

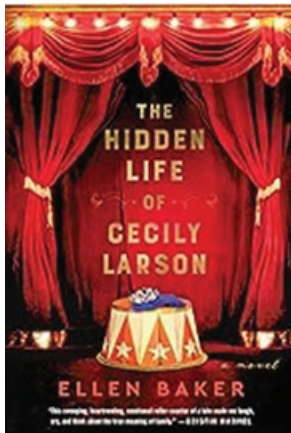
Monday, January 27, 2025 - *West with Giraffes: A Novel* by Lynda Rutledge

An emotional, rousing novel inspired by the incredible true story of two giraffes who made headlines and won the hearts of Depression-era America. “Few true friends have I known and two were giraffes...” Woodrow Wilson Nickel, age 105, feels his life ebbing away. But when he learns giraffes are going extinct, he finds himself recalling the unforgettable experience he cannot take to his grave.

It’s 1938. The Great Depression lingers. Hitler is threatening Europe, and world-weary Americans long for wonder. They find it in two giraffes who miraculously survive a hurricane while crossing the Atlantic. What follows is a twelve-day road trip in a custom truck to deliver Southern California’s first giraffes to the San Diego Zoo. Behind the wheel is the young Dust Bowl rowdy Woodrow. Inspired by true events, the tale weaves real-life figures with fictional ones, including the world’s first female zoo director, a crusty old man with a past, a young female photographer with a secret, and assorted reprobates as spotty as the giraffes. Part adventure, part historical saga, and part coming-of-age love story, *West with Giraffes* explores what it means to be changed by the grace of animals, the kindness of strangers, the passing of time, and a story told before it’s too late.



Monday, February 24, 2025 - *The Hidden Life of Cecily Larson: A Novel* by Ellen Baker



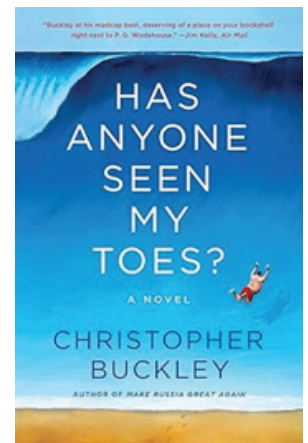
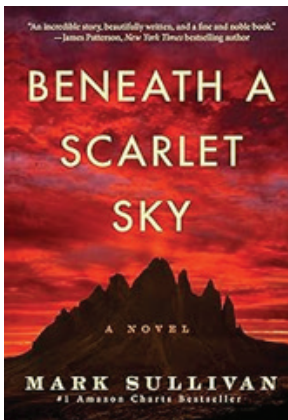
“A family secret, a DNA test, a journey as rich and colorful as the early-day circus itself. Through Cecily Larson’s hidden life, Ellen Baker tenderly examines personal determination, lost love, family ties, and our innate need to discover our own truth.” — Lisa Wingate, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Before We Were Yours* and *Before and After*. *Orphan Train* meets *Before We Were Yours* meets *Water for Elephants* in this compelling multigenerational novel of survival, love, and the families we make. In 1924, four-year-old Cecily Larson’s mother reluctantly drops her off at an orphanage in Chicago, promising to be back once she’s made enough money to support both Cecily and herself. But she never returns, and shortly after high-spirited Cecily turns seven, she is sold to a traveling circus to perform as the “little sister” to glamorous bareback rider Isabelle DuMonde. With Isabelle and the

rest of the circus, Cecily finally feels she’s found the family she craves. But as the years go by, the cracks in her little world begin to show. And when teenage Cecily meets and falls in love with a young roustabout named Lucky, she finds her life thrown onto an entirely unexpected—and dangerous—course. In 2015, Cecily is now 94 and living a quiet life in Minnesota, with her daughter, granddaughter, and great-grandson. But when her family decides to surprise her with an at-home DNA test, the unexpected results not only bring to light the tragic love story that Cecily has kept hidden for decades but also throw into question everything about the family she’s raised and claimed as her own for nearly seventy years. Cecily and everyone in her life must now decide who they really are and what family—and forgiveness—really mean. Sweeping through a long period of contemporary history, *The Hidden Life of Cecily Larson* is an immersive, compelling, and entertaining family drama centered around one remarkable woman and her determination to survive.

