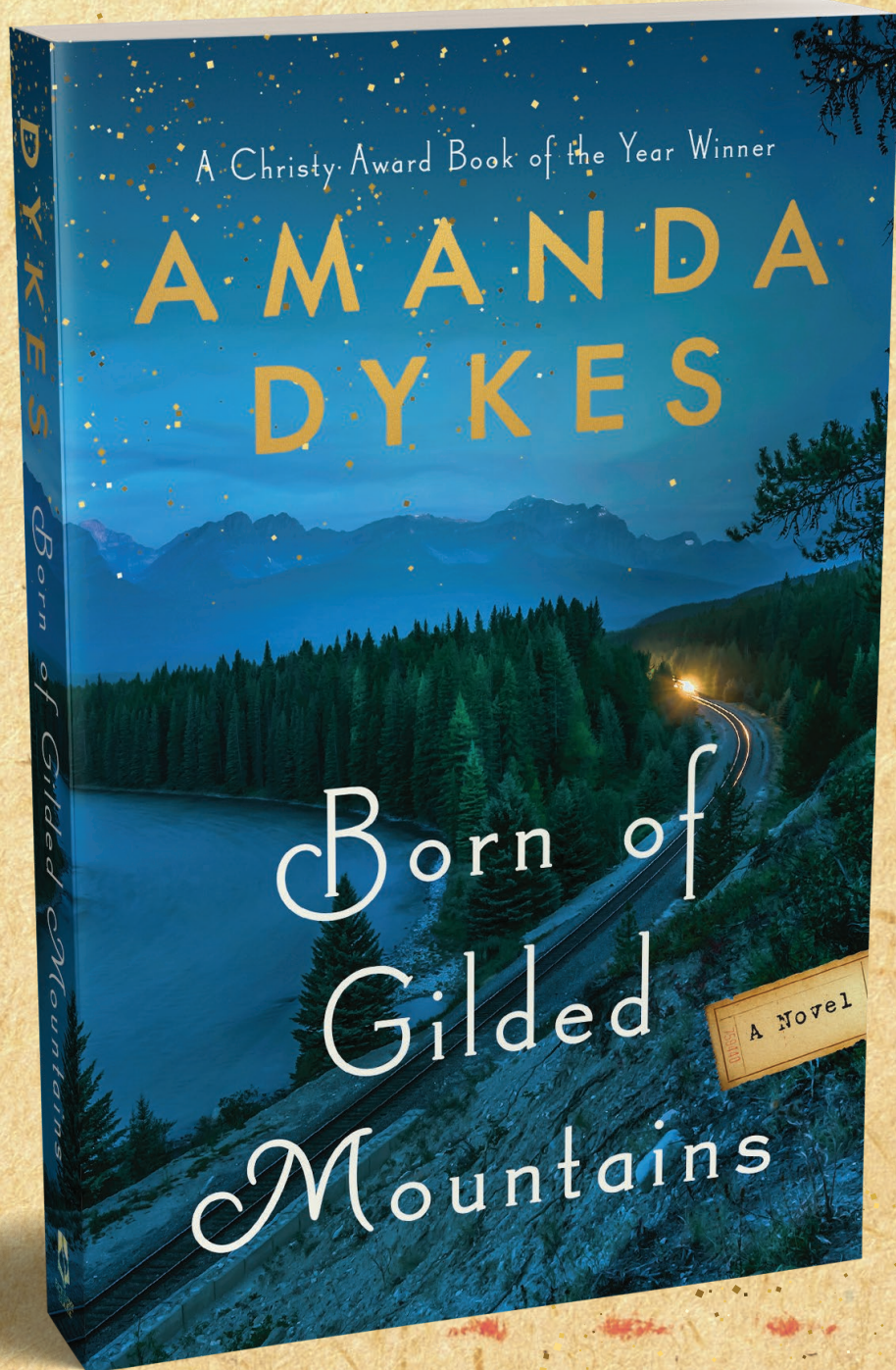


Book Club Guide



AMANDA DYKES Born of Gilded Mountains

A Christy Award Book of the Year Winner

AMANDA
DYKES

Born of
Gilded
Mountains

A Novel

Dear Book Club Leader,

It's no secret that I'm one of the world's biggest fans of book clubs. I'd expound for pages on why that is, but the truth is, you've just read (or are about to read) the very reason, in the form of this novel: community.

