



Season 3, Episode 25: Special Guest Gretchen Rubin

Mon, 2/1/21 • 54:30

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:10

Hey readers, welcome to the Currently Reading Podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you know, we won't shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:23

We are light on the chit-chat, heavy on the book talk, and our descriptions will always be spoiler-free. We'll discuss our current reads a bookish deep dive, and then we'll press books into your hands.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:32

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and I have never been happier to record an episode of this show in my life.

Kaytee Cobb 00:42

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I am sure that my reading life has made me better than I was before. This is episode number 25 of season three. And we're so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:54

All right. We are clearly really excited today, Kaytee. We are we're a little bit amped up because we have what I think is not an overstatement to say it's one of our dream guests here with us today. You guys, we have Gretchen Rubin here. And you know, this is a big deal for me. Gretchen is a New York Times bestselling author of some of my favorite books of all time. Books that have impacted me greatly, including *The Happiness Project*, *Better Than Before*, and *The Four Tendencies*, and along with her sister, Liz Kraft, she's the podcaster on her show *Happier with Gretchen Rubin*. When Kaytee and I first conceived of our show, we made a bucket list of guests and Gretchen was at the tippy top of that list. To be with her today is exciting. And for me just a little bit surreal. Gretchen, welcome to Currently Reading.

Gretchen Rubin 01:45

Well, thank you so much. I'm so happy to be talking to you. You know, I love talking books. So this is my dream conversation as well. I'm so glad to be talking to you today.

Kaytee Cobb 01:55

We are very excited. There's been a lot of anxiety and buzziness in our chat, especially this past week, just being just overly thrilled, actually is what it comes down to you.

Gretchen Rubin 02:07

Oh, that's nice. Thank you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:10

Right! But books are the great equalizer, right. And anytime you can have a conversation about books, you can have a conversation with anyone. So we're going to relax into the fact that we are all readers. And we're going to open up with our bookish moment of the week. And so Gretchen, did you have a bookish moment of the week prepared?

Gretchen Rubin 02:30

Yeah, you know, you mentioned we have the happier podcast with my sister, Elizabeth. We've thrown out a "try this at home" to listeners to reflect back on a book that you read in high school or college that you still think about now. And to go back and reread it. And so I recently went back and read *The Pillow Book* of Sei Shonagon, which is a book from hundreds and hundreds of years ago from a Japanese court lady. And it's just a, you know, a towering masterpiece of World Literature. It's a strange book with sort of anecdotes and stories and lists and descriptions. I had remembered it for years and thought of it often. And I'd been you know, it's one of those books that you just you keep meaning to go back to. So finally I was like, Okay, this is my, this is my justification. Now I have to go back and reread it. So I grabbed my copy that I had in college, and got it, got it off the shelf and read it. So that was a really great bookish moment to sort of reconnect with a book that I had connected with so deeply, you know, years ago,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:32

Did you like it? Was it interesting this time?

Gretchen Rubin 03:34

It really was interesting. It's more interesting because of its form, like I'm very interested in unusual structures. And her book really was... a pillow book is kind of a form of occasional writing sort of miscellaneous jottings. And it really is that and so sometimes she'll tell a story in you're like, I don't even know what she's talking about? I have no idea because it's so deep inside that kind of culture in that time and her frame of reference, it's hard to really even understand it. But then she has lists like, you know, elegant things. And she she lists elegant things in such a way that they're just as clear to us today, you know, snow on plum blossoms and I actually went online to look up. What does snow on plum blossoms look like? I've never actually seen that. Well, it's the most extraordinarily elegant, beautiful thing you can imagine. And so her descriptions are are so rich, and she paints a picture of her time and place that. No, I really did enjoy it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:28

All right, that sounds very, very interesting. All right, Kaytee, what is your bookish moment of the week?

Kaytee Cobb 04:33

Okay, my bookish moment this week is one that is actually nine months in the making. I got to go to a bookstore this week. Wow. I know. I know. In New Mexico where I live, everything is very closed down.

You can order curbside pickup for pretty much anything but there are no bookstores that are open in Santa Fe. So but because I'm visiting my parents this week, we've been you know, self quarantining together. I got to go to a local bookstore with them for the first time since March and I got to stroll the aisles and I got to talk to employees. And I got to read shelf talkers, which is probably my favorite bookstore experience. They had a great kids section. So that was Changing Hands bookstore in Mesa, Arizona. And in Arizona, it's like the Wild West. They have like the leading COVID cases in the nation. And they're like, we don't care. Everything's open, you can come. So you just mask up and you just, everything's open. So we got to go to a bookstore, and it was so delightful.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:33

And you got a huge stack of books.

Kaytee Cobb 05:35

I got a huge stack of books. It's embarrassing. But that's what happens when a bookworm has been like withholding herself for nine months. Gluttony,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:45

Right. Well, you saw my stack from Fabled, I mean, that was absolutely ridiculous. But I hadn't been to bookstore in a year. So you do what you got to do? Yeah. All right. Well, I feel kind of bad about my bookish moment of the week, because you two have not been able to take part in anything like this. But one of the things that I love about living in Austin, Texas, is that we have so many days of the year where we have really nice sunlight outside. And so one of the things that I've been doing is I've been allowing myself on the days when it's kind of bright and sunny, not necessarily warm, because there are days where it can be bright and sunny, but still very cool. But when it's bright and sunny, I let myself do 20 minutes of my audiobook, while I sit next to my pool and just kind of sit literally for 20 minutes, just listening to an audio book doesn't sound that special, except for the fact that it takes a lot for me to give myself permission to spend 20 minutes that way, in the middle of a morning, right. So it's one of those things, I'm trying to use a strategy of pairing I'm trying to say when it is bright and sunny outside, I am going to allow myself I'm going to take that as permission from the universe to spend 20 minutes listening outside. So that's a habit I'm really trying to put into practice in 2021. So I was able to do that several days this week until it started to get a little dreary, or here. So that was really, really fun. All right, and later in the show, I should say I got so excited earlier, I forgot to say we are going to be talking about really making reading a habit. Gretchen that's something you guys are talking a lot about on how on the happier podcast. We're going to talk about how people can do that or how readers can help their family members who maybe don't have that same reading habit, establish it in 2021. So that's coming later in our deep dive but first let's talk about our current reads. So Gretchen What have you been reading recently?

