February—that unpredictable time of the year when the promise of spring is so close yet so far. Was the groundhog right? If so, we still have plenty of winter left to read the diverse books described here. So, choose one or two, then curl up in your favorite reading spot to enjoy these inspirational, fun, insightful, quirky, and sobering selections.

Believable Hope: 5 Essential Elements to Beat Any Addiction
by Michael Cartwright with Ken Abraham (2012)

This book was an inspiration. Cartwright tells his story of having mental illness (psychotic symptoms) and addiction to alcohol then later food, and how he overcame them. Yes, he overcame them, instead of “being an alcoholic all his life.” It takes some hard work and goal setting and no excuses. His message helped me get back on track by really making short-term, specific, measurable (sound familiar?) goals so I can handle my stress more effectively (less eating and drinking, more gym) and being less critical of myself. His theories dovetail with “The Psychology of Self Compassion” by Dr. Kristin Neff who was a guest speaker here at York College last year. She encourages us to “be our best friend” and reminds us that “everyone fails, and fails miserably.” I liked the inspiration…and needed it. ~ Marian Lorence

Anatomy of a Song: The Oral History of 45 Iconic Hits That Changed Rock, R&B and Pop
by Marc Myers (2016)

I received Anatomy of a Song as a Christmas present. The book is based on a Wall Street Journal column of the same name and looks at the backstories behind 45 iconic rock, R&B and Pop hits of the 1950’s-1980’s. Along the way, the book also covers the history/culture of the music recording industry scene as context for each of the songs. So if you’ve ever wondered about the backstory for Runaround Sue, White Rabbit, Light My Fire, Magic Carpet Ride or Maggie May (plus 40 more hits), this collection of interviews with the well noted artists and others behind the songs is a fun read. ~ Thomas Craven

The Accidental Life: An Editor’s Notes on Writing and Writers
by Terry McDonell

Sex, drugs, and rock and roll…and all the other accoutrements of a writer’s life are crisply exposed in this personal expose of the most charismatic authors of our time. Hunter S. Thompson, Edward Abbey, and Kurt Vonnegut (among others) all came under the tutelage of Terry McDonell, one of the most commanding editors of American writing. His anecdotes lay bare the compelling backstories of ticking deadlines, the personalities of literary “bad boys,” and the dark realities of the publishing world. So, too, is this book a journalistic expedition into the frustrations, satisfactions and truths about authors. An insightful tour de force! ~ Tony Fredericks
The Flood Girls
by Richard Fifield (2016)

If you like quirky, I’ve got two books for you. The first is *The Flood Girls*. The author does a great job creating clearly defined and clearly flawed characters – most of them women – living in a small Montana town where everybody knows everything about everybody else. Separately, the characters have a hard time dealing with their world, but together they fill each other’s voids. It is a story about the personal redemption of the various characters (with one notable exception.) It took me a while to get into this book because of the numerous characters and their peculiarities, but once I got to know them, I really enjoyed their story (with one notable exception). The book reminds me a bit of Cathie Pellitier’s early works.

The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbs Out of the Window and Disappears
by Jonas Jonasson (2014)

The other book is *The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbs Out of the Window and Disappears*. Again, a cast of offbeat characters, but this time on a strange journey through Sweden. Of course, the central figure is the 100-year-old man, and the story revolves around his adventures both before and after he climbs out of his window. This one doesn’t have the edge of *The Flood Girls*, but it is easier to become a part of and just as entertaining.

So if you like quirky, here are two I highly recommend. ~ Paul Doutrich

Voyage of the Damned: A Shocking True Story of Hope, Betrayal, and Nazi Terror
by Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witts (1974)

Often the films and books we experience in youth shape our beliefs and political views for a lifetime. For me, one such film was *Voyage of the Damned* (1976), based on the 1974 book with the same title. It tells the story of 937 Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany aboard a cruise ship in 1939. About half the passengers were women and children. Cuba refused to allow the ship to dock, then the U.S. ignored pleas for help. Eventually the ship was forced to return to Europe. Great Britain, Holland, and the Netherlands offered some passengers sanctuary, but a number still died at the hands of the Germans. I recently read the book behind the film. While the true story was more complicated than I remembered, the elements could have come straight out of our daily headlines:

- a people feared and distrusted because of their religion
- refugees turned away at the borders as possible spies and saboteurs
- victims of war being scammed by smugglers and opportunists
- a weak economy that seems to pit working poor against immigrants
- countries engaged in seemingly endless propaganda wars

It’s a sobering reminder of what can happen when we allow our collective fears to outweigh our sense of compassion. To learn more about this event in our history, I recommend reading, “Voyage of the St. Louis” in the Holocaust Encyclopedia: https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005267
~ Vickie Kline
**The Sympathizer** by Viet Thanh Nguyen (2015)

The year is 1975. Saigon is falling to the North Vietnamese as the novel opens. The Vietnamese American author portrays a Viet Cong protagonist, a spy embedded in the South Vietnamese army. The spy’s sympathies are torn between North and South, Vietnam and America, communism and loyalty to his anti-communist boyhood friend. While fiction, this novel vividly describes historical events from a Vietnamese perspective. If you lived during the Vietnamese War or are interested in that era, you’ll want to read this account. ~ Beth Jacoby

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**Featured Library Resources**

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