Monday, March 24, 2025 - Has Anyone Seen My Toes? by Christopher Buckley

During the pandemic, an aging screenwriter is holed up in a coastal South Carolina town with his beloved second wife, Peaches. He's been binge-eating for a year and developed a notable rapport with the local fast-food chain Hippo King. He struggles to work—on a ludicrous screenplay about a Nazi attempt to kidnap FDR and, naturally, an article for *Etymology Today* on English words of Carthaginian origin. He's told Peaches so often about the origins of the world mayonnaise that she's developed an aversion to using the condiment. He thinks he has Covid. His wife thinks he is losing his mind. In short, your typical pandemic worries. Things were going from bad to worse even before his doctor suggested a battery of brain tests. He knows what that means: dementia!

But even in these scary times, there are plenty of things to distract him. His iPhone is fat-shaming him. He's been trying to read Proust and thinks the French novelist missed his true calling as a parfumeur. And he's discovered nefarious Russian influence on the local coroner's race. Why is Putin so keen to control who decides who died peacefully and who by foul play in Pimento County? Could it be the local military base?

**Monday, April 28, 2025 - Beneath a Scarlet Sky: A Novel** by Mark Sullivan

Pino Lella wants nothing to do with the war or the Nazis. He's a normal Italian teenager—obsessed with music, food, and girls—but his days of innocence are numbered. When his family home in Milan is destroyed by Allied bombs, Pino joins an underground railroad helping Jews escape over the Alps, and falls for Anna, a beautiful widow six years his senior.

In an attempt to protect him, Pino's parents force him to enlist as a German soldier—a move they think will keep him out of combat. But after Pino is injured, he is recruited at the tender age of eighteen to become the personal driver for Adolf Hitler's left hand in Italy, General Hans Leyers, one of the Third Reich's most mysterious and powerful commanders.

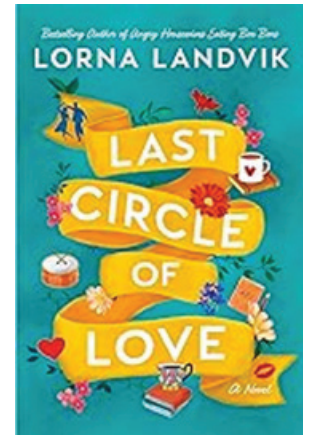
Now, with the opportunity to spy for the Allies inside the German High Command, Pino endures the horrors of the war and the Nazi occupation by fighting in secret, his courage bolstered by his love for Anna and for the life he dreams they will one day share.

Monday, May 19, 2025 - Last Circle of Love: A Novel
by Lorna Landvik (a Minnesota author)

Newly installed at All Souls Lutheran, Mallory “Pastor Pete” Peterson soon realizes that her church isn’t merely going through turbulent waters, but is a sinking ship. With the help of five loyal members of the Naomi Circle, the young, bold minister brainstorms fundraising ideas. They all agree that the usual recipe book won’t add much to the parish coffers, but maybe one with all the ingredients on how to heat up relationships rather than casseroles will.

Pastor Pete has her doubts about the project, but it turns out the group of post-menopausal women has a lot to say on the subject of romance. While Charlene, the youngest member at fifty-two, struggles with the assignment, baker-extraordinaire Marlys, elegantly bohemian Bunny, I’m-always-right Velda, and ebullient Edie take up their contributions enthusiastically. After all, their book is really about cooking up love in all its forms.

But not everyone in the congregation is on board with this “scandalous” project. As the voices of opposition grow louder, Pastor Pete and these intrepid women will have to decide how hard they’re willing to fight for this book and the powerful stories within—stories of discovery, softened hearts, and changed lives.



If you have questions or wish to participate contact Pastor Sue Wallager at swallager@zionanoka.org.

