

52 BOOKS IN 52 WEEKS (Year 2020/2021)

From Chris Little

Several years ago, because of my obsessive need to read, I wanted to take the 52 books in 52 weeks challenge. That challenge led to a write up on the library website and a good number of followers interested in the good books, the mediocre books and even the bad books that I critiqued and reviewed.

Each year since then I have continued with the challenge. Although one would think in a year like 2020 that I would far exceed my normal number of books it is a fact that it turned out to be my most challenging year to complete. Go figure! The following list includes the titles and reviews of the last year of a compulsive reader.

Week 1 – Harlan Coben, *Run Away*. Another homerun from Harlan Coben. He has been a favorite author of mine for many years now and remains my top go-to author when doing reader's advisory for the library. Being a parent myself, books about wayward children, and the trouble that they can get into always grab at my heart. While I have never had to deal with addiction issues with my children (now adults), Coben's descriptions and characterization make you feel the parent's heartbreak and desperation. How far will a parent go to save their child?

Week 2 – Amor Towles, *Rules of Civility*. I am definitely in the minority in my views of both this book and *A Gentleman in Moscow*. I did like this one better than the other but...neither was that great of a read for me. Parts of this story enraptured me and kept me reading but other parts left me glassy-eyed and bored. So to be fair I felt three stars would be a good compromise.

Week 3 – Mary Trump, *Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man*. Caution!!! Contains my own personal political opinion and is not necessarily the view of any other city or library employee!!! Well written and very informative for me. As much as I did not like this man before I like him even less now. I actually finished this book on the night of the "big" debate. Perfect timing I'd say. When the man's own family can't believe that he was actually voted into the white house? DYSFUNCTION, DYSFUNCTION, DYSFUNCTION!

Week 4 – Joanna Cannon, *The Trouble with Goats and Sheep*. I usually like stories told from a child's perspective but for some reason, this book just got on my last nerve. I found the majority of the characters completely annoying and what I thought began as a great storyline turned into; why did I waste my time on these annoying characters who never did seem to grow on me? The books one redeeming quality appears to be the cover which is what attracted me to begin with.

Week 5 – Marie-Helene Bertino, *Parakeet*. There are so many fabulous reviews on this book, however, it just didn't do anything for me. Perhaps at a different place or time in my life but currently I simply could not relate to this story or the characters within. The premise of the story is that a bride starts having serious doubts about her impending marriage just a little too late to feel she can do anything about it. The timing of her life starting to fall into place couldn't have happened at a worse time...or could it be the best time?

Week 6 – Kate Carlisle, *Murder Under Cover*. (Bibliophile Mystery #4) I'm a fan of this cozy mystery series for sure. Not my favorite so far but very enjoyable none the less. The premise of the series is the

main character Brooklyn Wainwright has the wonderful job of repairing very old and very valuable books but every book that comes across her path seems to bring trouble of the murdering kind.

Week 7 – Kim Vogel Sawyer, *The Librarian of Boone's Hollow*. I've not read much by this author but I most definitely intend to read more. I really love "faith" based books AND historical fiction so it seems the writings of Kim Vogel Sawyer are right up my alley. In depression time Southern America where life is tougher than tough, it takes a gaggle of horseback librarians and a whole lot of faith to bring a downtrodden community together. Delightful story.

Week 8 – Heather B. Armstrong, *The Valediction of Being Dead: The True Story of Dying Ten Times to Live*. This is a hauntingly accurate memoir of a young woman's battle with severe depression. After the loss of my young son, I suffered from what they called situational depression. Getting out of bed in the morning was a battle I often lost. But I compare the severity of that to the deep depression that Heather Armstrong suffered for seemingly no apparent reason and I can easily imagine the hopelessness that she dealt with. She was brave enough to undergo an experimental treatment in her fight for life. In her fight to give her daughters the wonderful mother that they so deserved. And she won.

Week 9 – P. L. Gaus, *Blood of the Prodigal*. Because I'm a fan of Linda Castillo and her Amish Mystery (Kate Burkholder series) I was excited to find another series of a similar type...however, this story just didn't meet my expectations at all. Character build-up was poorly done to the point that I was as often as not confused, asking myself "now which person was that again?" It was really just an okay read and it's doubtful that I will continue with more of the Ohio Amish Mystery series.

Week 10 – Shalini Boland, *The Child Next Door*. Fabulous! I couldn't put it down. Throughout the book I kept changing my mind about what exactly was going on and who was actually more creepy. And the twisted ending? LOVED!

