Best Reads 2018

Compiled by Vicky Calmes, Colby Community Library Director

Fiction

20. Winter Soldier by Daniel Mason

Lucius is a twenty-two-year-old medical student when World War I explodes across Europe. Enraptured by romantic tales of battlefield surgery, he enlists, expecting a position at a well-organized field hospital; however, when he arrives at a commandeered church tucked away high in a remote valley of the Carpathian Mountains, he finds a freezing outpost ravaged by typhus.

19. The Distance Home by Paula Saunders

In 1960s rural America, two siblings grow up in a place of love and turmoil. Rene is the apple of her father's eye: an over-achiever, athletic, clever, the best brain in class, and the best dancer in school. Her older brother Leon, doted on by his mother, is shy, a stutterer, but also a brilliant dancer. This is the story of two children growing up side by side—the one given opportunities and the other just misses—and the fall-out in their adult lives.

18. The Cemetery Keeper's Wife by Maryann McFadden

The 1886 rape and murder of kitchen maid Tillie Smith, 19, on the grounds of a New Jersey seminary where she worked captivated and outraged Victorian America. The Pinkerton Detective Agency declared the crime would not be solved. A few weeks later, though, janitor James Titus was arrested and eventually sentenced to hang. But does he? Skip to modern times: Rachel Miller, who has just married the 7th generation cemetery keeper, makes it her quest to find out what really happened to Tillie after discovering Smith's headstone.

17. Every Note Played by Lisa Genova

An accomplished concert pianist, Richard received standing ovations from audiences all over the world. That was eight months ago. Richard now has ALS. Three years ago, Karina removed their framed wedding picture from the living room wall, but she still hasn't moved on. Karina is paralyzed by excuses and fear, stuck in an unfulfilling life as a piano teacher, afraid to pursue the *path* she abandoned as a young woman, and blaming Richard and their failed marriage for all of it. When Richard becomes increasingly paralyzed and is no longer able to live on his own, Karina becomes his reluctant caretaker.

16. We Own the Sky by Luke Allnutt

Everything changes in a couple's life when they go from being "just us" to "we three." Rob meets Anna at Cambridge, love and marriage ensue, and then there's Jack. Work and friends and all the rest that used to define their lives fade to the background, especially after 5-year-old Jack's stumbles and fainting spells lead to an upending, devastating diagnosis.

15. The Last Suppers by Mandy Mikulencak

Ginny Polk works as a prison cook. She knows the harsh reality of life within those walls, yet she has never seen the prisoners as monsters, not even the ones sentenced to execution. That is why, among her duties, Ginny has taken on a special responsibility: preparing their last meals. Whatever the men ask for Ginny prepares, even meeting with their heartbroken relatives to get each recipe just right. Then Ginny learns facts about the man who killed her father…

14. The Dry by Jane Harper

After getting a note demanding his presence, Federal Agent Aaron Falk arrives in his Australian hometown for the first time in decades to attend the funeral of his best friend, Luke. Twenty years ago when Falk was accused of murder, Luke was his alibi. As Falk reluctantly investigates to see if there's more to Luke's death than there seems to be, long-buried mysteries resurface and so do the lies that have haunted them. Falk will find that small towns have always hidden big secrets.

13. A Gathering of Secrets by Linda Castillo

(This is the latest [#10] in the series. I would suggest reading them all!)

When a historic barn burns to the ground in the middle of the night, Chief of Police Kate Burkholder is called in to investigate. At first, it looks like an accident, but when the body of eighteen-year-old Daniel Gingerich is found inside burned alive, Kate suspects murder. She begins investigating only to discover a chilling series of crimes that shatters everything she thought she knew about her Amish roots—and herself.

12. Our House by Louise Candlish

There's nothing unusual about a new family moving in at 91 Trinity Avenue except it's Fiona's house and she didn't sell it! When Fiona Lawson comes home to find strangers moving into her house, she's sure there's been a mistake. She and her estranged husband, Bram, have a modern co-parenting arrangement: bird's nest custody, where each parent spends a few nights a week with their two sons at the prized family home to maintain stability for their children. Now Bram has disappeared and so have Fiona's children. As events spiral beyond her control, Fiona will discover just how many lies her husband was weaving and how little they truly knew each other.

