

Book Club Kit



"A compelling story that underscores why we treasure the past and value its echoes. I loved it!"

SUSAN MEISSNER, bestselling author of
The Nature of Fragile Things

About Sandra Byrd

Bestselling author Sandra Byrd continues to earn both industry acclaim and high praise from readers everywhere. The author of more than fifty books, her work has received many awards, nominations, and accolades, including the Historical Novel Society's Editor's Choice award, two Christy Award nominations, two *Library Journal* Best Book selections, a *BookPage* Top Pick for Romance, and inclusion on *Booklist's* Top Ten Inspirational Books of the Year list. In addition, as an editor and an in-demand writing coach, Sandra is passionate about helping writers develop their talents and has coached and mentored hundreds of writers at all stages of their writing careers.



A dedicated foodie from the age of sixteen, Sandra cooks through the topic and location of every book she writes. In her free time, she collects vintage glass and serve ware and loves long walks with her husband, Sunday suppers with her growing family, and Mimi time with her precious granddaughter.



[sandrabyrdwrites](#)

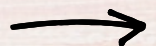


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A Note from the Author

I often write about family and friends because they are, for most of us, what brings the most pleasure—and sometimes the most pain—during the course of our lives. At the end of those lives, which comes faster than most of us imagine, we wonder, Did my life count? Was I able to achieve my dreams, goals, and live in hope despite fluctuating circumstances? Like Eunhee and Helen, I think many of us wish to live a hero's life, but the hero's life is mostly found in the day-to-day decisions we make to do good rather than be great. Some are able to pass along financial resources or material treasures to those who come after them. Mostly, though, our most valuable heirlooms are gifts of the heart, the soul, and the will, offered day by day throughout life rather than given after death. Helen and Eunhee lived heroes' lives and then passed the baton to their granddaughters, who did the same in their own time and with their own challenges.

Although my last ten novels were set in England, I am excited to return home in my writing, especially to Whidbey Island, a place my family loves. Although these United States have our share of challenges, there is truly no place like home. I wanted to explore a little corner of the universal thrill and challenge of those immigrating to America. During my research, I read and watched many accounts of those voluntarily immigrating to the United States, with a foot in each culture, as it were. Most of those folks wanted their children to be Americans but yearned for them to retain something of the mother culture too. Most of their children and the generations that came after had both feet firmly planted in America, a source of both pride and pain for their forebears. My friend Joan Nienhuis recounted that her Dutch forebears spoke Dutch but did not want their children to do so, so they would become fully Americanized.

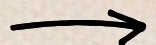


And yet continuing their cultural heritage was very important to them. Whidbey Island, to this day, hosts a Holland Happening celebration each spring, though most of the Dutch immigration took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Closer to home, each of my grandparents was in the first generation of their families born in the United States, their parents having immigrated here from Italy, Lebanon, and Scandinavia. My great-grandparents sacrificed to establish new lives in the US, leaving culture, friends, family—in some cases even children—behind forever. Happily American, I am so grateful to them. As with many voluntary adult immigrants, my forebears' motivations included increased financial well-being, a desire to escape a dangerous or hopeless situation in their homeland, and a goal to achieve a new, happier, more promising life—the American dream—for themselves and the generations who would follow. Although in *Heirlooms* these various paths are expressed through Dutch Americans to some extent and Korean Americans in a larger part, each with their own unique culture, I peek at the broader emotional intersection of immigration and the American dream.

The twentieth century had its fair share of wars, if any share is fair, but the Korean War somehow gets eclipsed by World War II and the Vietnam War. However, it was not an eclipsing experience for those who served in the armed forces, nor especially for the Korean people.

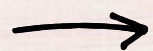
My affection and respect for Korean Americans and their culture sparked when I taught in a Korean American *Hagwon*, an after-school prep school of sorts. I taught English, essay, and preparation for the SAT. I grew in affection and admiration for my boss, my students, and their families as I knew them better and learned more about their culture. I not only came to love their delicious food, courteous manners, beautiful language, sense of humor, devotion to achievement, and customs, but my respect for the sacrifices made for the children made a huge impression.



Mothers sometimes lived in the US while their husbands remained in South Korea so the children could get the best possible educations. Fathers sometimes slept at their businesses so they didn't need to hire additional employees, instead saving money to educate their kids and bring relatives to live with them. Many well-educated people took jobs for which they were overqualified in order to be the proverbial foot in the door for their families. And yet I also witnessed that tug, felt by many children of immigrants to the US, from whatever their background. *Many have sacrificed to get me here, and I love and appreciate that, but can I shape my own life without disappointing my family?* My research took me beyond personal experience, of course, into in-depth interviews with Korean Americans and into many journals, letters, books, and firsthand reports.

