

## *Favorite Books IV*

Compiled from suggestions by Wisconsin legislators & legislative employees, June 2005

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/pubs/tapthepower.htm>

The following titles and book reviews were gathered as an activity for National Library Week 2005. Book reviews were written by legislators and legislative staff and were not altered except to paraphrase for length or to correct typographical errors. Also includes Web sites.

### Fiction

***Atlas Shrugged.* Ayn Rand, New American Library, 1957.** There is no greater description of how capitalism is meant to function, and how government encumbering of free economies sets in motion societal decay.

***A Deepness in the Sky.* Vernor Vinge, Tor Books, 1999.** Hugo award winner for best novel.

***The Heart is a Lonely Hunter.* Carson McCullers, Modern Library, Reissue edition (May 18, 1993).** This is a beautifully written novel set in a southern town in the 1930s. Through her richly developed characters, who are unable to make meaningful connections with the other people in their lives, the author explores how each individual is ultimately alone in the world. Despite the melancholy tone of the book, readers will be drawn in by McCullers' very likable, very human, characters.

***Memoirs of a Geisha: A Novel.* Arthur Golden, Knopf, 1997.** Not exactly a Cinderella story, but the central character is a poor girl who, through a series of events outside her control, is brought into the world of the geisha and as a mature adult lives quite comfortably. Like a lot of stories about unknown worlds, the main character is clueless about what is expected of her and we learn as she learns. Meanwhile, she has to maneuver some pretty tricky inter-house intrigue. I don't remember if dates were used much but the bulk of the story is set in pre-World War II Japan. Excellent storytelling; it feels like you're reading a real memoir.

***Miss Julia ... [novels].* Ann B. Ross, 1999-2005.** This humorous series (six, so far) is narrated in first-person by the central character, Julia Springer – a proper Southern woman.

***Once Removed.* Mako Yoshikawa, Bantam, 2003.** Set in Boston, Yoshikawa tells the story of Claudia and Rei, stepsisters who reunite after 17 years. She also tells the story of Rei's mother Hana, who was present during the bombing of Hiroshima, and who Claudia blames for stealing her father away.

***Oryx & Crake.* Margaret Atwood, Doubleday, 2003.** Set in a post-apocalyptic future following a world-wide bioengineering-induced epidemic, this novel recounts the story of Jimmy, one of the few survivors. The explanation for the epidemic unfolds gradually as Jimmy recalls how the world was when he was a youth.

***Tell No One: A Novel.* Harlan Coben, Delacorte Press, 2001.** This book will grab you by the collar and not let go. Don't even think about starting to read it unless you have several hours to devote to it. I read it over a weekend, almost in one sitting. It is a riveting mystery and prompted me to read other books by Coben.

***Vanishing Act.* Thomas Perry, Random House, 1995.** This is the first in a series of five mysteries featuring Jane Whitefield, a Native American "guide" specializing in helping people in trouble disappear. Perry writes very engaging thrillers and does a good job of character development. Other books in the series: *Dance for the Dead*, *Shadow Woman*, *The Face-Changers*, and *Blood Money*.

***The Wedding.* Nicholas Sparks, Warner Books, 2003.** Very sweet story about a man's plan to renew his marriage by his 30th anniversary.

### Nonfiction

***The Big House: A Century in the Life of an American Summer Home.* George Howe Colt, Scribner, 2003.** The Big House, built by the author's great-grandfather one hundred years ago on a deserted Cape Cod peninsula, is a local landmark. Colt spends one last August with his wife and two small children at the house. After spending forty-two summers there, the Big House is now up for sale. This is an intimate and poignant history of a house that watched over five weddings, four divorces, three deaths, along with countless anniversaries, birthday parties, etc. The book is both heartwarming and sad, and should be very enjoyable for anyone who holds cherished memories of summer.

## *Favorite Books IV* Continued

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**Cork Boat. John Pollack, Pantheon, 2004.** In the late 1990s John Pollack, frustrated by the cynicism and hypocrisy on Capitol Hill, quit his job as a speechwriter in order to pursue a boyhood dream to build a boat entirely of wine corks and take it on an epic journey. After overcoming many obstacles, he ultimately completes his vessel of 165,321 corks (also 15,000 rubber bands) and sets sail on a fantastic voyage down the Douro River in Portugal, where the Cork Boat becomes a national sensation.