Gretchen Rubin 07:39

Well, I had an amazing discovery. Nothing is more delightful than finding an author who has a long backlist and you are have just started down that road. So I'm a big lover of science fiction and fantasy. I also love children's literature. I love young adult literature. I love essays. I love memoirs. I love history. I love science. I love all kinds of books, but I do love his science fiction and fantasy. But I had never read the works of Octavia Butler. So this was just a treasure trove for me and I just had been, you know,

plowing my way. So with so much excitement through her books, and she has a very, very wide range and the kind of books that she writes, I'm kind of astonished to think of some you know, if you look at a book like Fledging, Fledgling, which I loved, or a book like the Patternist Sequence where the first one is Wild Seed, which is maybe my favorite, Octavia Butler. They're very, very different. But so anyway, I've been reading Octavia Butler, and that's very delightful.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:41

All right, Kaytee, what's your first current we will kind of round robin these a little bit.

Kaytee Cobb 08:47

All right. My first one this week is called The Extraordinaries by TJ Klune. And I can't talk about this book without kind of a stupid smile. Because even the tagline is, some people are extraordinary. And some are just extra. What? What? So our main character is Nick Bell. This is YA if you couldn't tell from that tagline. He's a queer teen who really wants to be an extraordinary and in the world he lives in extraordinaries, these are kind of superheroes, right? So they can fly or control flames or command shadows they battle good and evil and sometimes each other. And Nick not only wants to be one he's crushing hard on the extraordinary that's big in his town. His name is Shadow Star. He writes fanfiction about him online. He tries to spot him when he's out in public. It's a whole thing. Nick would really like the help of Seth, his bestie, to not only become extraordinary but to hopefully catch Shadow Star's eye, and of course it's why there has to be some drama, there may be a crush, maybe some secrets that have been swept under the rug. This book is a little eye-rolly in how YA it is. It's not going to be for everyone. I found myself rolling my eyes but I also found myself guessing sometimes correctly and sometimes not where the plot was going to go. But I was never bored the whole time. Never bored. This one came highly recommended from one of our bookish friends. Her name is Jessie Weaver. I'm so glad she pressed it into my hands. In fact, I am looking forward to the sequel, which is due out this summer. And if the name sounds familiar for the author, that's because this is TJ Klune of The House in the Cerulean Sea, which ended up on a lot of favorites lists for 2020. And was one of my favorites as well. So I was happy to pick up another one of his titles. So that was The Extraordinaries by TJ Klune.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:32

All right, my first book that I want to talk about today is true crime. And this is true crime for the real, hardcore sort of true crime lover, because trigger warnings abound with all true crime really, but this one is pretty violent. And you know, family murder abounds here. So let's tread really carefully. This is The Man From the Train: Discovering America's Most Elusive Serial Killer. This is by Bill James and his daughter, Rachel McCarthy James. So here's the setup. And this is sort of unbelievable to me. But between 1898 and 1912, scores of families across the country were bludgeoned in their sleep with the blunt side of an axe. And a few of these cases, I know it's about it's really it's this really violent. A few of these cases, like a really infamous one in Iowa, received national attention. But most the vast majority of these incidents went almost completely unnoticed outside of the communities in which they occurred. So right, entire families were massacred for no reason, no motive was discernible at all. And outside of the few miles right around them. No one knew not law enforcement, not journalists, absolutely no one. And very few people would realize that the crimes were related, fewer still would realize that all of these families lived within a very short distance from the train tracks. So celebrated True Crime expert, Bill James learns about this. And then he begins to investigate. And he begins to see this pattern. And he

starts working on this book with his daughter, who he hires as his researcher, Rachel, and they make an astonishing discovery just completely on their own. They figure out who this person is from these murders that are more than 100 years old, this book looks into not only the murders themselves, and there is a lot of this there is I mean, they catalogue every single crime and details of every single crime, which is great. And by the middle of it gets I mean, it's a there's a you know, it's a lot, right. Yeah, right. It's it's a lot, it's extraordinarily well researched, absolutely no question. The fact that I knew from the beginning that they had, in fact figured out who this person was, and what the pattern was, made it really, really interesting to me. So the book is definitely very interesting. It's very readable. But like I said, toward the middle, it gets a little bit weighed down in its own research, it's a little bit heavy, it sort of starts to feel a little bit more like a thesis that you would read, rather than a more commercial, true crime novel. So what I would say is, you know, power through that middle part if you're interested, because at the end, when they really show how they figured all this out, and all of the sort of threads come together. It is absolutely fascinating. So if you love the concept of an armchair detective being able to unravel a, you know, a century old mystery, this book is for you. If you're interested, and Kaytee will know, I don't I don't know why I am so interested in this. But if you like the concept of how people used to be able to get away with crimes that today they would never ever, ever get away with. This book is really for you. And but again, I do want to underscore it is graphically violent in its descriptions, and it can be really, really hard to read in those ways. But it's incredibly well done. So this is *The Man From the Train: Discovering America's Most Elusive Serial Killer* by Bill James and Rachel McCarthy James.