It's a gift Marybeth Spatts has been yearning for her whole life, until she fell into the heart of it in *Mercy Peak*, and it's a gift you offer every time you open the pages of a book and say to the members of your club, "Join us?"

For that, I say *thank you*. Not just for choosing *Born of Gilded Mountains*, though I'm deeply grateful for that. But even more, I'm giving thanks for the work you do to sow the seeds of friendship and connection through story. I believe it makes a world of difference. That page by page, heart by heart, book by book, you are making the world a place of warmth and welcome, hope, and healing.

Wishing to support that beautiful effort, my hope is that the contents of this book club guide will ease your work a little by providing you with a plethora of activities, resources, and ideas to help create a memorable book club experience, full of meaning and fun. Contents include

- Recipes
- Themed soundtrack to the book, if you'd like to play it in the background during your meeting
- Videos of the setting, including a tour of a mine
- Deleted Scene
- Discussion Questions
- On the Trail to Write this Tale (pictures from book research)
- ... and an invitation to leave the meeting with a mission

If you're open to having an extra guest, I'd love to see if our schedules coordinate in order to join you virtually (or even in person, if we're close!). Please feel free to reach out at AuthorAmandaDykes@gmail.com. It would be an honor to meet you!

With joy and thanks for you,

Amanda

Glamour and Grit

A menu that draws from the Golden Age of Hollywood and the depths of mountain life

Corn Bread Cook-Off

- 1) Invite book club participants to bring a favorite corn bread recipe, whether cooked from scratch or from a box.
- 2) Set up a corn bread buffet with everyone's corn bread and provide butter and honey for toppings. You can also serve a big pot of chili for on top of corn bread or on the side in a bowl, whatever you each prefer! Chili toppings can be included, too (sour cream, cheddar cheese, onions, corn chips, etc.).

Silas Bright's Cornbread, as transcribed by Rusty Bright:

Just make regular old corn bread, but add a smidge of nutmeg but not so much you know it's there. Doesn't make sense, but it makes a difference.

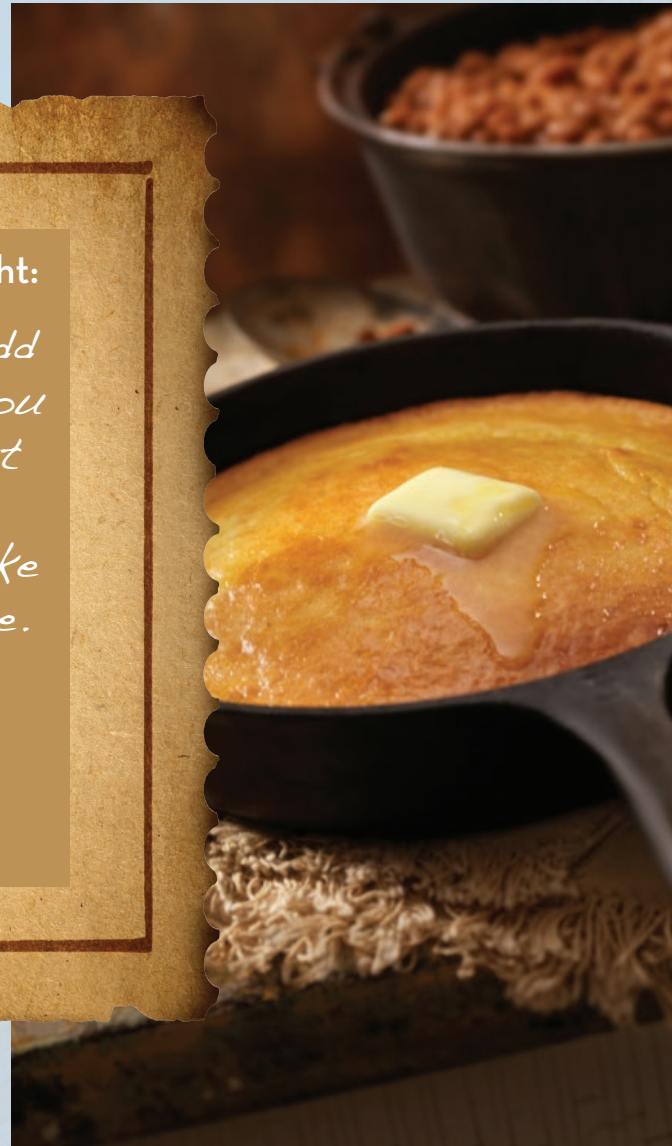
Cook in skillet until it holds together like a bread should. No pudding-like nonsense.