As a whole, our country is getting better at educating ourselves about and including and respecting those with developmental disabilities and the experiences of neurodiverse people. I researched both autism and Down syndrome to understand a bit about what it is like to be neurodiverse in a world built for neurotypical understanding or to have a family member who has developmental delays or disabilities or other physical and intellectual challenges. It was painful and horrifying to read about the treatment of the mothers of children—and those folks themselves—diagnosed not only in the fifties but also within my lifetime. I honor and admire the families, then and now, who have tirelessly fought for themselves and for loved ones who need additional support. I am thankful to all those who helped me better understand these challenges—they are listed in the book's acknowledgment section.

In the historical section of the book, I use the name *Down syndrome* to portray what was known at the time as *mongolism*. I do that for sensitivity's purpose and also because I hope many readers may not even have heard of *mongolism* being used in such a way.



There are varying positions on identifying autistic persons with either identity first (*autistic person*) or person first (*person with autism*). The language changes frequently, and under advisement, I chose to go with the identity-first position (see this article for a helpful explanation of this perspective:

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/identity-first-language/>) as the best way to convey respect and autonomy at the time of publication. Differing opinions are valid, of course.

When researching autism, I came across the phrase “When you know one autistic person, you know one autistic person.” I have adopted and expanded that philosophy for each of the characters in my book regardless of their cultural background, neurotypical or neurodiverse, physical or intellectual challenges, or current life situation. Although I strove to honor and represent norms for each culture in the book, I worked hard to avoid stereotypes with each person portrayed.

In the end, this is a story about family ties and deep friendship, how we balance one another, fill the gaps for each other, and hopefully find our love and sacrifice for each other in a healthy combination of “me” and “we.” The best family and friends stand in the gap for each other no matter the cost. Cassidy and Eunhee are very much alike—each, to some extent, lost her family and their support and so had to make a new life. Each was strong in her faith, ready to pack her seeds, as it were, and plant them anew. Grace and Helen were very much alike, focused on their careers and then pulled out of them for a moment to find the real meaning in their callings. The older generation provided strength and love for their own grandchildren and examples and support for each other’s.

I hope the book will strengthen you not only to dream but to set goals, to act for yourself and also for others, and to honor the heirlooms you’ve been gifted and plan for those you’ll leave for those coming after you.

Q&A with Sandra Byrd

Q. What was your inspiration for *Heirlooms*?

A. I love the intersection of one generation impacting the next—positively or negatively, knowingly and not. I wanted to bring a broader understanding of the intrinsic worth of every person. I wanted to explore the secrets we keep, the love we pass down, and bring home in our money-driven world that the heirlooms we inherit from a well-lived life are the most valuable of all.

Q. You use the Korean phrase for “taste of her hands.” Can you unpack that phrase for us? How does that play a role in the story?

A. *Son-mat* is the Korean concept that every woman—especially mothers—flavors a dish with her own hands, the spices adhering to her hands, leading everything she touches to have a distinct, unique flavor. Can women retain the best of the traditions handed to them, especially from mothers and grandmothers, whether in the traditional understanding—cooking—or branch out to include professional, personal, and faith life? In *Heirlooms*, each of the four women must learn how to both keep the traditions that are meaningful and shape her own life.

Q. What was the most challenging part of this writing project?

A. Managing the tremendous amount of research—including dozens of interviews and perhaps nearly one hundred other sources of information—involved in bringing so many times and cultures to life in an appropriate, sensitive way. Carefully weaving story threads so as not to reveal too soon.

Q. What do you hope your readers will take away from reading *Heirlooms*? How might it inspire or encourage their faith?

A. One character asks, “What are you doing today that fulfills the hopes and prayers of someone yesterday?” Each of us might consider that, and if the answer isn’t readily at hand, adjust our lives a wee bit.

Discussion Questions

1. Both Eunhee and Grace's mom, Mrs. Kim, discuss the concept of *son-mat*, the taste of your hands. In what ways do Cassidy and Grace apply the concept of *son-mat* to their lives? Are there items, attitudes, or ideas passed down to you from your family that you have changed or tweaked to make your own? Why? How would you feel if your child, grandchild, or another loved one changed something you gifted to them?

2. Helen and Eunhee agree that they would each like to live "a hero's life," ultimately finding that such a life is earned day by day, decision by simple decision. Can you trace the choices and sacrifices each of the women in this book makes to build their lives and carve a better path for others? What do you see in your own life, or the lives of those around you, that is genuinely heroic, though they might not find that to be so?

