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**Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan
Announces Initial Line-Up For
First Annual
BOOKS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE FESTIVAL
January 5 – February 28, 2023**

**Featuring Chelsea Clinton; Cynthia Nixon; Emma Straub;
Stephen J. Dubner; A.J. Jacobs; Yuhua Hamasaki;
theatrical adaptation *Dot Dot Dot: A New Musical*;
Butterfly in the Sky screening; pop-up lobby library & more**

Tickets go on sale Tuesday, December 13

New York, NY (December 9, 2022) – The **Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan (MMJCCM)** announced the initial lineup today for its first annual [Books That Changed My Life Festival](#), a two-month long celebration of literature and culture, featuring events inspired by or adapted from beloved literary works, including author conversations, writers workshops, weekly storytime, a gallery exhibit, musical concerts, theatrical and film events, and more. The festival at the MMJCCM will open on Thursday, January 5 and run through February 28, 2023; tickets go on sale on Tuesday, December 13.

Books That Changed My Life is a new initiative, hosted by the JCC's Lambert Center for Arts + Ideas, that celebrates the transformational role books play in our lives. Cozy up with a book from the pop-up library in The Laurie M. Tisch Gallery and attend a conversation with notable minds on the topic of their most impactful reads. The Jewish people are often described as "people of the book," and in this interactive celebration of all types of reads, the MMJCCM will honor the ways in which storytelling, documenting, and exploring other worlds allow all of us to live more connected and meaningful lives.

"'Books That Changed My Life' started as a phrase from Arts + Ideas director Udi Urman, which inspired and encouraged me to explore the idea of how books have changed not only my life, but the lives of authors and JCC community members," shares **Jason Blitman**, Lambert Center for Arts + Ideas Program Director. "We soon learned that *everyone* was excited to talk about a book that was meaningful to them, and that idea transformed into this festival – a true celebration of powerful storytelling and the lasting impact of words. With books, you experience perspectives, and stories, and voices that are diverse with limitless possibilities; whether you read or not, whatever your age, you can find something in this festival for you."

Throughout the festival, the JCC will welcome esteemed authors for live conversations surrounding their latest book releases, including **Chelsea Clinton** in conversation with **Abigail Pogrebin**, **A.J. Jacobs** in conversation with **Stephen J. Dubner**, **Cynthia Nixon** in conversation with **Felicia Kornbluh**, and **Emma Straub** in conversation with **Vanessa Kroll Bennett**. The JCC will also rebroadcast the very first Books That Changed My Life event from earlier this year, a prelude to the festival, an intimate conversation between prolific writers **Elizabeth Gilbert** (*Eat Pray Love*, *City of Girls*) and **Maggie Smith** (*Good Bones*, *Goldenrod*).

Budding writers and book lovers will also be featured in the festival, including a virtual panel with bookstagrammers **Brett Benner** (@bretts.book.stack), **Rae Lipkin** (@a.rae.of.books), and **Amanda Spivack** (@its.amandas.bookshelf); weekly storytime in the JCC lobby every Tuesday afternoon with guest readers including Drag Queens **Yuhua Hamasaki** (*RuPaul's Drag Race*, Season 10) and **Abbi Gezunt**; a timely panel on banned books with **PEN America**; a storytelling event with **Jewish Food Society**; and much more.

The multidisciplinary festival will feature musical concerts of the classic Israeli children's story **The Sixteenth Sheep** and a live album recreation by **Michael Winograd** of the great klezmer record *Tanz*; a film screening of Tribeca Film Festival 2022 Official Selection of the documentary **Butterfly in the Sky** telling the story of the beloved PBS children's series *Reading Rainbow* and iconic host LeVar Burton; and two family-friendly theater productions in partnership with TheaterWorksUSA: the first preview production of the new musical **Dot Dot Dot** adapted from *The Dot*, *Ish*, and *Sky Color* by Peter H. Reynolds; and **Warriors Don't Cry**, inspired by Dr. Melba Pattillo Beals's Little Rock Nine memoir.

The two month long festival at the MMJCCM includes programs for all ages, including a pop-up library in the JCC Lobby. On the shelves in the lobby library, books that have changed the lives of community members will be available for guests to take home, read, and bring back to the pop-up library shelves.

Tickets to Books That Changed My Life Festival go on sale on Tuesday, December 13. Additional information is available at book-festival.mmjccm.org.

Books That Changed My Life Festival is presented in partnership with organizations across the country, including Books Are Magic, Jewish Book Council, PEN America, TheaterWorksUSA, WonderSpark Puppets, and Jewish Food Society.

Books That Changed My Life Festival is made possible thanks to The Harold Anfang Foundation and the Israel Office of Cultural Affairs, Consulate General of Israel New York. Gallery exhibits and programs are made possible with the generous support of the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund. Additional support is provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and the generosity of individual donors.

