

# Book Club Companion: Celebrating Harris

## Plan your Book Club meeting

Stephanie Wittels Wachs's *Everything Is Horrible and Wonderful* is dedicated to her brother, Harris Wittels, a star in the comedy world known for his work on shows like *Parks and Recreation*, who died at just age 30 of a heroin overdose. While neither Stephanie, nor the 126 American and Canadian families every day who lose a member to heroin, can make sense of such tragedy, we can remember those lost too soon and honor their memory with the joys they brought to our lives. Harris brought joy not only to his family, but to the world. His comedy career was legendary, and he contributed to our collective laughter in a myriad of ways.

In your book club meeting, following your discussions around grief and addiction, we invite you to lighten the mood with these complementary titles available on hoopla. This collection, created in memory of Harris, features not only his own book—*Humblebrag: The Art of False Modesty*—but movies, albums, audiobooks, and more by those Harris admired, adored, and worked right alongside. Planning a menu? Harris's (sometimes wonderful, sometimes unapologetically horrible) favorite dishes are discussed in the book, and if food is part of your book club meeting, we encourage you to enjoy some fun, not-so-gourmet snacks from hoopla cookbooks while you discuss *Everything Is Horrible and Wonderful*.



## Did you know?

### A Note on the Title of our Spotlight Selection

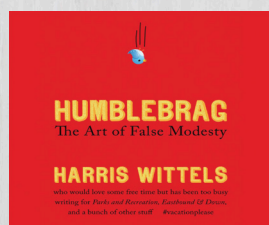
Harris Wittels not only inspired his sister's book, but the title. *Everything Is Horrible and Wonderful* is derived from a tweet from Harris's —@twittels— much adored Twitter account. In Stephanie's book, she says of the quote...

"That was my favorite thing you ever said. That is my favorite thing anyone has ever said. And it was exactly you — horrible and wonderful and everything in between."



## Perfecting the art of the #humblebrag

Have you used the #humblebrag? #humblebrag is one of the Internet's most storied phenomena, going so far as to be recorded in none other than THE DICTIONARY (with the likes of catfish, YOLO, and hot mess) and originated by none other than Harris Wittels himself.



In 2010, Harris jokingly made a Twitter handle devoted to braggarts who publicly call out, yet somehow downplay, major achievements. Suspicious, eh? Harris surmised they were quite conscious of what they were doing, and absolutely attention seeking. Its trajectory went so far that Harris committed it to a book; the audiobook, *Humblebrag: The Art of False Modesty*, is available on hoopla!

Looking for something fun to do with your book club? Take turns crafting your own fictional (or not!) humblebrag. If your book club is online, we'd love to see what you've got—just #humblebrag and #hooplabookclub too!