Week 11 – Stephen King, *End of Watch*. This was such a great series. I so hate to see it come to an end. Back in the day I fell in love with Stephen King's writing and kept up with him for many years but then at some point something changed and I no longer found the stories or writing enjoyable. But in the last few years, I have gained a new love and respect for this author. I don't care to go back and pick up the books that I missed while I was boycotting King's books but most anything new that he comes out with is on my "I have to read" list. Stephen King...thank you for the return of your previous self 😊

Week 12 – James Patterson, *1st Case*. I've become skeptical about starting any new series by Patterson simply for the fact that I have two that are my fave's and everything else seems to pale in comparison to the others. With that said, I'm not sorry that I read this one and will definitely give the next one a chance. It wasn't a fabulous five-star read but it was pretty entertaining.

Week 13 – Richard Paul Evans, *The Noel Letters*. One of my all-time favorite authors. As always, a perfectly wonderful, inspiring read. Richard Paul Evans NEVER disappoints.

Week 14 – Wanda Brunstetter, *The Crow's Call*. (Amish Greenhouse Mystery #1) If you enjoy Amish fiction as I do I highly recommend this new series. I also like the fact that there's a mystery involved. Enjoyable characters. I will definitely be reading more in this series.

Week 15 – Caroline Mitchell. *Silent Victim*. This was a great read! Suspenseful enough that it keeps you reading long into the night. This was my first by this author but I definitely want to read more from her.

Emma is a loving wife, a devoted mother...and an involuntary killer. Emma's darkest secrets are buried in the past but the truth can't stay hidden for long. A 4 star read!

Week 16 – Diane Mott Davidson, *Crunch Time*. (Goldy Bear Culinary Mystery #16) It's been several years since I read the previous books in this series. I don't know if it's because I'm older or if my reading tastes have just changed but I only found this a mediocre read. However, with that said, since I've made it so far through the series I will likely continue on with the rest.

Week 17 – Lisa Unger, *Confessions on the 7:45*. I enjoyed this book tremendously and at times found it hard to put down. My only complaint is that throughout the first half of the book I had a little trouble keeping up with who was who and is this taking place in current time or in the past. But all in all it left me wanting to read more by this author.

Week 18 – Sarah Simpson, *Her Greatest Mistake*. Overly descriptive and TOO WORDY. Frankly, other than a few intense parts here and there I found myself quite bored throughout. Considering the premise of the story I think this could have been an intense page-turning thriller but as it is?... I'm just glad it's over.

Week 19 – William Kent Krueger, **This Tender Land**. Oh my word I loved this book! I've been suggesting it to EVERYONE who cares to listen! I love historical fiction regardless but on occasion, you come across one that puts you in the mind of the characters, makes you feel their emotions, and this is one of those books. I miss the characters already. An enthralling, bighearted epic story with the feel of a modern classic. This was my first read from this author but it's definitely not my last.

Week 20 – Elizabeth Berg, **Night of Miracles**. I absolutely adored *The Story of Arthur Truluv* and I was so happy to see that there was a sequel. It was so enjoyable to go back and visit these old friends and to see which direction they took their lives. I didn't QUITE enjoy it as much as the first but without Arthur, I couldn't possibly. If anyone hasn't read this series I'd highly recommend it.

Week 21 – Linda Castillo, *A Gathering of Secrets*. (Kate Burkholder series #10) As always I love yet another book in this Amish mystery series. So much suspense and guessing and always that little twist at the end that keeps you reading on late into the night.

Week 22 – Wanda Brunstetter, *The Mockingbird's Song*. (Amish Greenhouse Mystery #2) Wanda Brunstetter writes wonderfully as always and I'm a big fan of both Amish fiction and Amish mysteries. I did get a little annoyed that every time the characters from the accident were mentioned (which is often) each of their names was written out instead of just saying "since the accident". That does get a little monotonous. But besides that...a very enjoyable read and I'm left anxious to see what comes in the next book. I'm not a fan of the character Virginia so I hope she somehow sees the error of her ways and becomes a happy person.

Week 23 – Shaun David Hutchinson, *The Apocalypse of Elena Mendoza*. I don't read young adult fiction often enough and I almost NEVER read sci-fi but regardless I was tremendously intrigued by the blurb I read on this book and I'm so glad I did. While the thought of actual virgin birth and healing others by simply touching them is pretty out there (when it's not about Jesus, that is) this story was written in a very appealing way that kept the reader wanting to read on. I'm glad I stepped out of my comfort zone to read this.