Spread butter on it or it's nothing.

Drizzle honey, if you want.

Done.

(Eat it while it's hot!)



Pineapple Upside-Down Cake

Ingredients:

2/3 cup brown sugar

1/2 cup unsalted butter

1 can pineapple slices

1 jar maraschino cherries

2/3 cup granulated sugar

1 cup flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

1/3 cup sour cream

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

3 teaspoons vanilla extract

1 egg (2 for extra fluffiness)

1/2 cup buttermilk



1. Pineapple layer: Pour melted butter into the bottom of a round springform cake pan. Sprinkle brown sugar evenly over butter. Arrange pineapple rings in a single layer with edges slightly overlapping. Cut pineapples as needed to fill in the outer ring near the edges. Place one cherry in the center of each pineapple.

2. Cake batter: Whisk together dry ingredients. Mix wet ingredients together, then add to dry ingredients, stirring until combined but still slightly lumpy. Pour gently into the cake pan on top of pineapples and cherries.

3. Bake on cookie sheet at 350 degrees for about 45 minutes or until set. Let cake cool completely, then invert it onto a large plate (with room for juices to drizzle down from bottom layer).

Enjoy! And watch out for Sudsy McGee and his penchant for pineapple cake . . .

Themed Soundtrack

to play as background music during book club meeting

QR code to playlist:



The screenshot shows a Spotify playlist interface. At the top, there are navigation arrows, a notification bell, and icons for social sharing and profile. The playlist title is "Born of Gilded Mountains Soundtrack" and it is described as a "Public Playlist" themed for the novel "Born of Gilded Mountains" by Amanda Dykes. The creator is listed as "Amanda Dykes" with 13 likes and 40 songs, totaling 2 hours and 19 minutes. Below the playlist header, there are playback controls: a green play button, shuffle, download, and share icons. A search bar shows "Custom order". The song list includes:

#	Title	Album	Duration
1	I Hear a Symphony Cody Fry	Flying	3:05
2	Known & Loved (feat. ... Blue Light Bandits, Joel A...	The B.L.B Demo	5:23
3	You Changed My Name	You Changed M...	3:56