Kaytee Cobb 14:27

That sounds horrifying. Nice job, Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:30

You are welcome. Murderful as always, okay. All right. Gretchen What is your second current read that you want to talk about?

Gretchen Rubin 14:40

I recently finished *Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke, which I highly recommend I I wasn't sure what to expect. It was not what I expected for that reason, and I certainly didn't see where it was going. But I found it. It really imaginative and unexpected very compelling. I think every member of my family now has read it, which is very unusual for us that we all liked it and read it and enjoyed it. So I really highly recommend *Piranesi*. It's also short. If you're kind of looking for if you have kind of a window for a short book, sometimes your schedule is such that you want a shorter book right now. It's a good short book, and it's a very, very compulsive read.

Kaytee Cobb 15:23

So I had tried to pick up a Susanna Clarke book in the past, but it was *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, and that one's like 1200 pages, and I made it through maybe 20% of it before I was like, I can't do this.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:36

Yeah, I DNF that one too.

Kaytee Cobb 15:38

So but this is like the complete other side of the coin is what you're saying? It's a it's a nice little delectable treat instead of a whole meal. Hmm.

Gretchen Rubin 15:45

Well, it's a whole meal. I like that Dr. Strange. I can never get Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell or doctor or what? I enjoyed that too. I actually like this book better. But yeah, it's it is it's a much more it's, it's, it's a book that's not so heavy in the hand.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:05

Gretchen, how do you feel about a what we would term a brick so but like a really big book? Do you feel like you love that? Or do you feel like now I want to get more books in? How do you feel about a big book?

Gretchen Rubin 16:16

Well, you know, there is that opportunity cost where you're like, I could read this book, or I could read three other books. And that is sometimes painful to consider. But I do feel like every book has a right length. And so for a book that it should be a long book, once I'm starting it, I don't begrudge it, its length. I do, as a writer myself, I do think that many books would be better shorter. And so I myself always have tried to make my books as short as they can be, and still, like, have everything in them that I want to have in them. And there are some writers who I wish, perhaps took that to heart a little bit more. But, but I do and I knew, and that's why I sort of mentioned that it's short, because I think sometimes you're sort of like, Okay, I'm due for a long read. Or I'm gonna go on a trip. And I want to stick with one book, or I have like a lot of reading time today. And so I can really, like you know, cover a lot of ground. And so that's a time when I'll tackle... I recently read a book called Little Big by John Crowley, which is very, very long. It's kind of a fairy tale. So it was odd to me that it was so long. Because that didn't seem suited to its subject. But then it turned out it worked very, very well. But I definitely put off reading it for a while because I was like, yeah, this is gonna This is gonna crowd out some other books for a while, but it was worth it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:31

Yeah, that's the difference. Right? When it's when they're really good, and they're really long. I think that's the best kind of reading.

Gretchen Rubin 17:38

Yes! I want it to be longer. Yeah, yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:42

All right. Well, that reminds me what you know, my favorite book of all time, I think is a book that Gretchen you would never read because you don't read books that include revenge. Am I right?

Gretchen Rubin 17:52

No, no, no unjust accusation. I love revenge. Unjust accusation. That's my Problem.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:57

Okay. Count of Monte Cristo?

Gretchen Rubin 17:59

I saw I skipped the beginning where he's being unjustly accused, right to the escape from the prison, which is not a spoiler, because it's like, I'm sure it's on the back of the book. Yes. So then it's like revenge. And I'm like, I'm here for the revenge, but I count me out. And then I just skipped anything that was about the accusation. But yeah, no, I had to skip the beginning. And I allowed myself to do that, which I don't think I've ever done that before in a book.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:23

I love that you read it anyway, even though that was kind of the cornerstone of the beginning of the book. But yeah, I'm just gonna skip it.

Gretchen Rubin 18:30

Yeah! It's such a it's such a classic. I felt like I you know, I got to read that over The Three Musketeers. And so I felt like kind of Monte Cristo sounded better.

Kaytee Cobb 18:39

Yeah, that was a good choice.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:41

Yes, yes. I didn't like Three Musketeers. But anyway, okay. I just I had to get in my Count of Monte Cristo thinks I've thought a million times. It's my favorite book, but Gretchen would never read it. But I was always...

Gretchen Rubin 18:51

Oh, is it your favorite book?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:53

It's my favorite book of all time.

Kaytee Cobb 18:54

It's her desert island book.

Gretchen Rubin 18:55

Oh, my! Interesting. Oh, interesting. I want to go back and look at it again and try to figure out what that reveals about you.

Kaytee Cobb 19:04

maybe we should have done this first.

Gretchen Rubin 19:06

He's like a superhero on a revenge. Kind of true crime spree, as I recall. So maybe it's there you go.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:15

It's full of murder and duels, and I absolutely love the lead character. He just has my heart. All right, Kaytee, what's your second book that you want to talk about?

Kaytee Cobb 19:25

Okay, my second book this week is A Knock at Midnight by Brittany K Barnett, and this book is incredible and it was pressed into my hands again by a bookish friend who said, Kayytee, I know you love social justice. I know you love Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson.

Gretchen Rubin 19:42

Oh, I love that. I have to pick this one up.

