Fiction

Another Brooklyn by Jacqueline Woodson: In flowing prose, Woodson offers a coming of age story along with insights into memories of the intense friendships between four African American adolescent girls growing up in Brooklyn. A real sense of loss is felt as the girls become women, developing their own lives, moving away from their friendships, and beginning to recognize the difference between reality and dreams. Davonne

Crow Lake by Mary Lawson: This family drama tells the story of four siblings raising each other after their parents die in a car crash. The scene is a remote and rural area of Canada, a small town with extremely good, as well as seriously messed up, individuals. The writer creates insightful lines that made me stop and ponder. Beautifully written, it will draw you in and immerse you in the characters. I will definitely want to read more Mary Lawson books. Linda

The Fifth Season by N.K. Jemisin: Winner of the 2016 Hugo Award (science fiction/fantasy), The Fifth Season is a fairly dark fantasy novel that takes place in a world severely impacted by geological changes. They rely on humans gifted with special powers to keep the world in check – but even they cannot stop what is coming. The book switches between different points of view but is able to do so rather seamlessly and it is important to see what is happening from the different perspectives. An exciting book that ends up in unexpected places. Talia

The Front Lines by Michael Grant: Alternative history is always a fun genre to pick up and Michael Grant does it justice. The Front Lines is a simple premise – what if women were able to serve in combat in World War II? The story follows three young women from very different walks of life as they struggle with their reasons for enlisting as well as life in the service. This is a Young Adult/Teen novel but it deals well with the very real consequences of war. It shows death, destruction, camaraderie, and everything one would expect from a World War II combat novel. Talia

Great Reckoning by Louise Penny: The applauded Book #12 finds Former Surete Chief Inspector Armand Gamache desiring a peaceful life in the tranquil Québécois village of Three Pines; but first he must come to terms with the evil he has witnessed during his homicide career and to amend the fallout from the vast corruption which reaches deep into the Surete Training Academy. Gamache has a chess-like plan, but so do others. Beware the details in the” slow boil” of first seven chapters and remember - “Don’t believe everything you think” Janice

Homegoing by Yaa Gyas: The beginnings of this saga reach back into the slave trade in 18th century Ghana following the lives of half-sisters, Effia and Esi and their descendants over seven generations and two continents. Gyas personifies the horrendous history of slavery with definitive stories of individual characters. Davonne

LaRose by Louise Erdrich: A heart-rending story of an Ojibwe man’s atonement for a tragic accident affecting his best friend, who is not a member of the tribe. While deer hunting, Landreaux Iron accidentally shoots and kills the 5-year old son of Peter Ravich, and after much soul-searching, offers his own son to the grieving family. The individual suffering of each family member is depicted, as well as young LaRose’s understanding of his role in the healing of the two families. Davonne

Miss Jane by Brad Watson: In a tenderly told story drawn from his own great-aunt, Watson explores the life of Miss Jane Chisolm, born in rural, early twentieth century Mississippi with a genital birth defect. Watson takes the reader into the potent, beautiful natural world around the farm. Jane finds her way to acceptance of herself through the lifetime friendship of the country doctor. Her strength is admirable. Watson’s writing is truly evocative, sparking all the senses. Judith

The One Man by Andrew Gross: Nathan Blum is given an impossible mission – get dropped into German occupied Poland, sneak into Auschwitz, find a scientist critical to winning the war, and then, somehow, get out. The story is full of intense moments of despair and hope as Nathan Blum goes about his mission and experiences the life inside Auschwitz. The twists keep the pages turning as you root for him to accomplish the mission. Talia
The Relic Master by Christopher Buckley: It’s 1517, and Dismas, an ex-mercenary, has been supplying relics to two key patrons, Frederick of Saxony, and the venal Cardinal Albrecht of Mainz. With the cardinal ever more demanding, Dismas tries to sell him a fake shroud of Christ created by his friend the painter Albrecht Durer. When the deception is uncovered, Dismas is forced to do penance by stealing the real shroud from the Duke of Savoy. What follows is a humorous and suspenseful romp through a period of time that saw brutalities and tortures as well as the rise of Martin Luther and the campaign he was able to wage against such abuses under the curious protection of Frederick, the great relic collector. I enjoyed the audio book read by James Langton. Beth

