



What we were wild about in 2012

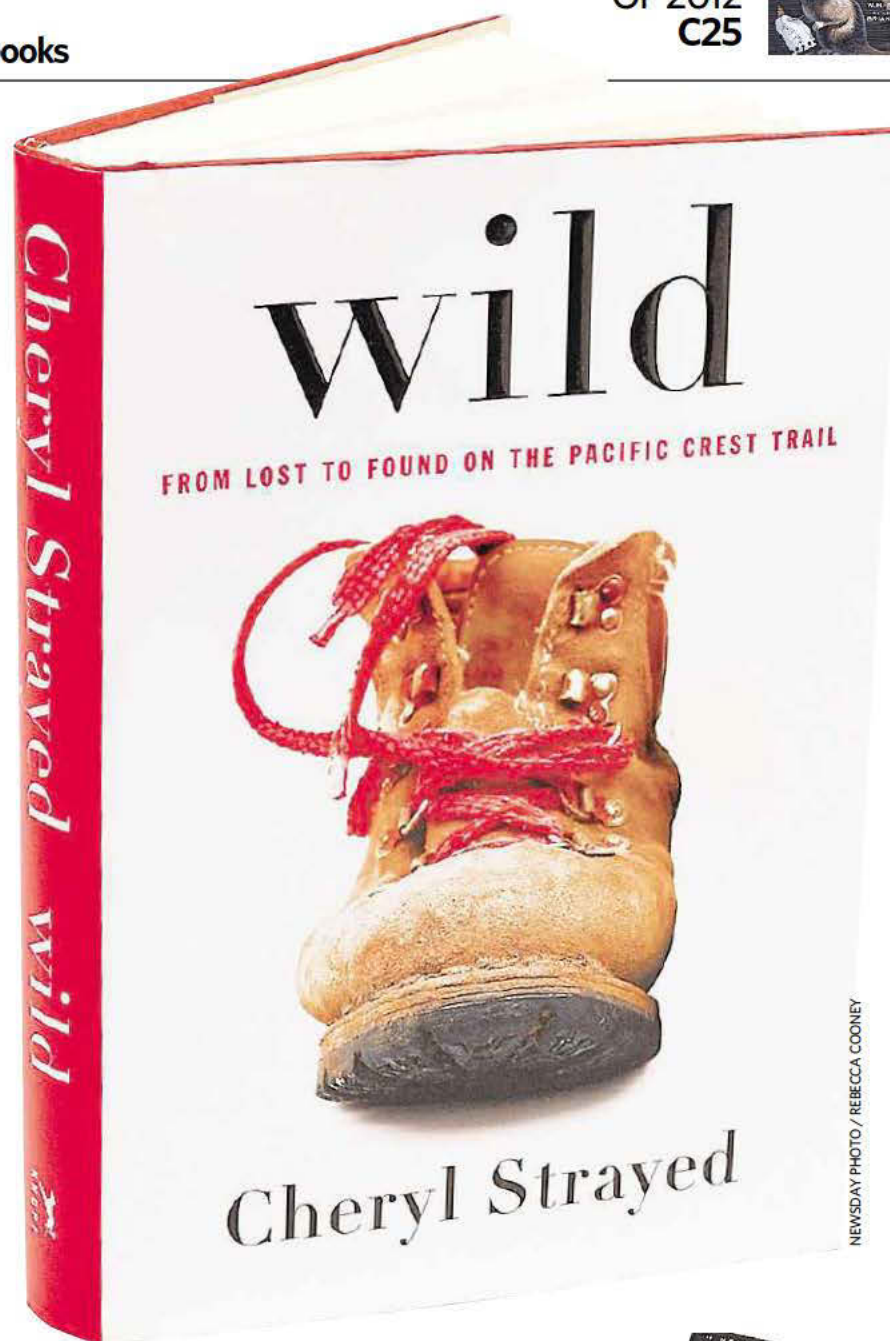
Our reviewers make the case for 10 books that wowed them this year

1 WILD: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail, by Cheryl Strayed (Alfred A. Knopf).

There are dumber things you could do, I guess. When Cheryl Strayed was 22, and her life was spinning out of control, she set out to hike 1,100 miles of the rugged Pacific Crest Trail, from California through Oregon to Washington — an attractive

young woman in the wilderness, alone. With a preposterously overloaded backpack. And hiking boots a size too small. The story of Strayed's journey, and the events that brought her to it (her mother's death from cancer, a divorce, drug use) are recalled in this extraordinary memoir, fairly bursting with joy, loss, lust, hardship and hard-earned wisdom.

