if I capsized again I'd fight all the harder. This life is worth fighting for." How might surviving a near-death experience or overcoming life-threatening hardship shape a person's perspective on the value of life?

Wheatley made several critical decisions while in the icy water—including letting go of the skiff when others tried to climb on and then holding the rope with his teeth and arms. What does his story suggest about the interplay in extreme situations of quick thinking, survival instinct, and sheer will to live?

Captain Hubbard of the *Geneva May* had "one chance to throw a line" to save George Wheatley—and chose to do so despite not having full control of his own boat. What does this act of bravery in the midst of chaos tell us about the responsibilities individuals feel towards one another in a crisis?

Imagine that Capt. Hubbard and his crew failed to save George Wheatley? Is it the effort that defines heroism? Or does the result matter, too?

What does this suggest about the human ability to maintain focus and act effectively amidst pandemonium? Is there something we could or should do to prepare ourselves to keep that level of focus in crisis?

Chapter 19

Even Frederick Douglass Has Something to Apologize For

Douglass endured immense cruelty at the hands of Thomas Auld in his younger years. What was your initial reaction to learning that he planned to apologize to Auld?

Douglass faced criticism for this meeting, with some suggesting he had "gone soft" and that he was no longer strong-willed enough to serve as a leader. Why would people regard such an act of forgiveness or reconciliation with a former oppressor as controversial? Should it be controversial?

The meeting between Douglass and Auld has been interpreted in various ways by historians: as reconciliation, a search for personal peace, or a strategic political act. Which of these interpretations resonates most strongly with you, and what does it reveal about the complexities of Douglass's character and motivations?

Douglass told Auld that he "did not run away from you [Auld], but from slavery." How did you understand this distinction?

Does this encounter change or deepen your understanding of what forgiveness can mean, particularly considering that the wrongs committed were in as monumental a context as slavery?

Chapter 20:

The Gimp Grand Marshal of Freedom

Discuss whether and how Sandy Cornish's life story exemplifies the qualities of resilience and determination, as well as the capacity to rebuild and move on after hardship and setback. Discuss.

Cornish is described as a man of "vigor and brawn" but also as a man with a "large soul" and "the most perfect gentleman." Do you think his personality traits challenge any assumptions or stereotypes people might have had about former slaves?

For blacks in Key West and all around Florida, Sandy Cornish's limp became a "powerful, perfect symbol for what so many black folks had endured ... in slavery times." Do you have any scars that speak of past challenges and struggles? Can you think of modern-day heroes whose scars carry a similar symbolism?

Sandy's wife Lillah was by his side during the traumatic self-mutilation events in Port Leon? What does their partnership in such a harrowing moment suggest about their relationship and their mutual determination to live in freedom?

Sandy and Lillah moved to Key West, then a town with a growing free black population and good economic opportunities. How important is finding or creating such a supportive community environment when individuals are striving to overcome personal trauma and rebuild their lives?

Chapter 21:

Across the Great Divide with a Talbot County Socialite

Identify the ways in which Ruth Starr Rose challenged societal norms during segregation times? What, if anything, can her actions teach us about approaching modern-day social divides?

The stereotypes the author shares about wealthy socialites living on inherited money are widespread in our culture. Are they fair?

Ruth Starr Rose declined the role of "rich-girl missionary helper" in her interactions with neighbors, instead diving "much more deeply" into the "communal, intellectual, and spiritual world" of those neighbors. What actions exemplify this deeper level of engagement? Is taking that approach even possible for most people, with jobs and family responsibilities and otherwise busy lives?

Rose set an ambitious goal: Using her art to "bring about unity between the races." Can art and other modes of creative expression really spark such understanding? If yes, give an example or two.

Rose ended up feeling that her neighbors in Copperville "have always given me as much as I have given them" Think of examples from your own life of times when you reached out to help someone, but ended up feeling more like the beneficiary of generosity in the end?

Chapter 22:

Black Voters in Chestertown Outwit the Establishment, 1870

Blacks in Chestertown were complete neophytes when it came to campaigns and elections before 1870. Did the level of strategic ingenuity they displayed in their first campaign surprise you?

Their strategy encompassed a "one-two-three combination of generosity, community-minded fun, and legal ingenuity." How did each of these elements contribute to the victory?

Those strategies seem to embrace an optimistic, fun-loving approach to electoral politics? Did it surprise you that blacks in Chestertown would take such a tack at a time when the horrors of slavery were still so fresh in their memories and the Eastern Shore was mostly ruled by pro-slavery Democrats?

The white Democratic power brokers who had previously used that land-ownership loophole reacted with "outrage" when black citizens employed the same trick. There is an aspect of some-things-never-change about this. Can you provide examples of comparable modern-day hypocrisy. Bonus challenge: Try to include examples from both of our main modern political parties, not just the side you may regard as the "bad guys."

What lessons, if any, can modern communities learn from the way blacks in Chestertown ran their 1870 campaign?