Kaytee Cobb 19:43

So Gretchen this time I'm talking to you. Okay, so Brittany K Barnett. She attends law school and goes into corporate law. I mean, it's Gretchen it's a book about Gretchen. But she has a passion that is different from her legal career and it's a beating Heart of social justice. When she was young and growing up in Central Texas, Brittany's mother was absent for a lot of her childhood partially due to a drug addiction and partially due to the conviction that arose from said drug addiction. So when she's studying law, she feels that passion for social justice wrapped around a mother who she sees interviewed on TV, and this woman is missing her child's life due to her own prison sentence. The story becomes really personal and deeply moving in that way, while also taking a deep look at systemic injustice related to sentencing disparities, like the one to 100 sentencing disparity between crack cocaine and powder cocaine. And, and we see that those two drugs are essentially the same, but because crack cocaine affects the black community, it is sentenced at a time at a ratio of 100 times more harshly than powder cocaine is. And so she's taking kind of little inroads into these various social justice issues. But the whole time she's also working to commute the sentences of some of the other central players in her book. So if you like Just Mercy, where he gets really, he really like leans in hard to the lives and personality of these men mostly on death row. This is the same idea, except it's a lot of times moms who are missing their daughters as they're growing up, and Brittany K. Barnett just brings their stories to life at the same time as revealing that little tender underbelly of herself. It's incredibly, incredibly well written. I was, you know, verklempt the whole time. It's like a mix of Just Mercy and The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander. I loved both of those. If you love both of those, this book is a must read. It's A Knock at Midnight by Brittany K. Barnett.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:43

Alright, so we're gonna take one of those left turns that we absolutely love to take from your book to this book. All right, so you know, everyone who listens knows I absolutely love a fairy tale. So I have a great one to bring to you today and actually one that I am not seeing as much on bookstagram as I would think that we would because it is so good, and it's got the most gorgeous cover. This book is Among the Beasts and Briars by Ashley Poston. So if you love fairy tale retellings, listen up, this one is going to be for you. Okay, so our story is set in the kingdom of Alaria. Where there are no droughts, disease, or

famine and peace is constant. And it's been this way for hundreds of years. Ever since the first king of Alaria made a bargain with the lady of the wild who ruled the forest that is that borders the kingdom. But as Alaria has prospered. Over the years the woods grew darker, cursed and forbidden. And the people who live in alaria just completely as much as they can they stay out of these woods. So our lead character is Cirrus and she's the daughter of the Royal gardener. She knows the evil of the woods outside of alaria better than anyone because when she was young, she barely escaped as the woods killed her friend and her mother. And now Cirrus has a small bit of the curse, which is turned into magic in her blood. And this enables her to have some really beautiful powers, but also, she's really tortured by painful memories. So as our story starts, a new queen of Alaria is crowned and at the coronation, things in the woods attack the kingdom itself. And Cirrus is forced on the run by herself only in the company of a small Fox. And it's up to her to find the lady of the wilds and beg her to save the kingdom. All right, so this one is so this is such a great story. So I read this book right after I had read a much heavier, heavier dark book. And so I was looking for something that was really sweet and light and this one was exactly what I needed at the start. And then as you get into it as with I think all good fairy tales, it's not all sweet and light at all. And there there are some scenes that are really memorable in a violent but in a you know, the the theme of the coronation scene is really one that I will not forget, it's really well written and the terror that's going on is really something that I have thought about over and over again. So I do want to say that this is a fairy tale that you can pass on to your tweens and teens because it is very sweet. There's nothing more than chaste kisses. So if you have if you have a you know child who likes this kind of stuff, but you don't want to hand them A Court of Thorns and Roses, that kind of thing. This one would really be a good sweet spot there. So it was a lovely fairy tale at the perfect time of year. I love to read fairy tales in January, and the cover the characters and the quest were all perfect. So this is Among the Beasts and Briars by Ashley Poston.

Kaytee Cobb 24:52

Sounds fun. I've read another of hers that I really liked called Geekerella. It's it's contemporary YA but it's really Like, kids crashing at Comiccon, kind of fun. So I like her.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:05

Alright, so those are our current reads. So now we are going to deep dive a little bit Gretchen into what you guys are doing over on the Happier podcast. And as soon as we heard as soon as Kaytee heard the show, which I think was just a couple hours after it dropped in early January, right? she messaged me and said, Oh, my gosh, Gretchen is talking reading in 2021, we have got to, you know, we have got to talk about this with her. So tell us a little bit about what you guys are doing to put a focus on the habit of reading over on the Happier podcast?

Gretchen Rubin 25:39

Well, a couple of different things came together. One is, you know, I've been writing about habits for years, partly because when I wrote The Happiness Project, I was writing about, what are the things we do that makes us happier. And then I also wrote a book called Better Than Before, which was about habit formation. Because what I've noticed in my own life and a lot of other people's lives is that often we know perfectly well what will make us happier, it's not a mystery, it's just that we're not very good at following through or making a habit of something like going to sleep on time, or putting down our phone or, you know, whatever it might be. And so one of the ways we thought we would tackle this, this

paradox is that, if so, for 2020, we, we challenged everybody to walk 20 and 20 to just walk 20 minutes, and there's all kinds of research showing why this you get a huge gain and health and mood and immune function, which of course everybody's very focused on. And we just had a tremendous response. So many people did it. And then we heard about so many great things that came from it. Also a lot of happy dogs.