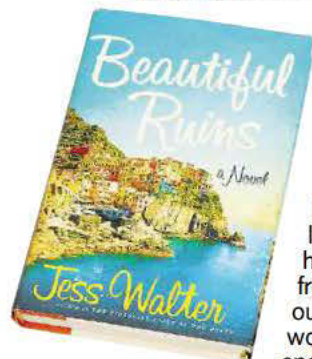
— TOM BEER



NEWSDAY PHOTO / REBECCA COONEY

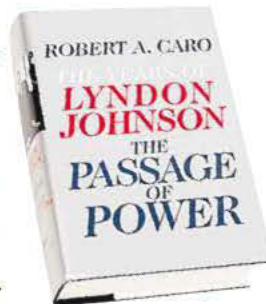
2 BEAUTIFUL RUINS, by Jess Walter (Harper)

This gorgeous, juicy novel moves from 1962 to the present, from a tiny Italian coastal town to the Hollywood back lot, narrating a love story, meditating on fate, and entertaining readers with a groaning board of fiction's pleasures. Among the ensemble cast of sweethearts and rogues is a spot-on version of dipsomaniac lover boy Richard Burton, here given a secret love child and dialogue so hilarious it might have come from an "SNL" skit. Throughout, Walter's sentences are wonderful, and his bravura ending ties up every thread in a bittersweet bow. — MARION WINIK



3 THE YEARS OF LYNDON JOHNSON: The Passage of Power, by Robert A. Caro (Alfred A. Knopf)

Volume 4 of Caro's Texas-size saga of Lyndon Johnson is brilliant biography, gripping history, searing political drama and an incomparable study of power. It's also a great read. "The Passage of Power," covering 1958-1964, takes in Johnson's failed campaign for the presidency, the close election, Kennedy's administration, the assassination, the transition and Johnson's early White House tenure. Despite the length, Caro leaves you wanting more.

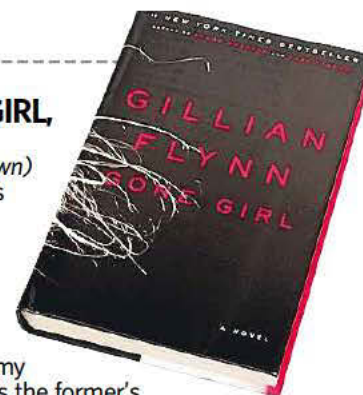


— PETER M. GIANOTTI

4 GONE GIRL, by Gillian Flynn (Crown)

As close as you can get to a perfect thriller, "Gone Girl" recounts the courtship and marriage of golden couple Nick and Amy Dunne — as well as the former's possible murder of the latter, and the latter's possible framing of the former. Talk about unreliable narrators! Nick and Amy are masterfully drawn, as are the most tertiary of Flynn's characters. Her intricate plot, which never crosses the line from inevitable to contrived, builds to one of the all-time great endings.

— ERICA MARCUS



See BOOKS on C24

thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Tuesday

"Jeopardy!" record breaker Ken Jennings speaks about and signs his book, "Because I Said So: The Truth Behind the Myths, Tales & Warnings Every Generation Passes Down to Its Kids" (Scribner). At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



Wednesday

Lake Grove author Reed Farrel Coleman reads from his new crime novel, "Gun Church" (Tyron Books). At 7 p.m., Sachem Library, 150 Holbrook Rd., Holbrook; 631-588-5024, sachemlibrary.org



Saturday

Children's author Adrienne Falzon reads her book "What Is An Angel?" (Blue Note Publications), followed by crafts and refreshments. Register in advance, \$5. At 10 a.m., Rogers Mansion, 17 Meeting House Lane, Southampton; 631-283-2494, southamptonhistoricalmuseum.org