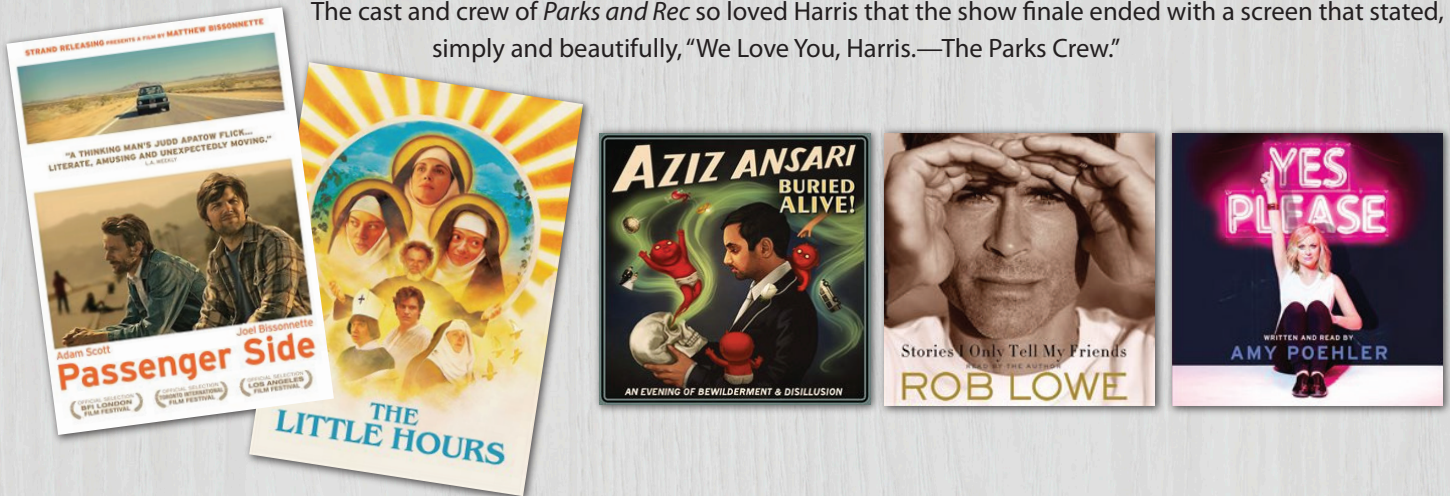
# Humblebrag

(n.) a statement intended as a boast or brag but disguised by a humble apology, complaint, etc.

## Recreation from the cast of *Parks and Recreation*

Got a little down time? Enjoy comedic genius brought to you by the cast of *Parks and Recreation*: co-workers and friends of Harris, who worked on the show as a writer, producer, and every now and then as “Harris the Animal Control Guy” —Phish t-shirt and all!

The cast and crew of *Parks and Rec* so loved Harris that the show finale ended with a screen that stated, simply and beautifully, “We Love You, Harris.—The Parks Crew.”



## Climbing the Comedy Ladder

While showbiz careers certainly are helped along by luck, Harris did work quite hard at his craft and approached comedy from all angles—from open mics to internships, podcasts to writer’s rooms, and—of course—endless hours on the ever-merciless stand-up stage. As Stephanie explains...

“My brother, three years and three months my junior, was the success story every Jewish mother ached to brag about at her weekly mah-jongg game: a Hollywood wonder-kid who landed his first professional TV writing job on *The Sarah Silverman Program* at twenty-two years old—only six months out of college after she saw him doing stand-up in L.A. Although unusual—the stuff that myths are made of, really—it wasn’t all that shocking. If anyone could fit into this dream scenario, it was Harris. His career trajectory seemed preordained.”

Before the Silverman gig, Harris scored a spot on UCB’s Comedy Death-Ray and worked alongside not only Sarah, but Doug Benson, Paul F. Tompkins, Tig Notaro, and more. In Stephanie’s book, according to Scott Aukerman (Comedy Death-Ray host), “...Harris killed. At twenty-two, on a line-up like that, he made his mark.”





## Further Discussion

It is impossible to honor Harris without honoring his enthusiastic (and persistent) love for the band Phish.

A quick search of the *Everything Is Horrible and Wonderful* eBook for the word “Phish” turns up a whopping 33 results, sometimes as many as four to a page and rarely with more than five pages in between. Harris loved Phish so much that, even though Stephanie did not, she was compelled to name the band over 30 times in just over 250 pages. Incredible.