Shop the festival books with our partner, Books Are Magic, a family-owned independent bookstore in Brooklyn, committed to being a welcoming, friendly, and inclusive space for all people. Purchase books online at: booksaremagic.net/books-that-changed-my-life-fest.

BOOKS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE FESTIVAL EVENTS:

Dates and panels subject to change. Additional details to be announced at a later date.

Books That Changed My Life Pop-Up Library

Opening Night: Thu, Jan 5, 6:30-8:30 PM; on display through Feb 27

Cozy up with a book from the pop-up library in our Laurie M. Tisch Gallery. We hope to bring a bit of joy to each of you as you peruse the shelves, scan the beautiful book covers, and chat with one another about your favorite titles. The Jewish people are often described as "people of the book" and in this interactive celebration of all types of reads, we honor the ways in which storytelling, documenting, and exploring other worlds allow all of us to live more connected and meaningful lives. On the shelves, find a book that

has changed the lives of community members; take one to read, bring it back, and tell a fellow JCC-er about it.

Book Social: Bookstagrammer Panel

Mon, Jan 9, 7:00 PM

Virtual

Around the globe, book lovers have turned to social media to share their love of books in a corner of the internet known as Bookstagram. We're joined by popular #bookstagrammers from around the country in a panel discussion moderated by The Lambert Center's Jason Blitman, to talk about books that changed their lives, what brought them to social media, and to come together in a public forum beyond social media. The conversation will feature Brett Benner (@bretts.book.stack), Rae Lipkin (@a.rae.of.books), and Amanda Spivack (@its.amandas.bookshelf).

Warriors Don't Cry

Sun, Jan 15, 1 PM

After hearing *Ya Girl*, a high school student with over a million followers on Instagram, struggle to make sense of today's tumultuous world, Melba Pattillo steps out of history to share the story of her battle to integrate Little Rock Central High School in 1957. In the theatrical experience *Warriors Don't Cry*, *Ya Girl* learns to see herself in Melba—and in all the young warriors who came before her who raised their hands and made a difference.

Inspired by Dr. Melba Pattillo Beals's Little Rock Nine memoir *Warriors Don't Cry*, this production is a catalyst for deeper discussion about social responsibility, civil discourse, social media, and community engagement.

Warriors Don't Cry is co-conceived by award-winning playwright Donnetta Lavinia Grays (*Where We Stand*) and director Tamilla Woodard (associate director, *Hadestown*), featuring original music by Toshi Reagon, spoken word, and video projection. This production is a collaboration between The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts and TheaterWorksUSA. The spring 2023 tour will be directed by Adam Stevens, with Jeannine Otis as music director.

Cynthia Nixon in Conversation with Author Felicia Kornbluh, *A Woman's Life is a Human Life*

Tue, Jan 17, 7 pm

Less than a week before the 50th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, Cynthia Nixon sits down with author and historian Felicia Kornbluh to discuss *A Woman's Life Is a Human Life*. Kornbluh's book is an urgent account of the movements that transformed the politics of reproductive rights: the fight to decriminalize abortion and the campaign against sterilization abuse, at a time when sterilization was disproportionately proposed as birth control to Black, Latinx, and poor women. The book addresses how grassroots action overcame the odds—and how it might work today.

***The Year of Living Biblically* Author A.J. Jacobs in Conversation with *Freakonomics*' Stephen J. Dubner**

Thu, Jan 19, 7 pm

Freakonomics is a groundbreaking and bestselling book that changed the life of prolific author A.J. Jacobs (*The Puzler*). A.J. sits down with author, journalist, and podcast host Stephen J. Dubner in a conversation inspired by his transformative 2005 book.

***This Time Tomorrow* Author Emma Straub in Conversation with Vanessa Kroll Bennett**

Wed, Jan 25, 7 pm

After reading Emma Straub's *This Time Tomorrow*, podcast host and writer Vanessa Kroll Bennett was immediately moved to write a [blog post](#) about the book to share with her community. Join Vanessa and Emma as they talk about themes of youth and the magic of the Upper West Side in a conversation inspired by *This Time Tomorrow*.

***Butterfly in the Sky* Film Screening**

Tues, Jan 31, 7pm

(US, 2022, 87 min)

Tribeca Film Festival 2022 Official Selection

This wonderfully nostalgic look back at the beloved children's show *Reading Rainbow*, explores its origin story and the challenges its creators faced in cultivating a love of reading through television. For 25 years, the series insisted on having kids speak to kids about their favorite stories, and it introduced the world to one of the most adored television hosts of all time, LeVar Burton. Burton reached millions of children of every background through the wonder of books—delving behind the pages to the people, places, and things each story explored. *Screening followed by Q+A with Steve Horelick, composer of the iconic Reading Rainbow theme song, "Butterfly in the Sky."*

Jewish Food Society Storytelling Event

Wed, Feb 1, 7 PM

Jewish Food Society presents "The Story That Changed My Life," a live taping of their award-winning storytelling podcast, *Schmaltzy*. Hear stories from authors and luminaries, followed by a lively roundtable discussion led by *Schmaltzy* host Amanda Dell. Book signing to follow, and like at all *Schmaltzy* events, enjoy drinks and bites inspired by the stories.

