

328 - My 10 Most Memorable Books

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 328 - My 10 Most Memorable Books.

Most Lazy Genius Podcast episodes are pretty practical, right? I like to share things you can take with you into your own life. This is one of those episodes, just something a little different. When we reflect on things from the past that have meant something to us, that bring us joy, that are just lovely to remember, it's good for us. It's fun! And since books are fairly universal as a thing people love, I'm going to share my 10 most memorable books. They're not necessarily my favorites although some are, but these are books that I remember where I read them, how they made me feel, what they were about, and I still think of them often. So I hope this inspires you to either look back at your own memorable books, another memorable thing, or just use this episode to learn more about me if you don't care about books.

These books are in chronological order of when I read them, so we're going to start with one of my first solo reading experiences that led me to discover that reading was more fun than just about anything else I could be doing, and that is *The Secret of the Old Clock* by Carolyn Keene. This is the first novel in the Nancy Drew series, and when I got that yellow-spined book from the library in the late 80s, it was like life started. I remember loving the mystery aspect, and mysteries and thrillers are still one of my favorite genres to this day. That book opened up reading for me and was my first real binge because I read every single Nancy Drew book in order multiple times during my tween and teen years. That first one though is still special. I have a super old fabric hardcover of it, not with the yellow spine, at a book sale a couple of years ago, and it's one of my favorite books I own.

Next up is *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck. I read *The Good Earth* as a homeschooled eighth grader, and I remember not wanting to. It was one of the first novels I ever read that was old and for adults, and I just didn't want to. But from what I can remember, I didn't act like I didn't want to because even as a homeschooler, I was an excellent, compliant student. So I read *The Good Earth*. And it got me. *The Good Earth* is about a family in a Chinese village where a man grows from being a peasant to being a landowner. There's a lot about love for the land and commitment to family and hardship. Frankly, it's not the kind of book I gravitate towards even now, but I remember reading that book like it was yesterday. I remember where I sat at the kitchen table, I remember looking forward to being it up, I remember how I imagined the story, lots of browns and yellows and oranges, I remember how it made me feel. I think it was the book that opened my eyes to the beauty of literature which is what I went on to study in college. *The Good Earth* was a big deal.

The third memorable book came when I was fifteen or sixteen. I had already read *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis and of course loved it, but somehow I stumbled across *Till We Have Faces* by him and devoured it. This book, to me, is a masterpiece. It's a retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche, but you don't have to know that myth to enjoy the story. I didn't

know, and it's one of my favorite books of all time. It's about a royal family, a power-hungry king and his three daughters, and there's a pretty big situation with having to appease jealous gods with one of the daughters and it's a whole dramatic thing. If *The Good Earth* was my gateway into classic literature, *Till We Have Faces* was my gateway into atmospheric, dark fantasy. It's just a stunner, and it will always be a favorite novel forever and ever.

We'll be right back...

So I discovered a love of reading, then of classic literature, then of fantasy literature, and this fourth book was one where I felt like I saw myself in a book for the first time in a really powerful way. I was in high school, probably my junior or senior year, and reading this book, *The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls, during that formative time was really special. *The Glass Castle* is a memoir, following Jeanette's life with her parents who were often without a home and struggled with various mental health issues. Her life was hard but normal to her, her parents were unreliable but loving in their own way, and she had to decide if she was going to live life the way they did or forge her own path. While I did not grow up unhoused, I did grow up in chaos. There was abuse and mental illness, and it was my normal. I also knew from going to friends' houses and hearing my peers talk about their families that my normal wasn't everybody's normal. And for awhile, I felt pretty alone in how I grew up. Most stories I read or saw were either fantasy stories or Disney movies or honestly more than that Alfred Hitchcock movies which were my favorite as a kid. So when I read *The Glass Castle* and read about someone else's actual lived experience, not a made-up story, it did something to me. It helped me feel seen and less alone, and it was a turning point for my healing from my own story. Plus, it's beautifully written and captivating and propulsive in its way. A very memorable book for me.

Next on the list is the Harry Potter series. I did not read these when they came out. In fact, I had a little bit of that "wizards are evil" messaging in my conservative Christian water, and even though my mom and sister both read the books, I didn't. I don't know that I actively chose not to, but I just never cared. I mean, a kid wizard? Okay. But when I was in my late 20s as a first-time mom with a brand new baby in a brand new neighborhood where I didn't know anybody, I was lonely. I've mentioned this before, probably quite awhile ago, but I had a hard time connecting with the moms who lived near me. They didn't seem to like me very much, even going inside when I walked down the street toward them. It was a really tough season. If you've been home alone with a new baby and feel like you don't have any help or community, and even getting the mail is isolating, you know how horrible that feels. And that's when I started reading Harry Potter. I thought, well now's as good a time as any. I'm home with this baby with little to do and no one to really see. Let's try this series. I read the whole thing in one fell swoop because of course I did, and those characters were my friends. I was so lonely, and they kept me company. I felt like we even grew up together a little bit. Harry Potter is memorable for a lot of people and maybe low-hanging fruit on a memorable reads list, but it was memorable for a very tender reason. I was lonely, and Harry made me feel less lonely. Plus the books are ridiculously good obviously.