Chapter 23:

Underestimating a ‘Plain Boy in Rural Life’

Have you been guilty of underestimating someone in ways that are comparable to the way L.T. Travers underestimated John Fletcher Hurst as just a "plain boy in rural life" who had some physical problems and surely wouldn't "amount" to much in life?

Hurst achieved remarkable things in life. Did it surprise you that his self-described goals were rather modest? *"I do not know what sort of place I shall get—perhaps a circuit, perhaps a little station. The Lord can do with me as he pleases. I am in His hands and [will] try to be willing to labor in whatever place He pleases."*

Regarding that same quote: How might adopting a mindset of openness to possibilities, rather than rigid goals and expectations, lead to unforeseen successes in our own lives?

Can we look at Hurst's story as a mirror to our own lives? Did we have hidden, untapped potential in our younger lives that people did not see or expect? How about now—do you still have unrecognized potential that you plan or hope to tap into?

Chapter 24:

The Whaleyville Wonder Makes a Difference in the World

Discuss the various ways Dale Wimbrow showed resiliency, constantly reinventing himself even as his health declined, limiting and then taking away his ability to pursue his music and then his art.

By all accounts Wimbrow was a man of deep Christian faith. How might that have contributed to his ability to bounce back in life time and again?

Was Wimbrow right to want to get credit for his poem? Did his anger over the way his work got separated from his name affect your opinion of him in any way?

"The Guy in the Glass" says honest self-reflection and personal integrity are the "most dangerous, difficult test." Is that still true today? Do you have strategies for making sure you're regularly "looking in the mirror" when it comes to ethics and morality?

Did it surprise you that Wimbrow considered a benefit concert he did for a black church in Whaleyville as one of the most memorable nights of his musical career, especially considering that this was segregation times?

Chapter 25:

The Helicopter Hero of '62 Throws Caution to the Wind

Capt. Sulpizi: "I had the helicopter, and [those stranded men] had to get out." How does this simple statement speak to the nature of courage and duty as practiced by military personnel and first responders?

Sulpizi's Distinguished Flying Cross citation praises his "complete disregard for his own personal safety." Where do you think that mindset arises from—individual character, professional training, a combination, or something else altogether?

Capt. Sulpizi's heroism is like something out of an action movie, but does it have any lessons applicable to everyday life? Can his story inspire us to act decisively and selflessly in smaller, yet significant, moments of need in our own communities? Think of examples.

Chapter 26:

Turning Orphans into ‘Poor Little Rich Girls’

What issues in our modern world have the potential to move you (with “frenzied urgency” and “sadness and outrage”) in the way Anna Earle was moved to swing into action over plight of orphans in the late 1800s.

The founders of the "Home for Friendless Children" aimed to provide a loving, educational environment, breaking from the "dreary Oliver Twist prisons" of earlier times. When you look out at our modern social support systems for children in need, what do you think needs a comparable revolutionary upgrade

Some girls at the orphanage playfully nicknamed themselves "poor little rich girls." What does this seemingly contradictory nickname reveal about their experiences, their sense of dignity, and their feeling of belonging in the broader community?

After a post-orphanage period when she lost her self-confidence and fell into a listless rut, Polly Pobst managed to pick herself back up and get going after hearing an offhand demeaning comment from a neighbor. Have negative experiences along those lines ever served as a catalyst for personal growth and success in your life?

One key undercurrent in this story is how important it was to the orphan girls that they be treated with dignity and respect, not as objects of pity. How does theme play out in the way Polly’s father shared visitation time with other girls? Or with the way the girls were "never treated as orphans, but as paying patrons" on their visits to Ocean City? Can you think of modern-day charities and government programs that do a good or a bad job with this?

Chapter 27:

The Mushroom Lady of Talbot County Blazes a Trail

Does the story of Mary Banning's life challenge us to question any judgements we make today about people with unconventional passions or pursuits? Give an example or two.

Banning's interest in mushrooms became an obsession after she began thinking of it as a "means of teaching faith" to and "cultivating [the] minds and morals" of children. Think about and discuss the way a hobby or interest while go into overdrive after getting connected to a broader meaning or social purpose?

After enduring a lot of ridicule, Banning eventually learned to get over the sense of hurt and instead to feel a measure of pity for people who wouldn't or couldn't see value in her work. Can her example help us maintain focus on our goals when faced with criticism or misunderstanding?

Banning wished she could have devoted her "whole life" to botany, but chose instead to do what botany she could while tending to family responsibilities. Discuss her thinking about this: "I had rather die with the feeling of having done my duty than die with the feeling of having gratified an undying love for botany." And discuss the times when family and other responsibilities got in the way of your dreams.

Mary Banning's scientific contributions went unrecognized until nearly a century after her death. How did the rediscovery of her work leave you feeling? Glad that she finally got credit? Sad that she wasn't around to accept that credit? How do those two feelings balance out for you?

Chapter 28:

The Snow Shoveling Brigade of Ocean City, 1922

Think about and discuss what it would be like to live in the era when there were cars and trucks, but no civic snowplow services.

