

Favorite Books VII

Reading suggestions by Wisconsin legislators & legislative staff, May-August 2008

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

The following titles and book reviews were gathered as an activity for National Library Week 2008. Submitted by legislators and legislative staff, the reviews were not altered except to edit for length or to correct typographical errors. Web sites of interest to book club groups, and to readers in general, are also included. Many more reading suggestions can be found in the previous six issues of *Favorite Books*. All of the previous issues are listed on the *Tap the Power* Web page.

Fiction

***The Book Thief* / Markus Zusak, Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.** This young adult book is exquisitely written and became one of my all-time favorite books as soon as I read it. The story is narrated by Death, takes place in early Nazi Germany, and centers around a girl who goes to live with foster parents. For me, however, the plot was secondary to the unusual and beautifully wrought manner in which the book is written. ... Someone else said this book is ideal for you if you like to eat words like ice cream, and I do! If you are purely plot driven, I don't think this will do much for you. If you have read Piers Anthony's *On a Pale Horse*, you'll probably like this book.

***The Kite Runner* / Khaled Hosseini, Riverhead Books, 2003.** This novel tells the story of Amir, and how guilt over the betrayal of a childhood friend follows him into adulthood until he finally "makes it good." Woven through the story is the emotional strain caused by a boy doing everything in his power to gain his father's approval. The setting takes the reader from the peaceful, colorful life in Kabul through the social upheaval brought by the Soviet invasion, followed by Taliban rule.

***A Thousand Splendid Suns* / Khaled Hosseini, Riverhead Books, 2007.** This novel covers three decades of civil war and Taliban tyranny from the perspective of two women, Mariam and Laila. An incredible chronicle of Afghan history and a moving story of family, friendship, faith, and the salvation found in love.

***True North* / Jim Harrison, Grove Press, 2004.** Reading Harrison is like eating a rich, varied meal. His writing is a mouthful, and you enjoy every minute of it. *True North* is about a family in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, mainly from the viewpoint of the son. It also features the son's research on the stripping of the forests in that area by early timber companies. Astonishing ending, and remarkable characters. If you like this, there's a sequel called *Returning to Earth*.

***We the Living* / Ayn Rand, Dutton, 1995 (60th Anniversary Edition).** A disturbing portrait of post-revolutionary Petrograd and how brutal repression at the hands of Communists marginalized individualism, creativity, and the human spirit.

***Women on the Edge of a Nervous Breakthrough* / Isabel Sharpe, Avon Books, 2007.** Fun, surprising, and wickedly entertaining novel about three former childhood classmates who are very different from each other and who end up entangled in small-town life in a fictional Wisconsin town. Cleverly written. Sharpe is a terrific Wisconsin author. A great vacation book.

Biography/Autobiography

***Armed and Dangerous: 40 Hard-earned Truths from Politics, Faith, and Life* / Richard K. Arme, Wiley, 2003.** Down-to-earth and clever collection of 40 lessons on politics, power, life, and faith drawn from Arme's life and time on Capitol Hill. Arme is the former Majority Leader of the House of Representatives and is known for his straight-shooting style. The "Axioms" are a humorous read, but each one also contains a lesson learned the hard way, through personal experience. It also contains some great stories and insights into the politics and leadership of the House of Representatives over the past several decades. A great and witty read for anyone with an interest in politics in particular or life in general.

***Dreams from My Father* / Barack Obama, Three Rivers Press, 2004.** It is a very sensitive and insightful coming-of-age story, and it was completely absorbing. I highly recommend this book.

***Here If You Need Me: A True Story* / Kate Braestrup, Little Brown and Co., 2007.** An interesting read about the life of a chaplain for the Maine Game Warden Service. Kate becomes a chaplain after the untimely death of her husband. She deals with the grieving loved ones of missing persons and the wardens who are searching for them. Funny, sad, and hopeful, there's a little something for everyone.

***The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid: A Memoir* / Bill Bryson, Broadway Books, 2006.** This book takes you back to the '50s, when kids could go out and play all day with their friends, when movies were a dime, and when mom stayed at home. It is a very funny book with a lot of reminders of what life was like back in that time. No computers, video games, iPods, or cell phones. This book is very enjoyable, especially if you are over 50. ⇒

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Favorite Books VII Continued

***Truck: A Love Story* / Michael Perry, HarperCollins, 2006.** Perhaps you've already read Perry's first book, *Population: 485*. Well, don't stop there. He's one of the few writers who can make me laugh out loud and cry in the same book. This story of Perry's romance with the woman he ultimately marries is more about life in general and his astute observations of people and nature than anything else. He's a delight to read if you value the writing at least as much as the story, if not more.