The next book is *An Everlasting Meal* by Tamar Adler. I read this in my late 20s, and it was a transformative book in how I saw food and cooking. There are recipes in it, but really it's a philosophical book about the kitchen, soul, and the beauty of leftover pasta water. It's kind of a meditation on waste but not in a guilt-trippy way. Actually, now that I think about it, it has some Laura Ingalls Wilder vibes. Remember reading *Little House in the Big Woods* (which also could've been on this list) and loving the simplicity of how they harvested food and cured meats in the cellar and lived in abundance even when our definition of abundance now is so different? That's how *An Everlasting Meal* feels. It's like the grown-up version of *Little House*. But it's not a story. It's essays and instructions and thoughts and a few recipes. It surprised me and sparked something in me that has never gone away.

Next up is in the top three memorable books of this list for sure, and that is *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern. Y'all, *The Night Circus* is the avatar for my favorite kind of book ever, and that is basically like a creepy circus book. I love circus books. I've read most of them. But this book is also imaginative and weird and beautiful and has a magical competition and a love story and obviously a weird circus. It's just everything. Now like I said, I'd read *Narnia*. I'd read *Harry Potter*. I'd read *Till We Have Faces*. My foray into fantasy and magical stories had already very much begun. But this book just knocked it out of the park, and it was also the first book like this I'd ever read. I hadn't read any Neil Gaiman who shockingly is not on this list even though some of his books are my favorites of all time. But *The Night Circus* was my gateway to Neil Gaiman. It opened the doors to this genre of weird magic books that I will devour for the rest of my life. It is gorgeous.

Three more to go.

We'll be right back...

This next book is one that I think every human should read, and that is *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson. I read *Just Mercy* in April of 2019, and it undid something that needed to be undone. I'm a pretty just person. I like rules. I like fair consequences. I always thought that if you did something bad, you should pay for it. I also thought that if you were in the justice system, if you were in prison, you deserved to be there. There's no way you'd be imprisoned for something you didn't do or that the system would be biased against certain people. So when I read *Just Mercy*, it opened my eyes to how narrow I'd seen the justice system for my whole life. This book along with the work of Shannan Martin which had already changed my mind about people who are incarcerated softened my heart even more for the humanity that should be honored in all of us. I had been reconsidering how I saw and felt about crime, justice, and consequences for years at that point, but this book was like my wings to fly away. It is beautifully written by a lawyer who had seen things I had never seen, who'd had his own mind changed, and who helped me realize that mercy and justice go together. It's an incredible book.

Just a couple of months later, I read *The Art of Gathering* by Priya Parker. I have always loved gathering. I throw parties, I invite people over for casual dinners, I like being part of the planning for larger gatherings at churches and businesses and such. I just love bringing people together.

And honestly I always felt a little weird about it. I had such strong opinions that I usually kept to myself about how gatherings should go and how important it was to set the tone. I would put so much energy into the details of my parties and felt a little silly doing it. I recognized group dynamics and knew that not every gathering was for every person. I had all of these thoughts but not a lot of concise language around it, and just kept it all to myself. Then I read *The Art of Gathering*, and it was like this little flame in me got brought into the light. Priya was saying things that I had been thinking with real words and actual data and the kindest of voices. It validated who I was in many ways and inspired me to move even more intentionally into the gatherings I'm part of. I still flip through that book years later. It was a really special reading experience for me.

And finally, *Jayber Crow* by Wendell Berry. I read this in 2020 during the pandemic, and I'm not sure there's ever been a more appropriate book for a more appropriate season. It's not the kind of book I generally read. It's a slower read, more character-driven than plot-driven, and beautiful language. Honestly, I don't usually care about beautiful language. I just want a good story that keeps me going. But this book, along with Wendell Berry himself, is really special. Reading about this lonely man who slowly tried to find community and purpose during a time in my life where I didn't have a lot of community or purpose - none of us did - was really special. I read it during actual lockdown, so there wasn't much to do other than sit on my porch or on my couch and read. So I read this, and it will go down as probably the most perfect, memorable reading experiences of my life.

And those are my 10 most memorable books. I hope this episode has been a fun, inspiring detour to the episodes we normally do, and I hope even more that it inspires you to think about the importance of, not just your own reading, but your own activities and conversations and ways you spend your time that have been turning points to who you most deeply are.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Laura Deery who sent me this message on Instagram. "As much as I love a totally clean fridge, a complete clean out only happens once or twice a year. So, in the meantime, whenever I end up with an almost-empty fridge drawer or shelf, I clean just that part of the fridge. Spray it down, wipe it sparkling clean. I like to think this helps keep the fridge cleaner than waiting for a time when I can tackle the whole thing." What a great reminder this is, not just for the fridge but for a lot of tasks that feel too big. Make it smaller. Pick one shelf when it's almost empty and just do it. This idea can be applied to so many things, and it's great permission to start small and do whatever you can whenever you're able. It doesn't have to all happen at once to count. Thanks for sharing this, Laura, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Thanks so much for listening, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week.