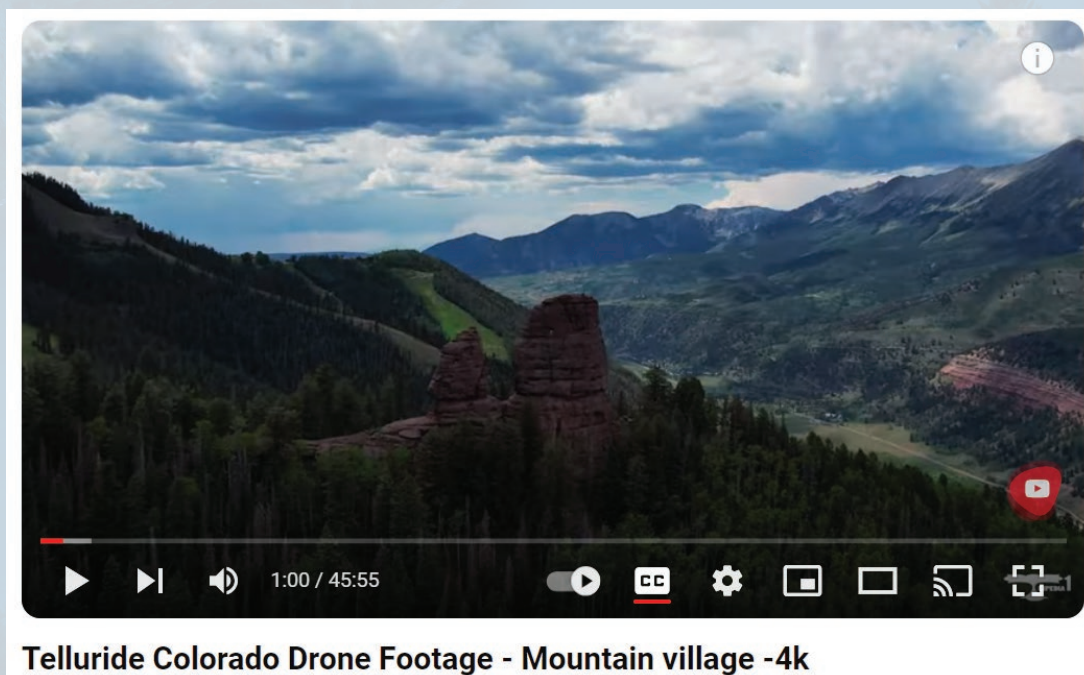
At the bottom of the screen, there are additional playback controls: shuffle, previous, play/pause, next, and repeat.

Visit Via Video

Take a virtual tour of the Bachelor Syracuse Mine in Ouray, Colorado!
This video helped inform Rusty and Mercy's scene in the mine.



Aerial footage of the San Juan Mountains. If you have access to a television during your meeting, this could be a neat thing to put on in the background on mute, for an immersive experience:



Deleted Scene

In the first draft of *Born of Gilded Mountains*, Mercy, Rusty, and Willa took a little trip to Hollywood midway through the book. I cut that part during edits because the story headed a different direction, but I'm saving it in hopes of creating a companion novella. Would you like a sneak peek? Here's the trio arriving at Mercy's Hollywood mansion . . .

"Wild horses couldn't drag me back there, Rusty."

-Marybeth Spatts, last week

RUSTY

Seagulls circled above as the bright yellow taxi with its white-and-black checkered stripe paused at a pair of gates with a gilded *For Sale* sign swinging in a gentle breeze.

"You sure this is the place, miss?" the driver said, eyeing Willa, Rusty, and Marybeth in their mountain garb, and eyeing the arching palms that flanked the white stucco pillars before them.

"This is it," Marybeth said, sounding like she was speaking of her own life-span.

They all got out, and as the taxi pulled away, Rusty let out a low whistle. "You had a gate on your street? Must be some street."

Marybeth didn't answer. Taking out a key, she inserted it into the lock and opened it for them, locking it behind them and leading the way down a brick-paved road, which, when it curved, Rusty realized was no road at all.

"This is a *driveway*?"

"Oh my," said Willa. She stopped, letting her gaze travel up the three stories of the white structure before them, with its red Spanish tiles and gleaming arched windows. "Celestial Climes," she said aloud, reading the black-iron words scripted over the door.

"Where are we?" Rusty said.

Again, Mercy didn't answer but unlocked the front door and followed them inside, closing and locking it behind them.

