

## *Favorite Books II*

*Compiled from suggestions by Wisconsin legislators and legislative employees, May 2003*

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*The following titles and book reviews were gathered as an activity for National Library Week 2003. Book reviews were written by legislators and legislative staff and were not altered except for length or to correct typographical errors.*

### Nonfiction

***The Best Democracy Money Can Buy.* Greg Palast, New York, Plume, 2003.** An investigative journalist's look at the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and World Bank, including how these organizations drive policy around the world.

***The Bias Against Guns: Why Almost Everything You've Heard About Gun Control Is Wrong.* John R. Lott, Jr., Washington, D.C., Regnery Publishing, 2003.**

***The Bible.* Various translations, denominations, and publishers.** Best book I have ever read. Each time I read it I learn more. What an awesome God He is to have created all the beauty we see and all the sounds we hear, this vast and wonderful universe . . .

***The Civil War: A Narrative.* Shelby Foote, New York, Random House [1958-74].** An engrossing 3-volume series on the Civil War. Written as a narrative derived from primary source documents (letters, etc.), so it is much livelier than many other history books.

***Ghost Soldiers.* Hampton Sides, New York, Doubleday, 2001.** It is the story of prisoners of war in WWII in the Philippines. It tells the story switching chapter by chapter between the life of the prisoners and the lives of their liberators. It impacted on me because of the vast number of courageous acts that led to eventual allied victory in WWII.

***The Vision of the Anointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy.* Thomas Sowell, New York, BasicBooks, 1995.** An interesting essay on personal politics written in a way even I could understand.

### Biography

***Seabiscuit: An American Legend.* Laura Hillenbrand, New York, Ballantine Books, 2002.** While there are other books that have had more of an impact on me, the best book I have read this year is *Seabiscuit* by Laura Hillenbrand. It is hard to imagine reading a book about a racehorse that ran over sixty years ago and finding it interesting but, *Seabiscuit* was a really fun book. It is a great story about a small horse with an odd gait that captured the imagination of 1930s America. The number one news story of 1938 (measured in column inches) was not FDR or Adolf Hitler but the story of *Seabiscuit*. For those of us who read piles of paper each day because we have to, *Seabiscuit* was a fun escape.

***Theodore Rex.* Edmund Morris, New York, Random House, 2001.** Provides an in-depth look at the life of one of America's most dynamic and beloved presidents. Makes a person appreciate the complexity of intellect and personality that is required to be a great President of the United States.

***Wait Till Next Year: A Memoir.* Doris Kearns Goodwin, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1997.** Doris Kearns Goodwin reminisces about her childhood and youth growing up in the suburbs of New York when Neighborhoods were equally divided between Dodger, Giant, and Yankee fans. A nostalgic read!

### Fiction

***Birdsong.* Sebastian Faulks, London, Hutchinson, 1993.** A very compelling book about love and loss from just before World War I until recently. It follows a young soldier's harrowing life through the war and the lives of his family later in the century.

***Down and Out in Paris and London.* George Orwell, London, Secker & Warburg, 1986.** Part autobiography, this novel follows the experience of a poor writer, first in Paris and then in London. The book exposes the fear of ending up poor and shows that there is no romance in poverty.

***Earth's Children (series).* Jean M. Auel, New York, Crown Publishers, 2002 (most recent).** A series of historical novels (including *The Clan of the Cave Bear*) that follow "Ayla", an ancient cave dweller, through her development as a healer, hunter, and animal tamer. It is obviously fiction since things that our scientists believe took centuries to develop take place in her lifetime. But it is interesting as the author explores the ways these early people survived the ice age and developed the weapons and instruments that allowed them to gather food, heal, and hunt. It is a five book series so far, and may be followed up with more.

***The Great Gatsby.* F. Scott Fitzgerald, New York, Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1995.** This book has everything, love, adventure, intrigue, and a bit of betrayal. I first read this book in college and it is a great example of classic American Literature. With this book, I learned about symbolism and irony, which makes this book one you don't want to put down.

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## *Favorite Books II* Continued

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***House of the Spirits.* Isabel Allende (Translated from Spanish by Magda Bogin), New York, Bantam Books, 1993.** My favorite book by this author (so far). Set in an unnamed South American country, this novel traces the history of a family as they live through turbulent political and social change.

