

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Summer 2013

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Summer Lies: Prairie Dog's Summer Reading for 2013

Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk by
Ben Fountain

Against backdrops of the war in Iraq and a Dallas Cowboys football game, the author of *Brief Encounters* with Che Guevara brutally but uproariously pinpoints the pseudo-patriotism, hypocritical machismo, capitalist corruption, and genuine confusion in America after "nina leven." *Catch-22* for the 21st century.

Gifts of the Crow by **John Marzluff and Tony Angell**
Crows are smarter than you. They are smarter than Stephen Hawking. Never play chess with a crow.

The Waitress Was New by **Dominique Fabre**
Work, friendship, unrequited love, neighbors in the apartment upstairs, aging, more work.... never has the day-to-day been more profoundly fascinating.

Dear Life by **Alice Munro**
You may have enjoyed them in *The New Yorker*, but somehow these stories reveal even more truths when they gather together between hard covers.

In Zanesville by **Jo Ann Beard**
An unnamed teen-ager and her best friend Flea feel helpless and hopeless in a small Midwest town

in the 70s, but they are too tough, too smart, and too funny to feel sorry for.

The Fault in Our Stars by **John Green**
Another novel that transcends the category of "Young Adult Fiction." A remarkably unsentimental love story of two teen-agers (yes, in the Midwest) living with cancer. More laughter than

twice before inviting him over for dinner.

Kill You Twice by **Chelsea Cain**
Born in Iowa City, Cain inexplicably became obsessed as a child with the Green River Killer of the 1980s. Fortunately for fans of grisly mysteries, she is brilliantly filling a rare niche: taut thrillers about a beautiful and creatively sadistic female serial killer.

The Gift of Stones by **Jim Crace**
The bar has been set for another rare literary niche: novels about everyday life in Neolithic times.

Cocktail Hour under the Tree of Forgetfulness by **Alexandra Fuller**
The honeymoon couldn't last forever for a happy young couple, their perfect marriage, and the British Empire in eastern Africa.

Atrocities: The 100 Deadliest Episodes in Human History by **Matthew White**
This scholarly compendium is more entertaining than it sounds. Categories of horrific events include Genocide, Religious Killings, and Crazy



tears, especially when the couple takes a "Make-a-Wish" trip to Amsterdam. Authentic characters, sharp dialogue, and some pretty good answers to that old question, What is the Meaning of Life?

Sutton by **J.R. Moehringer**
Willie Sutton comes off as a charming, non-violent, consummate professional in this "fictional biography" of the famed bank robber, but best to think

*Summer Reading List,
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Iowa City's Strategic Plan: Make Every Young Person a Criminal

The City of Iowa City no doubt has a "strategic plan." These documents usually contain a mixture of goals and methods to achieve those goals. Furthermore, they are flexible, which means that they must be updated every few years despite the chorus of groans that can be heard from the naysayers and skeptics who actually have to do the work.

In order to make sure that everything is up to date in Iowa City, and the strategic plan actually conforms to city policy, the city council should add a goal: "We will insure that every young person in Iowa City has a criminal record."

The council already has the methods in place to achieve this goal. The jail bond referendum was defeated in November and again in May because the Iowa City Police Department was largely responsible for the 500% increase in the number of people jailed since the last jail was built, at a time when population increased only by 150%. After the November referendum, the council voted to make things even worse by hiring two new police officers to patrol the downtown streets, arresting and handing out criminal citations to even more young people, including college students. Following the May referendum, the council responded by applying for a federal grant to hire two additional armed police officers for our high schools. They will be present in school to issue criminal citations, arrest students, and provide armed intervention in hallway fights.

We have fought this fight in the community twice before, most recently when former City High Principal Mark Hanson attempted to hire an armed officer. He was truly astonished at the outcry, since most other high schools around the state, or at least a lot of them, have an armed officer. This is Iowa City, though, not Mason City, and opposition was so vehement that the school board eventually let

it die. Does no one have any historical memory? If the School Board proceeds with this, it will be highly divisive, and create great bitterness in a community already badly divided on the jail issue.

A recent editorial in the New York Times (April 18) pointed out that it has been established, scientifically, that schools with police officers criminalize far more juveniles than comparable schools without officers. Officers are trained to arrest and penalize people, not act as teachers or social workers or role models. Will we not be content until every single young person in Iowa City has a criminal record?

"There is a very real danger that the presence of a weapon will heighten rather than defuse potentially violent situations."