Gretchen Rubin 26:38

And so this summer 2021, we're like, Okay, what is it going to be in 2021, and we had no debate in our minds, it was going to be Read 21 in '21. Because we've heard from listeners, because we have a very bookish audience like you guys do, obviously. And people will say, like, I love to read and yet I find it hard to find time to read or, you know, I'm not, I'm not getting up to speed with the word, you know, with the books that I want. I'm somehow it's always crowded, getting crowded out. And so we thought, let's really focus everyone's attention on creating the structures, getting the tools, you know, just like having a good reading light can make a huge difference. You know, it's like, sometimes you just have to, like, think about, okay, well, what's stopping me from reading or like, Okay, if I sit down with a book, I need to put my phone in the other room. So I can get up and get it if I wanted. But I don't have it right next to me, or, you know, whatever. And 21 minutes Seems reasonable. I think even a very, very busy person who doesn't have a lot of extra time, energy or money, can can make 21 minutes for reading. And, wow, we got an amazing response. I think a lot of people were really excited to kind of have an assignment like to be told, like, you're supposed to do this, and we're all doing it to like, they were looking for that. And we're really, really excited to kind of I think for some people, it's almost like getting permission or or sort of feeling like this is happening. I need to be part of this. But we've we've had so many people with like tools and strategies and hacks for like, how to build it into a habit. Because I think people understand it does make you happier. Yeah. And people are always talking about, oh, it increases empathy. And it has all these good effects. And I'm like, I may be great. Like, I love hearing that something is good for me that I like to do, but I do it because it's fun, right? I mean, it's more fun than anything else. And so and I think for a lot of people, like so many people said, like, once I was reading 21 minutes, of course, I was blowing past that. So anyway, we just started in January 1, we've had so many people respond with such enthusiasm, because I think people really do like to read, and they just need to make sure that it becomes a regular part of their day. Because the more you read, the more you the more reading you do, you're more used to using your Libby app or putting things on hold or going into your bookstore and kind of like following, you know, who's got what coming out? The more you do it sort of the more the more you want to do it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:57

Absolutely. Right. It builds on itself. For sure. I think, I think the permission has been one of those things that has felt really great about it, because I've talked about this with a couple of other friends who historically feel like they're sort of reluctant readers and or want to read but can't find the time. And they've said just being told just to 21 minutes feels doable, and it feels like something they can give themselves permission to do. So what I want to talk about this from a couple of different angles, but one of the things I wanted to do, sort of briefly is to have you run us through so you know, a part of what you a part of the structure that you've come up with is the structure of The Four Tendencies, the personality structure, which I just think is so useful for everyone to know. And can you tell us where our listeners can find out which one of the four tendencies they might fall into?

Gretchen Rubin 29:48

Yes, I have a free quick quiz. Like 3.2 million people have taken this online quiz. It's a quiz.gretchenrubin.com and you it's like 11 questions and you will get An answer and a little report that sort of tells you a kind of a quick overview of what that means and how you can put it to use.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:08

Exactly. So if you don't know what your tendency is definitely go Take the quiz and find out. I'm like you Gretchen. I'm an upholder. Kaytee, you're an obliger.

Kaytee Cobb 30:17

I'm an obliger, very much so.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:19

Right. And so knowing that is really important. So Gretchen, I wanted to see if specifically having to do with establishing this habit of reading, if you could kind of run us through what each one of the four one or two strategies that each one of the four tendencies might use to create this habit of reading in 2021.

Gretchen Rubin 30:39

Well, just to give a quick overview of the tendencies, so people know, it's whether you're an upholder, a questioner, an obliger, or a rebel. And my sister and I are also an upholder, obliger pair. It's a good pairing. Yes, it is great pairing. So what what this framework looks at is very narrow, but it's very significant, which is how you respond to expectations. And we all respond to two kinds of expectations, outer expectations, like a work deadline, and inner inner expectations. Like I want to keep a new year's resolution, and depending on how you respond to outer and inner in combination, that's what makes you an upholder questioner obliger rebel. So upholders readily meet outer and inner expectations. They meet the work deadline, they keep the new year's resolution without much fuss. They want to know what other people expect from them, but their expectations for themselves are just as important or more important. So their motto is "discipline is my freedom." So a very famous literary upholder is probably Hermione Granger. It's probably the most famous upholder. Then there are questioners. Questioners question all expectations, they'll do something if they think it makes sense. they resist anything arbitrary, ineffective, unjustified. They always need to know why they want to have rationale justifications. They love to customize, they love to research. So their motto is "I'll comply. If you convince me why." A famous literary questioner, Tyrion Lannister. Then we get to obligers. Obligers readily meet outer expectations, but they struggle to meet inner expectations. By the way, this is the largest tendency for both men and women.

Kaytee Cobb 32:13

I'm very comfortable with my obligerness.

Gretchen Rubin 32:16

yeah. So obligers, they, they will say I always am meeting my promises for other people, I don't understand why I can't keep my promises to myself. So the secret for them is if there's an inner expectation, like, I want to read more for fun, they need some form of outer accountability. That is, it's

not motivation or self care or priorities. its outer accountability, so and so their motto is "You can count on me, and I'm counting on you to count on me". So a famous obliger is George Bailey from It's a Wonderful Life. Then there are rebels, rebels resist all expectations, outer and inner, like they want to do what they want to do in their own way in their own time, they can do anything they want to do, they can do anything they choose to do. But if you ask or tell them to do something, they're very likely to resist. And typically, they don't even tell themselves what to do. And they won't do something like sign up for a spin class on Saturday at 10am. Because they think, well, I don't know what I'm going to want to do on Saturday. And just the idea that someone's going to expect me to show up is really gonna annoy me. So their motto is "You can't make me and neither can I." So, so those are the four. But if you're thinking about forming the habit of reading more, knowing your tendency can give you a lot of ideas about how to set it up.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:36

Yes, the whole key.

