

Reading for Fun is the Name of the Game

Two large golden retrievers, noses to the wind, lounged on the opposite forward benches of the pontoon boat as it plowed its way through the lake, carrying a noisy group of kids and grownups anxious to get in the water and swim...a Tom Petty soundtrack adding to the commotion. Holly, our golden, is more or less a flibbertigibbitt; Ralph, the male, with a noble head and soul to match, had been rescued by a friend from a neglected puppyhood spent tied under the deck of a huge house on Geist Reservoir...where teenage children of the owner spent all their time indoors playing video games. Ralph now has the run of the Michigan lake cottage area, and adopted us during our stay there. This dog had been gently taken in hand, bathed, trained, and - with beautiful manners - fits in anywhere.

All dogs have a story. In Garth Stein's *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, a family torn apart by a three-year custody battle after the death of the mother is narrated from the point of view of the dog, another dog with a philosopher's soul, who tries to pull them all together. Dogs give companionship and empathy every day of their lives, but this one is worth his weight in gold and is a must read.

In an effort to find out more about the perilously near-collapse of our country's financial system, I finally got my hands on a copy of *The Big Short*, by Michael Lewis. He comes at the crisis by telling the true story of several different bond traders who actually bet that the housing bubble would break, and ultimately made millions from the disaster. These guys were better than the Smartest Guys in the Room; they got it; they saw it coming and bet on it. Nobody on Wall Street knew exactly what was in the stacks of crookedly-rated derivative mortgages that could be purchased in bond form. Inevitably, foreclosures happened. Agriculture workers making \$14,000 a year had been given \$765,000 mortgages with little or no inquiry as to their solvency. Other new homeowners were encouraged to lie about their income. Their mortgages were bundled up neatly and marketed. And on it went. Our guys did their homework and realized it would never work. This story may be coming to a movie screen near you, because word has it that Brad Pitt's Plan B production company has hired a high-profile screenwriter to write the screenplay. 60 Minutes may re-air *The Big Short* piece that appeared on CBS months ago. Don't wait for the movie, read this entertaining book. If I could understand it, you can, too.

John Sanford's new page-turner, *Storm Prey*, consumed my weekend. The heat this summer has just been too much, so I divided my spare time between workouts in the pool and reading in the air conditioning. Not every novel I read got my attention, but this one did. Sanford is one of the best novelists I have ever read, and I had to wait a long time to get this one. Worth the wait, with the story line swinging from separation surgery on 18-month-old Minneapolis twins joined at the head... to outlaw, drug running, murdering bikers in the wilds of Minnesota out to get the surgeon, who had seen one of them the morning of their pharmacy heist at the hospital.

In July, I completed *The Promise*, by Jonathan Alter. This is an on-the-scene account of our President's first year in office. No wonder his hair is turning gray. Who on earth would ever want to be President of the United States?

Our Community Book Read book, the unfortunately titled *Three Cups of Tea*, by Greg Mortenson, is not a wussy book. Mortenson, essentially a homeless mountain climber living in the car he inherited from his grandmother, was somehow able to get funding and return to Pakistan to help villagers (who'd earlier saved his life) build their children a school. This important and true story is even more relevant today. He has helped 92 Pakistani and Afghan communities build schools, educating girls as well as boys in a Muslim stronghold. The reader gets truly clued in as to how things get done in Pakistan and Afghanistan. His patient dealing with local power and corruption is worth knowing about. What is more dangerous to the Muslim status quo, Predator drones or educating children? The outreach coordinator for Mortenson's Central Asia Institute will be in Columbus to speak to us this fall, and I'll be in the audience.

My Community Garden swooned in the heat, but produced some mighty fine tomatoes, basil and

pole beans. The highway construction on National Road creeps along, and although the water contractors have done something to my irrigation system, I have great hopes for an improved thoroughfare, with curb, gutter and sidewalks. It's been a season of change.

A lady came into the library a few weeks ago, wanting to know what we had to offer in the way of Westerns. She said she'd lost her husband and couldn't sleep. Reading a Western start to finish gets her through the night. I knew nothing about Westerns, but found some quickly enough, and sent her up to the Circulation Desk with a bag full. I hope she's resting easy. This summer has been a tough one. Books have helped a lot of us through it. My time with the family (and dogs Ralph and Holly) was wonderful. I noticed a few of the grandchildren reading when the action occasionally slowed down. Reading for fun is the name of the game.

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