The council applied for the federal grant on the advice of Police Chief Sam Hargardine, whose response to the Sandy Hook massacre was to publicly call for armed police officers in our schools. There is no reason at all to believe that an armed officer could have prevented the Sandy Hook massacre, and it is well known that the infamous Columbine High School massacre happened despite the presence of armed officers. It is perhaps ironic that the major outcome of the Sandy Hook massacre, with predictable assistance from President Obama, may be the introduction of guns into our schools.

Police officers will of course not leave their guns at the door. Some par-

ents will welcome the armed supervision of their children, but other parents will be outraged. Some children will be afraid of them. There is a very real danger that the presence of a weapon will heighten rather than defuse potentially violent situations. What happens when a student disobeys a police officer's commands and either has a knife or tries to grab an officer's gun?

Chief Hargardine will of course say that we are highly trained professionals who will probably never even draw our guns, but don't say it can't happen here. Keep in mind what happened on the streets of Iowa City to a now forgotten immigrant from Africa, John Deng, so intoxicated that he could barely stand up, shot dead by an officer because he had a penknife that he was probably using to defend himself against an assault by a white man. It does happen here, and if a student is shot or even killed by an officer, however tragic and unnecessary the case might be, it will be entirely legal.

I hesitate to even raise the issue because of the storm of outrage that greeted our even raising the issue of racial disparities in the jail, not to mention the vile and abusive racist communications I received for daring to oppose a bigger jail. (See "Don't You Dare Use the R Word" from the Prairie Progressive, available at <http://votenojusticecenter.org/>). However, The New York Times editorial also pointed out that the presence of armed officers led to the disproportionate criminalization of African American young people.

Iowa City community leaders have greeted the influx of black young people so far by imposing a 100% racist juvenile curfew, and putting up apartheid like signs at our bus stops. At a time when 40% of those jailed are African-American, our community leaders proposed

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Dick Fallow (1920-2013):

Remembrances of a (fellow) labor historian

We honor the memory of Dick Fallow because we understand, as he did, the importance of capturing past labor struggles and contributions of rank-and-file workers. When I saw him in 2009, we talked about an Iowa teenager's controversial and visible role in the famous 1912 Bread and Roses strike. Dick thought Pearl McGill, subject of my own research, should have a play written about her. When "Bread, Roses, and Buttons," written by local playwright Janet Schlapkohl, premiered in March 2012 on the hundredth anniversary of the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile strike, Dick Fallow, 92 years young as he would put it, drove to Iowa City to see it.

Fallow's lifelong commitment to the labor movement reflects his sustained belief in the centrality of organized labor in pushing forward an agenda of social justice and human rights. Fallow was in the vanguard of union organizing in the 1940s and 1950s when his union work put him in touch with people from all walks of life, from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, and across a wide political spectrum. Although he doubtless could have pursued a union career that would have catapulted him into top level leadership, Fallow chose to remain in the community to work for change. His daily life embodied the principles of acting locally and thinking globally.

Profoundly influenced by the atrocities he had witnessed as an American Field Service worker during World War II, Fallow determined to make a difference when he came home. In a 2012 interview he recalled, "In trying to figure out why Hitler came to power I learned pretty quickly that he was supported by the corporations of Germany as well as some American companies and I figured, 'Well, if that's the way the ball bounces

and this leads to war, I should take on the corporations.' And that's when I got connected with the UE in the Connecticut area as a volunteer."

Fallow worked as a volunteer for the United Electrical Workers, hiring on in different plants in Connecticut and Iowa to help organize from the inside. In the early 1950s, he was assigned to the Quad Cities area. "We had a good bunch of people," Fallow reflected. At membership meetings, members talked not only about work-related issues in the plant, but "whatever issue was out there," includ-

"The progressive legislation we take for granted today required the persistence of activists like Fallow – willing to endure the repeated failures that mark the incremental steps towards a more just social order."

ing city hall and foreign policy. "What it did," noted Fallow, "was it prevented a wall from being built between the leaders of the union and the membership. And it also consolidated the membership because—don't kid ourselves, the company at all times is always seeking to find that divisive point that they can exploit to get people split."

Fallow weathered the anti-communist hysteria of the McCarthy era and the UE's expulsion from the CIO. He recalled how the Taft-Hartley act brought an increase in red-baiting and blacklisting and "a chilling fear that stifled the possibility of discussion. After 1957 we were worn down by raids and competition as

to who was to represent the workers. A lot of money and time was spent by both sides that could better have been spent on promoting the interests of the working class."

Joining the International Association of Machinists, Fallow became a business agent, working in the 1950s and 1960s to end racial discrimination in Iowa by supporting Fair Employment Practice bills and fair housing legislation. His vision embraced the rights of migrant workers in Iowa during fiercely contested debates over Iowa's first

migrant child labor and migrant housing bills in the 1960s. The progressive legislation we take for granted today required the persistence of activists like Fallow – willing to endure the repeated failures that mark the incremental steps towards a more just social order.

