



FRIENDS OF THE PALM SPRINGS LIBRARY BOOK CLUB



WHITE HOUSES, November 16, 2018

Thanks to **Chris Rigos** (photo above) for leading the November discussion of *White Houses* by Amy Bloom. And I am grateful to Richard Bass for sitting in for me as facilitator. His notes from the meeting follow:

Chris framed the discussion by positing two fundamentals of historical fiction: 1) Don't invent facts; and 2) Don't do harm. There was much discussion on the nature of historical fiction. Is *White Houses* effective historical fiction as written in the first person? Is the book effective historical fiction?

Chris brought to our attention other books on the relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok, most notably, *Empty Without You: The Intimate Letters of Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok*, by Rodger Streitmatter, containing more than 3,500 letters, and *Eleanor and Hick: The Love Affair that Shaped a First Lady*, by Susan Quinn. He then shared factual historical background of both women, followed by a brief talk about the author, award-winning Amy Bloom. What stood out was that Amy Bloom was bisexual, having had a relationship with a woman in between two marriages to men.

Chris opened discussion by asking what surprised us. Readers noted that there was more respect for privacy at that time. The relationship between Eleanor and Lorena today would have been treated much differently, probably as scandal. Several readers loved the author's writing, claiming that it often read like poetry, but found the book short on information about Eleanor's character. On the whole, most readers appreciated the writing style of *White Houses* but found it lacking as historical fiction.

