

1. ***Lessons from the Edges: A memoir*** by Marie Yovanovitch, read by the author. ©2022 14 CDs. Just as the FBI thwarts many terrorist attacks before they happen, so too do our diplomats quell some would-be crises. In her career, Yovanovitch served as ambassador to Ukraine, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan. Her first State Dept. post was to Somalia, at, of course, a very junior level, and it was two years before any Americans died there. MY was a fact witness in Trump's first impeachment trial. Trump called her "a terrible diplomat. She was in Somalia, and look how that turned out." Marie saw lots of corruption abroad, but was shocked to witness similar in her own government. MY's parents grew up under Soviet and Nazi terror. They appreciated finding a home in America. Her mother, a nonagenarian, had died of a stroke right in the middle of Marie's ordeal of testifying.
2. ***A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan's plot to take over America*** by Timothy Egan ©2023 354pp. The second iteration of the Klan was inspired by the movie *The Birth of the Nation* (1915) which romanticized the first iteration. The Klan was for temperance, against immigrants, Negroes, Catholics and Jews. Due to the charismatic leadership of a grifter named D.C. Stephenson, the Klan, which openly preached White Supremacy, grew incredibly fast. Stephenson became wealthy by taking a cut of all dues and uniform sales, and more. In 1924 most immigration was cut (until LBJ 41 years later). Stephenson abandoned a wife and child and got away with molesting a string of women because he controlled politicians. Finally he was tried for murdering Madge Oberholtzer. He counted on being pardoned by the governor, but wasn't. The fever had broken.
3. ***Love Nina*** by Nina Stibbe, read by the author. ©2013 Hoopla, 8 hrs. Nina was 20 when she came down to London in 1982 to be nanny to the sons of Mary-Kay Wilmer, editor of the *LRB*. MK's ex was Stephen Frears, her neighbors were luminaries in the arts that Nina had never heard of. These neighbors dropped in all the time. Letters Nina wrote to her sister, unearthed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, describe the busy household. Nina studied A-Level English at a polytechnic, writing with a fresh take on *that* as well.
4. ***A Billion Years: My escape from the highest ranks of Scientology*** by Mike Rinder (1955-2025) ©2022. 294pp. The author grew up in a Scientology family. He had blind faith. It's an eventful book. I am interested in the evolution of a person's beliefs.
5. ***Backing into Forward*** by Jules Feiffer (1929- 2025) ©2010 444pp. Not only did JF make cartoons for the *Village Voice*, but he was a playwright, a screenwriter (*Carnal Knowledge; Popeye*), and a children's book author and illustrator. I was interested in his accounts of the creative process. He was a New Yorker who got hand-me-downs from his 3-yrs-older rich relative, ROY COHN.
6. ***What's So Funny? A cartoonist's memoir*** by David Sipress (1947- ) ©2022 249pp. Family dynamics, marriage, and religious attitudes are on display. Nat Sipress, immigrant who had cut himself off from his own family of origin, had a jewelry shop in Manhattan a walk through Central, Park from the family apartment. Apropos cartoons leaven the text. Angst. Sibling issues.
7. ***Darkroom: A memoir in black and white*** by Lila Quintero Weaver ©2012 250pp. A graphic memoir coming-of-age story simply told with annotated drawings. The author was five in 1961 when her family emigrated from Argentina to Marion, Alabama. She covers her growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement, childhood concerns she kept from her parents, adolescence, her father's photography hobby, and her own interest in drawing. She touches on religion, food, and letters from Argentina.
8. ***Valley of Forgetting: Alzheimer's families and the search for a cure*** by Jennie Erin Smith ©2025 347pp. In 1984 two young neurologists in Medellín, Columbia noted a pattern of early onset dementia in a family. They made a genogram of the family tree. They discovered other families in the remote hills. They persuaded families to donate victims' brains to science. They got drug companies to conduct long-term drug trials. Before the internet they needed to go to conferences, but lacked funds. Cartel violence was another impediment. Yet they persevered. They discovered a mutation (not the only one for Alzheimer's). The personal stories of the researchers and the afflicted families fascinated me. Statins that now help many elders were first developed to help people with a genetic propensity to have high cholesterol in youth. One hoped in vain that would happen with Alzheimer's.
9. ***For Those I Loved*** by Martin Gray (1922-2016) with Max Gallo ©1971 354pp. Updated 2006. Not sure everything in WWII happened exactly as described, because how could anyone remember that detail? Max Gallo has researched the general terrain so probably extrapolated some particulars. Martin was a black-marketeer in the Warsaw ghetto, escaped from Treblinka, joined the Red Army... got to NYC in 1946 where his grandmother and uncle, his only remaining relatives, welcomed him. He was a hustler and a born salesman. He worked all kinds of short-term jobs while gaining fluency in English. By age 35 he had "made it" in the antiques biz but he was on the verge of despair from overwork. He was overweight. Then he met Dina. She was Dutch. They married and moved to rural France. He closed his businesses except for investments he could attend to for 2 weeks every year. He got healthy. Dina introduced him to the arts. They had four children born 1960-69. Then in 1970 a fire took the lives of Dina and the children! In the 2006 edition I learned that in 1976 Martin re-married & had 5 more children! There are photo plates.
