

## Summer Anytime Reading

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*Editor's Note: Peter Sawtell publishes Eco-Justice Notes every week, but Reflections uses just one a month. Sometimes his articles are outdated before we can print them but nonetheless interesting and relevant. You can subscribe to his weekly article or read back issues at this website: <http://www.eco-justice.org>.*

The mythology about summer is that it is a time to slow down and relax, an occasion for a leisurely read. Most people that I talk to don't see many placid days of vacation. Whether or not your summer had the opportunity for vacation and literary afternoons, good writing can be re-creational as it touches our spirits and expands our minds.

Leisure reading can be most enjoyable when the stories and values inform and reinforce our best values. Fiction and history can support our eco-justice view of the world.

Over five years ago, I suggested six books that are "enjoyable reads that ... have some tenuous connection to the eco-justice cause." It is time to add a few more to the list!

***Jayber Crow*** by Wendell Berry

This novel about a small-town barber explores choices about simple living, the value of community roots, and the decidedly mixed benefits of "progress." One section explores a family's sharp disagreement about their farmland -- is it a heritage to be treasured, or a resource to be exploited?

***An Elegy for Easterly*** by Petina Gappah

Most of us are oblivious about the privilege of affluent societies. This collection of short stories provides remarkable insight about life in the failing nation of Zimbabwe, with its dramatic contrasts between poverty and wealth, and the devastation of the AIDS epidemic. In a dire setting, Gappah shows us that people are resilient in their universal search for love, joy, community, and meaning in life.

***Farewell My Subaru: An Epic Adventure in Local Living*** by Doug Fine

Doug Fine replaces his Subaru with a bio-diesel truck as part of his attempt at self-sufficient living on a New Mexico ranch. There are plenty of laughs as this urban man stumbles his way through misadventures with solar panels, irrigation systems, goats and used cooking oil. As the dust jacket says, "Both a hilarious romp and an inspiring call to action, Farewell, My Subaru makes a profound statement about trading today's instant gratification for a deeper, more enduring kind of satisfaction."

***A Heron's Balance***, by Cathy Barker

A grieving young widower spends two months canoeing and camping in the Boundary Waters wilderness on the US-Canada border, and finds transformation and healing by being so thoroughly steeped in God's creation. Written by a United Church of Christ pastor, the book is explicitly religious, but without being "preachy."

***All Over Creation*** by Ruth Ozeki

A prodigal daughter returns to rural Idaho, and a batch of gentle radicals ("Seeds of Resistance") protest about genetically modified potatoes. The "quirky" novel blends good storytelling about family relationships with discussions about important issues in modern agriculture.

***Impossible Things*** by Conni Willis

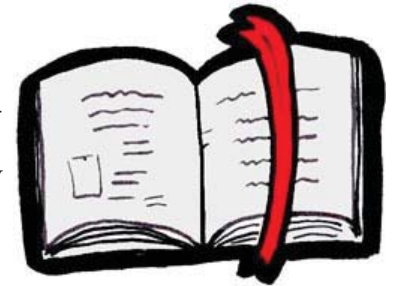
In this collection of science fiction stories, the novella that sticks with me is "The Last of the Winnebagos", about the time in our future when gasoline shortages mean that there are no more big recreational vehicles. That's a side point, though. The story really addresses grief in a world where all domestic dogs have died from a rogue disease. The other stories are delightfully odd.

***The Animal Dialogues: Uncommon Encounters in Wild*** by Craig Childs

These short vignettes of Craig's encounters with animals at times push the boundaries of prudence, but offer distinctive insight into creatures great and small -- bears and ravens, wasps and sharks, coyotes and humans. He wrote, "The life of an animal ... is far beyond the scientific papers and the campfire stories. It is as true as breath. It is as important as the words of children."

***Natives and Exotics*** by Jane Alison

Alison tracks both plants and people by following three generations of an Australian family as they scatter around the world. Questions of place and belonging run through the novel. *Publisher's Weekly* called it "a lush evocation of the way people love and alter (and are altered by) the environments they inhabit."



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