

There Is This Book



Gail Brecht

A strong literary arts advocate, Gail Marie Brecht “beat the clock” in starting one of her children on more than a lifelong interest in reading: *Prior* to the birth of one of her sons she was reading aloud to him, *in utero*.

Have you ever wondered what someone reads who spent years, as Gail did, working as a paralegal to general practice and civil litigation attorneys? Read Gail’s unique answers to “This Book’s” questions to find out.

Now a homemaker with a large footprint of volunteerism within the Baxter – Brainerd community, Gail’s principal emphasis in recent years has in some way involved a variety of meaningful support activities for literature, generally, and for the Brainerd Public Library, specifically, all through the creatively dynamic Friends of the Brainerd Public Library. One of the national level authors Gail most admires has been a presenter at an annual, very large and growing dinner event sponsored by the Friends, drawing together book enthusiasts, notable authors and this community.

With her background in children’s books, you cannot imagine what children’s book Gail could not “get into,” *literally* not “get into,” much less guess what “guilty pleasures” Gail does, indeed, get from books.

Q. What is the last great book you read (include name, author, genre, something about the author, something about why this book and its effect on the interviewee)?

The Sober Diaries, by Clare Pooley, who relates her experiences over the course of one year, nearly day-to-day, as she struggles with both alcohol addiction and breast

cancer while successfully maintaining a career, marriage and raising children. It balances hope and humor with honest personal reflection, and it gave me the encouragement and faith in myself that I needed to begin my journey of sobriety.

Q. What is your favorite book no one has heard of (include name, author and why this is that favorite)?

Shadows on the Koyukuk, by Sidney Huntington. This autobiography describes the incredible life experience of a native Athabaskan who grew up in rural Alaska. Huntington weaves personal adventures, survival advice and spirituality into his life, and his writing about it, as he learns to survive in a harsh and unforgiving climate. Amazing and inspiring.

Q. Do you consider any books to be “guilty pleasures” and if so, or if not, then why or why not (be discrete)?

The “guilty pleasure” I get from reading is immersing myself in a book while the laundry, dishes and cooking remain undone.

Q. What is your favorite book to recommend to others, and why?

I frequently recommend *This Tender Land*, by William Kent Krueger, a story set in a fictional Minnesota beginning in the 1930s and then follows the adventures of four children who escape abuse, via the Gilead River, from a state school. Krueger, who has presented at Friends of the Brainerd Public Library large events, is a master at developing characters who tug at your heart, and who also provides excellent descriptions of the river and the Midwest in general in 1932, the politics of the Great Depression, “Hooverilles” and racism practiced against Native Americans. I so appreciate Krueger’s sensitive and brilliant writing skills in exploration of complex human personalities and relationships. In *This Tender Land*, hope, strength, perseverance, love and loss, all tied together in a story I did not want to end.

Q. Do you consider any books that are considered to be “great books” to be overrated, and if so, then why?

The entire Harry Potter series is an enigma to me. One of my sons and I attempted to read the first book, but we did not make it to the second page of that book. Literally, the second page of writing. I stopped about half-way down and wondered how I could tell Evan that I just cannot get into the story (although it was my idea

to read it together), and I did not want to learn a new vocabulary just to get through the story. He expressed exactly the same ideas to me.

Q. What subjects do you wish more authors would write about?

The human spirit, and how people survive and thrive despite overwhelming odds, setbacks and discouraging circumstances.

Q. What moves you most in a work of literature?

I love the unexpected - a surprise twist, a character from the past who reappears, a mystery that is not easily solved.

Q. Which genres do you especially enjoy reading, and which do you avoid?

I especially enjoy biographies, historical fiction, humor and sobriety advice stories ("quit lit"). I avoid fantasy, westerns and science fiction.

Q. What book might people be surprised to find on your bookshelves (be discrete)?

Upon reviewing all of my bookshelves, I came to the conclusion that all of the books I own are predictable. Seriously. I think at some point thought it might be entertaining to sew little monsters, so of course I found a book to help me along the way (and I still have it): *Stupid Sock Creatures: Making Quirky, Lovable Figures from Cast-off Socks*, by John Murphy.

Q. Who is your favorite fictional hero or heroine, and who is your favorite antihero or villain?

My favorite fictional hero is Scarlett O'Hara, from *Gone with the Wind*. Scarlett is a happy mix of spirited determination and feminine wiles. The term "villain" conjures up a vision of Dr. Seuss' Grinch, but my mind must subconsciously suppress anything more villainous, as no really evil fictional character comes to mind. Because I read so much non-fiction, among my leading non-fiction villains are polluters and child abusers.

Q. Do you consider any books, which are not generally thought of as being among the great books, to be candidates for such a list, and why?

There is a children's trilogy of such books, known as the *Birchbark House* series, written by Louise Erdrich, about the life and adventures of a young Ojibway girl in

the mid-1800s, similar to the *Little House* series, but from a Native American perspective. Many details about a native community, survival skills and traditions are presented in a straightforward, delightful manner. I wish I had read them as a child and I have often recommended both series to teachers and parents.

Q. What books are stacked by your favorite place to read, waiting for you?

Hamilton: The Revolution, by Ron Chernow; *We are the Luckiest*, by Laura McKowan; *The Beauty in Breaking*, by Michele Harper; and, *Get Satisfied*, by Peter C. Whybrow, MD; *Betty Ford: First Lady, Women's Advocate, Survivor, Trailblazer*, by Lisa McCubbin.

Q. What book do you intend to read – and finish – next, and why?

400 or so. Do I have to pick one? Very reluctantly, because there are so many which are equally begging for attention, here is one: *Educated*, by Tara Westover.

Q. If you could invite one author, living or deceased, to dine with you, then who and why?

James Michener. I admire the combination of his curiosity, attention to detail, descriptive prose, sense of humor, humility and intelligence all reflected in his compelling and delightful historical fiction.

Q. Do you read one book at a time, or more, and whichever way you read, why do you do so “that way”?

I read more than one book at a time: I always have one loaded from *Audible* that I listen to on road trips, one that I read just for joy and at least one self-help or educational book to satisfy my curiosity or to better myself.

Q. If you know there is a movie and there is a book, which do you “consume” first, and why?

I always read the book first. I like to picture my own characters and locations, establish “in-my-head” voices, and set my own pace for the story to develop. Movie and television versions of books nearly always disappoint. One major exception is the movie “Gone with the Wind.”

Q. What do you think about the skills and abilities of those who reach the level of authors who are published by established publishers?

I am amazed by the talent of authors to create a story or to tell a true story in a concise, compelling manner. I have often wished to have that talent, but I realize my place is to enjoy and savor the incredible talent of those who write and are published.

Q. If you are about to be quarantined for two weeks, and can only bring one book with you, then which book will you bring, and why?

I would bring my Bible. I can't think of any other book that provides wisdom, direction, history, emotion, beauty, meaning and hope to anyone, anywhere.

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