In a departure from previous practice, we chose two books for discussion at our Feb. 3 meeting. These were **THE KITE RUNNER** and **A THOUSANDS SPLENDID SUNS** by Khalid Hosseini. It was decided that both books might be addressed since some members had already read one.

Also invited as a special guest was Thomas Gouttierre, dean of International Studies at UNO and UNMC. Since Tom knew and worked with Hosseini on the film of the Kite Runner, I thought he could enrich our book discussion with background information on the author and the conditions of life in Afghanistan.

Tom related during his first years in Afghanistan (1964-70) as a Peace Corps volunteer, and later as a program director for UNO’s Center for Afghanistan Studies, he came to know and appreciate the same peaceful and harmonious society in Kabul as reported in the early pages of The Kite Runner. At this time, women moved about freely, typically wore western garb, and were widely employed as teachers, doctors and other professionals throughout the capital.

The Russian invasion in 1979 led in the following decade of war to the killing and oppression of Afghanistan’s democratic, civilian leadership and its professional class, as well as to the utter destruction of the country’s infrastructure. Millions of citizens fleeing the chaos became destitute refugees in Pakistan and other countries. This is the background history of the notable events chronicled in the tragic personal and family stories of Hosseini’s two engaging novels. The first provides insight into these changes from the viewpoint of a young boy and maturing adult; the second book focuses on the subjugation and cruelties experienced by women of all ages when the traditional Afghan norms and values were eviscerated as the Taliban came to power.

For our next selection, we will read **Thomas Friedman’s HOT, FLAT & CROWDED**: Why We Need a Green Revolution – And How it Can Renew America (Release 2 – updated and expanded, 2009). The book can be purchased by Bibliophiles at 20% discount at the Bookworm in Countryside Village. Plans are being made to meet next at the Venice Inn on Wednesday, April 7th at 11:30. We look forward to seeing you there. Your reporter welcomes questions and comments (rrunyon@unomaha.edu; 393-3320)