

Guilty Pleasures By Laura Stoll

Over the past few years of writing these columns, I've enjoyed sharing some of my family's favorite books. Unfortunately, the critics (a.k.a. my family) said the columns made us sound like high-brow readers who only read serious and complicated books. On behalf of the Stoll crew, I'm here to say that we love a guilty pleasure as much as anyone else.

What's a guilty pleasure? According to Wikipedia, it's something with mass appeal that is not held in high regard by society. You won't find a guilty pleasure on a school's required reading list; you're more likely to see one on the beach or at the pool. Sometimes guilty pleasures come with a little bit of embarrassment for the reader.

However, there's nothing to be ashamed of. If you're slogging through "War and Peace" because you want people to think you're smart, you're not reading it for the right reasons. You should choose books based on how they make you feel.

On behalf of the extended Stoll family and in my capacity as Assistant to the Director of a small-town public library, I am here to officially remove the guilt from your pleasurable reading. If you find a book that brings you joy, what is there to feel guilty about? While I'm sure some people read Plato and Shakespeare for entertainment, nothing beats a dog-eared Debbie Macomber while sipping a Coke by the pool. You might not look like your high school's valedictorian but you'll be happy and relaxed.

As the second year of the pandemic continues and another snowfall undoubtedly covers the buds of spring, here are some pleasurable reads from our family bookshelves.

If you enjoy watching Netflix's popular "Bridgerton" series, you will love the books by Julia Quinn. They have even more of the humor, passion, and colorful characters you see on the small screen. Start with "The Duke and I," which pretty closely follows season one of the show. The books are a quick read so there's a good chance you'll be through the series before season three premieres in 2023.

Danielle Steel is an institution when it comes to pleasurable reading and I've read a few of her books. "Child's Play," which I devoured shortly after lockdown began in 2020, is about a successful (of course) lawyer with three accomplished (of course) children. When their perfect equilibrium is shaken, the family circles the wagons and (of course) all ends well.

The Mitford series of books by Jan Karon is about the adventures of Father Tim Kavanaugh, an Episcopal priest, his wacky neighbors, his overly-friendly dog, and the other colorful characters that make up the small town of Mitford, North Carolina. The drama in these books won't keep you up at night. One major plot point revolves around how Father Tim can get his secretary to stop treating him like a capricious little boy. You can start with "At Home in Mitford" but if you don't read all eight books in order, you won't be missing much.

Celebrity biographies are another genre I like to dabble in. I remember reading "Elvis and Me" by Priscilla Presley by the pool one summer as a teen and I couldn't put it down! These days, I'm looking forward to the May release of "The Office BFFs: Tales of The Office from Two Best Friends Who Were There" by Jenna Fischer and Angela Kinsey. The book promises to take us behind the scenes of the early days of the popular sitcom to their walks down the red carpet.

Sometimes a good audiobook is just what I need to put me to sleep at night. One of my go-to authors on Libby is Nicholas Sparks. Even though some of the romantic plotlines can be heart-wrenching, I always fall asleep knowing that true love will prevail. One of the most popular books at the KTL last year was Sparks' latest, "The Return." I have it downloaded through Libby and can't wait to give it a listen.

I hope these suggestions will inspire you to add some pleasures (without guilt) to your reading list.