

Life Stories: Biography and Memoir RA

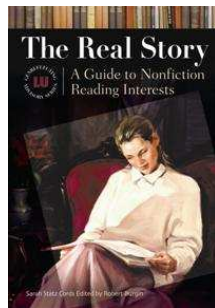
Truth can be stranger than fiction, which may help explain why biographies and memoirs often are the most popular nonfiction category in libraries. But that's just one element of their appeal. Author, blogger and librarian Sarah Statz Cords came to Deerfield Public Library on April 27 for ARRT's spring program "The Second Stacks: Life Stories," an RA-focused overview of bios and memoirs. Statz Cords is the writer of *The Real Story: A Guide to Nonfiction Reading Interests* (Libraries Unlimited, 2006) and www.citizenreader.com, a must-read blog dedicated to nonfiction.

She began her talk by delineating the difference between the genres, a distinction that is sometimes overlooked. "Biographies and memoirs tend to have a different audience," she said. "Smooshing them together is a disservice."

Biographies employ a detached framework. These are well-researched portraits usually told in the third person. They offer an overview of the subject's life and feature verifiable facts. Biographies generally fall into one of two types—subject or style. Subject bios exist for a number of popular categories such as politics, science, history, and sports. Style bios feature take a specific tone: scholarly, celebrity tell-all, inspirational, etc.

Biography appeal factors include interest in the person and/or subject and the desire to read a definitive account or "truth." Readers enjoy the perspective that a biography

brings to a person or subject, and they can be drawn to the predictable format and the idea of settling down to a long, in-depth read.



So how can you help fans of bios find a great book? Statz Cords offered several tips. First, it

helps to determine a person's non-subject interests (for example, would they prefer something long or short, scholarly or gossipy, etc.?). She suggests doing a quick web search on the subject if it isn't familiar—a quick glance at the Wikipedia entry can help. Track current events and occasionally check out which authors are making the rounds on TV programs like *Today* or *The Daily Show*. Finally, play with displays and don't be afraid to mine books from the YA or youth collections.

By contrast, memoirs tend to be subjective and less well-researched (we're looking at you, Greg Mortenson). Voice is important, pacing is quicker and the structure is less predictable than the birth-life-death framework of biographies. Readers relate to the author, and popularity often builds on word of mouth. Memoirs tend to read like fiction and be popular with book discussion groups.

Like biographies, memoirs can be separated by subject (adversity, work/profession, culture clash, relationships) and style (coming of age,

humor, a year in the life, etc.). When helping readers, advisors might want to think outside of the subject and consider readalikes for the book's voice or style. As with biographies, keeping on top of news and cultural trends is helpful. You can also make connections outside the genre—try suggesting essays, first-person fiction and more. Above all, don't be afraid to be creative and have fun!

For a full presentation outline, visit www.citizenreader.com and look for the Readers' Advisory Programs links at the top right of the page.

Summer Author Program: Karin Slaughter

ARRT is excited to present bestselling author (and staunch library advocate) Karin Slaughter for a conversation and book signing on



Thursday, June 23 from 1:30 to 3:30 at the Berwyn Public Library. Just days after the release of her latest thriller, *Fallen*, Karin will be interviewed by library consultant and blogger Rebecca Vnuk in a cozy "fireside chat."

Registration for this special \$15 event closes on June 9, so be sure to reserve your spot today. Visit www.arrrtreads.org for payment info and a registration form.

What's ARRT Reading?

Raves and recommendations from the Steering Committee

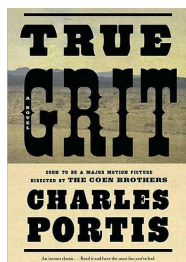
Swamplandia! by Karen Russell (2011)

The tight-knit Bigtree family owns and operates a shabby alligator attraction—Swamplandia!—deep in Florida's Everglades, but both the family and the tourist trap struggle to survive after their star attraction (also their wife/mother) passes away. This is a truly unique narrative, offering lush description, a hint of magical realism and an innovative eye for plot and character. There would be appeal here for fans of Carl Hiaasen, or those who like experimentation in subject and form; there is a touch of fantasy, but it is also a coming-of-age and deeply moving family story.



Hounded by Kevin Hearne (2011)

Atticus O'Sullivan is the last living Druid, largely because his existence allows the Celtic goddess Morrigan to taunt the Celtic god Aenghus Óg. After running and hiding from Aenghus Óg for much of the last 2,100 years, Atticus has decided to stand and fight in Arizona. Hearne deftly handles a myriad of strong secondary characters without causing chaos or confusion. The action and humor come fast and furious in this wonderful urban fantasy mixed with mythology. Atticus is a great combination of magically powerful badass and deep-thinking, modern-day guy.



True Grit by Charles Portis (1968)

Pious Arkansas spinster Mattie Ross unspools the yarn of how, as a resolute teenager decades earlier, she hired drunk and fearless federal marshal Rooster Cogburn to take her into Indian territory to catch her father's murderer.

By turns funny, gripping and grim, this marvelous novel is a lightning-fast read that can be enjoyed by just about anyone.

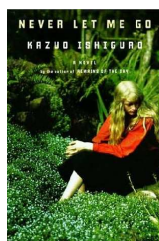
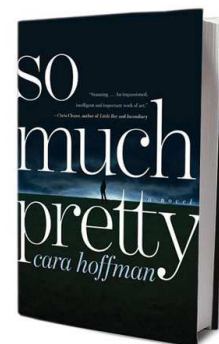
Keeping the House by Ellen Baker (2007)

Dolly, a bored young wife in a small Wisconsin town in 1950, falls in love with the deserted Mickelson house. She sneaks in the house to clean it and soon gets caught by young J.J. Mickelson, a WWII veteran haunted by his own demons. The Mickelson family's dramatic story is told



So Much Pretty by Cara Hoffmann (2011)

In the early 1990s doctors Claire and Gene Piper leave Manhattan and move to rural upstate New York with their toddler daughter, Alice. Fast-forward a few years and Alice is in high school when a local girl, Wendy White, goes missing. The town does little to investigate her disappearance. Only local journalist Stacy Flynn and the extremely intelligent Alice see beyond the town's apathy to the possible horror behind Wendy's disappearance. In her debut novel, Hoffman expertly tackles hard-hitting issues from factory farming to violence against women. Narrated from varying perspectives with a disjointed timeline interrupted by flashbacks, this dark, ominous story will leave you admiring Hoffman's careful plotting and distinctive characters.



Quarterly Book Discussion:

Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro

Join us on Wednesday, July 27, 2011 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at Itasca Public Library for the ARRT Quarterly Literary Fiction Book Discussion Group. This summer, we'll talk about *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro. The discussion is free and all ARRT members are invited. RSVP to Tuki Sathaye at tsathaye@itasca.lib.il.us.