

## 2007 Christmas Gift Book Suggestions

### OBC Members' Picks for Notable Books Encountered During the Year (Listed Alphabetically by Reviewer)

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Co-Chairpersons: Harold Hoffman and Jan Murphy



### ADULT FICTION

**Janie Branscomb**--Son-in-law of OBC member Sally Wylde has his first novel included in the New York Times' list of the year's 10 best books: *Man Gone Down* by Michael Thomas. It's also highly recommended by this humble churchgoer.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/04/books/review/Glover.t.html>

**Janie Branscomb**--*The Hummingbird's Daughter* by Luis Alberto Urrea, our current Book Group pick. I loved it!. It's about a Mexican curandera in late 1800's who became a saint (Teresita) to some of the Indians there and is still revered by many. She was an ancestor of the author, whose novel includes a lot of historical information he dug up over the course of decades of research

**Elaine Hoffman**--*The Book of Marie* by Terry Kay. A man at middle age reviews his growing up in segregated Georgia in the later 50's and early 60's. Marie, a girl from "up North," comes to his high school and changes him and the town. The major themes include memories sweet and bittersweet, love, what it is like to go home again, friendship, and letter writing that spans 50 years. This novel offers a wonderful insight about how we review our memories not to seek closure but for new beginnings.

**Karen Thomas Smith**--*A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaleid Hosseini. I didn't know how he could redeem the stark story of these women's lives in Afghanistan, but he did. It is a very redemptive, hopeful--and not unrealistically optimistic--work.

**Walker Knight**--I just finished *A Thousand Splendid Suns* recommended by Karen Thomas Smith, and I would add my amen to that book. I'm so thankful my daughters were not raised in such a repressive society.

**Donna Goddard**--*A Thousand Splendid Suns* was one of my favorites this year, too.

**Karen Thomas Smith--*Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*** by Laila Lalami. I think this is a masterpiece exploring why folks risk it all to take a dangerous and illegal boat trip to enter Europe. Laila is Moroccan and I heard her speak last summer. I actually got to sit beside her at dinner and told her I felt like some kind of groupie crashing a party.

**Karen Thomas Smith--*Map of Love*** by Ahdaf Soueif--Okay, the title is cheesy, but the book is powerful. And several times I gasped at the astute political commentary in this book written in 1999 (prior to 9-11). Ahdaf Soueif is an Egyptian woman who lives in England.

**Buddy Gill--*The Kite Runner*** by Kahled Hosseini, is based on the author's growing up in Afghanistan and then surviving the Russians and the Taliban. But it is much, much more; it gets uncomfortably deep into the human condition. They have made a movie of it, so read the book soon.

**Katelyn Murphy-McCarthy--*Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*** by Lisa See. I liked looking at the lives of women in a different culture and thinking about both the limitations of their worlds and the value of the work they did. The chapter on foot-binding is not for the weak of heart, or stomach.

**Katelyn Murphy-McCarthy--*The Rapture of Canaan*** by Sheri Reynolds. One of my favorite books from years ago, this book looks at the lives of members of a cult in rural Appalachia, through the eyes of one of its teenagers. My mother says the audio is one of the best-performed that she's heard.

**Sonja Neely & Steve Holt --*The Book Thief*** by Markus Zusak for the young adult on your list. I love, love, love this book and its feisty female heroine Leisel. Set in WWII Germany, the story is narrated by Death, who is dry witted and not especially happy with his line of work. I know -- sounds scary -but it is ultimately a redemptive tale about the love of words and, well, just love.

**Ken Stone--*Love in the Ruins* and *The Second Coming*** by Walker Percy. His fiction writing is full of his upbringing within traditional southern religiosity, but he is able to examine that tradition with a critical eye that does not (quite) reject it. And he tells a good story, too. He captures in rich detail the atmosphere of life in the vicinity of Asheville and Montreat, North Carolina, of the mid-1960s to 1970s. Percy observes and describes nature, human behavior, and introspection in extravagant detail. I felt as though he were writing about my relations in western North Carolina. [http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/english/ms-writers/dir/percy\\_walker/](http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/english/ms-writers/dir/percy_walker/)

**Ken Stone--*The Last Gentleman*** by Walker Percy tells a semi-autobiographical tale of a young southern man living in New York, then traveling back through the south on an extended trip, eventually back to his home. Percy uses the story to study the major (and some minor) elements of the racial tensions, oppressions, and progress in the 1960s. Again, this is from the perspective of a southerner with an "evolved" viewpoint. This story reminded me of Karen Shipp's experience growing up in eastern North Carolina, where her minister father was forced out for being seen taking African-Americans into his home, and for preaching similarly -- which also resulted in a drive-by shooting at their home. Percy's story fills in the blanks for me, since I was too young to have seen the worst of this and since my parents were not part of the activism and went out of their way to remove race as an element of conversation or decisions.



## JUVENILE BOOKS

**Katelyn Murphy-McCarthy-- *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*** by Ann Brashares. I read this, as its intended audience is not 8-year-old boys. It's a great story of four true-to-life girls who share separate journeys, a strong commitment to their bonds with each other, and a fantastic pair of pants that makes each of them look terrific. This would be a great book for a mother-daughter book club.