Gretchen Rubin 33:38

Yeah. So Meredith upholders like you and me, we tend to be if anything, we tend to be rigid. That's often a complaint about upholders. So putting something on the calendar tends to work really well. Maybe it's the same time every day, because habits were more easily when something is repeated, you know, more or less this as much the same as possible, but even just scheduling it like a dentist's appointment every day. like where's it gonna go? upholders tend to do really well with that. With questioners, questioners love customization, they love they love understanding why super requester would really be thinking hard, like, why do I want to do this? Why is this good for me? Why does this serve what I want to get out of life? How do I set this up in the way that makes sense for me? Everybody else is reading before bed, but I'm too sleepy. I find that I met my you know, I prefer I want to get up first thing in the morning and read with my morning coffee. And that's going to be the way I'm going to start the day, right? Like really going deep into how do you want to set this up for you that customization. Now obligers need outer accountability. So for an obliger joining a book group is a classic solution, right? Or maybe you challenge yourself on Goodreads to a certain number of books and you tell everybody, okay, this is my thing. I've heard of a lot of people reading the books that their children are reading at school and saying like, oh, we're all going to talk about it because now you're on the hook or saying to your children while you're reading your school books. I'm going to be reading my book and so part of it is Cuz and then and you say to your kids, and if I'm not doing my reading, you don't have to do your reading and that you know, your kids will be replacement they love that, um, you can think of your duty to be a role model to other people, you can think of your duty to your future self, oh, if I come to the end of the year, and I still never getting chance to read, I'm gonna be so disappointed with myself. There's, you can do challenges on social media, there's all different kinds of and I think even something like Read 21 in 21. For some people, just the idea, like we're all doing this, you get on my site, you can print out a page, that's like a Don't break the chain, a lot of times people feel very obliged. Some obligers don't feel accountable to something like that. But for some like just wanting to cross that off the list, if people want that, that's at gretchenrubin.com/resources. Because Don't break the chain is really helpful for some people, and they just like they don't want to miss they're getting their cross off of the day. And then rebels. Rebels, they either do it because of identity. I'm a reader, I've always been a reader, and I'm getting back to that part of my identity, or like, I'm a poet, or

I'm a historian or I love Popular Science. So I'm going to go deep into that identity, or it's just what I love, you know, it's this is what I want. Sometimes with rebels challenges work, like you think I can't read 100 books in a year, watch me, or sometimes with rebels, they kind of like feeling like they're getting away with something like, I'm at a read for a half an hour at work every day and try to stop me you know, it's kind of like feeling like you're sort of getting away with it. Or like you're sort of breaking the rules. Sometimes rebels enjoy that. So you can see how certain like joining a book club might be great for an obliher but not so good for a rebel if they feel like Well, I don't want to read the same book everybody else is telling me to read. This is gonna annoy me. Often rebels will say a few people recommend a book to highly, they don't want to read it. Yeah. So you want to know, like, if you have a child that you're trying to help to read, you maybe don't want to say, Oh, it's so good to love it. You'll love it. You'll love it. They'll be like, No, I won't. You're not the boss of me. You might just leave it out on the on the table and say, I've heard good things or you know, cool cover.

Kaytee Cobb 37:04

What about don't read this book?

Gretchen Rubin 37:07

Would that would work really well with some if you do? And we all know that. Right? There's nothing like being told, like, for mature audiences only to be like, Oh, yeah. Went right for that book. Yeah, no, or sometimes also up for a challenge could be something like, I'm not sure somebody your age would be able to understand this.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:27

Yeah, this works for my kids.

Gretchen Rubin 37:29

Yeah, yeah, you can give it a shot if you want. But I don't think you're gonna get much out of it. It's like really, you know, like that challenge?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:36

Right? Well, so I think all of those things are so helpful to know. And one of the things that Kaytee and I were talking about, as we got ready for talking with you today is that most of our audience, just because obviously, we're a book podcast, they've established that habit of reading, right, that's something that they do. But one of the things that we hear all the time and that we live in our own lives, is how to kind of help the people in your life, establish that habit, right. And you have to be very careful about how you do that. Because there you can step wrong in a lot of ways. So knowing the tendency of the person that you're trying to kind of assist in this way, is really helpful in figuring out how to do it. So if you write if you have a rebel husband, you definitely want to, you know, step very lightly, or use some of those tools that you just that you just talked about. So Kaytee, I know this is something that you had talked about, I don't know, do you think Jason's a rebel or is he a questioner?

Kaytee Cobb 38:33

For sure. And so my husband, Jason, he, he will feast or famine with regard to reading, if I get him started somehow, usually with like rebel kind of things like, oh, I've heard this is good, but I would never

ever ask you to read it. And it's the beginning of a series, he will not do anything else until he has finished that series once he's in. But, but then the rest of the time, he doesn't even care to pick up a book, you know. So it's like, I could never get him to do 21 minutes a day, because he has to have something that's drawing him in so profoundly. And so I've been thinking, you know, with a questioner that has some of those rebel tendencies. What can I do to get him to regularly say, Okay, well, I finished that one. Now I'm ready for another book. And I don't know the answer.

Gretchen Rubin 39:17

Like go into a bookstore and picking out books, like sometimes it's like, oh, let's just stop. And I mean, you know, COVID permitted. Let's go and pick us. I think nothing makes somebody want to read more than they have a book that they really are interested in. Right. And so maybe having that stack not just some not necessarily things that you've you're suggesting, but that he's himself has picked out,.

Kaytee Cobb 39:39

Right? Make sure it's just always a feast, have a buffet laying around for him.

