

The Ripple Effects of Attending Book Club

Tweety Hsiao

BEFORE YOU READ: What do we mean by the phrase “ripple effects”? What might the ripple effects of attending a book club be?

In May 2019, I joined a book club at my local library. It wasn't that I loved books, it was simply that I wanted to polish my English. Unexpectedly, the ripple effects of this decision have changed my life.

“Hi, my name is Alice, I was sitting near you during the book club. Do you remember?” Alice said.

This was the first time I met Alice. We were in the restroom of the library.

Feeling guarded, I answered quietly. “Hi. Yes, I remember you.”

“I was impressed with what you shared during class,” Alice said enthusiastically. “Do you want to have a coffee later? There is a Café upstairs.”



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Her invitation was the first ripple that I experienced after joining the book club.

Holding two master's degrees and having ten years experience in taxation, I came to the U.S. a few years ago, expecting to fly high in the sky where infinite possibilities were my companions. Unfortunately, I left my career due to circumstances beyond my control.

This transition from the sky to the ground hit me hard. Suddenly, I lost my independent wings. I was upset, lost, and trapped. Swallowed by setbacks, I cut off all connections and shut myself down. I had never imagined that depression could be so close to me.

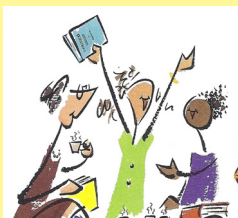
“I will wait for you outside.” Alice said, closing the restroom door.

I followed her to the Café, a hidden gem that I had never discovered. The aroma of coffee immediately brought me a sense of comfort, relaxation, and trust. We talked for an hour, and this conversation opened the door for the second ripple.

“Why don't we start our own book club?” Alice proposed.

Steps to Starting a Book Club

After you read, consider what steps you would take if you wanted to start a book club. Write down the steps. Create an invitation, either on paper or on the computer. (Actually sending the invitation is optional.) What ideas do you have about how you could hold your book club during the pandemic?



“Our own book club?” I echoed. “It sounds great.”

I swiftly took the initiative in organizing our book club—inviting people, sending reminders, choosing books, and preparing questions. The feeling was so great. I could even feel the old me! A girl who used to be confident was shouting inside my body, waiting to be released from Aladdin’s lamp. Gradually, my energy, confidence, and feeling of belonging came back. The book club was like a salvation to me.

After one week, our book club officially started. We discussed books, exchanged ideas, and shared cultures. As time went by, our book club surprised me with the third ripple—enjoyment of the taste buds.

We held our weekly meetings at the downtown library, where exotic restaurants beckoned us. So we added another ingredient to our book discussion—visiting new restaurants each week. Now we had food for our intellect, as well as food for our bodies.

Over time, we developed a close bond with each other, especially Alice and me. This was the fourth ripple—friendship. Unfortunately, Covid-19 disrupted everything.

“I am leaving,” Alice texted me in April 2020.

“What? What happened?” I asked.

“My husband was recalled by his company. Our family will have to leave in one month,” Alice explained. Her husband worked in the airline industry, and the future did not look good.

On June 17, 2020, I visited Alice for the last time to say goodbye.

Since then, Alice’s life changed dramatically. She used to be a housewife who followed her husband wherever his duty was, but Covid-19 shuffled their roles. Alice returned to school as an elementary teacher and is now the family breadwinner. Facing her husband’s extended leave from work, Alice had a lot of stress.

One day, I called her and asked, “Alice, do you want to continue our book discussion—just you and me for the time being?”

“Yes, I would love to,” she answered firmly.

“I need some distractions to help me relax.”

I scheduled a virtual meeting with her, hoping that the book club would be a salvation to her as well.

Living in this world where unexpected events are a regular visitor, everyone more or less hits rock bottom at some point. For me, I appreciated the unexpected gifts that attending book club bestowed upon me. Compared with one year ago, I’m still out of work due to not having a working permit, but I’m more content. And I have become an avid reader, which is the last ripple in this journey.



Tweety Hsiao is a student at Project Read in San Mateo, CA. She was born in Taiwan and has two master’s degrees in Taxation and Public Finance. She loves reading and writing, as she believes that reading can take her everywhere, and writing can unlock her imagination.

Ripple Effects of Starting a Book Club

The author describes many ripple effects of starting a book club. Find them in the text and underline them or highlight them.

What is an unexpected gift in your life? Describe the “ripple effects” of that unexpected gift.

