

4-1-2002

Book Marks

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Recommended Citation

University, Furman (2002) "Book Marks," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 45 : Iss. 1 , Article 27.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol45/iss1/27>

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BOOK MARKS

Each issue of *Furman* magazine includes brief reviews of books written by Furman faculty and alumni, as well as reviews of books recommended by faculty and staff as “good reads.”

RECOMMENDED

David Snowdon, *Aging With Grace: What the Nun Study Teaches Us About Living Longer, Healthier, and More Meaningful Lives* (Bantam Books, 2001). This is a story about 678 retired nuns who participate in the author’s longitudinal research examining the effects of aging on mental ability. The nuns agree to be tested on a regular basis and, at death, to donate their brains to scientific examination. Snowdon’s research approach is to relate their mental abilities while they are alive to the condition of their brains at death.

This book offers an interesting glimpse into the research methodology of an epidemiologist, and at the same time is a warm and personal look at the spirit and commitment of some rather amazing people. Responding to the charm of his “subjects,” Snowdon violates one of the cardinal rules of science: emotional detachment. As the subtitle suggests, the book offers valuable insight into how to age gracefully and successfully.

—Gil Einstein, *Psychology*

P.J. Finn, *Literacy With An Attitude: Educating Working Class Children in Their Own Self-Interest* (State University of New York Press, 1999). This is a provocative book, although the author is not the first to realize that working-class children frequently get the short end of the stick. There’s this theoretical construct of the “haves” versus the “have-nots” that some of us have encountered in the concrete as opposed to the abstract. Many of us “have-nots” could have benefited from Finn’s explanation of how the Corresponding Societies of 19th-century England concluded that being poor and powerless was not necessarily the will of God or the natural order of things. This literacy of the Corresponding

Societies is the “literacy with an attitude” that Finn endorses for America’s working class children.

People throughout history have been beaten, hanged, burned, even sprayed with the ubiquitous fire hose for wanting access to this powerful tool. Few will read Finn without seeing the obvious parallel between the perils of attaining literacy in 18th-century England and in the southern United States during the 19th and 20th centuries.

— Tom Cloer, *Education*

Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (Vintage Books reprint, 1993). I kept putting off reading this book because it was so long (980 pages of text), but when I finally picked it up, I read it in a week. If anything, it’s even better than Bullock’s classic *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* because including Stalin provides a compelling binocular focus. How are we to understand these two cruel giants of the 20th century? Bullock offers no overarching generalizations that explain everything, but he suggests that both men were outsiders — loners who felt a sense of betrayal and of destiny. They were crazed but blessed with powerful memories, always underestimated by their opponents, and ruthless. The one thing that separated Stalin from Hitler — and ultimately gave him victory over Hitler — was his ability to learn from his mistakes, especially at the crucial Battle of Stalingrad.

— David Spear, *History*

Malika Oufkir and Michele Fitoussi, *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail* (Talk Miramax Books; originally published in 1999 as *La Prisonnière*). This autobiographical account by Oufkir, daughter of the closest aid to Hassan II, king of Morocco during the sixties and seventies, is a tale of extremes: extravagant luxury and total depravation, vengeful cruelty and amazing courage. At the age of

5, Oufkir is taken to the royal palace to be a companion to Princess Lalla-Mina. Palace life is full of luxury but also of brutality, particularly toward women. After her father’s coup attempt against the king fails and he is executed, Oufkir, her family and two friends are sent to the infamous desert gaols, where they spend the next 15 years under severe conditions. What saves them is their will to survive and the power of their imagination.

The book recounts their remarkable escape, their four years of house arrest, and finally their exile in France. Recent Moroccan history, human rights, and women’s lives under a totalitarian regime are just some of the book’s themes.

— Sofia Kearns, *Spanish*

Beryl Markham, *West With the Night* (North Point Press, 1983). In 1906, 4-year-old Beryl Markham and her father left England for Kenya, where he was soon to begin cattle ranching in Nairobi. This dramatic move marked the beginning of a lifelong adventure for Markham that included hunting with tribal elders, raising race horses, piloting bush planes, and finally completing a solo transatlantic flight. Here, in her powerful autobiography, she offers a compelling account of a girl’s coming of age against the backdrop of a developing Africa. Indeed, in her lifetime she watched Nairobi grow from a handful of haphazardly arranged, tin-roofed buildings to a city of 30,000 people. Her sensitive portrayals of the Masai Murani, with whom she hunted wild game from a young age, are rich with commentary about the tribe’s religious beliefs, social and moral values, bravery and sense of humor, and her vivid descriptions of the rift valley, with its heat, insects, tall grass and thorn bushes, are without equal.

— Joe Ashley, *Technical Services*

FROM ALUMNI

Robert Harris ’76, *Nerds Among Us* (5:09 Press, 2002). The author’s first novel is a humorous tale of intrigue that takes its hero, Jake Bravado, on a “dangerous journey” to discover where all the nerds have gone. In the publisher’s words, Jake steps “into the world of digital watches, pocket protectors, and ill-fitting polyester clothing” and subsequently embarks on a quest to “save the world from nerdiness.” Harris’ tongue-in-cheek approach is not surprising, considering that his previous book was the lighthearted *Fun With Phone Solicitors: 50 Ways to Get Even!*

Judith Robertson Asti ’74, *A Spiritual Journey Through Breast Cancer: Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow* (Moody Press, 2002). The author, an associate editor of *The Paladin* during her days at Furman, takes the reader through her battle against breast cancer, with which she was diagnosed in July 1998. In particular, she describes how her faith helped her cope with the diagnosis, aggressive chemotherapy and radiation treatments, and a mastectomy and reconstruction surgery. The publisher says the book is a “compelling story” that offers a message of hope and support to anyone touched by the disease. A published short story writer and essayist and an award-winning copywriter, Asti is now a freelance writer living in West Bloomfield, Mich.