

Favorite Books VI

Reading suggestions by Wisconsin legislators & legislative staff, May-August 2007

www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb/pubs/tapthepower.htm

The following titles and book reviews were gathered as an activity for National Library Week 2007. Submitted by legislators and legislative staff, the reviews were altered only for length or to correct typographical errors. The complete text of all reviews can be found here: <http://www.legis.wi.gov/lrb/pubs/ttp/ttp-05-2007.html>. The bibliography also includes Web sites of interest to book club groups, and readers in general.

Biography

***Natalie Wood: A Life* / Gavin Lambert, Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.** Critical reviews proclaim this to be a very good Hollywood biography written by an acclaimed novelist, screenwriter, biographer, and friend of the Wood/Wagner family. The book itself is well written and documented, but is emotionally difficult to read at times. ... Genetically prone to depression and to the abuse of alcohol and painkilling drugs – all of which were possible factors in her drowning death – this book captures Wood as an intelligent, but vulnerable, actress whose life was cut short much too soon.

***The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley (1874-1958)* / Jack Beatty, Da Capo Press, 1992.** If you like thick books and biographies, you'll like this book. Curley was a Boston politico from the days of political machines, but Curley's "machine" had only one concern – Curley. The novel *The Last Hurrah* and movie of the same name are based on Curley's life. What a life that was. ... With help from the existing political machine, Curley got his start in politics when he was elected to represent Ward 17. He was elected Mayor of Boston several times, failed to win a gubernatorial election, but was elected to the House of Representatives – the same district John F. Kennedy would represent after Curley's term expired and he once again ran for Boston's mayoral office. ... The author does a superb job of painting a picture, not only of Curley's life but the times as well. It is very well researched and well balanced. Highly recommended.

Nonfiction

***Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How It Threatens Creativity* / Siva Vaidhyanathan, New York UP; 2003 reissue.** An accessible, but thorough, discussion of the issues surrounding copyright in the digital age. It helped me understand how copyright works and the profound effect it can have on innovation and creativity in the marketplace.

***Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader* / Anne Fadiman, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.** In this delightful collection of essays, Fadiman shares her love of reading and the integral role books have played in her life.

***Falling Through the Earth: A Memoir* / Danielle Trussoni, Henry Holt & Company, 2006.** Set mostly in La Crosse where she grew up, it is a memoir of the effects on the family of her Vietnam War veteran father and her own visit to Vietnam in hopes of finding understanding and closure.

***Fermenting Revolution: How to Drink Beer and Save the World* / Christopher Mark O'Brien, New Society Publishers, 2006.** O'Brien combines a serious historical overview (5000 B.C. to present) of beer's role in human civilisation with occasional humour to make an argument for sustainability and community, concluding with a 24-point plan for restoring ecological balance, strengthening community, and creating healthier and more rewarding lifestyles. ...

***The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History of Women Who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades Before Roe v. Wade* / Ann Fessler, Penguin Press, 2006.** While the title may imply that this book is a push for a pro-choice agenda, it is not. The author, herself an adoptee whose birth mother relinquished her unwillingly, wrote this as a catharsis for herself, [and] also to make public what happened to so many women and men years ago. This is not just a bunch of case histories. As you get deeper into the book your astonishment is reduced and your sad realization that our culture allowed and encouraged this involuntary surrender of babies (with the best of intentions the majority of the time) seeps in and sits on your heart. Fessler is eloquent, questioning, and very human in her reticence to find out her own history. This stunning book should be read by men and women, regardless of your views on life issues. It would make a great book club discussion book.

***A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* / Dave Eggers, Simon & Schuster, 2000.** This is a fantastic autobiography about a 20-year-old college student who moves to San Francisco with his little brother after both of their parents die. The author is thrown into the role of father to a kid that is only a few years younger than him, which gives the pair a very unique relationship both with themselves and the world around them. Sometimes it is hard to tell where the truth ends and the author's imagination begins. ⇒

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Favorite Books VI Continued

***The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid: A Memoir* / Bill Bryson, Broadway, 2006.** This is a very funny look back at life in the 1950s and 1960s in Iowa. Bill Bryson grew up in Des Moines and tells many amusing, heartfelt stories of life in an eccentric family.

***The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything* / Brian McLaren, Thomas Nelson, 2006.** ... McLaren argues that many Christian churches have gotten it all wrong ... that the “kingdom of God” is not a matter of waiting for some abstract future, but is instead a powerful message of justice, reconciliation, love, and revolutionary change to be lived in the present. ... [It] is a message that has been challenging many to look deeper into their faith and how they live their lives.

