

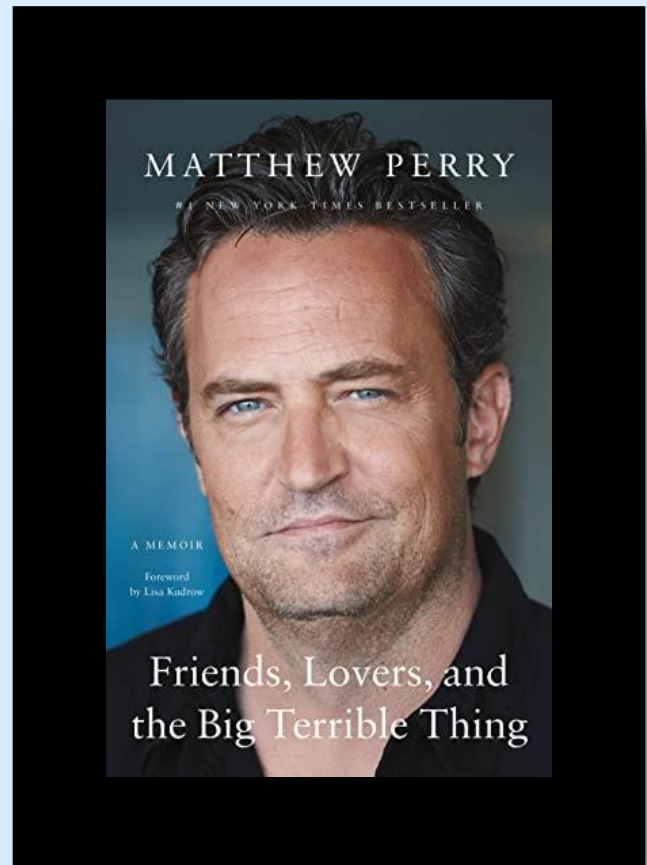
## Allison's Book Corner December 2023

*Friends, Lovers, and the Big Terrible Thing* by Matthew Perry  
(Flatiron Books, 2022)

Who remembers appointment television? Your favorite show aired on a certain day and time, and you made sure you were home to watch it. **Friends** was one of the last shows of appointment television. It was part of the Thursday night (very hot) NBC lineup in the nineties. No streaming back in the old days, folks. I do not speak lightly when I say millions of us lost a friend on October 28, 2023 when beloved **Friends** actor Matthew Perry died. When the news of his death flashed on my cell phone, I thought it was a morbid joke. I immediately reached out to a girlfriend to see if this was indeed true. How could it be? The cast of **Friends** is comprised of actors too young to leave us yet. And then: that feeling in the pit of my stomach. Chandler Bing (his character on **Friends**) is no longer on this earth. It was just a little bit too much to bear.

If you are anything like millions of us who watched and enjoyed the t.v. series **Friends**, it felt like you lost a member of your family when Matthew Perry died. I loved the show because every character was someone I knew in my college dorm. When I watched, I could say "oh, Phoebe is just like so-and-so." And Joey lived down the hall. And Chandler, well, he was the cute guy who always had a joke or a funny line. His whole being was humor - probably to cover up a million serious things - but let's only enjoy the humor. A college kid in his twenties can only scratch the surface of what Chandler Bing may have been hiding.

Well, as we learn in his wonderfully written memoir, Matthew Perry was an alcoholic and serious drug user throughout the ten seasons of **Friends**. He tells us that he cleaned up for season nine, and that was the one year he was nominated for an Emmy award. Perry tells us he was trying to fill a hole within himself that seemingly had no bottom. The addictions were covering up the inner pain that he had since childhood. Perry devotes a fair amount of time to



describing both his childhood and his parents, very accomplished people who divorced when he was a year old and who now outlive him.

Each of us who is not wealthy has thought, at one time or another, that surely more money would solve all of our problems. This memoir debunks that thought. Matthew Perry had all the money. He had all the success as well as numerous women (his dating escapades are detailed in this book). ***Still, it was not enough.***

Matthew Perry is very candid here about his drug and alcohol addictions and their impact on his body. Until he reveals it in his book, I had no idea that in every season of ***Friends***, his physical appearance changes based on his addiction at the time of filming. He truly loved the cast of the show and its creators as family. This love held him together for the ten seasons. Matthew and his constant humor make this read easier than it should be. I was astounded by the amount of abuse he brought on his own body. In reading about each addiction and the millions spent on rehab, you wonder, amazed, how Matthew lived as long as he did. Indeed, the memoir opens by Matthew telling us that he should be dead. You will read this book with a deep sadness and inner foreboding. He had such hope. He had been clean for 19 months when he died. He saw a future much larger than acting: he was devoted to helping other addicts. Thankfully he was able to make a difference in the lives of many alcoholics in the time left to him.

As many of you know, the cause of Matthew's death has been ruled accidental, and I will let the readers determine how ketamine and other factors led to his death in his hot tub. It is tragic.

I like to think I know a thing or two about Matthew Perry after watching him all of those years on television. And now I know him on a whole different level after reading this memoir. There is a song written and sung by the Grammy-nominated country music singer Jelly Roll entitled "Save Me." (Can you hear Matthew as Chandler Bing riffing on Jelly Roll's name?) Jelly Roll's performance of this song is one of his Grammy nominations. I will end with the lyrics that made me think of Matthew Perry and cry all over again:

*Somebody save me, me from myself  
I've spent so long living in Hell  
They say my lifestyle is bad for my health  
It's the only thing that seems to help*

*All of this drinkin' and smokin' is hopeless  
But I feel like it's all that I need  
Somethin' inside of me's broken  
I hold on to anything that sets me free....*

Now Matthew Perry is truly free.