

Morsels of the Mind Book Group

Date: May 16, 2002

Book Title: Pope Joan by Donna Woolfolk Cross

Hostess: Sandy Oato

Food served: salami, fontina and provolone cheeses, Italian breadsticks and crackers, cannoli, pizelles that look like rose windows, and biscotte

Book Synopsis: In the 9th century, a very intelligent woman named Joan assumed her slain brother's identity and rose in the Catholic church to become Pope John Anglicus. After the 1600s, the church distanced itself from her and destroyed all documentation. Pope Joan's existence is now considered a legend.

Review: Cross wrote a believable story about Joan's life. She drew us in right from the beginning, and we appreciated her skilled use of much research about times in the Dark Ages. Almost everyone highly enjoyed the book and were sorry to come to the end of it. (Amazon.com - 4.5 stars based on 141 reviews.)

Highlights of Discussion: Group members expressed outrage at the way Joan's father and some other male characters treated women in that historical period. Everyone loved Gerold, her lover. The group learned new vocabulary introduced in the book. (Saracens- nomadic people from the lands between Syria and Arabia; the Franks - West Germanic people who entered Rome in 253 A.D. and occupied the Netherlands, most of Gaul, or France, and lived along the Rhine.) We wished we knew Latin, including words associated with the Catholic church. Some of us also would have like a map of that peiod.

Attendance: Nancy Dausman, Ginny Stuart, Laura Lewakowski, Nancy McQuate, Anne Starke, Mary Grant, Anne Hill, Nancy Schellenberg, and Sandy Oato

Suggestions/Business: Next month's book selection - Driving Mr. Albert by Michael Paterniti at Nancy McQuate's. Bring suggested titles for next year's list.