



# BiblioFiles

By Ruth Freeman

Readers' Advisor @ the Rowayton Library

## July 2010

There is great summer reading on the shelves. Come on in and browse and share your favorites with us; here are our recommendations:

'The Double Comfort Safari Club' by Alexander McCall Smith continues the saga of Precious Ramotswe and the No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency. The cases continue to pile up, each requiring the deft touch of Mme. Ramotswe's accumulated wisdom and the contributions of her loyal secretary, her husband and the feckless mechanics. As always, the cases are more about finding or keeping happiness than solving a violent crime. I love the evocative writing; it's a visit to Africa every time you open the book.

'Solar' by Ian McEwan is a clever satire of Michael Beard's life. A Nobel Prize winning physicist whose best years are clearly behind him on both the professional and personal fronts, his life is on a downward spiral. Out of fresh ideas, with his fifth marriage on the rocks, he is increasingly irrational. Through descriptions of his increasingly desperate efforts to stay ahead of the competition McEwan draws a portrait of a man who will do anything to salvage his pride and try and maintain the respect and adulation of his peers. There are wonderful comical moments; the best are on the polar ice ship and in the quasi academic committee meetings.

"Delicious, affordable, wholesome food" is the goal of "The Green Kitchen, Techniques to Learn by Heart" by Alice Waters. This is a gorgeous book; it aims to make good technique instinctive so you are a confident cook. Many guest cooks inspire with their favorite dishes and kitchen wisdom. If Alice seems just a tad too perfect you can read 'Medium Raw' by Anthony Bourdain. One of his essays does a humorous job of putting Alice in her place.

Get to the farmers market and buy blackberries just so you can make the blackberry buttermilk cake in Bill Yosses' book 'The Perfect Finish'. Written with Melissa Clark it is an eminently approachable dessert cookbook from a master chef. His recipes are clearly explained and photographed; having made three of them the first two nights I had the book out I can attest to their accuracy. They are not particularly complicated but have big flavors. This book is fun!

'Silk Parachute' by John McPhee is his most recent collection of essays. It's eclectic but somewhat sports centered. Canoes, lacrosse sticks, golf clubs and basketballs all figure prominently. McPhee has the wonderful ability to make any subject fascinating, whether you play the game, are in the



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business, have the interest, or not. The collection is rounded out by essays on geology and a terrific one on fact checking (anyone who has read 'The Imperfectionists' will enjoy this one about the irascible copy editor at the New Yorker). Finally, the title essay is simply marvelous. Start anywhere in this collection – you'll be glad you did.

'Stay' is a first novel by Allie Larkin. Featuring Joe, the larger than life German Shepard who only responds to commands in Slovak, it's a light hearted romance that pushes all the right buttons for summer reading. It's funny, well written, the main characters are believable and the plot won't strain your brain. On the other hand it won't insult you either – highly recommended and not just for dog lovers.

'A Fierce Radiance' by Lauren Belfer is a compelling story, with tons of fascinating historical detail. Set in New York during WWII it's the story of Claire Shipley, a photographer for Life magazine, and the doctors and researchers at The Rockefeller Institute who are trying to make penicillin in quantity in time to save lives on the front. There is a love story, plenty of intrigue and realistic depictions of the stresses of wartime. It's incredible that just decades ago one could die from a scratch. The thrill of the eventual successful synthesis of penicillin really drives this narrative. This book was hard to put down.

'The Chill of Night' by James Hayman is set in Portland Maine. It provides excellent suspense and good police procedurals, almost to the point where it's instructional. You are immersed in the gritty underside of Portland following the search for the killer of a young associate in one of the city's preeminent law firms. The book is enhanced by a sympathetic portrait of a key witness who suffers from schizophrenia. Abby's courage is inspirational. Det. Michael McCabe is the complicated hero (aren't they all?) who doesn't rest until the case is wrapped up.

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