Week 24 – Elizabeth Berg, *Confession Club*. I adore Elizabeth Berg books. They're always so sweet and uplifting; feel good kinds of stories. What a wonderful series this has been, beginning with an all-time favorite book *The Story of Arthur Truluv*. While the second and third books in the series can never compare to the first, they remain to be wonderful reads regardless.

Week 25 – Stuart Turton, *The Devil and the Dark Water*. I am definitely in the minority here but for myself personally, I'm not even sure 1 star is an appropriate number. And honestly this one is going on my rarely used DNF (did-not-finish) shelf. I gave it 18 chapters and I was still bored silly so I decided to give it up. Maybe it was just the writing style but I have too many want to reads sitting on my shelf than to continue with one that is just not entertaining or intriguing me.

Week 26 – Anthony Franze, *The Advocates Daughter*. This is the first book by this author that I've read ...or rather, listened to. I liked his interview at the end. It gave me more of a feel of who he was and how the story came about. For being in the crime/mystery genres, this was middle of the road for me. I liked it, but I wasn't wowed. It was a good read for the day. I liked the main character and his wife. They were well drawn, as were the other characters. The story line, however, had some incredible leaps over reality. Some of the scenarios were wild. But still 3 stars.

Week 27 – Katherine Seligman, *At the Edge of the Haight*. This was just a mediocre read for me. I pick up young adult fiction on occasion and very often enjoy it greatly but not this one so much. The descriptions of life on the streets as a homeless person were quite wonderful and well written. I think perhaps I just could not relate to nor particularly care for any of the characters.

Week 28 – Kiley Reid, *Such A Fun Age*. Nice job on a debut novel but just an okay read for me. While it is well written and an interesting storyline I really struggled with having a relationship or kinship with any of the characters, except maybe Bri...she was adorable. A big-hearted story about race and privilege, set around a young black babysitter and her well-intentioned employer. I suspect that we will see more from this author however and that at some point she is going to knock it out of the ballpark.

Week 29 – Dean Koontz, *Devoted*. While I came to adore several of the characters I did actually find many sections throughout the book tedious and, well, boring. I've been and remain a huge fan of Dean Koontz but this was definitely not a favorite.

Week 30 – Kenra Elliot, *The Last Sister*. This really was just an okay read for me. While the potential was there for a nail-biting thriller/mystery, I found large portions of the book tedious and boring. I AM glad I stuck with it to find out the "who did what's" but I'm not sure if I will attempt another or not.

Week 31 – James Patterson, *The 20th Victim*. This wasn't my favorite "Women's Murder Club" story. There were spots throughout the story that I found myself wishing things would pick up and get interesting. I was also questioning things like Joe and Lindsey going for a moonlight walk after they look in on their little daughter to make sure she's sleeping soundly? Would cops do that? Would anyone do that? Is James Patterson getting sloppy? I do however enjoy keeping up on the characters and will likely continue to follow this series.

Week 32 – Paige Shelton, *The Cracked Spine*. I'm totally a cozy mystery reader and I was definitely intrigued by a "Scottish Bookshop Mystery" series. While I love the premise of this series I am not completely taken in by the characters...yet, anyway. I did like it enough to want to give at least one more go and see if they can capture my inquisitive heart.

Week 33 – Lisa Gray, *Thin Air*. This book wasn't really my cup of tea. For one thing, I had a hard time keeping track of who was whom, especially with "name changes" and jumping back and forth in time. The concept was good and there were definitely parts that I found myself following along intrigued by the mystery and suspense of it but all in all the story was just simply okay for me.

Week 34 – Julie Clark, *The Last Flight*. OMG! Loved this! I am always on the hunt for new "thriller" writers and this one did not disappoint! Will absolutely be recommending this one to my library patrons who share my love of suspense!

Week 35 – Susan Wittig Albert, *The Darling Dahlias and the Cucumber Tree*. (Darling Dahlias #1) A historical cozy! Think 1930's and small-town characters with all of the quirks and fabulous gossip/drama and charm of small-town America. I definitely want to keep up with these new friends that I've found.

Week 36 – Dave Ramsey, *The Total Money Makeover*. I've rarely met a "self-help" that I actually liked let alone loved but this book was fabulous. I actually listened to this one and I'm so glad that I did. With the author also being the narrator his passion and enthusiasm came through so clearly whereas I think if I had read it I wouldn't have taken so much away from what he was trying to say. I highly recommend this book for absolutely EVERYONE!

Week 37 – Nicholas Sparks, *The Return*. Not a favorite Sparks book for me but I did still enjoy it very much. Truly, Sparks doesn't write a BAD book. I do, however, prefer his stories that involve my use of a box of tissues.

