



Top six list of most inspiring books in the past year (or so)

I keep a list of all the books I've read in pretty accurate order. This is the season to review those books and choose a Letterman-style top six list of books that meet these criteria: 1) Well written. That is a must. 2) Deals with common parts of human nature that we all need to navigate. 3) Even when the subject is tough, the books leave us with a sense that we can come through hard things and be uplifted. They aren't nihilistic. 4) They entertain us.

These are my choices that I think a critical mass of you would appreciate. After I made the list, I saw that I chose half fiction and half non-fiction. That was random. I wasn't looking for a particular mix. Here they are in reverse order leading up to my number one book during this period. (Don't jump ahead! I believe the number one choice will surprise you as it did me.)

6) **The Department of Sensitive Crimes** by Alexander McCall Smith. Smith, who gives us the Scotland Street Series and the Ladies Number One Detective Agency series, began a new series referred to as the Detective Varg series. We have a quirky police department in Sweden who investigate three little odd-ball crimes of small consequence. But what if instead of crime/suspect/arrest, we have more complicated human situations and a police force dedicated to teasing it out. This is a quick read that left me amused and thinking.

5) **The Story of Arthur Truluv** by Elizabeth Berg. A connection happens in a cemetery as an older man in grief for his dead wife meets up with a pregnant teenager whose family isn't pleased with her. Grief, crisis, what comprises family, and the human connections that allow us to make the journey to a new normal and new happiness are all explored.

4) **The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up** by Marie Kondo. I've had a lot of fun at the expense of this book and for that I'm (sort of) sorry. The value of the book isn't in any of the organizational hints but in causing us to examine what our personal relationship is with "stuff." Since reading it, I haven't taken a single bit of advice on organizational techniques. But I've nonetheless completely changed three areas of the house that badly needed attention – my bookcases, the bedroom walk-in closet, and the garage. When Kondo says get rid of that which doesn't "spark joy," we innately know exactly what she means. Acting on it is priceless.

3) **The Shakespeare Requirement** by Julie Schumaker. I love this book about the besieged English Department Chair at a college/university. I've had that job and Schumaker's depiction is perfectly on-point. What Schumaker does best is show how all the chaos and

rivalry, the politics and student obstacles, even the ex-wife who still works there, come together in mutual support to make better people of us all. (And it's hilarious.)

2) **The Electric Woman** by Tessa Fontaine. The memoir of a woman who has taken care of her mother for years and, when given the opportunity, takes a job as a carny side-show performer is one of the most touching I've read. The point is in the saying, "The trick to eating fire is there is no trick." You eat fire. True for side show performers and true for the rest of us struggling with hard things in life which means all of us. Sometimes we face the flames.

1) **Notes from a Public Typewriter** by Michael Gustafson is 156 fast pages with lots of white space. This antique public typewriter resides at the Literati Book Store in Ann Arbor. What do people write in public when no one is looking? They write about everything. This book is number one for me because it is so human and moving – full of humor and pathos, hope and a desire for connection, the reflective spirit, optimism, the power of putting words to page with no delete button ("like life"), and the ability to overcome. If you read nothing else on this list, I hope you take a few minutes for this. You will be rewarded with a Werewolf who plays the violin and his new friend.

That's my list and, of course, the library can connect you with all these books. May the peace of the season be yours, and your reading give you a chance to reflect on what we have in common.

See you at the Library!

Upcoming Events: **Coffee and Crafts** meets once more this Friday from 10 – 12. **Bavarian Princess Cocoa & Candy Canes** will be Dec. 19 at 10:30. Follow us on FB and Twitter.