Gretchen Rubin 39:44

I think that helps with a lot of people like and I thought I find that I read more when I have a like a giant stack from the library because you know, kind of the clock is ticking with the library. And I'm like, oh, if I want to read these I got to get going. And, and even though I love to read I still feel that. So I think I think the stack does make people read more. And also never to tell people they shouldn't read what they feel like reading, I think a lot of times people feel very judged or they or you know, a parents trying to interfere with what children reading, oh, that's trash, or you shouldn't waste your time.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:14

It's like reading is reading, reading through them. Right reading for pleasure is important. One of the habits we're trying to establish in our family in 2021, is in the evening time, when Normally, we tend to kind of settle in, maybe my husband will turn on the TV, I'm kind of usually, you know, working at this time, and Jackson will be on games, what we're trying to do is really lessen the amount of time that he's that he's on games. And so we've established, you know, we want to do 20 minutes of reading where all three of us are in the same room, but sitting quietly and reading him. And having

Gretchen Rubin 40:48

Such a pleasure. There's, there's a unique pleasure with reading in the same room with others. I also like reading by myself, but there is something so cozy about reading with other people.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:58

Yes. And what I found is that Jackson is nine, and he's a wiggly nine, right. So sitting still in a quiet room is, you know, not something that he loves. But one of the things that I found is if I put it put on an ASMR room on YouTube on the TV, so the TV isn't like just muted on CNN, which is normally what very frankly, it would be, it's an ASMR room with that kind of little bit of noise coming out of it. So the little raindrops or leaves crunching or whatever it is, it's in the background, for whatever reason, he can drop into that more concentrated state. With that in the background, and the three of us reading. So that's just been a nice combination. And we've done it for a couple weeks now it seems to be working

for us. But I have been very vocal about the fact that we are going to establish this as a habit, something we do each night, before we all kind of go our separate, you know, ways of on our different devices and such.

Gretchen Rubin 41:55

Well, I do think that one of the most like one of the very striking things about habit formation is how catching habits are for good and for bad. Like we really pick up habits from other people. So whenever we want someone else to have a habit, we should definitely exhibit that habit ourselves. And the more strongly we exhibit it, probably the more likely they are to kind of catch the wind of it. So something like this is really good, because it's everybody doing it together. So there's sort of this feeling like, this is what is happening right now, in our house. Like, this is what we're doing, you know, and then you're also modeling like, Oh, this is so good, or I don't know what to read next, or, you know, whatever. I think that's a great idea. I think 20 minutes is a perfect length of time. Because, you know, it's it's long enough to get some really like to get absorbed in a book. But if you're feeling antsy, it's not torture, if you're very fidgety.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:44

Right. And we've also been kind of keeping each other abreast of what's going on in our books. I was just reading this book about very scary murder for mermaids. And Jackson was very interested in what's happening in your book. And of course, it's a book I would never hand to him to read because it's not appropriate. But I could sort of tell him a little bit about it in a way that made him go, Well, that sounds really interesting. And then he would tell me about his book. So it's, it's been a good habit.

Kaytee Cobb 43:08

So just in case anybody was trying to madly scribble down the web addresses that Gretchen mentioned or her quiz or anything like that. All of that will be linked in show notes. You guys know, it'll all be there for you. I promise, I'm going to take good care of you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:20

Thank you for doing that, Kaytee. Okay. So as we all continue with our habit of reading most of us way more than 21 minutes a day. Let's talk a little bit about books that we want to press into readers hands. So Gretchen, as you, as you probably know, this is the section where we ask each other and then also whatever guest is with us to tell us a book that they think is just so good. They really want to put it into other readers hands. Do you have one of those today?

Gretchen Rubin 43:48

I do. And this is this is a very unusual book. And it's not the kind of book that you sit down and kind of read straight through probably you more pick and choose the parts that interests you. But it's a book called A Pattern Language by Christopher Alexander. He's kind of this. He's this architect out of California. And what he does is he looks at humans spaces, homes, workspaces, cities, and kind of parks and things like that. And identifies patterns, 253 patterns. That's why it's a pattern language. And these aren't patterns like have your dining room chandelier. 36 of inches above the dining room table or something or like this is what broke, is it? No, it's like, a staircase as stage windows overlooking life. Child cave, secret place, half wild garden, you know, sleeping to the east. And he shows all these

examples. It could be like a 14th century Japanese monastery and a 17th century Norwegian farmhouse and a 1970s Ranch House and you and you see like, Oh, they all have cascade of roofs. Or they all have you know, bench by the door and to me, it completely changed the way that I see spaces because I was like, Oh, yes, if you're in a room where it has light on two sides, you're just much more comfortable in that room. And so anyway, I felt like it was a book where he gave me a language to understand what I was seeing and what I was attracted to. And it also kind of helped me understand these patterns in like kind of humankind and the kind of places that we're attracted to, and why. But he's sort of skipped around, it's all it's very poetic, apparently was very influential in the development of like computer science language. For reasons I don't understand, but it's beautiful. The one thing about it is, is pretty expensive, because it's got so many pictures in it. So it can be pricey. But you could probably get it from a library.

Kaytee Cobb 45:42

Have you read the entire thing? Or have you only skipped around?

Gretchen Rubin 45:47

I read all the parts about houses, some of it is about like the design of cities, and like how thick your walls need to be and stuff like that. Like it's pretty technical. So I skipped that part. But I read, I've read all the parts that are about that kind of like, like office, he has these very specific, it's hilarious. You realize why people don't like open plan offices, because it's like, you should be no closer than this to another person. And you shouldn't be able to hear somebody who's doing a different kind of work from the kind of work you're doing. And you should have, you should be able to see that he has all these various specific things. And as he's describing it, you're like, Oh, my gosh, you are, you're describing the perfect office situation for me. But I skipped the parts that are that are more about like, you know, I mean, I don't think he talks about sewer lines, but it's like some of this stuff is Yeah, it's not it's not for the average lay person, but you just it's very easy to just find the parts that are interesting.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:38

All right, Kaytee, what's your press for this week?