Week 38 – Marlene Chase, *The Photo Album*. (Annie's Attic Mysteries #3) I really enjoy this cozy series. They're definitely not my favorite reads but a nice easy read when I just want to get lost in a book. I will definitely continue to follow this series.

Week 39 – Kristin Hannah, *The Four Winds*. My thoughts/feelings about Kristin Hannah's books are almost always "I LOVE THEM" as I did with this one as well. It may in fact be one of my favorites. I'm sorry that it's over. 😞

Week 40 – Susan Wittig Albert, *The Darling Dahlias and the Naked Ladies*. (Darling Dahlias #2) I just love this cozy series. I am enchanted by the characters and the small town of Darling, Alabama. Southern fiction at its best.

Week 41 – Steve Cavanagh, *Th1rt3en*. This was my first Steve Cavanagh book and I believe I've found my new favorite legal thriller writer! My ONLY reason for not giving it 5 stars is there were a few extremes that simply made me roll my eyes. I understand that this man can feel no pain but seriously... Beyond little things like that, I seriously loved the book!

Week 42 – David Baldacci, *One Good Deed*. I'm intrigued enough to want to continue following Aloysius Archer but I also found this series less enjoyable than what I'm used to from David Baldacci. I like the historical time frame, and I like the character so I just can't put my finger on what it is about this new series that I feel is lacking. But I will definitely give the next in the series a try.

Week 43 – Sandie Jones, *The First Mistake*. This was my first book by this author and I really did love it! I haven't had the opportunity to read *The Other Woman* yet but now I will for sure put it at the top of my list. If you love twisty and suspenseful books you will love this author. I gave this one 5 stars!

Week 44 – Susan Wittig Albert, *The Darling Dahlias and the Confederate Rose*. (Darling Dahlias #3) Old fashioned, Southern fiction...the characters are absolutely charming. Probably not a FAVORITE cozy read but I definitely want to continue on with the series.

Week 45 – Greer Macallister, *The Arctic Fury*. Usually how I want to rate a book is pretty cut and dried for me by the time I finish it but that is not the case with *The Arctic Fury*. I love the premise of the story, I liked the characters (even the not-so-loveable ones) and I was ready for an arctic adventure. But...there were sections of the story that seemed to drag me into boredom while other sections had me sitting up and thinking, "oh, it's about to get good!" I loved the beginning and the end however so everything in the middle makes it a decent 3 star read. I will say I do definitely want to read more books by this author.

Week 46 – Linda Castillo, *Shamed*. (Kate Burkholder series #11) I just love this series...I hope it never ends. A warning however that this series is not of the cozy mystery variety. They can get very graphic.

Week 47 – Susan Wittig Albert, *The Darling Dahlias and the Texas Star*. (Darling Dahlias #4) *The Darling Dahlias and the Texas Star* is the 4th book in the cozy mystery series about a gardening group in Darling Alabama in the 1930's. While not my favorite cozy series they are still most enjoyable. I have become very fond of each and every character.

Week 48 – Clare Mackintosh, *I Let You Go*. I just LOVE books by Clare Mackintosh...ALL of them! This one absolutely kept me reading late into the night.

Week 49 – Melanie Benjamin, *The Children's Blizzard*. This was just an okay read for me. I actually read the non-fiction version of the story a few years ago. I pretty rarely choose non-fiction over fiction but in this case, I did prefer it. I had a hard time relating or building a relationship with any of the characters. They seemed very... one-dimensional? However, I must say, I was very happy to see some good things come for poor Anette. As a library worker I would probably recommend the non-fiction version to patrons over this one.

Week 50 – Jennifer McMahon, *The Drowning Kind*. I loved the twisty, turny, supernatural storyline here and following along with the different timelines and slowly finding out how everyone was connected from 1939 to the present day. I absolutely love Jennifer McMahon's books. If you're into the bizarre, supernatural, or just all-around creepy...you should definitely give this author a try.

Week 51 – Kate Quinn, *The Rose Code*. I really loved this book. My only complaint is that it seemed too long. You wonder how a book I'm loving can seem too long? Too much of a good thing for me. But I will and do definitely recommend it to others.

Week 52 – Kate White, *Have You Seen Me?* Reviews on this book are kind of all over the place but for me personally I enjoyed it. It's probably more a 3.5 than a 4 but...I liked it. It was definitely not a 5 star "I loved this book" kind of read and it's for sure not one of my favorites by Kate White but I love psychological thrillers and there were definitely some twists and turns that kept it from being a boring read.