"Jumping jellyfish," Rusty said. It was like light fresh off the sun had stepped onto a ballroom floor with marble and quartz and they fell so madly in love with each other the whole thing just exploded into the form of a house. Or a mansion. Castle?

"You can choose any room," Marybeth said, her voice rising and falling in forced normality. But Rusty heard the thin tone of it. "They should all have fresh linens."

"Tell me you worked here. Tell me you're the one who put the linens on the beds."

Marybeth's mouth twitched. "I did put linens on the beds."

"But she didn't work here, dear," Willa said, from where she examined a wall of black-and-white photos, all in black beveled mats with gold frames. Mercy Windsor smiling, laying hands and feet in a cement star. Mercy Windsor smiling, wearing dark sunglasses, waving in a boat on the Riviera. Mercy Windsor smiling, the president kissing her hand on the steps of the White House. Mercy Windsor smiling, again and again and again.

Marybeth Spatts frowned at the pictures. "I . . . didn't put these up myself," she said.

"Pinnacle put on many events here, and they wanted things a certain way."

"Events," Rusty said skeptically.

Deleted Scene

Marybeth raised a shoulder and let it drop. “Dinners. Galas. Soirees.” She shuffled her foot. “The usual.”

Rusty narrowed her eyes, then took off, dashing to see what sort of place was host to “the usual.”

There was a sweeping banister she wanted to ride down. There was a projection room with red velvet seats, like a fancy theatre. There were vaulted ceilings so high they were like a second sky. There was an indoor waterfall, for Pete’s sake. There was a fireplace you could see from two sides, with tiled hearth and lines so clean they could slice the air. There was a kitchen so big it must’ve fed an army at some point, with three ovens and two refrigerators. Outside, there was a patch of trees with plump oranges hanging from their branches.

“You have your own orchard?” Rusty gawked. “Well, I guess you have your own forest back on the mountain. That’s not too different.”

Still . . . Rusty pictured Marybeth’s humble camp at the boathouse. Her simple bedroll beneath the stars. Her campfire, built by hand with rocks she’d circled up herself. The way she kept her food cool in a glass jar with a lid, nestled into the shores of the lake.

“Far cry from your camp back home,” Rusty muttered.

Marybeth smiled. “That was an upgrade.”

The women settled in, and Marybeth pulled out a box of crackers and a jar of peanut butter from the back of a high cabinet. She brought three plates out to the poolside, and they dipped their feet in while they dined.

“I hid these,” she confided, picking up the peanut butter and cracker to pass around. “Wilson P. Wilson would not have stood for me consuming food like this regularly.” Her eyes danced as she laughed, but these snippets of what life had been like here . . . Rusty’s perception of her as the coddled queen of the silver screen was beginning to crack.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Rusty and Marybeth's friendship was one for the ages . . . and yet for nearly twenty years, they'd never met face to face. What is it about letters that offers the chance to bind people together? Have you ever had a special pen pal or received a piece of mail that held great importance to you?
- 2) For years, Rusty chose "the frigid grip of isolation" over the "sea of community, compassion, currents she knew were kind." Why is it sometimes tempting for us to choose isolation over community? Has there ever been a time when community surprised you in a good way?
- 3) What are Marybeth and Rusty's main personality differences? How did those complement or challenge their friendship? Have you experienced a friendship or relationship where a different personality proved to be a gift?
- 4) Consider the things Mercy lends her voice to—or doesn't lend her voice to—throughout the book: scripts, lullabies, warnings to her father and to Wilson P. Wilson. How does her use of voice grow or change throughout the story?
- 5) Would you rather live in Rusty's cabin, Mercy's Celestial Climes, or Wildwood Estate? What about camping in the boathouse or running the traveling book boat/wagon?

Discussion Questions

6) If you had to dine tonight on a Classic Hollywood menu (Cobb salad, pineapple cake, crème brûlée, salmon puffs, caviar, etc.) or a Mercy Peak menu (chili and corn bread, biscuits and gravy, Boston brown bread, blueberry pie), which would it be? What would you add to your chosen feast?