Knowing of Fallow's close ties to the Quad Cities community, I called him when I began work on an oral history project to preserve Iowa Latino history. He gave me four names, names that opened an

important door into this history. Within two weeks, I had been invited to the Cook's Point Reunion of the Davenport League of United Latin American Citizens – LULAC Council 10. Many of the interviews and rich collections of documents now preserved in the Iowa Women's Archives at the University of Iowa Libraries can be traced to the original four names suggested by Fallow. In 2009, when LULAC celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in Davenport, I was surprised to see Dick Fallow there. On reflection, I should not have been.✿

— Janet Weaver works at the Iowa Women's Archives.

Sunland: Chapter One

And here they were, the walkers and canes and Panama hats under the parrot-green Arizona sky. I checked my watch. Four thirty was dinner hour, the fever-rush to the dining commons. In the shimmering heat of the summer afternoon, everyone prepared for gossip and spoons. Elevators in the whitewashed towers opened with a pneumatic hiss, spilling groups of twos and threes onto the central brick quad, where men in oversized Hawaiian shirts mingled with elderly women who stood bent, and tiny, and fragile underneath the hook-armed, hundred-year-old saguaro. Ms. Haybroke, one of my septuagenarians, led the charge with a sleek new cell phone to her ear. Her heavy blue eye shadow looked applied via paint gun. She sauntered my way and pinched the phone shut.

“Just get me the same,” she said and passed me a silky envelope. I handed her a white paper bag. My finger grazed her ring as she moved on, but for a moment I felt comradeship -- that we were spies trading information, that we were children exchanging notes. Inside her envelope was her monthly payment, in cash.

I stood at my usual bench by the lake, my granddad’s old, tattered U.S. postal bag looped over my shoulder, distributing white paper bags with gold stickers over the flaps. I worked for my clients. We whispered about dollar amounts, doses.

I hitched the bag to my other shoulder, feeling a sting in my rotator cuff, and kept my eye on a stranger leaning on a ‘yield for wheelchair’ signpost. A white Stetson shaded the stranger’s face. The man was watching with interest. I was unable to connect him to any of my clients. I knew faces around Paseo del Sol. And they knew mine. I watched him snuggle his thumb in his jeans pocket and study me as though he wanted to know me. I was always interested in men who wanted to know me, in men I didn’t

know. Any day, at any hour, a police baton could tap at my door, and the work would come to an end. The man’s eyes shifted overhead when aquamarine drapes slashed shut inside one of the assisted-living towers. Some old folks enjoyed watching brilliant, slow-moving sunsets filled with dramatic cloudbursts. Others hid behind thick drapes.

People on campus knew my grandma as Miss Mary Beth, as Ms. Dulaney, as Bethie, but to me she was Nan -- just Nana, my nana, whom I adored -- and Nana was late for the dinnertime sprint.

When Nana finally appeared she had an argyle scarf around her neck. A puffy, hand-knit wool sweater concealed her curved back. It embarrassed me when Nana wore wool in this kind of heat.

“Scrubbing the grout stains again,” she said, rolling out her usual routine. “You should see the caulking,” she went on. She pulled two fingers through short gray hair with black strings in the mix. “Goes white to brown in minutes. Minutes! We need bleach. A big bottle. The biggest. The kitchen is under attack, Sidney. I thought you were supposed to help with the cleaning.” Her tongue slid over specially ordered dentures. “And what are you doing out in the sun again?”

“We’re having dinner. Remember?”

“Is it Tuesday?” she said.

Beside her I felt like a hovering giant. As a teenager, as I grew, she shrank. Now she was a slight eighty-eight-year-old with large purple veins, thick as earthworms, lining the tops of her hands.

As we walked to the dining commons, I watched the stranger unhitch his thumb from his jeans and right himself like an impertinent bowling pin. I ignored the man’s stare and showed Nana the loot inside Grandpa’s bag: celecoxib for her arthritis, lisinopril for hypertension, sertraline for mood stability, and so on. A small pharmacy.

“All of it illegal, I suppose,” she said.

“Cheaper,” I said. “I’m trying to

keep ahead of your bills. The cost of managed care is astronomical.”

“Oh, save it.” Nana drilled me with her stare. I knew she didn’t approve of the side business I’d carved from her living situation--she worried about my safety, the law, especially the violence along the border. “I just never thought Frederick would sire a criminal son,” she said.

“Enough with the guilt trip, Nan.”

“Don’t sass your grandma.” She wiped at the corners of my mouth with a wet thumb. “I just wish you’d find something better to do with your time.”