10. ***Who Is Government? The Untold Story of Public Service*** edited by Michael Lewis ©2024 243pp. Profiles of individual civil servants. A chapter by Dave Eggers is about a woman astronomer at the Jet Propulsion Lab. Geraldine Brooks wrote a chapter on cyber-sleuthing in the IRS. There's a chapter about the Dept. of Justice's anti-trust group, one about the National Archives, one about the CDC and the FDA. John Lanchester writes about how the Dept. of Labor Statistics calculates the Consumer Price Index. Other stats: The Misery Index=(Unemployment rate)+inflation. It was 8.12 when first defined during the LBJ administration. It was 5.01 in Sept. 2019, 15.03 7 months later. Reagan was the only president re-elected with a double-digit misery index, but it had fallen from 19.93 at his inauguration to 11.25 by 1984. Measuring gives the government ideas of what needs improvement.
11. ***Zbig*** by Edward Luce ©2025 560 pp. Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928-2017) moved from Poland to Montreal when he was 11 in 1939. His father was a diplomat. The family listened to Polish radio every night. Then one day the trademark theme notes from Chopin were replaced by "Deutschland uber Alles." Zbig earned a Harvard Ph.D. He became a professor. Zbig and Henry Kissinger, 5 years his senior, were frenemies for the rest of their lives. They met regularly for dinner. Kissinger was Nixon's Secretary of State. Zbig was Carter's National Security Advisor. In 1997, when NATO agreed to expand, Zbig was the first person Madeleine Albright called. Tidbit: After Carter normalized relations with China in 1978 (bad news for Russia), at a dinner at the Brzezinski home, Zbig asked Deng if there was any domestic pushback to his trip to America. "There was some opposition in the Province of Taiwan." Brzezinski's moniker within China was "The Polar Bear Tamer." Also covers Brzezinski family life. Photo plates.

12. ***The Lives of Lee Miller*** (1907-1977) by Antony Penrose (her son) ©1985 207pp. Tony came to appreciate his mother in researching this book. There were so many aspects to Lee's life that this biography brings together: Her American childhood, her years in Man Ray's Paris studio, her first marriage to a rich Egyptian, her life as a war correspondent. Photo plates.
13. ***Playground*** by Richard Powers ©2024. 400pp. Todd of Evanston, and Rafi of a Chicago ghetto, bond over Chess and Go at Ignatius H.S. in the 1980s. At the U of Illinois, Rafi becomes a poet, and falls in love with Ina. Todd gets into AI, in its expert systems infancy. He gets in on the ground floor of the internet, developing an interactive game called *Playground*. He catches up on neural-network AI. He becomes a tech billionaire. As an adult Rafi works at the U of I library. There's a thread about a diver and oceanographer born in Montreal in 1935, Eve Beaulieu. Fast forward. Todd develops Lewy body dementia. There's an epilogue set on an island in French Polynesia. Silicon Valley investors want to manufacture floating cities there that will be deployed outside the reach of taxation. There's a real ending, and one that AI hallucinated, given all the aforementioned facts.
14. ***Time of the Child*** by Niall Williams ©2024 287pp. Set in Advent 1960 in Ireland. A newborn is abandoned. Dr Troy revives the infant. His daughter and office manager, Ronnie, bonds with the baby whom she calls Noelle. Dr. Troy wonders if 4 years earlier he perhaps stood in the way of a budding relationship between Ronnie and Noel Crow, who had since emigrated to America. He concocts a crazy scheme to make amends, soon deflated by reality. Another thing Dr. Troy feels guilt about is sending a pregnant girl to a Laundry 20 years earlier. He also regrets that he loved the late Annie Mooney for years and never told her.
15. ***The Road from Belhaven*** by Margot Livesey ©2024 255pp. Book Group. An eventful old-fashioned novel set in Scotland. Lizzie was born in 1873 and raised by her grandparents on Belhaven Farm. Glasgow is industrializing. Lizzie draws. There are crises.
16. ***Absolution*** by Alice McDermott ©2023 450pp. (Large Type) My book group discussed this. Mostly set in Vietnam in 1963. Patsy is there with her husband Peter who was recruited by the CIA to be an engineering advisor in Saigon. Earlier, Patsy had headed South with a fellow Marymount classmate to register voters. In the expat community Patsy met Charlene, a corporate wife, mother of 3, and a sort of colonial-style do-gooder. But Charlene is warm and helpful when Patsy suffers a miscarriage. Patsy almost adopts a Vietnamese "orphan." Patsy bonds with Charlene's 7 yr old daughter Rainey. Another American, Dominic, helps out at a leper colony on his days off. Peter and Patsy leave Vietnam a day before the fall of Diem. Decades later Patsy, Dominic and Rainey re-connect. Dominic has a great relationship with his son who has Down Syndrome. Rainey's husband has dementia.