Poet Mark Doty discusses the anthology "The Best American Poetry 2012," for which he was guest editor (Scribner). \$10 suggested donation. At 5 p.m., Canio's Books, 290 Main St., Sag Harbor; 631-725-4926, caniosbooks.com

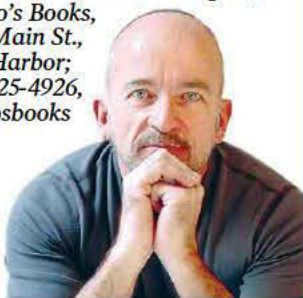
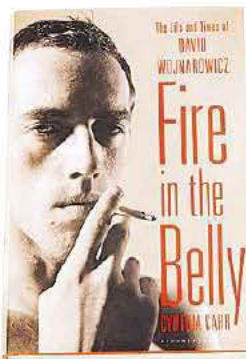


PHOTO BY STAR BLACK

bestbooks2012

What our critics went wild for

BOOKS from C23

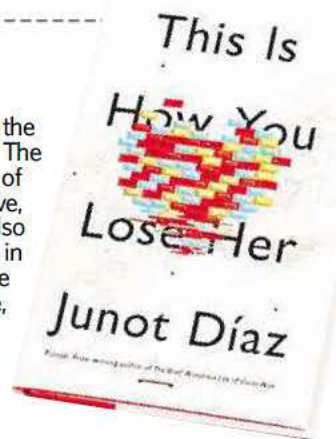


5 FIRE IN THE BELLY: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz, by Cynthia Carr (Bloomsbury)

David Wojnarowicz, who died of AIDS 20 years ago, at age 37, is not a household name today. But biographer Cynthia Carr, who wrote about art for the Village Voice, has created a vivid portrait of the artist as a young man, set in a gritty, derelict New York peopled by wildly creative characters pushing artistic boundaries. No surprise, Carr writes perceptively about her subject's work and the era's "culture wars." But she is also exceptionally good at fleshing out Wojnarowicz as a character — at once vulnerable and prickly — and her pages on his illness and death are simply heartbreaking. — TOM BEER

7 THIS IS HOW YOU LOSE HER, by Junot Díaz (Riverhead)

What is so sexy about this story collection is not the sex, which is often messed up, but the language. The writing has so much energy that even the saddest stories of the stupidest mistakes somehow make you glad to be alive, just so you can watch the fireworks. Díaz's third book is also the third to feature his alter ego, Yuniors, who came of age in "Drown" and developed his bad womanizing ways in "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao." Those continue here, woven through with the story of his older brother, Rafa, who womanizes, too — as far into cancer as he can. New Jersey has had its share of poets, and Díaz is proving to be as great as any of them. — MARION WINIK



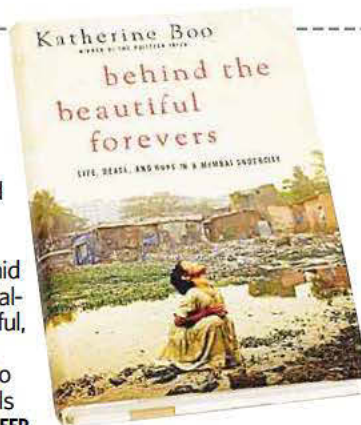
8 BUILDING STORIES, by Chris Ware (Pantheon)

It's a surprise to discover that obsessively detailed cartoonist Chris Ware's new graphic novel can be described as a "box of stuff." Ware seems like a guy who alphabetizes his socks, but, as with so many great artists, he's at his best when he tries something new. "Building Stories" is Ware's new thing — a beautiful collection of cartoons about a woman living in a little ramshackle building who has a huge, multifaceted, emotionally rich life. The story is told through various formats, including two newspapers of different trim sizes, a stunning portfolio and a simple strip of paper that unfolds and unfolds. "Building Stories" begs not merely to be displayed but to redecorate your house. — SAM THIELMAN



9 BEHIND THE BEAUTIFUL FOREVERS: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity, by Katherine Boo (Random House)