11. The Home for Unwanted Girls by Joanna Goodman

In 1950s Quebec, French and English tolerate each other with precarious civility. Maggie's English-speaking father has ambitions for his daughter which don't include marriage to the poor French boy on the next farm over, but Maggie's heart is captured by Gabriel Phénix. When she becomes pregnant at fifteen, her parents force her to give baby Elodie up for adoption and get her life "back on track." Elodie is raised in Quebec's impoverished orphanage system. It is a precarious enough existence that takes a tragic turn when Elodie, along with thousands of other orphans in Quebec, is declared mentally ill as the result of a new law that provides more funding to psychiatric hospitals than to orphanages. Maggie, married to a businessman eager to start a family, cannot forget the daughter she was forced to abandon.

10. The Wife by Alafair Burke

When Angela met Jason Powell while catering a dinner party in East Hampton, she assumed their romance would be a short-lived fling, like so many relationships between locals and summer visitors. To her surprise, Jason, a brilliant economics professor at NYU, has other plans, and they marry the following summer. Six years later, thanks to a bestselling book and a growing media career, Jason has become a cultural lightning rod, placing Angela near the spotlight she worked so carefully to avoid. Then the accusations begin…

9. I'll Be Your Blue Sky by Marisa de los Santos

On the weekend of her wedding, Clare Hobbes meets an elderly woman named Edith Herron. During the course of a single conversation, Edith gives Clare the courage to do what she should have done months earlier: break off her engagement to her charming, overly possessive fiancé. Three weeks later, Clare learns that Edith has died and has given her another gift: Blue Sky House now belongs to Clare. Shifting between the 1950s and the present and told in the alternating voices of Edith and Clare, this is an emotional novel that probes the deepest recesses of the human heart.

8. A Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

Offred is a handmaid in the Republic of Gilead. She may leave the home of the Commander and his wife once a day to walk to food markets whose signs are now pictures instead of words because women are no longer allowed to read. She must lie on her back once a month and pray that the Commander makes her pregnant, because in an age of declining births, Offred and the other handmaids are valued only if their ovaries are viable. Offred can remember the days before, when she lived with her husband Luke, when she played with and protected her daughter, when she had a job with money of her own, and access to knowledge. But all of that is gone now…

7. The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell by Robert Dugoni

Sam Hill always saw the world through different eyes. Born with red pupils, he was called "Devil Boy" or Sam "Hell" by his classmates; "God's will" is what his mother called his ocular albinism. Her words were of little comfort, but Sam persevered, buoyed by his mother's devout faith, his father's practical wisdom, and his two other misfit friends. Forty years later, Sam, a small-town eye doctor, is no longer certain anything was by design—especially not the tragedy that caused him to turn his back on his friends, his hometown, and the life he'd always known.

6. A Stranger in the House by Shari Lapena

Karen and Tom Krupp are happy. They've got a lovely home in upstate New York, they're practically newlyweds, and they have no kids to interrupt their comfortable life together. But one day, Tom returns home to find Karen has vanished. Her car is gone and it seems she left in a rush. She even left her purse, complete with phone and ID, behind. Karen was in an accident but she is mostly okay, except that she cannot remember what she was doing or where she was when she crashed. The cops think her memory loss is highly convenient, and they suspect she was up to no good.

5. The Great Alone by Kristin Hannah

Ernt Allbright, a former POW, comes home from the Vietnam War a changed and volatile man. When he loses yet another job, he makes an impulsive decision: he will move his family north, to Alaska, where they will live off the grid in America's last true frontier. As winter approaches and darkness descends on Alaska, Ernt's fragile mental state deteriorates and the family begins to fracture. In their small cabin, covered in snow, blanketed in eighteen hours of night, Leni and her mother learn the terrible truth: they are on their own, and there is no one to save them but themselves.

4. The Woman in the Window by A.J. Finn

Anna Fox lives alone—a recluse in her New York City home, unable to venture outside. She spends her day drinking wine, watching old movies, recalling happier times, and spying on her neighbors. Then, the Russells move into the house across the way: a father, a mother, and their teenage son. They seem like the perfect family. Anna, gazing out her window one night, sees things that break that illusion...

