Staff Picks
Summer 2013

FICTION

**Arcadia by Lauren Groff:** An interesting story about life and families in a commune in the 60’s, an era I knew about but didn’t really know about! Great character development and follow through about the importance of love and family strength. *Audrey’s pick*

**Farewell, Dorothy Parker by Ellen Meister, 2013.** A fun, fast-paced, entertaining story peppered with the acerbic wit of Dorothy Parker, whose ghost is revived by movie critic, Violet Epps. This quick read offers a modern day scenario that also serves as a reminder of the clever and irreverent Dorothy Parker. *Davonne’s pick.

**Garden of Evening Mists by Tan Twan Eng:** A wonderful story in Malaysia after WWII, beautifully written and rich in culture and and history. *Audrey’s pick*

**The Good Cop by Brad Parks:** Carter Ross -funny, charming, intelligent Newark Eagle-Examiner reporter- is back in this third mystery by Brad Parks, and he’s developing like a good scotch in an oak barrel. If you haven’t read any of these books, you don’t have to read them in publishing order. Parks is very skilled at giving readers enough back story in just a few simple phrases or sentences. Great action, funny dialog, and satisfying ending make *The Good Cop*, Brad Parks best work yet. *Judith’s pick*

**Midwives by Chris Bohjalian:** As a recent fan of Bohjalian (Sandcastle Girls and Before You Know Kindness), I have been going back to read some of his earlier works. Midwives (1997) is a story told by Connie, the daughter of a midwife in Vermont in the 1980’s. Connie’s mother is charged with murder after she attends a birth that goes very wrong. The book tells the story of the trial and the toll it takes on her family. This is a riveting story with a gripping plot that explores moral, medical and political issues. Well worth reading. *Linda’s pick*

**Northern Light by Jennifer Donnelly, 2003.** (In the Teen section.) Northern Light is a young adult, historical fiction depiction of the true-life murder investigation of Grace Brown in 1906, as narrated by fictional protagonist, teen-aged Mattie Gokey. The book offers thoughtful depictions of American society such as rich versus poor, class differences, and the difficulties of girls and women in a patriarchal society. Theodore Dreiser’s classic novel, An American Tragedy, is also based on the events that lead to the death of Grace Brown. *Davonne’s pick*

**Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey, 2012.** Revisiting the Russian folktale, The Snow Maiden or Snegurochka, this story is set in the Alaskan wilderness, as a childless pioneering couple leaves civilization to homestead in the harsh climate and landscape of Alaska. The story contrasts the brutal realities of pioneer life with ethereal, supernatural quality of a fairy tale. *Davonne’s pick*

**Suspect by Robert Crais:** LAPD cop, Scott James, lost his partner nine months ago in a brutal shootout, in which he was also critically injured. Nine months later, there are still no arrests, and no suspects. His PTSD is bad, but he talks his way into joining the canine unit. German shepherd, Maggie, is a veteran of three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan who lost her handler to an IED. Her PTSD is as bad as Scott’s. They team up to find the murderers. Thrilling, emotional, intense, with some of the best characters and writing in crime fiction, *Suspect* is as good as *Taken* and *The Sentry*. *Judith’s pick*
A Tale for the Time Being by Ruth L. Ozeki: "A time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be.” In Tokyo, sixteen-year-old Nao has decided there’s only one escape from her aching loneliness and her classmates’ bullying. But before she ends it all, Nao first plans to document the life of her great-grandmother, a Buddhist nun who lived more than a century. A diary is Nao’s only solace. Across the Pacific, we meet Ruth, a novelist who discovers a collection of artifacts washed ashore in a Hello Kitty lunchbox—possibly debris from the devastating 2011 tsunami. As the mystery of its contents unfolds, Ruth is pulled into the past, into Nao’s drama and her unknown fate, and forward into her own future. Full of Ozeki’s signature humor and deeply engaged with the relationship between past and present, fact and fiction, quantum physics, history, and myth, A Tale for the Time Being is a brilliantly inventive, beguiling story. Linda’s pick

Twelve Tribes of Hattie by Ayana Mathis, 2012. A courageous debut novel, author Ayana Mathis juxtaposes the tale of Hattie, her eleven children and one grandchild, against the Great Migration of the 1920s as African Americans moved from south to north. The Biblical reference of 12 tribes provides the vision of Hattie’s ‘tribes’ scattered across a changing America. The sad and difficult struggle of their individual lives is told as the novel goes back and forth in time ultimately returning to Hattie and her relationship with grandchild, Sala. Davonne’s pick

