

January 2021

## **Non-Fiction**

### **Eleanor by David Michaelis (Biography)**

This recently released biography of Eleanor Roosevelt is a look at one of the United States most admired women who was certainly one of the world's most influential women during her lifetime.

I have read other books about the Roosevelts but not one dedicated to Eleanor. In this one I learned a lot, some of which was surprising. Perhaps at 536 pages not as complete as multi volume biographies but it is so compelling. If you are interested in Eleanor, her husband, politics, history, world events, love; I think you will find this fascinating and a very worthwhile read. It has a few pages of black and white photographs.

Reviewed by Cynthia Pelliccia

### **Mill Town by Kerri Arsenault (Maine Non-Fiction/Paper Industry)**

I couldn't stop reading this book that combines the author's family tree research with growing up in Mexico, Maine in an area known as Cancer Valley. Sometimes difficult to understand the sequence as this book was written over many years, but well worth delving into. The central question is never far from mind: what is the cost to health, lives, and the environment when measured against economic survival. She again raises the issue of the danger of dioxin. A topic that was talked about a lot for a while and we haven't heard anything about lately. This book encompasses class, race, poverty, corporate greed and power, government indifference, environmental justice, and family history.--

Reviewed by Hildie J. Lipson

### **A Promised Land by Barack Obama (Autobiography)**

The book outlines Obama's election and his first term in office.

Listening to Obama narrate this book adds to the understanding of the man, his love of family, his goals and the difficulties in being President of the United States of America. The book and CD are long, but it is necessary in order to understand the challenges of the position.

I would encourage anyone interested in a true American hero to listen to or read this book.

Reviewed by Lucy DiRenzo

**Strangers in their own Land: Anger and Mourning on the Right by Arlie Russell  
Hochschild (Non-Fiction)**

The author, a well known Berkeley sociologist, went to Louisiana to seek answers to the question: “why are voters who are exposed to toxic emissions, occasional explosions and chemical spills, and the erosion of the Coast due to oil canals and climate change voting to eliminate the EPA?” She describes herself as living in a Berkeley bubble of liberals and reports on extensive visits with Louisianans, trying to be friends and to understand how they think and feel. I worked for the US Forest Service in Louisiana for a few years, and have relatives in South Carolina, so her quest interested me. If you know friends or relatives who are good and intelligent people, and you cannot understand how they can believe the things they do, read this book. Her book, published in 2016, is well written and persuasive. Her ability to approach people as a friend is admirable.

The stakes just got higher: as I write this, mobs have burst into the Capitol to disrupt the formal and final count of the votes of the Electoral College. The Republican voters in Louisiana are not the only people who feel themselves in a strange land. I do too.

Reviewed by Lloyed C. Irland

**The Daughters of Yalta: The Churchills, Roosevelts, and Harrimans: A Story of Love and War by Catherine Grace Katz (History/World War Two Era)**

The reminder “Behind every great man...” doesn’t necessarily mean wives, and in this case the often overlooked daughters played a significant role during the memorable year of 1945. Sarah Churchill, Anna Roosevelt, and Kathy Harriman came together at just the right moment making sure their fathers were well positioned to draw World War II to an end. The lives of these particular women were never easy and often unhappy but were each drawn to extraordinary measures in their devotion to their fathers. A fascinating glimpse into the private lives of public figures.

Reviewed by Mary Jean Cowing

**Saving Freedom: Truman, the Cold War, and the Fight for Western Civilization by Joe Scarborough (Biography)**

The author shares the story of the unsuccessful haberdasher from Missouri who finds himself as the unlikely leader of the free world. Harry S. Truman was not a college graduate but he was a voracious reader. When he was elected to the Senate, the junior Senator distinguished himself for his preparation to discuss any topic. Truman found himself as the compromise choice to be

Vice President on the FDR ticket. During his term as the VP he was largely ignored and left out of the Roosevelt administration's discussion of all the most important decisions.