The Ocean City “snow shoveling brigade” was organized mainly in a spirit of curiosity and fun—everyone wanted to go see the beached whale. Do you think people are more likely to join in this kind of project out of a sense of fun, rather than duty?

How might this incident inspire some unconventional ideas when it comes to recruiting people to get involved in a civic project?

Once municipal governments did take over snow plowing duties, do you think people got used to it so much that it would never occur to them to form another snow plowing brigade?

How does this smaller, quirky little story connect to the larger theme of the book—“ordinary heroes” making a difference.

Chapter 29:

The Survivor: Robert Banks and the Price of Freedom

What did you make of Robert Banks's decision to not write home to his mother? Was he correct to fear giving her false hope about his survival?

Banks credited his mother's faith and teachings with giving him the ability to maintain his sanity while imprisoned in North Korea. What foundational things did you learn growing up that have helped you get through difficult times?

How does the broader, long-term story of Robert Banks's postwar struggles with PTSD and addiction influence our understanding of what it means to be both a "hero" and a "survivor?"

The author implies in an afternote that he regards the decision of modern-day members of the Banks family to share the full story of their father's postwar life as heroic in its own right. Do you agree? What makes that decision admirable?

What did you make of Robert Banks's love for the Lee Greenwood verse: "I'm proud to be an American, where at least I know I'm free. I won't forget the men who died, who gave that right to me."

The love the Banks children had for their father, despite his postwar struggles, is one of the most moving aspects of this story. How can we as a society do a better job of acknowledging the full humanity and positive impacts of individuals who endured personal challenges of this sort?

Chapter 30:

The Brave March of the Barefoot Boy

Charles Tindley taught himself to read while growing up in an atmosphere of poverty and oppression. Where do you think that level of determination comes from in a young child?

It must have taken great courage for Tindley to step forward in that church full of white people and prove to everyone that he could read from the Bible. What did you make of this act of bravery?

Tindley: "From that moment my ambition to be educated knew no bounds."
Discuss how a single touchstone experience like that can prove to be transformational in a human life. Do other, comparable examples from history come to mind?

The contrast between Tindley's humble beginnings in Worcester County and his later successes as a preacher, civic activist, composer and musician is amazing. What qualities do you think are most essential in American success stories like this?

Chapter 31:

The Lifesaving Saints of Smith Island, Virginia

It's hard sometimes to resist the temptation to say, "I told you so." Discuss the difference between the times we should probably avoid saying it and the times when we should feel free to say it?

What leadership qualities do you think Capt. Hitchens needed in order to make sure his team maintained focus and equanimity when rescuing sailors who acted irresponsibly or ignored stern warnings?

How might Capt. Hitchens's hobbies—as a naturalist and an expert marksman—have contributed to his success in the Life Saving Service?

Despite "cold, hunger, exhaustion, sleepiness" the surfmen of Smith Island were still able to find the "thrill" and "excitement" of rescue work. That work unfolded in extreme circumstances, of course. Are there strategies that can help us keep in touch with the "thrill" and "excitement" of our work when times get tough or clients and customers behave in ungrateful ways?

Chapter 32:

Should You Hate These Do-Gooder Delaware Women?

Would you like to have Emily Bissell and Mary Thompson as members of your community?

Did their opinion about women's suffrage affect your opinion about their numerous other community accomplishments? If so, how?

Were you surprised by the argument Bissell and Thompson made against women having the right to vote? Do you agree with the author that it was stronger than you expected, even if the argument didn't convince you?

Was the journey to get past "presentism" and understand the arguments against women's suffrage in their own time worthwhile? Should we try as a society—in school and in history books—to make more of an effort to understand figures whose views are generally regarded today as misguided or worse?

The author says that the "mud-slinging" that erupted during the suffrage campaign proved Bissell's and Thompson's point about politics in a way. What does this suggest about the challenges of maintaining integrity and effectiveness when engaging in highly charged political debates?

Did it make sense for the author to include these women in a book about unsung "heroes?" Did you agree with his contention that these women can serve as a reminder to stop and think before making snap judgements and expressing outrage over the opinions of neighbors and strangers alike in our own contentious times?

Chapter 33:

Past Forward in Chincoteague, 2023

Is there tension in your community between development and historic preservation? Or perhaps related worries, that development will change the character of the community? Compare those tensions with the ones that arose in Chincoteague over the Beebe ranch.

The museum board launched its campaign despite being far from certain of the results and quite worried that with such a tight deadline, the responses might add up to mostly “crickets” and criticism. What can their example teach other communities about pursuing ambitious goals despite daunting odds?

The "pony nesting dolls" gave this campaign an "emotional reach" that extended far beyond Accomack County.” Are there lessons here for other communities about developing compelling stories that can extend their own emotional reach?

Was it a fitting ending to the book, the way Cindy Faith imagined cafeteria lady Jeanette Beebe looking down from heaven and “nodding her head.” Does the story hit its goal of demonstrating that the "can-do spirit" of Delmarva’s "ordinary heroes" is alive and well in present times?