***A Year by the Sea: Thoughts of an Unfinished Woman* / Joan Anderson, Doubleday, 1999.** Lovely, spot-on book about marriage, autonomy, self-discovery, struggle, expectations. This woman spends a year in her Cape Cod cottage when her husband announces he's taking a job transfer to a different state, and she chooses not to go with him. Their kids are grown, and she takes this year to evaluate her life and marriage, and ultimately decide to stay in the marriage or decide to leave it. Brave and insightful.

Nonfiction

***The Children's Blizzard* / David Laskin, HarperCollins, 2004.** The incredible story of the Midwest blizzard of 1888 will stun and amaze you. If you have read the Little House books, this is a lot like *The Long Winter*, but with more detail about what actually happened to so many children during this unfortunate event.

***Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* / Lynne Truss, Gotham Books, 2004.** A wonderfully humorous book about the importance of punctuation in everyday life. An enjoyable and easy read.

***It's All Too Much: An Easy Plan for Living a Richer Life with Less Stuff* / Peter Walsh, Free Press, 2007.** If you like Peter Walsh on "Clean Sweep," you'll appreciate this book. It's written as if he dictated it in his blunt yet helpful manner, directly speaking to each reader. If you are one drowning in your possessions and it seems too much to handle, this book provides a great guide to turning your mess into a peaceful paradise. ... Whether you have a large house or a small apartment, Peter Walsh shows how to make what you have the best it can be, and how much a clean, organized home can improve your mood, health, and overall life.

***A Perfect Mess: The Hidden Benefits of Disorder – How Crammed Closets, Cluttered Offices, and On-the-Fly Planning Make the World a Better Place* / Eric Abrahamson, Little Brown and Co., 2006.** Offers many examples of ways in which obsession with neatness reduces productivity and crushes creativity.

***Posterity: Letters of Great Americans to Their Children* / Dorie McCullough Lawson, Doubleday, 2004.** Interesting window into the lives and interests of famous Americans, and this would also be a great gift book. Read letters from Thomas Jefferson, General Patton, Oscar Hammerstein, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Groucho Marx, and more. It's great to "hear" their voices with their guard let down, so to speak.

***Rescuing Sprite* / Mark Levin, Pocket Books, 2007.** This is an intimate look at the love between a family and a dog; one that movingly shows, in Mark Levin's words, that "in the end, we humans are the lucky ones." Any dog owner who has had to decide (or is currently contemplating) whether "it's time" can appreciate this book. Two hankies.

***Russia at War, 1941-1945* / Alexander Werth, Avon Books, 1965.** A detailed description of the Eastern Front of World War II as written by a Russian-born British journalist who was allowed back into the USSR during the war. Has detailed accounts of each battle as well as capturing the mood of the Soviet people and the role played by the Communist Party propaganda machine.

***Urban Meltdown: Cities, Climate Change and Politics as Usual* / Clive Doucet, New Society Publishers, 2007.** Poet-turned-city councillor Doucet offers a very lively account of a number of urban issues, including what makes cities and neighborhoods livable and the connections between land use and transportation planning, what makes for good schools, engaging citizens in their communities, how we shop, and numerous other topics including, yes, the environmental impact of public and private policy decisions.

Related Web Sites

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."

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

TheCapitol.net: www.thecapitol.net/Recommended/books/polit.htm "Political and Government Classics."

LibraryThing: www.librarything.com An "online service to help people catalog their books easily. You can access your catalog from anywhere – even on your mobile phone. Because everyone catalogs together, LibraryThing also connects people with the same books, comes up with suggestions for what to read next, and so forth." Both free and subscription accounts are available.

The New York Times – Books: www.nytimes.com/pages/books Link to best sellers, Sunday book reviews, "Paper Cuts: A Blog About Books," and much more.

Read On, Wisconsin!: <http://readon.wi.gov> Aimed primarily at student reading levels, this site promotes literacy by recommending books to parents, teachers, and librarians.

ReadingGroupGuides.com: www.readinggroupguides.com The Online community for reading groups.

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