Our third meeting at Spezia (1/14/15) was smoother than the last. Some intervention by Terry Haney, Chris Behr and his Selection Committee accounted for the changes. Our new waiter, Jordan, was extremely courteous and efficient. Suggested tips were included with individual bills. Our March and May meetings will be in the larger room where we first began.

Karen Shoemaker was our eloquent writer guest on hand to discuss **THE MEANING OF NAMES**. The questions and praises began flying early. “Yes, this became the story of my Mom’s birth. It was a miracle, since 80% of pregnant women with influenza died in childbirth, along with their babies. My grandmother’s German name was Gertrude, but I changed it to Gerda, so I could better relate to her as an imaginary character.” In clear and vivid language, Ms. Shoemaker relived the novel and her writing process before our avid group of readers. Someone questioned whether the Vogel baby (her mother) was actually rejected by several families to which the priest offered her for shelter. Ms. Shoemaker replied, “Yes, picture yourself presented with a baby that came from a family tainted with Ebola. Would you take that baby into your home?”

The combination of the 1918 influenza pandemic and the cruel personnel losses of the First World War were heavy burdens faced by the characters in the book. On top of those harsh realities, the numerous German immigrants also had to confront intense local anti-German attitudes that paralleled the war efforts abroad.

Our readers were so taken with the vivid portrayal of farm life, including the body language and feelings of the characters that the question became “Did you grow up on a farm?” Ms. Shoemaker said no, she grew up in O’Neil, but visited her
grandmother’s farm often, and fell in love with horses and the farm life and surroundings.

In research, that took ten years and resulted in a two-foot high pile of drafts, she learned that her lonely characters were unable to share intimacies and genuine conversation about their relationships. She hopes that her book awakens her readers to the need for openness as a way to share and lighten mutual burdens.

Volunteers serving on our selection committee: Sue Matson, Lee Myers and David Clements, along with facilitator Chris Behr, presented the book recommendations below:

**Bill Bryson, ONE SUMMER, 1927**

**Doris Kearns Goodwin: THE BULLY PULPIT**

David and Sue advocated for each book on the basis of having read both titles in advance. It was agreed to discuss the first of these at our next meeting on March 4th and the second one at the next meeting on May 6.

Both titles are in paperback editions and will be available at the Book Worm. Visit them in their new location in the Loveland Center on 90th St. and West Center Road. Ask Beth Black for your 20% discount offered to members of the Bibliophiles Book Club.

Bob Runyon, reporter
rrunyon@unomaha.edu
402-393-3320