**Katelyn Murphy-McCarthy--*Bud, Not Buddy*** by Christopher Paul Curtis. This is a funny and poignant story of a boy's search for his father after his mother's death, this book looks at race and economic issues during the Great Depression. I would recommend this especially in audio format.

**Katelyn Murphy-McCarthy--*The Skull of Truth*** by Bruce Coville. This is part of a series that delves into the emotional lives of young boys. This particular book talks about truth --and gave me a lot to think about



## ADULT NONFICTION

**Margaret Blevins---*Living Buddha, Living Christ*** by Thich Nhat Hanh,. It is a wonderful book, and easy to read in segments for devotions. (Might be good for the Patchwork Class as well.)

**Margaret Blevins--*Eat, Pray, Love*** by Elizabeth Gilbert. Funny, but honest account of her travels as she searches for answers and overcomes depression after a divorce. This book was named one of the "12 nonfiction books that mattered in 2007" by Today's Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

**Carolyn Copenhaver--*Social Intelligence*** by Daniel Goleman. A state-of-the-art, easy-to-read book by a former NYTimes Science writer delivers the latest research on how we communicate, mostly unconsciously, brain(s) to brain(s) This book provides some astonishing revelations about various human neurological configurations and (indirectly) begs us to practice tolerance and

warns us that our own emotions can create toxic contagion within families and groups. This book gave me hope for a better world.

**Bea Hoffman--*A Cup of Your Life*** by Joyce Rupp. A spiritual guide for finding greater closeness to God using the ancient religious symbol of the cup.

**Elaine Hoffman--*The Glass Castle*** by Jeanette Walls. This is a memoir about the author's life growing up in a very poor, very proud and very dysfunctional family plagued by alcoholism and mental illness in the 70's and 80's. What is striking and also sad is the resiliency of the children including the author and her final understanding of the choices her parents made to remain in poverty and ultimately homeless.

**Lou Clymore--*The Glass Castle*** is a good book. Those children were remarkable in their resiliency. I wanted to smack the parents.

**Jim Holmes--*Clapton: The Autobiography***--Eric Clapton's Autobiography is a good read, especially for those who enjoy his music and are familiar with the lyrics. He writes of his experiences growing up in Ripley--his confused family life and its psychological affect on him later in life as he struggles through relationships, drug and alcohol addiction--all while maintaining his musical career.

**Jim Holmes--*The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post 9-11 America***--Susan Faludi offers an insightful analysis of how our nation responds to crisis by resorting to mythmaking using a familiar fantasy formula of manly men and damsels in distress. Her analysis of the Jessica Lynch story was particularly poignant.

**Jim Holmes--*Grace (Eventually): Thoughts on Faith***--Anne Lamott's latest collection that maintains her unique style of storytelling that makes you laugh and cry at the same time. She read one of her stories from this book when JoEllen and I went to hear her speak at Central Presbyterian Church earlier this year.

**Jim Holmes--*The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*** by Douglas Brinkley'. This book is a detailed account of what happened (and what didn't happen) during the critical week of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. I must confess, I have not read the whole volume--but what I have read is excellent. I recommend this book to anyone interested in Oakhurst's efforts with Churches Supporting Churches and our connections with our brothers and sisters in New Orleans.

**Jim Holmes--*Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*** by John Perkins. This 2004 Best Seller was recommended by one of the group of Cuban missionaries who visited Oakhurst this summer. Perkins' account gives Dollar Diplomacy a whole new meaning as he describes U.S. Economic policy and exploitation in the developing world.

**Buddy Gill--*The Long Road Home*** by Martha Raddatz, follows a platoon of soldiers as well as their families back home, through a brief but terrible combat in Sadr City, Iraq. It is remarkable not only for its dispassionate clarity, but also for the way the story is told without any sort of political or ideological spin. (Some of you know Raddatz from her appearances on Washington Week; she has probably been to Iraq more times than any other correspondent.)

**John Shippee--*Books by Gary Gunderson***. While we're thinking about books, how about those written by some of our own--which may reflect our own experiences. I have been influenced in countless ways, including my writing when I get the chance, by the Gunderson series. ***Deeply Woven Roots*** discusses the strengths of congregations. ***Boundary Leadership*** goes into depth on one aspect of what informs our life as a community. Gary also wrote ***Leading Causes of Life*** with Larry Pray, a Montana pastor colleague. All these books can be found on the net

(www.amazon.com and www.alibris.com) or (I believe) through the Interfaith Health Program at Emory. Any one of these books would make a great Sunday School Theme book.

**Ken Stone--*Lost in the Cosmos--The Last Great Self-Help Book***, by Walker Percy. This book is intended as a thoughtful alternative to the deluge of self-help books published in the 1980s and beyond. It consists of a collection of short philosophical/theological "thought experiments" designed to awaken our moral sensibilities from the numbness that we tend to fall into. Each is well-written, with subtlety and penetrating insight that sneaks up on you then kicks you in the stomach. "No pain, no gain."

**Geoff Sumner--*Chile: the Other September 11***, Edited by P. Aguilera and R. Fredes, Ocean Press. A compilation of essays, poems, speeches, lyrics from a variety of people involved in the first 9/11 tragedy, the US backed coup against Chile and its elected government. The two 9/11s had no connection, as far as I know, other than being crimes against humanity and the coincidence of dates. It's a surprisingly gentle and thoughtful book, with lots of interesting detail and insight.

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