

This week's column is by Kirkland Town Library staff person, Amy James.

Like my father, I love a book that prompts me to go to my Atlas and find the exact spot where I'll be spending the next while. There's something about situating myself on the earth as I read that I find supremely satisfying, even if I can't physically go there now...or maybe ever. Since March, I've increasingly found myself longing to get past the boundaries of the tiny radius in which I have been existing. Books can help us be distant from others while at the same time traveling long distances.

In *The Outrun*, a memoir by Amy Liptrot, the author leaves her chaotic, alcohol fueled life in London - a place she'd long idealized - to return to her childhood home in the Orkney Islands off the northeastern coast of Scotland. As she sinks back into the natural world, she begins to rediscover the rhythms of life that shaped her as she examines her past from a new perspective - that of an adult who has "failed" at her dream, and needs a new one. Her journey takes her further afield in the archipelago to more remote, tiny islands; one winter she weaves herself into the fabric of the community on one of these. Along the way, she examines rare birds, quirky characters, ancient sites, towering sandstone cliffs, and the parts of herself she'd feared she'd lost.

Turning to fiction, novelist Kristin Hannah's "The Great Alone" takes us to a remote area of Alaska, where Leni Allbright and her family resettle seeking a new beginning as homesteaders. The rugged landscape is the backdrop for Leni's coming of age in her dysfunctional family - her father suffering from PTSD, her mother a victim of domestic violence. But in spite of the sometimes difficult subject matter, it's not all doom and gloom; Leni revels in her new surroundings, learns to be self-sufficient, makes lifelong friends, and is changed forever not only by her personal trials but by her experience of the stunning, unspoiled, and sometimes cruel natural world. She must learn to survive both. I took countless steps listening to Hannah's engrossing and well-told story.

Nathaniel Philbrick's *Revenge of the Whale* is a travel story that may make us happy to be at home rather than embarking on a multi-year whaling voyage with rudimentary navigational equipment and the possibility of ending up adrift in a vast, unforgiving ocean for months at a go. Based on Philbrick's award-winning book, *In the Heart of the Sea*, this slimmer volume draws on first hand accounts from the young cabin boy, the first mate, and other sailors on board The Essex, and can be at once gripping and grisly. Our journey is from early 19th century Nantucket Island, south around Cape Horn and up into the boundless, nearly unbroken Pacific. The book also provides a window into the social order of the time, touching on unsurprising racial inequities and the Nantucketers' suspicion of "off-islanders." It also takes us on a deep dive into the brutality of the whaling industry with most ships owned by - in a more surprising turn - wealthy Quakers.

This is a perfect juncture to explore place and its impact on us - how it can heal, challenge, help us time travel to a different chapter of our lives. Both *The Great Alone* and *The Outrun* are available in book form at the KTL, now accessible with curbside service. *The Great Alone* is also

available as a book or audiobook through Libbie. Revenge of the Whale is available only as an audiobook through Hoopla. Travel on, and stay safe!