3. Cassidy struggles to reconcile her passion for flowers with her feeling that she must do something practical to make money and save her land. Is it selfish to want to make a life at the same time you make a living? Do you believe that the desires of our hearts are placed there by God? How do we balance the need to work, as outlined in Genesis, with Jesus' promise that he has come to bring us an abundant life (John 10:10)?

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4. Eunhee tells Helen, "Sometimes secrets are kept out of love and not a wish to deceive." But Grace's mother offers, "Sometimes opening a secret to sunlight brings freedom and joy." Do you think Helen and Eunhee were right to keep such a significant secret from their families? How do you know when a secret should be kept and when it should be shared? Does it matter whether that secret is your own or someone else's?

5. Grace's *halaboji* asks her, "What are you doing today that fulfills the hopes and prayers of someone yesterday?" Can you see in your own life the fulfillment of someone else's hopes and prayers? Which of your own hopes and prayers would you fervently desire to see come to pass in another generation?

6. Do you cook, bake, or even just eat a favorite family recipe? Why do you treasure it? Have you written down your recipes to share with your friends, children, or grandchildren?

7. Helen and Cassidy both experience loneliness and a longing for family. How does each woman see that longing fulfilled in unexpected ways? How would you define *family*, and who fills that role in your own life?

8. We usually think of heirlooms as physical possessions, often of significant monetary value. But can sentimental possessions be just as valuable? What about attitudes, approaches, understanding, or care? What is the most treasured heirloom you have ever inherited, and why? What is the heirloom you most wish to bequeath to your loved ones?





A note from Sandra Byrd



Hello, wonderful new book club friends!

Thank you for inviting me and *Heirlooms* to your gathering. I'd be right there with you if I had my way, whipping up the snacks and beverages and making the living room cozy. But since I can't be, I thought it would be fun to share how to tie some book themes into your reading experience.

Gardens and gardening were important to both Cassidy and Helen, who, of course, learned the art from Eunhee. Cassidy riffed on the Victorian practice of tussy-mussies—posies that conveyed meaning depending on what flowers comprised the bouquet—in building her business. She offers a posy to Annika, recognizing and honoring her skills and heart. Cassidy didn't offer an olive branch to Nick, but she did offer an apple branch, unintentionally sharing her buried affections.

There are many books on flower language—and they do not all agree on the meanings! One of my favorites is *Tussie-Mussies: The Language of Flowers* by Geraldine Adamich Laufer. I love her ideas not only for love, but for occasions such as a new job, a new car, and a new baby!

My first and most treasured in the genre is *Language of Flowers* by Kate Greenaway. A true Victorian, Greenaway lived between 1846 and 1901. You can purchase inexpensive reprints of her book and [even access it for free via Project Gutenberg online.](#)

There are many ways to incorporate flower language into your book club meeting. You might choose to assemble a bouquet where each flower represents something about the book you're reading. You might ask each club member to bring a blossom, herb, or branch whose meaning resonated with them in the book's content. You can incorporate the flowers into the beverages and snacks you serve. Here are a few ideas to get you started!

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I've listed some popular flowers and their meanings below, but of course, what's available will vary depending on where you live and in what season you meet. Have fun!

For *Heirlooms*, peonies, love-in-a-mist, or red carnations might be a fun place to start. If you or someone you know grows rose of Sharon (eternal blossom that never fades) or forsythia (new beginnings), the stunning branches make a perfect floral centerpiece that ties right in with the book. Red carnations are appropriate for any book with an inspirational message. Their common name derives from the Latin word for "incarnation." They also mean admiration, love, and passion.

Love-in-a-mist, or nigella, means kiss me twice. Or perplexity!

Peonies, first recorded in a Chinese tomb in the first century, convey beauty, bravery, compassion, and life. If there's a more beautiful flower anywhere, I don't know what it is. They play, as you know, a central role in my book.

Here are a couple of other flowers you might consider as your group meets to discuss *Heirlooms*. And don't forget herbs! For example, you could float some mint (virtue) in your lemonade if you prefer them to pansies (thoughts).

clematis—mental beauty
daisy—I share your sentiments
oak-leaved geraniums—true friendship
gillyflower—bonds of affection
iris—message
lantana—rigor
lupine—imagination
sweet pea—departure
pine—hope in adversity
raspberry—remorse
rosemary—remembrance



Recipes

Food brings people together and fosters community and a sense of home in *Heirlooms*. Make these recipes with your book group (and don't miss the recipes in the back of *Heirlooms*!) to experience that with your group as you discuss the novel.

