

Resolving to Read by Laura Stoll, Assistant to the Director

For many people, the new year means making resolutions to be more fit, get rich, or finally get organized. None of that for me! I revel in the fact that I made it through another year relatively healthy, financially stable, and with all of my paperwork tossed in the same messy basket, if not neatly filed away. I do make one goal every year: how many books I hope to read before December 31.

There are several ways to set and track a reading goal, but I use Goodreads because it lets me tag the books I want to read in the future, mark them as read once I'm done, and keep track of how many I've read in a year. It's easy to log in on my phone or computer while I'm browsing the stacks at the library or watching BookTok videos. Goodreads also lets users leave reviews, which I find useful for remembering which books were my favorites.

I have used Goodreads to set and track my reading goals since 2016. Except for this year, I've always exceeded the total number of books I hoped to read. In 2022, I only made 91% of my goal. For an overachiever, the fact that I didn't reach a goal was disappointing, especially since it was doing one of my favorite things.

I've thought a lot about why I didn't reach my reading goal. It's possible I set it too high. Maybe I was busy with the two graduations, two new jobs, one new college student, and six Covid diagnoses in my immediate family. It's not like there weren't any good books published this year. I think the answer is actually pretty simple: I got into a reading slump. There's no explanation other than I got out of the habit of reading.

I can see on Goodreads that my reading was at its slowest in November. To be fair, I did spend some time starting - but not finishing - a few books, including Stephen King's "The Stand," which, in my defense, is more than 1,000 pages long. I managed to break out of the slump in December with Matthew Quick's "We Are The Light," an inspiring story about a small town recovering from tragedy and I ended the month with "Signal Fires" by Dani Shapiro, a favorite podcaster of mine.

I took a few things into consideration when I set my goal for 2023. For one thing, the vast amount of time I spent starting books that I eventually didn't finish should count for something. I haven't decided exactly how I'm going to count them but I'm not going to discount them entirely. Second, I decided that I don't want to set a lower goal than I set in 2022; I think this year's slump was a one-off and I'll be back to my usual pace next year. Finally, I'm going to let go of any negative self-talk about what I accomplished in 2022. Just because I didn't read as many books as I'd planned doesn't mean I didn't do a lot of good reading last year. (Also, I'm going to finally finish "The Stand" despite the fact that I'm sure Ben, Tom, and Dennis are shaking their heads with doubt right now.)

With all of this in mind, there are quite a few books I can't wait to mark as "read" on my Goodreads account in 2023. I've been waiting patiently on the hold list for my turn to read "Lucy by the Sea" by Elizabeth Strout and just before New Year's Eve, my name came up. I didn't watch Meghan and Harry's Netflix documentary but I can't wait to read his book, "Spare," which comes out in January. If you're also intrigued by the Sussexes, stay tuned for details about how you can borrow a copy of the book and join us for a discussion and afternoon tea on February 27. I started reading Barbara Kingsolver's "Demon Copperhead" in November but didn't get around to finishing it. It wasn't because it wasn't interesting; it was just part of my slump.

Now that I look at it, my Goodreads list of books I want to read includes 89 titles, far more than I'll have time to read in one year. Plus, I never know when something new and compelling will come along. No matter what 2023 brings, whether it's the energy to read 100 books or another reading slump, I'm confident it's going to be amazing.