

Wrapping Up a Year of Reading Kris Wiley for The News-Review

I read 153 books last year. Not a record, but I was pleased with the quality of the titles I chose.

A couple of weeks ago in this space, I shared that my favorite read of the year was “In a Distant Valley,” a quiet, character-driven novel set in northern Maine by Shannon Bowring.

Here are few more books that got my seal of approval in 2025.

Favorite mystery: “We Are All Guilty Here,” the first book in the North Falls series by Karin Slaughter. There is a lot packed in this fast-paced drama featuring Deputy Emmy Clifton. Emmy leads an investigation into the deaths of two teenage girls, a case that has a striking similarity to a tragedy that rocked the town 12 years ago. She also has family drama to manage, especially when her long-lost sister, who became an FBI profiler, comes back to town to help.

Other favorite mystery: “Murder at Gulls Nest” by Jess Kidd is the first in a series set in 1950s England. Nora Breen is a former nun-turned-amateur detective who descends on a boardinghouse to find her missing friend. A couple of residents die, and Nora solves the case with the help of a local detective inspector.

Favorite memoir: “Wildfire Days: A Woman, a Hotshot Crew, and the Burning American West” by Kelly Ramsey. This is a page turner about a woman in her late 30s who joins a hotshot firefighting team in northern California. The book covers her first two years as a hotshot, from naïve rookie to crew veteran. As much as I enjoyed the days in the life of a firefighter, I loved how vulnerable Ramsey was with her personal life.

Bonus: Ramsey is scheduled for a virtual visit with the library at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, June 4.

Favorite nonfiction book: “Careless People: A Cautionary Tale of Power, Greed, and Lost Idealism” by Sarah Wynn-Williams. Wynn-Williams talked herself into the inner circle of Facebook with the goal of helping create ethical guardrails on the social media platform. Instead, she was privy to the growth of a juggernaut led by a group of tech giants who seemingly lost their collective moral compass.

Best surprise: “Wild Dark Shore” by Charlotte McConaghy. I sometimes skip the buzziest books because I fear disappointment. Case in point: I still haven’t read “Where the Crawdads Sing” by Delia Owens or “Lessons in Chemistry” by Bonnie Garmus.

In fact, I left “Wild Dark Shore” to the very end of the year, but I’m glad I didn’t wait any longer. The atmospheric novel set on a remote island in a time of escalating climate change was, at heart, a story about the love a father has for his children and the lengths

he will go to in order to keep them safe. The vivid descriptions of the flora and fauna brought to life the fictional Shearwater Island, which was inspired by the actual Macquarie Island near Antarctica.

All of these books have a lot of meat for discussion groups. A couple of more titles for book clubs to consider: "Replaceable You: Adventures in Human Anatomy" by bestselling pop-science writer Mary Roach and "I See You've Called in Dead," John Kenney's funny, tender novel about an obituary writer searching for a reason to live.

Next Week's Programs

Tuesday, Jan. 13, 10 a.m. – Grab-and-go kids craft kits while supplies last

Tuesday, Jan. 13, 6:30 p.m. – Online Book Group (email kwiley@roseburgor.gov for the Zoom link)

Wednesday, Jan. 14, 10:15 a.m. – Storytime with Aurora

Thursday, Jan. 15, 10:15 a.m. – Storytime with Aurora

Thursday, Jan. 15, 5:30-6:30 p.m. – Kids STEAM activity: slime