

# Inspiring women, finding their own inspiration

A variety of titles give these women insight and encouragement

By TERRA OSTERLING

**L**ynne Maquat grew up learning that girls should not stand out. The J. Lowell Orbison endowed chair and professor of URMC's Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics finds the inspiration to transcend that oppression, which can continue into adulthood for many women, in books.

"Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype," by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, is a constant on her reading list of books that inspire and empower.

"These stories about courage and the true nature of women teaches us that we can be very powerful and can make a difference in very constructive and nurturing ways, whether in a family or professional context," says Maquat, who is also the director of the Center for RNA Biology and chairwoman of the University of Rochester Graduate Women in Science.

The 2014 Athena Award recipient turns to this book and another for the inspiration to find strength and answers in herself to do the hard work that she embraces.

The lessons in "When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times," by the American Buddhist nun Pema Chödron, are always relevant, beautiful and grounding, says Maquat,



Photo by Kimberly Simpson

**Lesli Myers, superintendent of schools for the Brockport Central School District, was inspired to follow her current career path after reading Ben Carson M.D.'s autobiography.**

herself a practicing Buddhist.

"I appreciate the message of checking our motivation so that we react with love, kindness and compassion in times

of difficulty—when it is hardest to do that," says Maquat.

For Maquat and three other local women who are leaders in their profes-

sional communities, the answer to the question "What do inspiring women read for inspiration?" is similar: They

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ATHENA AWARD

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Simon Business School congratulates Elizabeth Schirmer-Shores, Kate Washington, and all the exceptional women who are finalists for the 2017 ATHENA Award.

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Bloomberg Businessweek, 2015

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to my fellow finalists  
for the  
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*It is an honor to be in  
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Nannette Nocon

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find stories that unlock the truth inside themselves to discover the strength, endurance and creativity that, in turn, inspires others.

Like Maquat, Lesli Myers, superintendent of schools for the Brockport Central School District, also finds that books can lead to fruitful introspection.

How Myers, a 2016 Athena Award finalist, decided to become an educator was inspired by the story of a doctor. She was unsure about her career path when she read Ben Carson M.D.'s autobiography, "Gifted Hands," during a plane ride home after a college graduation trip.

"When I set the book down, I was in tears," she says. "My grandmother encouraged me to put God first in my life, so as a person of faith, I asked God, 'What do you want me to do?'"

Myers thought about what she was good at, and mediating neighborhood arguments as a child came to mind.

"It clicked that I could continue on to study psychology. If I had not read that book at that moment, I would not be where I sit today as superintendent of schools," she says.

Discovering her purpose, for herself

and for serving others, is an inspiring theme that overlaps for Myers in the children's book "The Giving Tree," by Shel Silverstein.

She says the unselfishness of the title character, the tree, stays with her: "The tree gives until everything is gone and the boy, now an old man, can only sit on the stump. There is some controversy over whether this is a positive or negative relationship, but I look at the positive aspect. Because, at the end, they still have a relationship."

The story so inspires Myers that she frequently reads it aloud in elementary school classrooms. It gives her hope, she says, that as a leader she will continue to have an impact on children, families and staff.

Sharing inspirational reading is also a tradition for Michelle Ashby, founder and CEO of Tipping Point Communications. Every new person joining the company is invited to read "The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference," by Malcolm Gladwell. The book continually inspires Ashby in how she runs her own business and in how Tipping Point serves clients.

"In the end, the business is about finding that unique spark in a company and

helping the brand or product to catch fire. Our everyday inspiration at Tipping Point is to do that for our clients—and do it for ourselves," she says.

Two more books that Ashby turns to many times every year are "Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't," by James Collins, and "The Great Game of Business," by Jack Stack. Although these books focus on manufacturing examples, each, says Ashby, offer rock-solid concepts for leading a business.

**A hard but inspiring book, says Deborah Hughes, is "A Fine Balance," by Rohinton Mistry. Set in India, it portrays the story of two people living in the untouchable class.**

"Depending on what is going on in the business, I can open these books, find the key themes and modify them to be more current, hip and applicable to a marketing communications company," she says. "These books are more than an inspiration; they are really a reference tool for me."

Ashby also looks for daily inspiration on Twitter, where she finds a leadership community in following Fast Company and the Harvard Business Review.

"On Twitter, I can tap into what other people in business are doing to create an interesting office culture as I'm always looking for inspiration for how I can be a better leader for my teams," she says.

