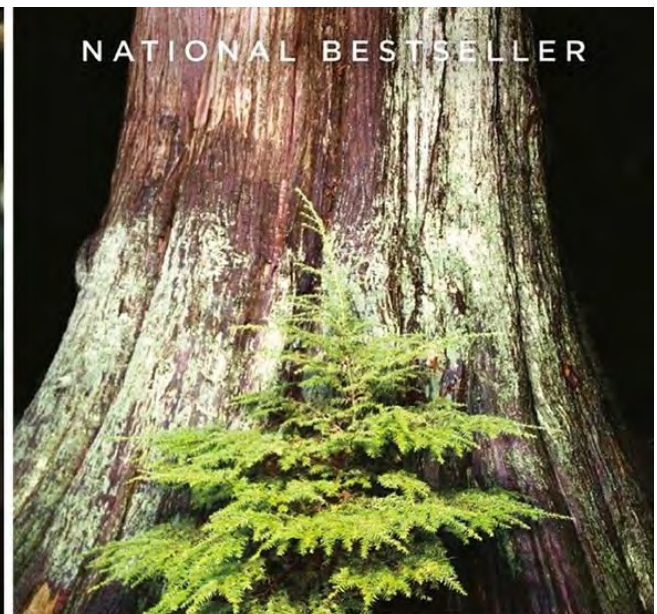


BIBLIOPHILES

Suzanne Simard, best-selling author of 'Finding the Mother Tree,' pledges advocacy for environmental protection 'until I'm dead'

The professor of ecology finds literary heroes in both the expected (Rachel Carson) and the less so (Virginia Woolf).

By **Amy Sutherland** Updated September 20, 2023, 9:00 a.m.



FINDING THE MOTHER TREE

Discovering the
Wisdom of the Forest

SUZANNE SIMARD

"Elegantly detailed . . . deeply personal. . . . A testament to Simard's skill as a science communicator." —*The New York Times*

Suzanne Simard, author of "Finding the Mother Tree." UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, FACULTY OF FORESTRY AND KNOPF

Suzanne Simard wrote “Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest” to change people’s thinking about the forest, to make readers see the hidden intelligence of the natural world. The scientist accomplished all that and became a best-selling author and a TED-talk star in the process. A professor of forest ecology at University of British Columbia, Simard will speak as part of Boston College’s Lowell Humanities Series at 7 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 27 in Gasson Hall.

BOOKS: What are you reading?

SIMARD: “The Book of Joy,” which is an interview done by my book agent, Douglas Abrams, with Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. It’s lessons for life from people who have thought about it and had tough lives themselves. I’m not that far into it but I like their tenacity and commitment to mankind. He also did a book like this with Jane Goodall, “The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times.” There are great teachings in that book about how we can’t sit back on our laurels.

BOOKS: Was there an early book that influenced you?

SIMARD: Maybe all ecologists say this, but one of the key books for me was Rachel Carson’s “Silent Spring” for so many reasons. One, we were at an environmental tipping point then with pesticides. All by herself, she rose up against these huge pesticide companies with gobs of money, and she was dying from breast cancer. That was such a contribution to humanity.

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BOOKS: Was there a book you read for inspiration for your book?

SIMARD: There are authors I love, such as Annie Proulx. I love her dramatic characters and how they fit into the land. I love her style. One of my early influential writers was Virginia Woolf. I love how she wrote these loopy, long sentences. When I write I always think of her style.

BOOKS: How much do you read fiction now?

SIMARD: Hardly any. [We] academics work so damn hard. Not that everybody else doesn't but we are constantly reading, writing, and publishing journal articles. You cannot keep up with anything, not even with your own field. Then you get burned out. Reading fiction seems like what you would do as an antidote but a lot of us scientists don't. We read popular books about other fields so that we understand them.

BOOKS: Did you feel like journal reading has ruined reading for you?

SIMARD: Yes, I loved reading and now I pick up a book and I think, "Oh God." Not all of them, like if I find a book I love, but, for the most part, I pick up a book and think of it like a journal article. I'm hoping to recover from that at some point.

BOOKS: Did you read Richard Powers's "The Overstory," which has a character that the author based on you?

SIMARD: Yes. I loved the book. He blended a couple of people to make the character of Patricia Westerford but she's largely based on me. He just watched my TED talks. He did a pretty darn good job considering he hadn't talked to me. One thing that is different about Patricia and me is that she kind of gave up at the end. So many people do give up and say I'm done, but not me. Not until I'm dead.

BOOKS: What are the other fields you read about?

SIMARD: I love to read about Indigenous people. They have a huge lesson for us, and it's crucial for moving forward on climate change. I did a series called Canada Reads last year for which I read five books, almost all of them were Indigenous authors. I read Michelle Good's "Five Little Indians," which is a novel about kids who were taken from their home in the early 1900s, put in a residential home, and let out in their mid-teens into downtown Vancouver. I read "Life in the City of Dirty Water," which is by the Canadian author and environmental activist Clayton Thomas-Muller. He grew up in this Winnipeg family that was wracked by alcoholism.

BOOKS: What will you read next?

SIMARD: Don't laugh. I've had this going for a while. Bob Joseph's "21 Things You Didn't Know About the Indian Act." I need to know that for my work, so that's next.

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