

Exploring Beyond the New Shelves

By Laura Stoll, Assistant to the Director

My reading resolution for 2025 is to choose books from beyond the brand-new things we receive at the library. After many years of gravitating towards books that were published in the last year or two, I started to notice that I have a lot of older books on my TBR (“to be read” list) that have been neglected. Here are some titles that I either missed reading when they first came out or that I want to reread in 2025.

“The Great Alone” by Kristin Hannah. This is an unpopular opinion but I’m not a fan of Kristin Hannah. When my cousin Charlie said this was one of her favorite books, I decided to give it a try. The book is about the Allbright family: Vietnam POW Ernt, his wife Cora, and their daughter Leni. Although the family first finds a fresh start on the last frontier, what follows is darkness, violence, and the struggle to survive.

“The Poisonwood Bible” by Barbara Kingsolver. I read this book when it first came out in 1998 and since then, I’ve often said it’s one of my favorite books of all time. Is that still true? I can barely remember the plot so it will be interesting to see if I’m still enamored with it. From the publisher, “The story is told by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce, evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. They carry with them everything they believe they will need from home, but soon find that all of it—from garden seeds to Scripture—is calamitously transformed on African soil.”

Another book I claim to be an all-time favorite is “A Prayer for Owen Meany” by John Irving. Unlike “The Poisonwood Bible,” I’m confident I will love it as much as I did every other time I’ve read it because I think about it often. The way the characters and the events all fit together in the end is so satisfying that I wonder if life really works that way. It’s as if everything Owen and John experienced was part of a larger plan. I can’t wait to read it again with new (and older) eyes.

I started reading the Maisie Dobbs series by Jacqueline Winspear a few years ago and I’m still slowly making my way through. Next on my list is number seven, “The Mapping of Love and Death.” The stories take place between 1910 and 1929 and feature the title character, a private investigator building her business in the aftermath of the First World War. The seventh book “takes Maisie from London’s most exclusive drawing rooms to its most downtrodden neighborhoods, forcing her to wrestle with memories of serving as a nurse in the Great War.” If you like mystery and historical fiction, don’t miss this series.

“The Heart’s Invisible Furies” by John Boyne was recommended by my coworker Cindy, who also loves “Owen Meany” and “The Poisonwood Bible.” According to the publisher, this “is a novel to make you laugh and cry while reminding us all of the redemptive power of the human spirit.” That sounds like just my thing!

Nina, another coworker of mine, suggested anything by Rona Jaffe. Based on some internet research, I picked “The Best of Everything.” Nina also suggested the famous “Peyton Place” by Grace Metalious. Although I’m pretty sure I read it before, I think it will take on a whole new meaning now that I’ve become a citizen of a small town.

I don’t plan to spend all of my reading time on older books this year. I’ll have to make space for new releases by some favorite authors: Anne Tyler, Curtis Sittenfeld, Geraldine

Brooks, Jennifer Weiner, Emily Henry, and Abby Jiminez. As always, there's too much reading I want to do and not enough time!