Kaytee Cobb 46:40

Okay, this week, as our listeners know, I like to think about our deep dive in our guests when we're doing a press. So the book that I want to press this week is children's literature, because, Gretchen loves children's literature, and it takes place in New York City, which again, Gretchen here we are. So I'm going to press on the list this week, *The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street* by Karina Yan Glaser. The setup is pretty similar. The Vanderbeekers have always lived in the brownstone on 141st. Street. It's practically part of their family. This is a noisy family five kids, but their landlord upstairs who is a reclusive curmudgeon, and I love me a good curmudgeon. His name is Biederman, they call him the Biederman. He has to evict them. But their home is so unique to them. And it's part of them. So this family reminded me a little bit of *The Willoughbys* by Lois Lowry except without terrible parents, just a terrible landlord. And it just pulls you in and it's the first in a five book series. The fifth one just came out this past winter. And you just so you can pick it up. You can fall in love with this family and then there's plenty more where that came from. If you fall in love with the Vanderbeekers, there's music there's a garden on the roof. It's very evocative, very New York City. I loved it. My kids loved it. And I've been

thinking about it ever since I first read it, which was in December of 2018. So almost two and a half years ago. If you love wonderful children's literature, like all three of us do, please pick up *The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street* by Karina Yan Glaser,

Gretchen Rubin 48:23

You know, I'm in two children's literature book groups.

Kaytee Cobb 48:25

I do know that!

Gretchen Rubin 48:26

Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 48:27

Have you read this?

Gretchen Rubin 48:28

Which I highly recommend! No, but I'll suggest it to the group because we're always we always bring suggestions and we all sort of decide, yeah, so I will I will bring this one into the group. So yes, but if you're like, if you love children's literature, I think a lot of people don't realize how many adults do love children's literature and young adult literature.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:47

I have a theory about why I love children's literature. And that's because as an upholder as someone who is fairly rigid about my life and my day and the way that things need to go, I find that children's literature and middle grade novels can give me a sense of whimsy, and fun in a childlike way that I don't spend a lot of my life being able to lean into. So I feel like that's part of why I'm attracted to children's literature. It harkens me back to when I didn't have to adult all the time. It made me when it felt okay to be more interested in things that were simpler. And so it's a restful place in my reading. Now I do of course, like mysteries and thrillers. But for me, middle grade and children's literature is comfort reading. And I think that my mind sometimes needs that place of resting. So actually, I had the same idea, Kaytee, that you did when I thought about my press for today. That's not going to it's not going to surprise you. I also wanted to lean into children's literature and I was thinking of a book that actually just came to me in the last year and a half from a listener press. Actually we asked our listeners for books, they wanted to press into our hands. This was one It's become one of my favorite books of all time. And it reminds me a lot of *Secret Garden*. And *A Little Princess*. So kind of puts me in mind of those fantastic those classics from children's literature. This is *The Ordinary Princess* by M. M. Kaye.

Gretchen Rubin 50:16

So I've read something else by M. M. Kaye. That sounds familiar,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:20

right? M.M. Kaye does have a very, very long series of books that are set in many different countries. And I believe that there's some mystery elements, but it's also kind of historical. So that might be, that

might be what you're thinking of, but *The Ordinary Princess* is fantastic. So here's the setup. As a good fairy tale does, this one starts with a baby being bestowed magical gifts from fairies. So along with receiving wit, and charm and health and courage, Princess Amy receives a special fairy christening gift, she's gifted with ordinariness. Amy is from the start very unlike her six beautiful sisters, she has brown hair and freckles. She'd rather have adventures than play the harp or embroider tapestries. And she definitely does not want to become queen. And then comes the day when her royal parents try to marry her off. And so Amy does the only thing she can think to do, she runs away. And because she is so extraordinarily ordinary, she easily secured the job as the 14th assistant kitchen maid at a neighboring palace. And they're much to everyone's surprise, she meets a prince who's just as ordinary and special as she is. And they have so many ordinary and special adventures together. This book is so sweet. It's not long, but it is very, very sweet. It is very, very light. It is the perfect palate cleanser, if you've read something heavier or darker. And it's a really great, it's, I think, great for any adult reader. It's that good. But also, it's a fantastic read aloud for all of your kids because it just lends itself the short chapters and they kind of all end on a hook. It's really, really nice for a read aloud. Also, it's a great jumping off point for a lot of discussions about what it means to be special. How being pretty imperfect doesn't necessarily mean that you're happy. And really importantly, I think it talks about what real love not Prince Charming love looks like. So this is *The Ordinary Princess* by M.M. Kaye. And I love it.

Kaytee Cobb 52:36

Well, we just pressed into Gretchen's hands a couple of really great books, I feel like!

Gretchen Rubin 52:41

Yes, I've been writing my notes down. I cannot wait to head off to the bookshop or the library, depending on what I can get my hands on fastest.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:50

So I love it. All right. Well, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me. I'm Meredith at @meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 53:00

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram. Gretchen, where would you like our listeners to connect with you?

Gretchen Rubin 53:07

At @gretchenrubin on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook and then gretchenrubin.com is my website and Happier with Gretchen Rubin is my podcast.

Kaytee Cobb 53:16

Perfect.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:17

All right full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps, so you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found on our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Kaytee Cobb 53:27

Those show notes will be chock full of resources this week. Of course, you can also contact us directly at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or via email at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:37

And if you really want to help us, rate and review us on Apple podcasts, but even more importantly, become a patron, bookish friend, or shout us out on social media that makes a huge difference toward us being able to find our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 53:51

Yes, a recommendation from you to your bookish best friend is the best way to pass along your love of this podcast or Gretchen's podcast or Gretchen's books and help all of us continue to grow. Thanks for doing that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:02

Alright, until next week. Happy reading.

Gretchen Rubin 54:04

Happy reading.

Kaytee Cobb 54:05

Happy reading