

BOOK CLUB NEWS

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Lab Girl by Hope Jahren

Discussion Leader: Tory Hurst

“Some people are great writers, while other people live lives of adventure and importance. Almost no one does both. Hope Jahren does both. She makes me wish I’d been a scientist.” Ann Patchett, author of *State of Wonder*



Born September 27, 1969, Anne Hope Jahren is an American geochemist and geobiologist at the University of Oslo, known for her work using stable isotope analysis to analyze fossil forests dating to the Eocene. She has won many prestigious awards in the field, including the James B. Macelwane Medal of the American Geophysical Union. (Wikipedia) [Click here](#) to view her PBS interview.

Our discussion reflected Hope Jahren’s exuberance for science. Tory began with a question: which of the themes in this memoir appealed to you the most?

Comments flowed easily: All of them appealed to me, integrating life with science.... I was impressed with the challenges she faced with manic-depression, grants, travels, disappointments, and all.... I loved the science but was awed by the author's life story.... I didn't like giving human quality to the plants/I loved giving human qualities to plants... I'm impressed with the road trips. Hope Jahren was a fighter! She let Bill be who he was. The course of research is arbitrary; i.e. they went to Ireland without a research goal. A very informative read. I found her behavior as a professor irresponsible; she took advantage of Bill. I loved the author's personal and scientific journey. Her focus on botany was fascinating; i.e. the maple leaf breaks off at the same place. I loved learning how she became a scientist. I can feel the exuberance with which she experiences science. I learned the process of scientific discovery. I will never view a plant in the same way as before this read.

What themes appealed to you the most?

How did Hope's Jarhen's upbringing influence her journey? What can you say about the relationship between Hope and Bill? Between Hope and her husband? Why was there more discussion of Bill than of her husband? In the title, why does she use the term "girl" rather than "woman"? Hope is passionate about lifting the stereotype of women and girls in science. See her fun use of #manicuremonday:

<https://twitter.com/hopejahren/status/422523304688115712?lang=en>.



Exuberance flavored the go-around.

Wonderful discussion!

Because of the title, I expected a lighter story. Reread Chapter 8 and how it relates to her story. Not much is said about Hope's husband and child. I learned so much about plants that I could relate to. I would not have liked to work with her/I would have liked to work with her. I can relate; I knew people with that passion. I loved that one sentence about a plant representing extensive research and time. It is intriguing to compare Jahren's mind works with that of a scientist I know – my husband. The scientific description was poetic and brought home to me with delight. I loved the book from beginning to end and bought it for a gift. Considering the obstacles, Hope Jahren's accomplishments were extraordinary. She has great writing skills – lucid and dramatic. I am particularly impressed with her tale of the pharmacy and will remember it forever. I felt it should have been two books: one the story of plants; the other, a memoir.

“Engrossing...Thrilling...Does for botany what Oliver Sacks's essays did for neurology, what Stephen Jay Gould's writings did for paleontology.” - *The New York Times*

Thank you, Tori, for your expert leadership of our discussion, your third book club discussion of this book. Join us January 19, 2018, at 2 PM for a discussion of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, by Ernest Hemingway. Happy New Year and happy reading!



