

Family Picks from Boise to Boston to Brussels  
By Laura Stoll, Assistant to the Director

My extended family is scattered across the United States and abroad but one thing we all have in common is a love of reading. When I sent out an email earlier this month asking for book recommendations, I was inundated! Here are suggestions from the Stoll family.

Elizabeth's most recent read was "Mister Monkey" by Francine Prose. She says, "It's the story of an off-off-off Broadway production of a children's musical about a monkey who gets adopted by a family in New York, then gets accused of stealing a wallet. Each chapter is written from the perspective of different people involved in the production, and everyone is questioning the poor life choices they made that made them end up doing this stupid low-budget show."

Elizabeth and Becca both work in the Broadway world so it's not surprising that they picked theater-related books. Becca recommends Gregory Maguire's "Wicked," the basis of the hit musical. She says, "This book has everything! Sex, scandals, political turmoil, an allegory on colonialism, and Elphaba joining a terrorist sleeper cell to overthrow the Wizard's government in the name of animal rights?!?!" She said that the musical is a loose and sanitized version of the book and it was a fun and easy read.

Ben just finished "A Winter's Promise" by Christelle Dabos, which he says "is a very fast-paced fantasy/sci-fi story." This title is the first in a quartet, originally written in French. According to the publisher, the first book "introduces readers to a remarkable heroine and to the richly imagined universe of the arks: floating celestial islands governed by the spirits of immortal ancestors."

On the non-fiction side, Betsy recommends "East West Street" by Philippe Sands. It examines the lives of two Jewish lawyers, Hersch Lauterpacht and Raphael Lemkin, born within three years of each other and students in the same city. Betsy says, "It's dense but also very timely because it talks about the origin of the terms 'crimes against humanity' and 'genocide.' I've been learning a lot."

Rob is reading "Dr. Mutter's Marvels: A True Tale of Intrigue and Innovation at the Dawn of Modern Medicine" by Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz. This biography is about, Thomas Mutter, the inventor of plastic surgery. Rob says, "It's a fascinating look at surgical practices in the early/mid-1800s and the 'medical politics' of the time, especially in Philadelphia. The Mutter Museum there is named after him. Very interesting place to visit."

A few books appeared on several reading lists. Charleigh was one of three who had read Britney Spears' book "The Woman In Me." While it would be a stretch to say we "enjoyed" reading about her struggles, the book was authentic and entertaining. Tana French is an award-winning Irish American author of several mystery novels. Five family members recently read "The Searcher" and can't wait to read her newest title, "The Hunter." "Demon Copperhead" by Barbara Kingsolver comes highly recommended by Emily, Barby, and Cathy. Cathy says it "deserves every prize." It's no surprise that my three well-read aunts Betsy, Barby, and Cathy have already read the runaway hit "The Women" by Kristin Hannah. While they all enjoyed it, they agreed that they didn't enjoy it as much as Hannah's previous book "The Great Alone."

In total, my family sent more than 50 suggestions that I couldn't fit into this column. I guess we all enjoy talking about books! You can look forward to more book recommendations from my family in future columns!