Truman received word of Roosevelt's death and found himself in the unenviable position of dealing with Joseph Stalin and the Russian aggression that followed WW II. Truman recognized that the countries of Greece and Turkey were targets of that aggression. His petition of Congress to give aid to those countries became known as the Truman Doctrine and became the model for America's foreign policy.

Truman's handling of the Cold War and the fight for the alliances that have maintained relative peace has shown this unlikely little man from Missouri to be one of the most underrated presidents in our history.

Reviewed by Jim DiRenzo

### **This Life is In Your Hands by Melissa Coleman (Maine Memoir)**

Just finished reading: THIS LIFE IS IN YOUR HANDS, a memoir by Melissa Coleman, cc 2011. I found it disturbing, but uplifting. The author, Melissa, is the daughter of Sue and Eliot Coleman, who were idealistic followers of Scott and Helen Nearing, LIVING THE GOOD LIFE. The Colemans buy 60 acres of land from the Nearings and begin to learn to live off the land by farming organically. Melissa grows up with one sibling, Heidi, and then, later on another sibling Clara. The time is 1968, when Sue and Eliot build a small cabin on their 60 acres and begin their journey. This is a very personal story of the struggles and yet happiness of a family. In the past I have visited the Nearings and their farm, so I was particularly interested in this book. Heidi Julavits says in her review: "Melissa Coleman's enthralling account of '70s back-to-the-land living is an important cultural and emotional document; this is a story about surviving and, eventually, thriving amidst the shadows of loss."

Reviewed by Jill Howes

### **Lucky.. Little Guy, Big Mission by Eileen Doyon (Children's Non-Fiction/For All Ages)**

This is a story of a disabled puppy adopted by a disabled Army veteran and her service dog. Lucky trains to become a therapy dog for kids. This would be an inspirational book for anyone 3 to 93. The author is a N.H. author, Maine soldier, and Lucky is the Leeds Central School therapy dog

Reviewed by Steve Dodge

## **A “Master Class”: What A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold Taught Us, Over 70 Years Later**

Aldo Leopold’s Sand County Almanac has been re-issued in a facsimile of its original 1949 edition, including its evocative illustrations. Noted author Barbara Kingsolver contributed an introduction. An Appalachia resident, Kingsolver shares Leopold’s affection for rural life and ways. She reexamines the question that drove Leopold’s work: Can humanity live in a place for a long time without wrecking it?

Sand County weaves in nuggets from Leopold’s education in the classics: Odysseus and his wine dark Sea (Homer), Abraham’s concept of land (Genesis), Tristram (Edward Arlington Robinson), and “when the morning stars sang together” (the Book of Job). These allusions hint at a widely educated mind. They show us something we’ve lost.

It is fitting and most gratifying that an acclaimed writer introduces this re-issue of Sand County. It speaks to its recognition as a work of literature in the finest sense. Few articles in our forestry publications will be read for as many generations as will Sand County and the various compendia of Leopold’s writings.

Reviewed by Lloyd C. Irland

## **Fiction**

### **A Little Life by Hanya Yanagihara (Fiction)**

It’s a big book (at 816 pages), about four diverse young men who meet in college and happen to remain friends throughout their lives. It follows the twists and turns in their lives - with both wondrous and painful events. It’s a story about the magic and limitations of friendship and the enduring stamp of childhood trauma. She tells the story with a love for the drama of human life. Exquisite and profound prose.

Reviewed by Julie Allen

### **Redhead by the Side of the Road by Anne Tyler (Contemporary Fiction)**

Ever since reading the Accidental Tourist I have been a fan of Anne Tyler. To paraphrase a memorable line from this book, ‘being a parent means never having a worry free day again.’ My next favorite book was Ladder of Years, an account of a runaway housewife whose spouse can’t even recall the color of her eyes when he posted a Missing notice in the local paper. Redhead by the Side of the Road is not as memorable as these two books. While the author adeptly captures the quirkiness that is our human hallmark, I feel she has surrendered to the formulaic plot. That said, it’s a light and entertaining read, an escape from these heavy times.