***I Know This Much Is True.* Wally Lamb, New York, Regan Books, 1998.** It is the story of two brothers. One has mental illness and the other, who does not feel responsible for his brother. An excellent writer was on best seller list a few years ago. A thick book but very engaging.

***Independent People.* Halldor Laxness (translated from Icelandic by J.A. Thompson), New York, Vintage Books, 1997.** On its face this book is about sheep farming in Iceland. But the book is really about perspectives on life and philosophy. It is sad and rich – and simply a great story. Laxness won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955.

***Infinite Jest.* David Foster Wallace, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1996.** This is one of the few books that really captures the human condition through almost hyperbolic situations. It is worth devoting yourself to its 1,100+ pages. This book deals with drug addiction in society, so I don't know if it would appeal to everyone, but for those who are post modern lit. fans, this is a must read.

***The Lord of the Rings.* J.R.R. Tolkien, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1994.** Tolkien's epic novel of good versus evil in Middle Earth set the standard for the fantasy genre in the latter part of the twentieth century and beyond. It truly immerses the reader in a mythical world inhabited by elves, dwarves, hobbits, and humans, all struggling against an unimaginable evil.

***The Passion.* Jeanette Winterson, New York, Grove Press, 1997.** This book captivated me with its dream-like narration and magic realism. The protagonists are a French soldier and a Venetian casino dealer during the Napoleonic Wars. Winterson appears to be asking: what is the nature of passion and where does one find love?

***The Stone Diaries.* Carol Shields, New York, Penguin Books, 1995.** “[*Stone Diaries* is a] fictionalized autobiography of Daisy Goodwill Flett, captured in Daisy's vivacious yet reflective voice . . . The events of Daisy's life, however, are less compelling than her rich, vividly described inner life – from her memories of her adoptive mother to her awareness of impending death. Shields' sensuous prose and her deft characterizations make this her most successful yet.” —*Amazon.com editorial*

***The Things They Carried.* Tim O'Brien, New York, Broadway Books, 1998.** In light of our current war – this book – along with his book *If I Die in A Combat Zone* bear noting. They are great chronicles of the Vietnam War. Although *The Things They Carried* is labeled fiction it is based in his personal experiences as a soldier on the front lines. *If I Die in A Combat Zone* is also great; this is the memoir of his own personal experiences. Must reads for anyone interested in the Vietnam War.

***Three to Get Deadly.* Janet Evanovich, New York, St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1998.** Janet Evanovich just simply makes me laugh. The way she writes, her books have a serious but mischievous element to them. Stephanie Plum the bounty hunter with her friend Lula and boyfriend (sometimes) Joe Morelli are in cahoots together and Joe seems to be where he is needed at the most unusual times in the most unusual places.

***To Kill a Mockingbird.* Nelle Harper Lee, New York, Harper-Collins Publishers, 1999.** It was such a good book for people of all ages and in all stages of life. I read it my senior year in college and couldn't put it down. It had a great message and read so easily.

***The Unbearable Lightness of Being.* Milan Kundera, New York, HarperPerennial, 1999.** This is a book about making choices, imperfect as they may be. It focuses on the idea that existence seems frustratingly weightless when you realize that everything happens only once, then fades into the past. I appreciate this book because it made me think and is beautifully written.

***White Teeth.* Zadie Smith, New York, Vintage Books, 2001.** Excellent story by new, young author about immigrant families in contemporary London.

***Young Fu of the Upper Yangtse.* Elizabeth Foreman Lewis, New York, Bantam Books, 1990.** This 1933 Newberry Medal Winner is a masterwork of children's literature. It documents the hard work and success of a young man who moves to Peking with his mother from their family's ancestral farm. Lewis paints a rich and appealing picture of a Chinese city in the midst of swarms of change pulled in several directions by urban expansion – modernity – foreign influence – socialism and layer upon layer of Chinese folk tradition. Its message of the triumph of industry and honesty is effective without being heavy-handed and as a young reader I thrilled over and over again as Young Fu took on the challenges of urban life.

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