***The Woman at the Washington Zoo: Writings on Politics, Family, and Fate* / Marjorie Williams, PublicAffairs, 2005.** Williams was a Washington, D.C., journalist who died young of cancer. Her husband put this book of her work together posthumously. Not only was she a thorough and talented writer at documenting interesting politics, she was so human and real at describing some parts of her cancer diagnosis and what it meant to her, her young children, her family, and her outlook. Really amazing book.

Fiction

***For One More Day* / Mitch Albom, Hyperion, 2006.**

Very good book, insightful and an easy, interesting read.

***The Greatest Salesman in the World* / Og Mandino, Bantam, 1983 reissue.** Don't let the book's title fool you ... [this] is a MUST READ! If you're in need of a little inspiration, this book is for you! If you are a zealous reader and would like to have an extraordinary reading experience, apply the Scrolls as directed in the book daily!

***The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* / Douglas Adams, Del Rey, 1997 reissue.** “[A] whimsical odyssey. ... Characters frolic through the galaxy with infectious joy.”—*Publisher's Weekly*

***In the Name of Salomé* / Julia Alvarez, Plume, 2001 reissue.**

... This book follows the life, writings and family history of Salomé Ureña, ... the national poetess of the Dominican Republic in the late 1800s. Alvarez is a master of making all of her characters come to life while ... giving us new perspectives on the tumultuous political climate of the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Haiti over the last 100-plus years. Alvarez is an inventive writer who knows how to make a story unfold in ways that surprise and captivate the reader.

***Like We Care* / Tom Matthews, Bancroft Press, 2004.** Clever concept and wonderful language in this novel about how companies use marketing and advertising to seduce and profit from us. ... If everyone read this and thought about it, they might realize how much power our dollars really have. ... I also laughed out loud in several parts of the book. This author wrote the movie *Mad City* (similar theme of how the press can show you only what fits their agenda). A treat and this makes you think.

***Links* / Nuruddin Farah, Riverhead Books, 2003.** This is an amazing and touching book about the effects of war-torn and corrupt Somalia on its residents. His writing style is very powerful and this book is certainly among the best I have ever read.

***Meeting the Enemy* / Arthur Rathburn, Brite Publishing, 2003.** This is the story of a young German prisoner of war captured in South Africa and brought to the U.S. The story follows him through several prisoner of war camps. ... Not one to read war stories, I was totally fascinated by this book. It is based on a true story.

***Slaughterhouse-Five* / Kurt Vonnegut, Dell Publishing, 1999.** ... *Slaughterhouse-Five* is not only Vonnegut's most powerful book, it is also as important as any written since 1945. Like *Catch-22*, it fashions the author's experiences in the Second World War into an eloquent and deeply funny plea against butchery in the service of authority. *Slaughterhouse-Five* boasts the same imagination, humanity, and gleeful appreciation of the absurd found in Vonnegut's other works, but the book's basis in rock-hard, tragic fact gives it unique poignancy – and humor.

***Suite Française* / Irene Nemirovsky, Vintage, 2007 reprint.** Irene Nemirovsky was a Jewish Russian immigrant who fled Russia as a teenager. ... She began work on what was to be a five-part novel about Nazi occupation of Paris and northern France. Before completing the novel, she was arrested and sent to Auschwitz in the summer of 1942, where she died a month later. Her daughters preserved their mother's notebooks for over 50 years. Unbeknownst to them, they contained the manuscript for *Suite Française* ... [which was] translated and published ... 64 years after the author died. ... *Suite Française* is a novel worth reading.

Related Web Sites

AbeBooks: www.abebooks.com “Over 100 million new, used, rare, and out-of-print books from more than 13,500 booksellers.”

American Library Association: www.ala.org/ala/librariesandyou/recomreading/recomreading.htm “Recommended Reading.”

Book Clubs Resource: www.book-clubs-resource.com “A comprehensive guide to discount book clubs and reading groups.”

BookFinder: www.bookfinder.com An ecommerce search engine of over 125 million books – new, used, rare, out-of-print.

BookSpot: www.bookspot.com An “invaluable resource for book information online.”

TheCapitol.net: www.thecapitol.net/Recommended/bookspolit.htm Political and Government classics.

Gardiner (ME) Public Library: www.gpl.lib.me.us/wrw.htm “Who Reads What Celebrity List.”

Reading Group Choices: www.readinggroupchoices.com

ReadingGroupGuides.com: www.readinggroupguides.com

Wisconsin Library Association: www.wla.lib.wi.us/readers/WLAC/lac.html Wisconsin Literary Awards.