**Dave Gorman's GoogleWhack! Adventure. Dave Gorman, The Overlook Press, 2004.** While attempting to write a novel, the author was distracted by an obscure Internet game: Googlewhacking. In playing this game, a player attempts to find rare search term combinations which return a single result using the Google search engine. [www.googlewhack.com](http://www.googlewhack.com)

**Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation. Lynn Truss, Gotham Books, 2004.** Who would have thought a book about punctuation would have become a best seller – not only in Britain, but also in the U.S.?! With her rousing cry – “Stiklers, unite!” – Truss advocates use of proper punctuation, which is becoming an endangered species (e.g., Banana’s on sale instead of Bananas on sale). She believes sloppy punctuation and low standards have been fostered by use of the Internet, txt msgs, and email. The Web site has interactive games where you can test your punctuation knowledge. [www.eatsshootsandleaves.com/](http://www.eatsshootsandleaves.com/)

**Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done. Larry Bossidy & Ram Charan, Crown Business, 2002.** They should really publish a “Dummies Guide to...” version of this book. It is a must read for anyone who wants to succeed. It breaks down in practical terms how to accomplish most any task. I learned more how to get things accomplished in this book than I ever did in college.

**To America: Personal Reflections of an Historian. Stephen E. Ambrose, Simon and Schuster, 2002.** The late Stephen Ambrose gives his perspective on historical events that shaped America and the responsibility of being an historian. *To America* flows from chapter to chapter discussing the stories that shaped our country, the role of history in today’s society, and offering tips on story telling and writing. In addition to the founding fathers, he discusses the lives of Lewis and Clark, Eisenhower, Nixon, Martin Luther King, Jr., and General Armstrong Custer. For local flavor, he talks about growing up as a child in Whitewater. He also talks briefly about his time as a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. For fans of Ambrose, who passed away shortly after completing this book, *To America* is by far his most personal and opinionated work and provides perspective into the mind of a man who dedicated himself to telling the stories of America.

**The World is Flat. Thomas L. Friedman, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.** Written by a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist from the *New York Times*, Friedman’s latest book on the impact of globalization explains how the technical advances of the digital era have leveled the playing field, or “flattened” it, as he describes it, so that less developed countries like India and China can easily compete to provide the services and goods that were once exclusively provided by industrialized nations.

### Biography

**Big Russ and Me: Father and Son – Lessons of Life. Tim Russert, Miramax/Hyperion, 2004.** This book is a personal, down-to-earth look at Russert’s formative years of the 1950s and 1960s in South Buffalo, New York. Especially emphasized in this book is the pride he feels for his father, Big Russ, who worked two jobs and was a veteran of World War II. Russert also speaks of his Catholic upbringing, his love for the Buffalo Bills, his sense of patriotism, and his love of family. The story takes the reader through his college years, his years working on Capitol Hill for Daniel Patrick Moynihan, landing his job with NBC, and then becoming moderator of *Meet the Press* in 1991. The final chapter is a note to his son Luke, now in college.

**The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio: How My Mother Raised 10 Kids on 25 Words or Less. Terry Ryan, Simon and Schuster, 2001.** This is nonfiction, but reads like a novel. Terry Ryan recounts her life in a home with 10 children, an alcoholic father, and a mother who writes jingles and poetry to keep their home afloat.

**The Weight of It: The Story of Two Sisters. Amy Wilensky, Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 2004.** Wilensky recounts her childhood with her younger sister Alison, who grew morbidly obese during high school and later had gastric bypass surgery.

### Related Web Sites

[www.book-clubs-resource.com/](http://www.book-clubs-resource.com/) Book Clubs Resource  
[www.heritage.org/about/community/insider/reading\\_list.html](http://www.heritage.org/about/community/insider/reading_list.html)  
The Insider: Conservative Reading List by the Heritage Foundation  
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