17. ***Galway Bay*** by Mary Pat Kelly ©2009 551pp. (Normal Type) The author spent 20 years researching this novel, based on her own ancestors' 19<sup>th</sup> century journey from Ireland to Chicago, specifically Bridgeport, the neighborhood where my father's grandfather Daniel E. Healy (born in Ireland in 1833) lived from 1836 until his death in 1914. His career was manager of Stearns Lime and Stone. So I was thrilled to read that Stearns quarry was one of the businesses in Bridgeport when the Kellys arrived in 1848. The Kelly story begins with young love, and a few happy years, until the famine, which was *awful*, as was the harrowing journey to America. The Kelly family multiplied. The Civil War and the Chicago Fire happened. The younger generation attended St. Xav's and Ignatius. I know graduates of both schools, which remain Chicago mainstays. The novel ends with a family reunion at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. My mother's mother, newly arrived from County Mayo, attended that Fair.
18. ***The Covenant of Water*** by Abraham Verghese ©2023. 25 CDs, read by the author. The BOP is 736 pp. An epic novel set mostly in Kerala, India, 1900-1977, on the working estate of a modestly well-off Christian family. Big Ammachi arrives at Parambil in 1900 as the 12-yr-old bride of a 40-yr-old widower. She develops into the matriarch of several generations. Three major characters are doctors, Digby Kilgore, Rune Orquist, & Mariamma. They all are involved at some point in St. Bridget's Leprosarium. Other characters pursue vocations in art, writing, and estate management. There are several love stories and several parent-child sagas.
19. ***The Correspondent*** by Virginia Evans ©2025 281pp. Sybil Van Antwerp was born in 1939 and adopted at age 1. We learn about Sybil's relationships in letters she wrote 2012-2021. Sybil is a retired lawyer with 2 adult children. A middle child died in childhood. Sybil's son gave her a DNA kit. We are propelled to learn more about these things. Sybil's individuality comes through.
20. ***Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*** by Jonathan Safran Foer ©2005 10 CDs/326pp. I ran across an old letter from a recently deceased friend, Elinor Miller. In it Ellie raved about this book. It's narrated by Oskar Schell, 9, a very bright only child. Oskar lives in Manhattan. His father died on 9/11. Oskar embarks on an obsessive quest to answer some questions about his father. Oskar's beloved paternal grandmother lives across the street. There's a thread about her background in Dresden during the war.
21. ***Ernie's Ark*** by Monica Wood ©2002 189pp. Eileen Doherty has added me to the email list of her building's Short Story Group. The title story of this collection was so compelling I read them all. They are all set in a fictional paper mill town in Maine, during a strike. As an interconnected group they make a novel reminiscent of Elizabeth Strout. Eileen said, "I loved Ernie"
22. ***Tolstoy Lied*** by Rachel Kadish ©2006 325pp. Tracy, 33, is a tenure-track English professor. She deals with departmental politics. She relies on friends Jeff, Hannah and Yolanda. I liked the scene where Tracy meets George, a lapsed fundamentalist.
23. ***The Safekeep*** by Yael Van der Wouden ©2024 262pp. Set in 1961 in The Netherlands. Three siblings 28 to 31 years old, meet for dinner. Louis brings a girlfriend, Eva. Hendrik has come alone but his siblings know his significant other, Sebastian. Isabel is single, and a misanthrope. She lives alone in the big house they moved into in rural Holland in 1942. I can't summarize the rest without "spoiling the movie," but it's about lies people and nations tell themselves. Shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

None of the following books are fiction. They are in a separate group because I personally know these authors:

24. ***Vera Tells All*** Unpublished manuscript by Carola Murray-Seegert (Aquinas '64) Carola interviewed her mother (1906-94) in two long sittings in the 1980s, and transcribed those interviews into this document, inserting photographs. Family & Chicago history.
25. ***Sister Eve*** by Anne Gunshenan (my cousin) ©2025 174pp. Memorial book about the author's sister Eve Gillcrist, O.P. (1924-2019). Lots of photos. Eve had a varied career: Anyone who does not appreciate the rich life of some nuns should read this book.
26. ***Belly Dancing in a Brown Sweatsuit*** by my niece Elaine d'Entremont Sorrentino ©2025 66pp. I attended her poetry book launch at a gala in March. "Dance with exhilaration down an uncharted path." "They'll discover/I sometimes colored outside the lines."