7) There are some elements tucked into the book that serve as “echoes” of one another. Pinnacle Studios has the initials *P. S.*, for example, which is an important component of letters to Marybeth. Can you think of any others?

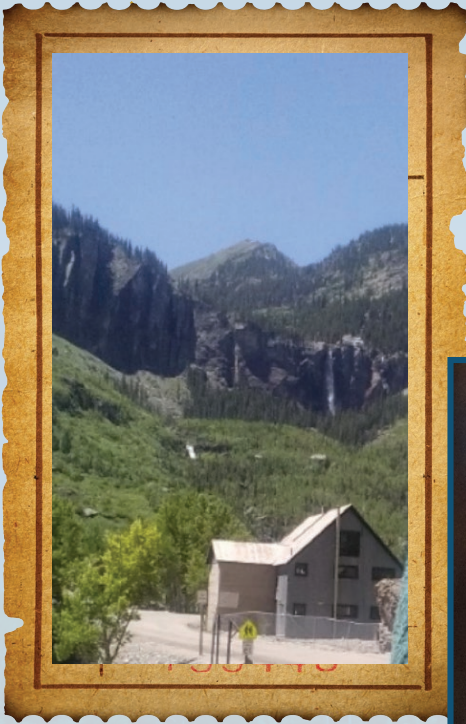
8) While watching “the burst,” Miss Ellen says, “When the mountain cracked open, it seemed like our hearts did, too, even wider—but then we saw what it made way for. . . . It’s a daily reminder that light will break into our darkness.” Can you think of other examples, personally or in history or other stories, when something broken has been redeemed into a place of light?

9) Joel 2:25 (ESV) says, “I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten.” In *Mercy Peak*, Marybeth experienced the unexpected fulfillment of dreams she had long given up on (a lullaby just for her, being rocked to sleep, finding a family who cherished her). How did other characters experience the theme of restoration in their own lives? Can you think of a time when God pursued you with a long-held dream but in an entirely different form than what you’d imagined?

10) At the end of the book, we learn that a movie (in the fictional world) is in the works! Who would *you* cast to play the characters of this book?

On the Trail to Write this Tale

Pictures from Research

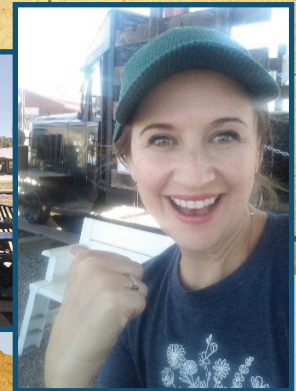


Once upon June of 2022 (yes, that means this book was in the works for over two years), my family and I drove all night and half the next day to get to the San Juans, where we found . . .

Notice the waterfall spilling down the mountain in Telluride. That's Brida Veil Falls, inspiration for the falls behind Wildwood.



Galloping Goose No. 1 in Ridgway, Colorado.



A year later, I drove across L.A. in over 100-degree weather to find Galloping Goose Number 3.

759440

On the Trail to Write this Tale

Pictures from Research



And a month or so after that, I headed out to write a scene about a movie star in a mine. I took a detour to go take a tour of a mine (I live near some historic mines). And who did I end up in that mine with, of all the people on the planet and by sheer coincidence? A movie star! I kid you not. I'll tell you the story sometime....



Down in the belly of the earth



Poking around a trainyard



Mercy's Mission

An Invitation

*As you close the pages of this book together, may
I invite you to take part in a special mission?*

*Mercy spent her whole life searching for belonging for her heart. This week,
will you be on the lookout for someone who could use a listening ear, a friendly
gesture, a reminder that they're thought of and valued and loved?*

*One moment at a time, I believe we can extend Jesus' heart to those around us
through acts that may seem small to us but may mean the world
to someone else. What do you think?*

Shall we change the world together?