Reviewed by Chris Jones

### **Confessions on the 7:45 by Lisa Unger (Suspense)**

My confession of this Lisa Unger thriller...I couldn't put it down and finished it in record time. The book begins with secrets shared between two women on a stalled commuter train. Strangers...or are they?...then part ways after their chance encounter and short, but intimate conversation. Then an unexpected text comes through on Selena's phone..."It's Martha...From the train." (Goosebumps)

Buckle your seatbelt for the ride that follows. Unger's twists and turns on the plot kept me guessing and engaged.

It's a well written thriller that doesn't disappoint.

Highly recommended!

I'm looking forward to reading more books by Lisa Unger.

Reviewed by Bev Petell

### **Devoted by Dean Koontz (Thriller)**

A mute, gifted boy with autism communicates telepathically a terrifying threat to a unique Golden Retriever. The dog sets off to help. A scary story for dog lovers.

Reviewed by Steve Dodge

### **The Searcher by Tana French (Mystery Fiction)**

This stand alone mystery takes place in rural Ireland. A retired and recently divorced American policeman has just moved here from the US, to escape from his prior life, and is refurbishing a run down cottage, and getting to know the neighbors. The policeman and most of his neighbors are endearing in spite of themselves, the countryside is beautifully portrayed, the progress on the rehab of the house is encouraging and the plot is clever and believable. A very satisfactory read with much less violence than I remember from the early books in French's series.

Reviewed by Jane Andrews

### **Poldark & Sequels by Winston Graham (Historical Fiction)**

The POLDARK series by Winston Graham is comprised of 12 books written between 1945 and 2002 set mostly in Cornwall England between 1789 and 1820. Perhaps these books are best known because of the PBS Masterpiece Theater presentations aired between 2015 and 2019 which I admit to never having watched. The multi-volume saga basically is the story of Ross Poldark, the strong independent squire, his outspoken wife Demelza and their 4 children - Jeremy the oldest and headstrong Bella the youngest. I still have two more books to read in the series and do dread the end of this year-long (for me) reading adventure. I usually read something else between each volume in order to make the story last as long as possible - maybe I could be a soap opera junkie? I was fortunate to be able to borrow the books from "a friend of a friend" who owned them, but am told Janet should be able to get them for readers via the Cary Library's interlibrary loan program. If you like period pieces, the 12 volume total of nearly 6,500 pages will fly by and I recommend every single book.

Connie Locashio  
Granite Hill Estates  
Augusta

### **The Lobster Kings by Alex Zentner (Suspense/Maine setting)**

An island lobstering family with a 300 year history on the Maine/Canada border Reading this you may wish you were on island time.

Reviewed by Steve Dodge

### **The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse by Charlie Mackesy**

We saw this author interviewed on CBS's Sunday Morning. I decided I had to have the book.

The story, the art and the words are all wonderful. I love this book and found it very enthralling. It's a different kind of book.

The author did these drawings on Instagram, was encouraged to publish them as a book, started with a run of 10,000 books and became a #1 New York Times Best Seller, a Wall Street Journal Best Seller & a USA Today Best Seller. A great book for these times. Janet has it on order.

Reviewed by Cynthia Pelliccia

### **The Great Believers by Rebecca Makkai (Contemporary Fiction)**

Many readers recommended this to me. The Great Believers is set in the 1980s during the AIDS epidemic when so many victims of this (then) mysterious disease came together and formed families of support for each other. What a moving narrative. Another thread of the book takes place 30 years later when some of the survivors are reconnected by their shared losses back in the day. This absorbing novel was eye opening for me. If you are looking for a serious read that touches on family, loss, the AIDS epidemic (about which I felt shamefully ignorant--and has so many parallels today), cults, and what the critics call redemption--this is worthwhile. A finalist for the Pulitzer and National Book Award, and winner of many well-deserved accolades.

Reviewed by Janet Adelberg