### About Harris’s love for Phish, some excerpts from Stephanie...

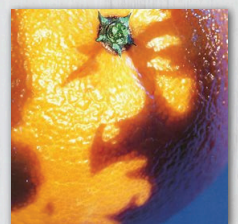
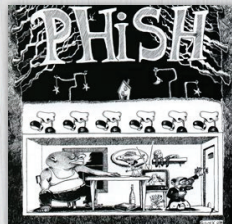
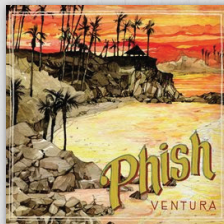
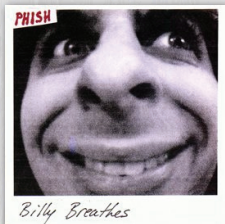
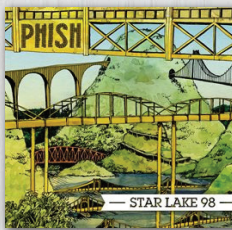
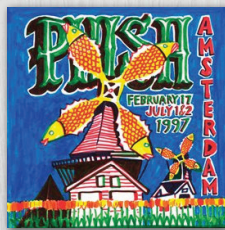
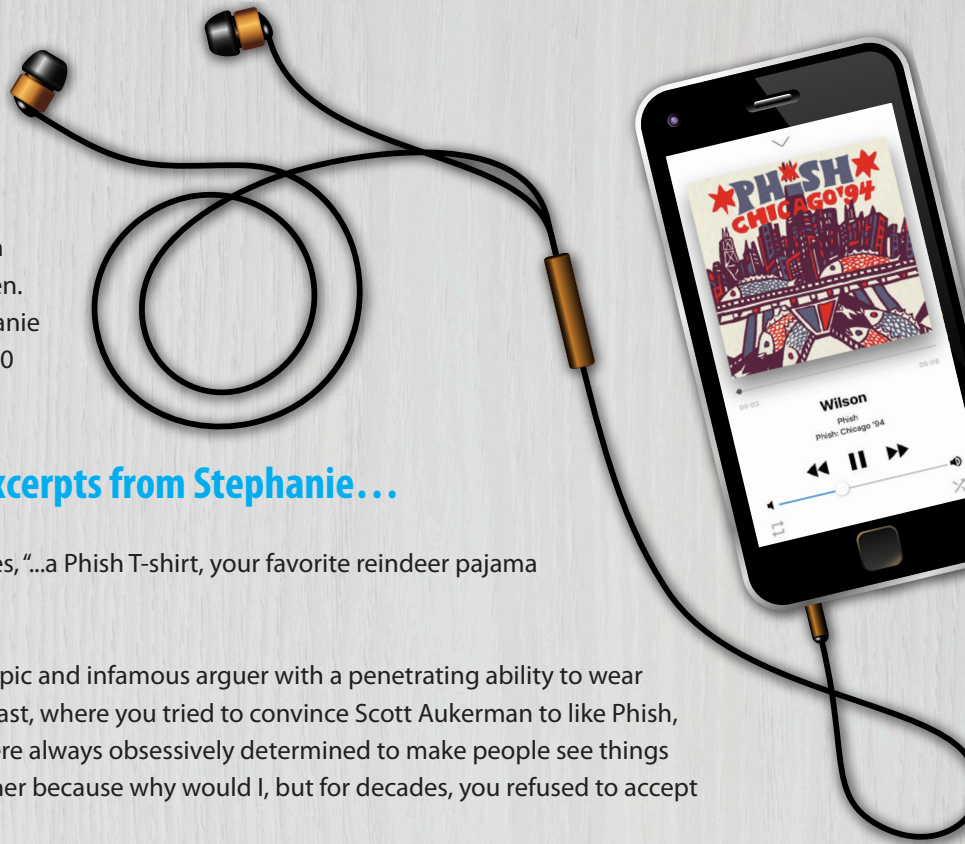
Chapter 3, in regard to selecting Harris’s burial clothes, “...a Phish T-shirt, your favorite reindeer pajama bottoms, house slippers, and a Phish hat.”

Chapter 4, where Stephanie discusses Harris as, “an epic and infamous arguer with a penetrating ability to wear people down.” An example, “The Analyze Phish podcast, where you tried to convince Scott Aukerman to like Phish, was the most Harris thing of all time because you were always obsessively determined to make people see things your way. Like Scott, I never liked the band Phish either because why would I, but for decades, you refused to accept this as a possibility.”

Chapter 33, as Stephanie and her parents fly to Mexico for Christmas to avoid the oppressive holiday blues that come with grief, she discusses all the things about the resort that Harris would love. She imagines heaven as its own type of resort and what Harris might be up to, saying, “...I wonder if you’re up there right now, sitting on a cloud, eating ice cream. If so, I hope Phish is playing in the background.”

Harris’s love for Phish did not only infect (and infuriate, and humor) Stephanie, but Aziz Ansari too—who penned the foreword. Aziz discusses spending a lot of time with Harris in the week before his death, and during that week as Harris put his iPod on shuffle as he drove Aziz to dinner, Harris’s fellow comedian noticed that every single song was a different variety of Phish bootleg, noting, “I kept forcing him to skip until it was Phish maybe covering another more tolerable band’s song.”

Yep...a mention of Phish didn’t even make it past the foreword. Whether you love Phish like Harris or don’t dig them like Stephanie, that’s for you to decide. Either way, we think it would be a disservice to Harris not to ask you and your book club to at least give the band a spin!



