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## Booklover-Boston Strong

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**Samuel Johnson** (I think it was he) noted that one can learn a lot simply by reading the spines of books. Try it sometime and you will see what I think he meant. What he didn't say is that when we visit the homes or offices of friends and colleagues, we also make certain judgments by reading the spines of the books we find there. Hmm, three rows of *Reader's Digest Condensed Books*, *Happiness is a Warm Puppy*, and the *Collected Poems of Rod McKuen*. Don't hold your breath waiting for the accompanying essay and annotated bibliography and don't despair when those very titles disappear into a portable reading device that keeps them safe, out of sight, and out of mind. 🐾

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## Booklover — Boston Strong

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Sunday April 21, 2013 was a cool breezy morning. Runners in Charleston, SC were gathering at Colonial Lake for an impromptu 5k run. There was a strong need in the running community to show Boston that we stand strong and will continue to run our marathons in the wake of the bombings that had occurred at the finish line of the **Boston Marathon** on Monday. I participated in this event not only to show this strength but to remember that I had once stood at the finish line of the **Boston Marathon** cheering a friend as she finished. It was emotional and exhilarating to run this race.

I have often remarked that somehow the **Nobel Literature Laureate** books find me at the right time. The book in my queue for this column is an excellent example of this phenomenon. But before I reveal the author and book title this story has just a bit of a circuitous path.

If you have been a follower of this column from the beginning you might remember **Joy**, my British friend who lives in Eleuthera, Bahamas. I had the opportunity recently to visit and join her for the Tuesday morning gathering at the **Haynes Library** in Governor's Harbor, Eleuthera. Naturally, most of our time together was spent discussing books we had read. **Joy** reads primarily non-fiction and one of her recommendations was **Sinclair McKay's** new novel *The Secret Life of Bletchley Park: The WWII Codebreaking Centre and the Men and Women Who Worked There*. Once back home I ordered the paperback version from **Amazon** as it was not available in a Kindle edition. Soon I was immersed in a story of dedication, patriotism, and the code of silence among the men and women who broke the Enigma code used by the Germans

during World War II. **McKay** chose to tell the personal stories within this greater story from the viewpoint of many of the individuals who were recruited to work at Bletchley Park. The result is a very intimate, genuine, and detailed account of this amazing story. Sidebar: Bletchley Park was once owned by **Joy's** great uncle.

These code breakers respected their "vow" of silence and never received the recognition and fame like the generals, statesmen, and leaders from this world war. **Sir Winston Churchill**, however, is in the group of people that history remembers as a great leader and statesman from the World War II period. He served as **Prime Minister** of the United Kingdom from 1940-1945 and again from 1951-1955. A great orator, he was able to inspire his people during the very dark periods of World War II. But **Sir Churchill** also had another claim to fame — the 1953 **Nobel Prize in Literature**. His book entitled *The River War: An Historical Account of the Reconquest of the Sudan* is the current title in my queue. **Sir Churchill** was a member of the 21st Lancers serving in the Sudan and had participated in the British cavalry charge at the Battle of Omdurman in 1898. His interest in writing about war campaigns was emerging during this time and while in Sudan he wrote accounts for the *Morning Post*, a London newspaper. Wikipedia's says *The River War* ... "provides a history of the British involvement in the Sudan and the conflict between the British forces led by **Lord Kitchener** and Dervish forces led by **Khalifa Abdallahi ibn Muhammad**, heir to the self-proclaimed **Mahdi Muhammad Ahmad** who had embarked on a campaign to conquer Egypt, to drive out the

non-Muslim infidels, and make way for the second coming of the Islamic Mahdi."

And now the connection comes full circle. I have started reading this book published over one hundred years ago about Muslims, infidels, and fanaticism at the very time our country has sustained yet another assault. The book is lengthy and I have not finished it as I write. I need to take time with this one. Only from an understanding can there be peace. And I look forward to the time where understanding prevails.

Military history might be one of the last genres of books I would choose to read. But I leave you with three quotes illustrative of the Nobel Committee's description of "his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values.":

"Solitary trees, if they grow at all, grow strong; and a boy deprived of a father's care often develops, if he escapes the perils of youth, an independence and vigour of thought which may restore in after life the heavy loss of early days. It was so with **Mohammed Ahmed**.

"The moment was at hand. Then, and not till then, the third wave came — the wave of fanaticism, which, catching up and surmounting the other waves, covered all the flood with its white foam, and, bearing on with the momentum of the waters, beat in thunder against the weak house so that it fell; and great was the fall thereof."

"The movement which **Mohammed Ahmed** created did not escape the common fate of human enterprise; nor was it long before the warm generous blood of a patriotic and religious revolt congealed into the dark clot of a military empire." 🐾