To the Bright Edge of the World: A Novel by Eowyn Ivey: An atmospheric, transporting tale of adventure, love, and survival from the bestselling author of The Snow Child, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. In the winter of 1885, a small expedition of men set out to explore the untamed Alaska Territory by traveling the up the Wolverine River Valley. The book follows the journal of Colonel Allan Forester on his travels and the journal of his wife, Sophie who is left behind. This is an incredible telling of a wild Alaska, it’s native peoples and the love between Allan and Sophie. Truths that are discovered during this year of adventure change their lives and the lives of future generations. Linda

The Wild Girl by Kate Forsyth – This interconnection of storytelling, folklore and history tells the account of the relationship between Dortchen Wild and Wilhelm Grimm, culminating in the birth of Grimm’s Fairy Tales. Set in the German kingdom of Hesse-Cassel in the early 19th century, the backdrop illustrates life under Napoleon’s oppressive French rule. Davonne

Non-Fiction

The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World by Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton Abrams: Nobel Peace Prize Laureates His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu have survived more than fifty years of exile and the soul-crushing violence of oppression. Despite their hardships—or, as they would say, because of them—they are two of the most joyful people on the planet. This book is a rare opportunity to experience a week they spent together discussing “How do we find joy in the fact of life’s inevitable suffering?” Read their stories, hear their wisdom, and learn the science and intuitiveness of joy. Linda

Dark Horse (Documentary): Horse racing has always been a rich man’s sport. The Dark Horse looks into a poor Welsh village’s attempt to break that convention. A horse pool is set up and money is gathered in order to buy a mare and breed a first class race horse. The “characters” (in this case real people) are hilarious and just as stunned as the rest of England when they actually succeed. This is a true underdog story and you root for them every step of the way. Talia


Hold Still by Sally Mann: In this groundbreaking book, a unique interplay of narrative and image, Mann’s preoccupation with family, race, mortality, and the storied landscape of the American South are revealed as almost genetically predetermined, written into her DNA by the family history that precedes her. In lyrical prose and startlingly revealing photographs, she crafts a totally original form of personal history that has the page-turning drama of a great novel but is firmly rooted in the fertile soil of her own life. Julie

M Train by Patti Smith: M Train begins in the tiny Greenwich Village café where Smith goes every morning for black coffee, ruminates on the world as it is and the world as it was, and writes in her notebook. Through prose that shifts fluidly between dreams and reality, past and present, we travel to Frida Kahlo’s Casa Azul in Mexico; to the fertile moon terrain of Iceland; to a ramshackle seaside bungalow in New York’s Far Rockaway that Smith acquires just before Hurricane Sandy hits. M Train is a meditation on travel, detective shows, literature, and coffee. It is a powerful, deeply moving book by one of the most remarkable multiplatform artists at work today. Julie

On My Own by Diane Rehm: I listened to this book, read by the author, which gave the story even more poignancy. She tells of her unusual, but strong, 50-year marriage. Her husband suffered from Parkinson’s disease, and had a wish to end his life before his death. I admire how she dealt with the difficulties of her life with the same grace, wisdom, and good manners that she did. The audiobook is read by the author, which gave the story even more poignancy. Judith

When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi: At the age of thirty-six, on the verge of completing a decade’s worth of training as a neurosurgeon, Paul Kalanithi was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer. One day he was a doctor treating the dying, and the next he was a patient struggling to live. The book tells his life story and his death story. Mortality from a doctor’s point of view is enlightening. Dr. Kalanithi’s life is worth remembering. Linda

You’ll Grow Out Of It by Jessi Klein: is a wonderful coming of age book. Throughout all the stages – kid, teenager, college grad, woman-seeking-mate, marriage, motherhood -she views the growing pains of life through a humorous lens. Sometimes it’s outrageous, but mostly it’s insightful and just spot-on funny. Klein has written for SNL, and has been a regular panelist on NPR’s Wait Wait...Don’t Tell Me! Currently she’s executive producer for Comedy Central’s Inside Amy Schumer. Judith