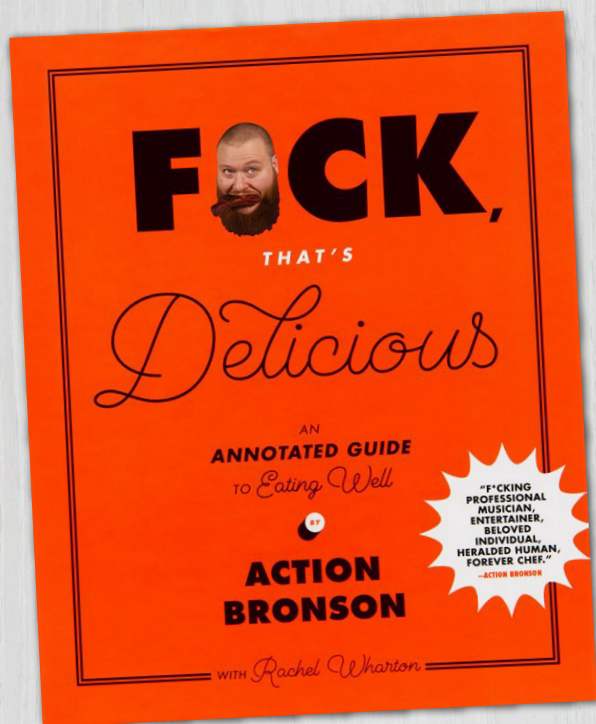


# Building a Book Club Meeting Buffet a la Harris

About Harris's dietary habits, Aziz says in the foreword, "He would always order the most unabashedly unhealthy, grossest thing at lunch." Also, "He would take four things of mozzarella string cheese, line 'em up, and melt it in the microwave. And then he'd eat this with a fork for a snack."

Another excerpt, this one as Stephanie and her parents are at a resort in Mexico diverting the grief that comes from Christmas at home without Harris, where she suggests how her brother would behave if he was alive and along for the resort's buffet dinner: "You wanted to try it all. I think you liked the process of getting the food more than you liked eating it... You always went for the mac and cheese, lo mein, egg rolls, crab Rangoon, sushi, chicken fingers, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, potatoes au gratin, prime rib, nachos, quesadillas, fried mozzarella sticks... Never any vegetables or fresh things."

To fuel your book club's discussion and satiate Harris-level appetites and curiosity, may we recommend rapper Action Bronson's *F\*ck, That's Delicious: An Annotated Guide to Eating Well*.



Action Bronson, in addition to being a rapper and television host, is a chef – but that doesn't stop him from appreciating fast food, holes in the wall, and – upon reflection – those not-so-healthy processed foods which comprised a major part of many '90s kids' childhoods. His part cookbook, part memoir, part travelogue brings to mind Harris in that, no matter how much fame or fortune these public figures earned, nothing could sway them from their ol' standards.

While the book features more refined and regional dishes like Golden Beet Poke, Pipikaula Short Ribs from Hawaii, cacio e pepe of Rome, and Focaccia with Australian Feta and Satsumas, let us direct your eyes – and palates – to these book club menu options...

Chapter 5: **Fried Potatoish Situations**

Chapter 9: Important Note III: **Takeout Eaten Off the Hood of the Car**

Chapter 10: Taco Bell's **Cheesy Gordita Crunch**

Chapter 29: **The Butcher Sandwich** recipe, where the cooking wine is likened to looking like oil you've just changed out of an old Chevy Celebrity

Chapter 41: **Chipwich**

## Don't forget dessert!

We LOVE the excerpt from the book where Harris is consumed with writing a pilot for NBC that plots a "twenty-eight-year-old burnout" living in his parents' basement against a brilliant teen brother who "invented and made millions off Cone Tips, the chocolatey bottom of a Drumstick ice-cream cone," one of Harris's childhood loves. While we didn't come across a "Cone Tips" recipe in our travels, try these dessert recipes – all available from cookbooks on hoopla!



From the **CoolHaus Ice Cream Book**, decadent cookie recipes to whip up ice cream sandwiches with:

Pretzel Chocolate Chunk Cookies, Peanut Butter with Cap'n Crunch Cookies, Gluten Free Coconut Almond Chocolate Chip Cookies



From **Jeni's Splendid Ice Cream Desserts**, ice creams and accoutrements reminiscent of Cone Tips with a gourmet twist:

Yazoo Sue Ice Cream with Rosemary Bar Nuts, North Market Waffles, J-Bars, The Salty Grahama