For Deborah Hughes, president and

CEO of the National Susan B. Anthony Museum & House, reading historical novels is that path to learning truths about herself. Especially, she says, when the story is a difficult read, making it powerfully transformative for her.

"The Invention of Wings," by Sue Monk Kidd, is one such novel.

"This book is about the incredible human capacity to endure, and even thrive, in horrific circumstances," says Hughes, a 2016 Athena Award finalist.

Slavery and women's issues are central themes in a plot that features Hetty, an enslaved woman, and Sarah and Angelina Grimké, real-life 19th-century South Carolina abolitionist sisters.

"The story deals honestly with racism and bigotry, but does it in a way that you can stay with the text, and at the end of the book you are changed," she says.

A similarly hard but inspiring book, says Hughes, is "A Fine Balance," by Rohinton Mistry. Set in India, it portrays the story of two people living in the untouchable class.

"Their world and struggles are both universal and entirely different from my own, and at the end of the book I had a better understanding of the hope and despair of others living in another corner of the world," Hughes says.

The book specifically reminds Hughes of what she experienced and learned about people while participating in relief efforts after Hurricane Katrina.

"That incredible resilience and joy amid horrific destruction and loss—it is inspiring for me to see the human character at its finest and most beautiful," she says.

*Terra Osterling is a Rochester-area freelance writer.*

## Past Athena Recipients

**2016: Elaine Spaull**  
Center for Youth

**2015: Amy Tait**  
Broadstone Real Estate LLC

**2014: Lynn Maquat**  
University of Rochester Medical Center

**2013: Anne Kress**  
Monroe Community College

**2012: Judith Ford**  
**Baumhauer M.D.**  
University of Rochester Medical Center

**2011: Kitty Van Bortel**  
Van Bortel Ford, Van Bortel Subaru  
and Van Bortel Used Car Center

**2010: Jennifer Leonard**  
Rochester Area Community Foundation

**2009: Holly Hillberg**  
Johnson & Johnson

**2008: Ruth Lawrence M.D.**  
University of Rochester Medical Center

**2007: Patricia Malgieri**  
Then with the city of Rochester

**2006: Jean Howard**  
G.J. Howard Consulting

**2005: Carolyn Portanova**  
Then at Catholic Family Center

**2004: Elizabeth McAnarney M.D.**  
Golisano Children's Hospital at Strong

**2003: Ursula Burns**  
Xerox Corp.

**2002: Sandra Parker**  
Rochester Business Alliance Inc.

**2001: The late Katherine Keough**  
St. John Fisher College

**2000: Sue Stewart**  
University of Rochester, retired

**1999: Betsy Harrison**  
Genesee Country Village  
& Museum, retired

**1998: Susan McLaughlin**  
Then at Eastman Kodak Co.

**1997: Linda Becker**  
Healthcare Benefits Network

**1996: Kathleen Whelehan**  
Upstate National Bank

**1995: Bernice Skirboll**  
Compeer Inc., retired

**1994: Barbara Kelley**  
Bausch & Lomb Inc., retired

**1993: Karen Noble Hanson**  
Episcopal Diocese of Rochester

**1992: Katherine Hudson**  
Then at Eastman Kodak Co.

**1991: Mary-Frances Winters**  
The Winters Group

**1990: Louise Woerner**  
HCR Home Care

**1989: Chris Pulley**  
Evelyn Brandon Health Center

**1988: Rose Marie Beston**  
Nazareth College of Rochester, retired

**1987: The late Judith Schwan**  
Eastman Kodak Co.

## Past Athena Young Professional Award Recipients

**2016: Melanie Wolk**  
Trevett Cristo Salzer & Andolina P.C.

**2015: Claudia Burke**  
Trillium Health

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### 2017 Athena Finalists



**Deborah Stamps '98**  
Rochester Regional Health



**Mary Zelazny '88**  
Finger Lakes  
Community Health



**Flor Colon**  
Former Brockport  
Foundation Board Member  
Xerox Corp.

### 2017 Athena Young Professional Finalists



**Tokeya Graham '05**  
MCC Damon  
City Center



**LaShunda  
Leslie-Smith '06**  
Connected  
Communities



**Kate Michaels**  
Northwestern  
Mutual



**Tiffany Paine-  
Cirrincione '01**  
University of Rochester  
Wilmot Cancer Center

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