3. Virgil Wander by Leif Enger

Midwestern movie house owner Virgil Wander is "cruising along at medium altitude" when his car flies off the road into icy Lake Superior. Virgil survives but his language and memory are altered, and he emerges into a world no longer familiar to him. Awakening in this new life, Virgil begins to piece together his personal history and the lore of his broken town, with the help of a cast of likeable and curious locals.

2. Send Down the Rain by Charles Martin

Allie is still recovering from the loss of her family's beloved waterfront restaurant on Florida's Gulf Coast when she loses her second husband to a terrifying highway accident. Devastated and losing hope, she shudders to contemplate the future, until a cherished person from her past returns...

And the Number One Best Fiction Read of 2018...

1. The Reckoning by John Grisham

Pete Banning was Clanton, Mississippi's favorite son—a decorated World War II hero, the patriarch of a prominent family, a farmer, father, neighbor, and a faithful member of the Methodist church. Then, one cool October morning, he rose early, drove into town, and committed a shocking crime. Pete's only statement about it—to the sheriff, to his lawyers, to the judge, to the jury, and to his family—was: "I have nothing to say." He was not afraid of death and was willing to take his motive to the grave. Will his lawyer be able to save him from himself?

Non-Fiction

5. Thoughts from a Tree Stand by Joseph R. Lange

This work, by local author Joe (Dick) Lange, is a compilation of forty-nine years of enjoying God's great wonders. With many hours spent afield, Lange finds wisdom as evidenced in nature. To anyone who enjoys the outdoors and even those who don't, these reflections on life are a refreshing read.

4. Buy the Little Ones a Dolly by Rose Bingham

In a small, close-knit Wisconsin community, a mother goes into town and never returns. It's 1952 and Rose, at 15, is the oldest of seven children, the youngest of whom is only three. As hard as Rose and her father tried to keep things together on the home front, with the help of kind relatives and sympathetic neighbors, in 1954 the children were ultimately placed in an orphanage and later split up into five different foster families. "Buy the little ones a dolly" were some of the last words Rose received from her mother in a Christmas letter, sent without a return address. Rose made it her lifelong mission to maintain contact among the siblings. The mystery surrounding her mother's disappearance comes to light 59 years later.

3. <u>Don't Make Me Pull Over</u> by Richard Ratay

With the birth of America's first interstate highways in the 1950s, families were bit by the road trip phenomenon bug and were soon streaming—without seatbelts—to sometimes wacky locations. In the days before cheap air travel, families didn't so much *take* vacations as *survive* them. Between home and destination lay thousands of miles and dozens of annoyances. With his family, Richard Ratay experienced all of them from being crowded into the backseat with noogie-happy older brothers, to picking out a souvenir only to find that a better one might have been had at the *next* attraction, to dealing with a dad who didn't believe in bathroom breaks.

2. <u>The Radium Girls</u> by Kate Moore

The Curies' newly discovered element of radium makes gleaming headlines across the nation as the fresh face of beauty and wonder drug of the medical community. From body lotion to tonic water, the popular new element shines bright in the otherwise dark years of the First World War. Meanwhile, hundreds of girls toil amidst the glowing dust of the radium-dial factories. The glittering chemical covers their bodies from head to toe: they light up the night like industrious fireflies. With such a coveted job, these "shining girls" are the luckiest alive—until they begin to fall mysteriously ill.

And the Number One Best Non-Fiction Read of 2018…

1. <u>The Sun Does Shine</u> by Anthony Ray Hinton

In 1985, Anthony Ray Hinton was arrested and charged with two counts of capital murder in Alabama. Stunned, confused, and only twenty-nine years old, Hinton knew that it was a case of mistaken identity and believed that the truth would prove his innocence and ultimately set him free. With no money and a different system of justice for a poor black man in the South, Hinton was sentenced to death by electrocution. He spent his first three years on Death Row at Holman State Prison in agonizing silence. For the next twenty-seven years he was a beacon—transforming not only his own spirit, but those of his fellow inmates, fifty-four of whom were executed mere feet from his cell. With the help of civil rights attorney and bestselling author of *Just Mercy,* Bryan Stevenson, Hinton won his release in 2015.