

## **Brown Bag It with Books**

July 12, 2012 - Carlene's picks

**Nicholas Sparks**, a master of love stories, incorporates the importance of family and overcoming challenges in his novels.

In ***The Best of Me*** (c2011) modern day Romeo and Juliet types Amanda and Dawson fall in love as teens. Both return home years later for the funeral of a mutually beloved mentor, whose plan helps bring them back together.

In ***The Notebook*** (c1996) Noah Calhoun reads his story of young love to an elderly woman in the same nursing home where he resides. As the story progresses we realize the characters in his "Notebook" are Noah and the woman to whom he is reading. A romantic tear-jerker about young love from across the tracks and enduring love. Made into a feature film in 2004. - *movie trailer*-

In ***The Wedding*** (c2003) Sparks brings back characters from his first book, Allie and Noah Calhoun. Noah's oldest daughter Jane, and her husband Wilson, have been married almost 30 years. Jane and Wilson's daughter Anna announces her desire for a simple wedding on their anniversary. Fearing his wife's love for him is gone, Wilson woos Jane for months leading up to the wedding, seeking advice from Noah. The wedding of Anna turns out quite beautiful and much more than Jane expected.

**Elizabeth Berg's** novels present typical woman characters in situations that require them to discover their inner strength and self worth.

In ***Once Upon a Time There Was You*** (c2011) divorced parents Irene and John are forced to re-examine their lives when 18-year-old daughter Sadie goes missing. Presenting complex personalities, Berg is also funny and entertaining.

***Year of Pleasures*** (c2005)

Boston widow of several months, 55-year-old Betta Nolan, fulfills her dying husband's dream of moving out to the Midwest and starting a new life. Betta purchases a Victorian house and opens a gift shop for women. By finding and celebrating the simple pleasures of life, Betta catches hope and begins to heal.

***90 minutes in Heaven* by Don Piper** (c2007)

About a man who experienced a horrific car accident, was pronounced dead and "woke up" 90 minutes later. He describes his experience in heaven and his struggles after returning to his pain-ridden, mangled body. His spiritual transformation allowed him not only to cope with his suffering, but to transcend it.

***The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven* by Kevin Malarkey (c2010)**

Kevin Malarkey's short drive home on November 14, 2004 with his son, Alex, turned out to be an unexpected road trip to heaven and back. Alex's story of the time he spent in heaven while in a coma is a remarkable account of miracles, angels, and life beyond this world. –book trailer–

***Heaven is for Real* by Todd Burpo (c2010)**

As the subtitle states this is “A little boy's astounding story of his trip to heaven and back.” Four-year-old Colton survives and begins talking about being able to look down and see the doctor operating and his dad praying in the waiting room. Colton describes how he met his miscarried sister, whom no one had told him about, and his great grandfather who died 30 years before Colton was born. Told by the father, but often in Colton's own words, the simple message is, heaven is a real place.

**Mitch Albom:**

***Have a Little Faith* (c2009)**

Anticipating his own death, Albom's 82-year-old childhood rabbi asks him to write and deliver his eulogy. The book features a number of Albom's experiences--from his friendship with an African-American ex-convict, now an inner-city pastor, to his uncomfortable public discussions of faith with his rabbi. Albom's story gives insights about his life's purpose, the need for forgiveness, his loss of faith, and his newfound belief in something larger than himself.

***Five People you Meet in Heaven* (c2003)**

On his 83rd birthday, a tragic accident kills Eddie, as he tries to save a little girl from a falling amusement ride cart. He awakes in the afterlife, where his life is explained to him by five people, some of whom he knew, others who may have been strangers. One by one, from childhood to soldier to old age, Eddie's five people revisit their connections to him on earth, illuminating the mysteries of his "meaningless" life, and revealing the secret behind the eternal question: "Why was I here?"

**Richard Paul Evans' *The Walk* series**

Seattle ad executive Alan Christoffersen has lost everything - his job, his home, and the love of his life. He decides to take a soul searching walk to the furthest point from Seattle – Key West, Florida. Along his walk Alan deals with issues of loss, betrayal, forgiveness and hope. Full of interesting characters who both help Alan and are helped by him, each book leaves you wanting to know who he'll meet next.

**Jodi Picoult's *House Rules* (c2010)**

Unable to express himself socially but possessing a savant-like knack for investigating crimes, a teenage boy with Asperger's Syndrome is accused of killing his tutor when the police mistake his autistic tics for guilty behavior. The soul-searing question looms: Did Jacob commit murder?