For three years, Boo followed the lives of men, women and children in Annawadi, a desperately poor, makeshift slum in the shadow of India's Mumbai airport. In "Behind the Beautiful Forevers," she locates the vital human drama amid the squalor, and her diverse characters hook you — especially teen entrepreneur Abdul Husain, and Fatima, his resentful, one-legged neighbor, who strikes out at Abdul's family in spectacularly self-destructive fashion. In life, it's too easy to look away from such grinding poverty. Boo's book compels our attention, and rewards it. — TOM BEER



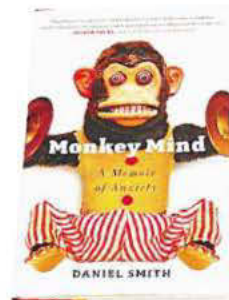
May We Be Forgiven



A.M. Homes

10 MAY WE BE FORGIVEN, by A.M. Homes (Viking)

This engrossing novel starts with a biblical set of brothers, George and Harold Silver, one a murderer, the other an adulterer — nice Jewish boys from the New York suburbs. When George goes to prison, Harold is left to take over his house and his children. But the shocking part is how endearing Harold is, and how warmly the author depicts his 21st century Pilgrim's Progress, from dating on the Internet to hiring a bar mitzvah planner. Homes' sharp eye provides a relentless social satire, while her big heart understands how screwed-up people can actually change for the better. — MARION WINIK



6 MONKEY MIND: A Memoir of Anxiety, by Daniel Smith (Simon & Schuster). As much a coming-of-age story as an illness memoir, "Monkey Mind" may be the funniest book published this year. From Smith's bizarre sexual initiation on the way to a Phish concert to his matriculation at the "Jewish Mardi Gras" campus of a liberal arts college, the author's descriptions of his nausea, vomiting, sweating and mental anguish are enjoyable beyond reason. His discovery of the work of Philip Roth was a major turning point, allowing him to see his condition not as humiliating handicap but as an ethnic birthright and literary franchise. — MARION WINIK

bestbooks2012

Young readers are 10 times lucky

Great tales, for kids of all ages, that stood out on the shelf this year

BY SONJA BOLLE
Special to Newsday

WHAT CAN A CRANE PICK UP?, by Rebecca Kai Dotlich, illustrated by Mike Lowery (Alfred A. Knopf)
Combining toddler-pleasing elements — silliness, a bouncy rhyme scheme, the ever-popular subject of trucks and a wacky illustration with each turn of the page — this read-aloud book easily becomes a shout-along. "Can a crane lift men in business suits? Yes! And a load of cowboy boots. Cowboy boots or even a COW. A cow? But HOW?" Ages 1-5

THE ADVENTURES OF LITTLE NUTBROWN HARE, by Sam McBratney (Candlewick)
Anyone who adored "Guess How Much I Love You," McBratney's father-son love letter, will be delighted with this collection of four short stories about Big Nutbrown Hare and Little Nutbrown Hare. After big adventures and a little risky business, it's always good to come home to a cozy burrow. Ages 3 and older

SLEEP LIKE A TIGER, by Mary Logue, illustrated by Pamela Zagarenski (Houghton Mifflin)
Sumptuous illustrations and elegant word choices turn the familiar complaint — "I'm just not sleepy!" — into something special. Snails "curl up like cinnamon rolls inside their shells," "bears are mighty sleepers," and although the little girl isn't tired, it feels good to be nice and clean, the sheets feel crisp, and . . . zzz. Ages 4-8

THE TOWN MOUSE AND THE COUNTRY MOUSE: An Aesop Fable Retold and Illustrated by Helen Ward (Templar Books)
After a visit from his city cousin, country mouse grows "less certain of his contentedness," and goes to try the delights of town. Ward's paintings make a symphony of gold — from the faux-gilt cover, to the sun-drenched hues of the meadows, to the glow of the city's brass elevator doors and nighttime windows lit from within. Ages 4 and older

I, TOO, AM AMERICA, by Langston Hughes, illustrated by Bryan Collier (Simon & Schuster)
In this happy pairing of verse and pictures, the illustrator has added a new dimension to a few Langston Hughes lines by making "the darker brother" who narrates a Pullman porter, an image with great nuance in American history. Ages 4-8

