

The Story of Well-Read Mom

By Marcie Stokman, Founder and President of Well-Read Mom.

Well-Read Mom began when my daughter, a new mom at the time, called me, expressing her loneliness and desire to meet with other women in a meaningful way. I heard a cry in her voice. At that time, I was aware of how my own reading had declined, but I also realized that after years of managing a busy house of nine people, I was a happier and better woman, wife, and mother when I was reading good books. Our desires merged, and Well-Read Mom was born.

Since then, many women have joined us to read more, read well, and grow in friendship. The books they read encourage personal growth, friendship, and meaningful conversation. What started from a desire and longing of mothers to meet with other women in a meaningful, intelligent way complete with fun and friendship has turned into a cultural force that encourages women to explore the human condition and reorient themselves to what is good, beautiful, and true.

My passion for promoting reading literature has not waned over the past ten years; it has only grown. As the number of women accompanying one another in groups across the nation increases, there is the possibility of a cultural impact. When women read more, everyone reads more, spouses, friends, neighbors, and, most importantly, children. Parents who model reading at home are more likely to raise children who read, and this skill is necessary for maintaining a civil society. Dana Gioia, former head of the National Endowment for the Arts, wrote, "Reading is not a timeless, universal capability. Advanced literacy is a specific intellectual skill and social habit that depends on a great many educational, cultural, and economic factors. As more Americans lose this capability, our nation becomes less informed, active, and independent-minded. These are not the qualities that a free, innovative, or productive society can afford to lose."

Today, books from our tradition are being pushed aside for more contemporary works, or people ignore literature altogether because they think it's irrelevant. In addition to that, reading from print is falling by the wayside. It's becoming harder to garner the necessary focus and attention for sustained reading. The women who participate in Well-Read Mom believe that literature is nourishment for human development and desire to continue educating their hearts, minds, and imaginations so that they are more aware of the meaning and beauty present in their daily lives.



Authors of the NEA Reading at Risk report, "Literary reading strongly correlates to other forms of active civic participation...If one believes that active and engaged readers lead richer intellectual lives than non-readers and that a well-read citizenry is essential to a vibrant democracy, the decline of literary reading calls for serious action." The report concludes that the trends in reading among all demographic groups in America, especially the young, indicate "an imminent cultural crisis."

I believe Well-Read Mom is an attempt to respond to this cultural crisis. In his famous work *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre writes, "...for some time now we too have reached that turning point. What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us."

In our media-driven age, my conviction is that reading books is not a skill we can afford to lose; instead, we must fight to preserve this ability. Well-Read Mom is a grassroots effort to promote reading, and it is working!

Since its inception in 2012, thousands of women have read and discussed great and worthy books together. Thousands of friends, neighbors, relatives, and most importantly, children have been impacted as well. Together we can work to keep the flame of reading alive in our culture.

With gratitude,
Marcie Stokman