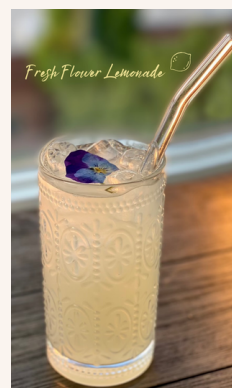
Seattle Fog

You might be more familiar with a London Fog, combining Earl Grey tea, lavender syrup, and milk or half-and-half, all to taste. But give my hometown combo a try, too. Simply replace the tea with espresso or coffee and serve hot or cold! Lavender syrup is easy to buy online and adds the essential floral element. You can also purchase culinary lavender sprigs online at Amazon or Etsy.



Garden Lemonade

Pour your favorite lemonade over ice and then float a pressed pansy (or another small flower) on top—you can even try this over iced tea. The pressed flowers are easy to make by rolling the blossoms between two pieces of parchment paper; YouTube has lots of instructions, or you can buy them ready-made at Etsy.



Recipe photos courtesy of Sandra Byrd

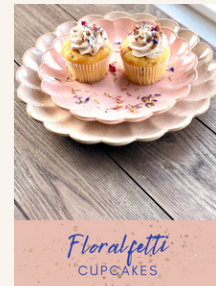
Rose Cardamom Shortbread

Bring the elements of the garden into your book club with these beautiful and delicious shortbreads. I used the recipe from [Bigger Bolder Baking](#) for my cookies but followed the guidance from [Milk and Cardamom](#) for dipping them in white chocolate (melting wafers work best, as that recipe's author notes) and sprinkling with culinary rose petals (found on Amazon). I didn't use pistachios as I have developed a sensitivity toward them, but you might sprinkle those on, too, if you like!



Floralfetti Cupcakes

Easy-peasy! Make a batch of Funfetti cupcakes using whatever mix or recipe you prefer. After icing, sprinkle edible dried flowers (Etsy or make your own) across the tops!



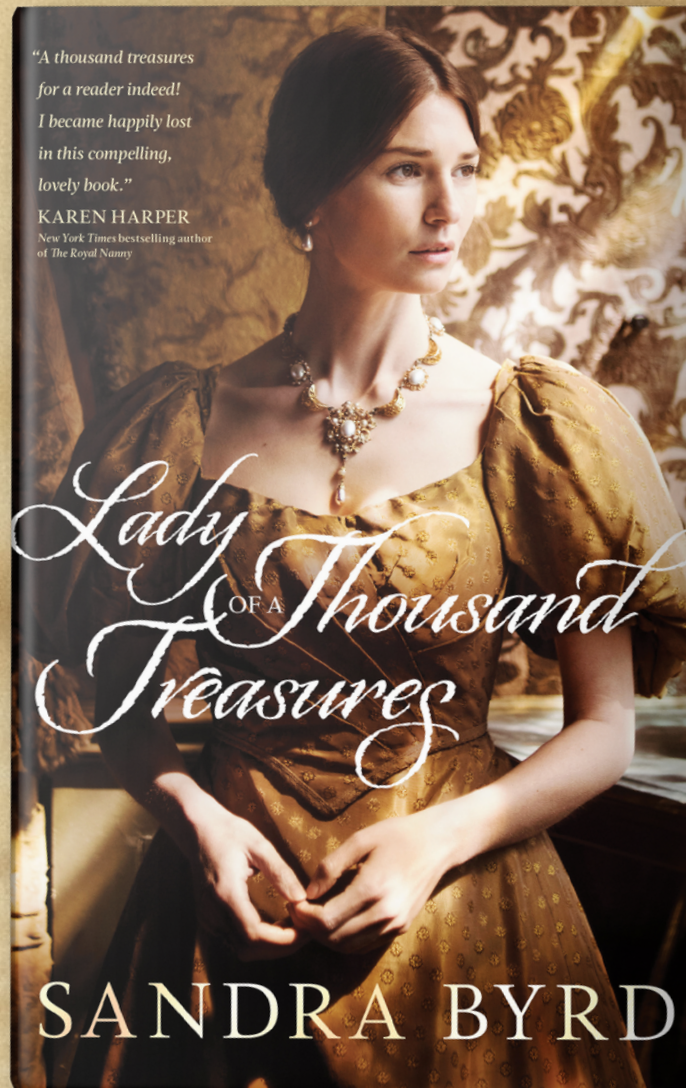
My recipe notes:

Thanks for choosing



for your book club!

Step back in time to Victorian England in



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