MALCOLM AT MIDNIGHT, by W.H. Beck, illustrated by Brian Lies (Houghton Mifflin)
Everyone thinks Malcolm the new classroom pet is a sweet mouse, but he's actually a rat. The honorable Malcolm wishes to come clean about his identity, but first he'll have to rehabilitate the reputation of his kind, taking to heart the motto of the classroom pets' society: "A critter reveals his true self at midnight." Ages 9-12

THREE TIMES LUCKY, by Sheila Turnage (Dial Books)
In the kind of North Carolina town where the reverend has a son named Thessalonians, an irresistible Southern narrator — a literary descendant of Scout Finch of "To Kill a Mockingbird" — Mo LoBeau announces this novel's mystery from behind the counter of the Tupelo Diner: "There's been a murder and we're out of soup." Ages 10 and older

THERE IS NO DOG, by Meg Rosoff (Putnam)
Rosoff's premise in this cheeky (some might say blasphemous) novel is that God is a teenage boy. That would explain a lot, wouldn't it? The creator is surly and self-involved, has little attention span and even less ability to sort out the mess he set in

motion. He also has occasional flashes of brilliance and joy. Ages 12 and older

REACHED, by Ally Condie (Dutton)
In the final book of the "Matched" trilogy, we hear all three voices of the triangle Condie established when the perfectly controlled Society mistakenly paired our heroine, Cassia, with the mysterious intended mate, Xander. Ages 12 and older

CODE NAME VERITY, by Elizabeth Wein (Hyperion)
A young Scottish woman taken prisoner in occupied France spins out her confession to her Nazi interrogators. Like Scheherazade, a narrator in desperate straits, she constructs her story cleverly. Is she indeed confessing? Is she dissembling to prolong her life? Is she lying to give her partner time to complete their mission? Ages 14 and older

bestsellers

Publishers Weekly's list of national best-sellers powered by Nielsen BookScan

hardcover

1. **THE LAST MAN**, by Vince Flynn (Atria)
2. **MERRY CHRISTMAS, ALEX CROSS**, by James Patterson (Little, Brown)
3. **THE RACKETEER**, by John Grisham (Doubleday)
4. **POSEIDON'S ARROW**, by Clive Cussler (Putnam)
5. **FLIGHT BEHAVIOR**, by Barbara Kingsolver (Harper)
6. **THE CASUAL VACANCY**, by J.K. Rowling (Little, Brown)
7. **GONE GIRL**, by Gillian Flynn (Crown)
8. **SWEET TOOTH**, by Ian McEwan (Doubleday/Talese)
9. **THE PANTHER**, by Nelson DeMille (Grand Central)
10. **THE SINS OF THE MOTHER**, by Danielle Steel (Delacorte)

1. **KILLING KENNEDY**, by Bill O'Reilly (Henry Holt)
2. **BAREFOOT CONTESSA FOOLPROOF**, by Ina Garten (Clarkson Potter)
3. **THOMAS JEFFERSON**, by Jon Meacham (Random House)
4. **GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS** (Guinness World Records)
5. **NO EASY DAY**, by Mark Owen (Dutton)
6. **HOW TO CREATE A MIND**, by Ray Kurzweil (Viking)
7. **MY YEAR IN MEALS**, by Rachael Ray (Atria)
8. **HELP, THANKS, WOW**, by Anne Lamott (Riverhead)
9. **I DECLARE**, by Joel Osteen (FaithWords)
10. **THE SIGNAL AND THE NOISE**, by Nate Silver (Penguin)

paperback

1. **THE PERFECT HOPE**, by Nora Roberts (Berkley)
2. **PROOF OF HEAVEN**, by Eben Alexander (Simon & Schuster)
3. **FIFTY SHADES OF GREY**, by E.L. James (Vintage)
4. **REFLECTED IN YOU**, by Sylvia Day (Berkley)
5. **FIFTY SHADES FREED**, by E.L. James (Vintage)
6. **FIFTY SHADES DARKER**, by E.L. James (Vintage)
7. **LIFE OF PI**, by Yann Martel (Mariner)
8. **TEAM OF RIVALS**, by Doris Kearns Goodwin (Simon & Schuster)
9. **LONE WOLF**, by Jodi Picoult (Atria/Emlay Bestler)
10. **THE INNOCENT**, by David Baldacci (Grand Central)



NEWSDAY PHOTO / REBECCA COONEY