In the distance thick black fingers dropped from the sky and touched the thirsty soil. It was raining far off. I felt a rush and grabbed my grandmother’s hand. Lightning veins appeared, flickering like broken neon. Black rain clouds looked like pulled dirty cotton. Thin strands of sunlight shot through the clouds and caressed my neck. During monsoon season, the days were long, superheated, and oppressive. In the late afternoons I liked watching for rare skies and meteorological dramas, scanning the outlying horizons for signs of pregnant, silver-blue rain clouds, hoping and praying for clouds that would strain and heave and cry before blowing off, so that nothing was left but the good, sodden smell of oiled creosote and wet earth, that welcome and needed relief under the windy clapping of acacia leaves.

“You did the same as a boy,” Nana said, gripping my hand tighter. “Always sky-gazing. Must be something up there you like.” ✨

— Don Waters lives in Iowa City and Portland, OR. His novel *Sunland* will be published by University of Nevada Press in October 2013.



*Make Every Young Person a Criminal,
Continued from Page 2*

Quad Citians for Responsible Gun Laws

- May 26, 1938
House Un-American Activities
Committee formed
- June 12, 1963
Medgar Evers murdered in Jackson,
Mississippi
- June 25, 1938
Wages and Hours Act banned child
labor and set a 40-hour week
- July 9, 1958
US invaded Lebanon
- July 18, 1918
Nelson Mandela born
- July 22, 1948
Henry Wallace named Progressive
candidate for President

building an even bigger jail to house young people when they turn eighteen, i.e. greatly expand the existing school to prison pipeline for African-Americans. Now they propose to put them under the supervision of armed guards in school. More than 50% of young people in “secure juvenile detention” are African Americans already That number will grow.

Armed officers in our high school will hurt the young people of our community of all races by giving more of them criminal records, leave many students feeling threatened by the presence of guns in the schools, divide parents over whether it is good or bad for students, further polarize a community where many people on both sides remain angry over the jail elections, exacerbate racial divisions, and do incalculable harm to public education in Iowa City. In a community that is proud of its schools, it is difficult to imagine a more divisive, harmful step to propose. ✂

— Jeff Cox

Quad Citians for Responsible Gun Laws is being re-energized in the Quad Cities by a dynamic and diverse group of community leaders.

We will be rebuilding a grassroots organization to press for responsible gun laws, to work to prevent gun violence in our neighborhoods and to connect with people across the political spectrum who believe that there are common sense actions we can take to protect ourselves from violence caused by such things as assault weapons, ineffective background checks, and gun trafficking. Contact Cathy at cbarts4@gmail.com for more information.

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Summer Reading List,
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Tyrants, with a handy appendix of The 100 Deadliest Multicides.

Help Me Find My People: The African American Search of Family Lost in Slavery by Heather Andrea Williams

Can you imagine a man with a gun and a whip walking away with your mother... forever? No, you can't, but Williams provides a searing taste of families permanently ripped apart, the terror of human trafficking, and the constant threat of loss.

The Twelve Tribes of Hattie by Ayana Mathis

A fictionalized, more contemporary version of Help Me Find My People. Not a novel for relaxing on the beach, but a worthwhile tour-de-force by a recent Writers Workshop grad.

Summer Lies by Bernhard Schlink

The author of *The Reader* depicts decent people facing difficult decisions, then deluding themselves to justify the disastrous results of their poor choices. Cautionary stories for all seasons!

Talulla Rising by Glen Duncan

A female werewolf struggles with self-doubt, loneliness, and parenting issues.

Zone One by Colson Whitehead

In the not-too-distant future, the world is still mopping up the remaining zombies who nearly destroyed the human race. The scariest monsters, we are reminded, are those most like us: catatonic consumers, the seemingly-friendly folks next door, the flesh-eaters lurking just beneath the veneer of "civilization." Whitehead's world -- including pre-apocalyptic Vegas casinos, urban workplaces, and the New York club scene -- makes TV's *The Walking Dead* look like a mundane soap opera.

On the Spectrum of Possible Deaths by Lucia Perillo

Poetry as stand-up comedy, paying bittersweet tribute to the good things in life ("dogs and pie and swimming") and the not so good (damaged bodies, bad French movies, "the sadness of the bound-to-happen").

The Price of Inequality by Joseph Stiglitz

The Columbia economics professor plays a tune similar to Paul Krugman's, but hits a lot more notes. "America has become a country not 'with justice for all,' but rather with... justice for those who can afford it." ✂

— *Prairie Dog*

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"The hardest thing in life is to know when to hold fast to one's principles and when it's acceptable to bend them."

— *Bernard Schlink, Summer Lies*