Under Tower Peak by Bart Paul: A contemporary western thriller, Bart Paul, through spare, blunt writing has created a wild country noir with gripping action. His protagonist, Tommy Smith, a veteran of two tours in Iraq, is likeable and complex. He has returned home to work stock and pack animals for an old friend who runs a trail riding business in the Sierra Nevadas. The trouble begins when he and his partner, a high school buddy, stumble on a plane wreck with a body when they are doing trail clearing work in late spring. Judith’s pick
NON-FICTION

*The Astor Orphan* by Alexandra Aldrich (974.7041 Aldr): I had never heard of Rokeby, the ancestral home of the Astor family, before last summer, when a niece was employed as a gardener there. How wonderful, I thought, to be able to live in a sprawling 43-room Hudson Valley mansion—this would have been one of my childhood dreams! But as a child I could have never imagined that a 10-year old girl looking out of a window at Rokeby would be fantasizing about the middle class life my family was living. In *The Astor Orphan*, Alexandra describes the life she and her destitute parents shared in the elegantly crumbling mansion with her better-off aunt and uncle and two younger cousins. “A vividly gothic family romance.”

*Blue Nights* by Joan Didion, 2012. (BIO Didi) After the death of her daughter, Quintana Roo, the author shares her insights about the inner world of grief, melancholy and reflection. In this moving testimony, Didion faces the stark realization of life that consists of continuing loss. *Blue Nights* is almost a sequel or continuation of her critically acclaimed book, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, a portrait of the universal experience of coping and coming to terms with the death of a loved one.

*Davonne’s pick*

*The Coming Jobs War* by Jim Clifton (331.1097 Clif): A patron donated this book to the library because he thought it should be available for anyone to read. He’s right. Clifton is the Chairman of Gallup. Having tremendous worldwide data at his fingertips, he outlines a difficult, but doable plan for the future of America. The writing is spare, straightforward, and easy to understand. Most interesting to me was his insistence that success will come from using the concepts of Behavioral Economics, rather than those of Classical Economics. He clearly explains the distinctions. Like Linda’s pick, *Lean In*, this is another book that should be given to all recent graduates.

*Davonne’s pick*

*Fall of the House of Dixie* by Bruce Levine (973.713 Levi): I love reading civil war fiction and found this non-fiction book helpful in understanding the time period. In this major new history of the Civil War, Bruce Levine tells the riveting story of how that conflict upended the economic, political, and social life of the old South, utterly destroying the Confederacy and the society it represented and defended. Told through the words of the people who lived it, *The Fall of the House of Dixie* illuminates the way a war undertaken to preserve the status quo became a second American Revolution whose impact on the country was as strong and lasting as that of our first.

*Linda’s pick*

*How to Create the Perfect Wife: Britain’s Most Ineligible Bachelor and his Enlightened Quest to Train the Ideal Mate* by Wendy Moore (823.6 Moor): Thomas Day (1748-1789) had numerous virtues: He supported the American Revolution, opposed slavery, believed in living simply to support those in need, abhorred social conventions, and wrote bestselling poetry and children’s books. BUT (and it’s a big one), his disdain for grooming, fashion, polite society, and ‘female agency’ (women’s rights) led to a string of rebuffed proposals and broken engagements. After being rejected by a number of young women, Day concluded that the perfect partner he envisioned simply did not exist. Rather than giving up his search for the woman of his dreams, however, he illicitly adopted two teenage girls from a British foundling hospital and set out to create his perfect companion. Darkly funny, bizarre, fascinating, outrageous and …true.

*Beth’s pick*
**Jujitsu Rabbi and the Godless Blonde by Rebecca Dana (BIO Dana):** Witty, irreverent, fast-reading, describe Rebecca Dana’s odd, but engrossing coming-of-adulthood-post-college tale. Suburban girl moves to Manhattan, lives with three guys, lives with her first love, then ends up in Brooklyn for a time, living with an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who, like Rebecca, is questioning the first dream of what his life would be like. Delightfully interesting; I didn’t want to put it down. One of my favorite lines described the three roommates: “Neil, Burt, and Max called me “Jane” for Jane Goodall, who lived with the apes she studied.”  

*Judith’s pick*

**Lean In by Sheryl Sandberg (658.4092 Sand):** *Lean In* poses a set of ambitious challenges to women: to create the lives we want, to be leaders in our work, to be partners in our homes, and to be champions of other women. The author is the COO of Facebook and a leader in business. I found the book inspiring and truthful. The author is intelligent, honest and funny. This is my new “go-to” book to give to all recent graduates.  

*Linda’s pick*