***Ha'Keves haShisha Asar* in Concert**

Sun, Feb 5, 11 am

This special event will feature a concert of the classic Israeli children's story and album *Ha'Keves haShisha Asar (The Sixteenth Sheep)*. Together with host Elad Kabilio of MusicTalks, Yoav Eshed on guitar, Alon Nir on double bass, and Eviatar Slivnik on drums, this performance will celebrate the incredible 1978 collaboration of author Yonatan Gefen and composer Yoni Rechter, which created a unique piece of art that speaks volumes to children and adult alike. *Songs will be performed in Hebrew.*

Banned Books Panel with PEN America

Thu, Feb 9, 7 PM

PEN America champions the freedom to write, recognizing the power of the word to transform the world. Join PEN America's Director of Free Expression and Education Programs Jonathan Friedman, in a timely and important panel discussion with frequently banned authors and topic experts.

Chelsea Clinton in Conversation with Abigail Pogrebin

Mon, Feb 13 at 7 PM

New York Times bestselling author Chelsea Clinton's latest book, *Welcome to the Big Kids Club*, is the essential guide for kids welcoming the newest member of their family. Chelsea sits down with JCC staple Abigail Pogrebin to talk about the book, as well as Clinton's influential, bestselling, and life-changing *She Persisted* series. Tickets include a signed copy of the book.

Michael Winograd Plays Tanz: A Live Album Recreation

Thu, Feb 16, 7 PM

Join Brooklyn musician Michael Winograd and his stellar band for a performance of *Tanz*, a recreation of the 1956 album featuring clarinetists Sam Musiker and the King of Klezmer Dave Tarras. Ahead of its time, *Tanz* was a landmark recording, pushing the boundaries of Jewish music. Now celebrated as one of the greatest Klezmer records, more than six decades later, *Tanz* comes to life in this live performance and concert filming. *Presented in partnership with Aaron Bendich from Borscht Beat Records.*

Rebroadcast: *Big Magic*, Elizabeth Gilbert + Maggie Smith in Conversation

Thu, Feb 23, 7 PM

Virtual

Join us for a rebroadcast of the very first Books That Changed My Life event: an intimate conversation between prolific writers Elizabeth Gilbert (*Eat Pray Love*, *City of Girls*) and Maggie Smith (*Good Bones*, *Goldenrod*), inspired by Gilbert's bestselling book *Big Magic*, a book that changed Smith's life. The live stream of this event was recorded in April.

Dot Dot Dot: A New Musical

Based on the *Creartrilogy* series of books, *The Dot, Ish & Sky Color* by Peter H. Reynolds

Sun, Feb 26, 1 PM

Dot Dot Dot: A New Musical is based on the *Creartrilogy* trio of award-winning picture books (*Sky Color, The Dot, and Ish*) by New York Times bestselling author Peter H. Reynolds. The musical, like the series, celebrates the power of originality, self-expression, and opening our eyes to look beyond the expected.

When Marisol (from *Sky Color*), a young artist and curator of the Musee de Marisol, decides that her gallery requires more than her own art, her search for emerging talent leads her to Vashti (*The Dot*), whose dots inspire Ramon (*Ish*) to become an artist in his own right. The musical follows Marisol's journey to help her new friends, and her entire community, break free from self-criticism and learn to let their imaginations soar. Written by Keelay Gipson and Sam Salmond. Directed and choreographed by Jesca Prudencio.

Storytime in the Lobby

Every Tues at 4:30 PM

Every Tuesday at 4:30-5:15 from Jan 10 to Feb 28 will be storytime in the lobby library. Join us for special guests including: drag queen Yuhua Hamasaki, WonderSpark Puppets, JCC staff members, and more.

ABOUT THE MARLENE MEYERSON JCC MANHATTAN

Together with its community, the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan creates opportunities for people to connect, grow, and learn within an ever-changing Jewish landscape. Located on 76th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, the JCC is a vibrant non-profit community center on the Upper West Side. It also presents a robust slate of virtual programming, serving an even wider community. The JCC serves over 55,000 people annually through 1,200 programs each season that educate, inspire, and transform participants' minds, bodies, and spirits. Throughout COVID-19, the JCC has pivoted to meet the community online, exceeding 102,000 registrations to over 3,000 virtual classes and programs in the earliest part of the pandemic. Since its inception, the JCC has been committed to serving the community by offering programs, classes, and events that extend beyond neighborhood boundaries, reaching people at all stages of their lives.

Learn more at mmjccm.org

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