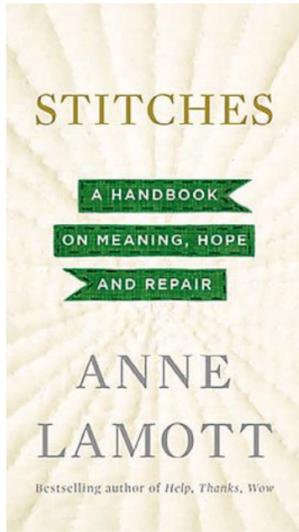


Reader's Choice

For the second year, Salon asked its readers to share the best book they read in 2013. It was an open call, so any book, from any genre, from anywhere in the world and from any point in history was eligible. Here are some of the submissions we received.

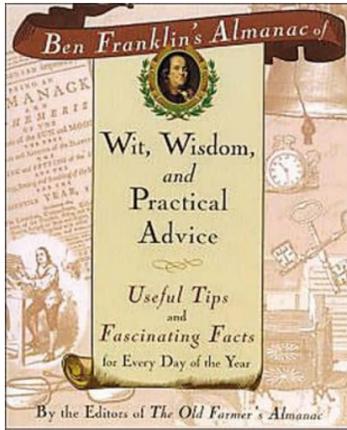
Stitches: A Handbook on Meaning, Hope and Repair by Anne Lamott, Riverhead, 112 pages / **Living Beautifully: With Uncertainty and Change** by Pema Chodron, Shambhala, 128 pages / **The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living** by Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, Riverhead, 352 pages

If you enjoy a variety of perspectives on a topic – in this case, happiness – these three deliver simply, beautifully and with humour. Lamott's *Stitches* shows how, with gratitude and compassion, even the most tragic life can be stitched back together. You'll find your screwed-up self on every page – and in good company. Pema Chodron's latest, *Living Beautifully*, is packed with wisdom on living compassionately – the key to happiness. A Buddhist nun, Chodron's perspective brings east to west in a readable, inspiration guidebook. In the updated standby, *The Art of Happiness*, psychiatrist Howard Cutler applies western science and research to the Dalai Lama's teachings for those who need "evidence" that happiness is really as simple as being good to each other and ourselves. – CATHY FYNN



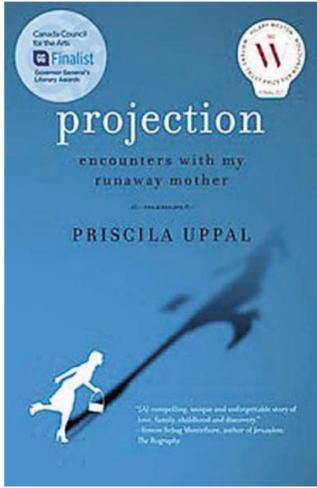
Ben Franklin's Almanac of Wit, Wisdom, and Practical Advice: Useful Tips and Fascinating Facts for Every Day of the Year edited by The Old Farmer's Almanac, Yankee, 400 pages

Ben Franklin's *Almanac of Wit, Wisdom and Practical Advice* proved to be the best book I read last year. Being an almanac, it was done, of course, a day at a time. I chose the beginning of each day to delve into the world of Franklin, arguably one of the most famous Americans. The book's editors at Yankee Magazine noted he was not, "a president, eminent professor, professional athlete or movie star," but "spent his whole life conveying information and ideas." They've excerpted most of the content from Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*, which he wrote from 1733 to 1758. His work is just as readable and sensible, and just as good a guide to life, as it was long, long ago. Having had a taste of Franklin's advice, observations, clever couplets, I am now looking to delve deeper into this man's life, and seeking a good biography, which perhaps will be my book of the year for 2014. Anyone know one? – DAVID GOSS, Saint John



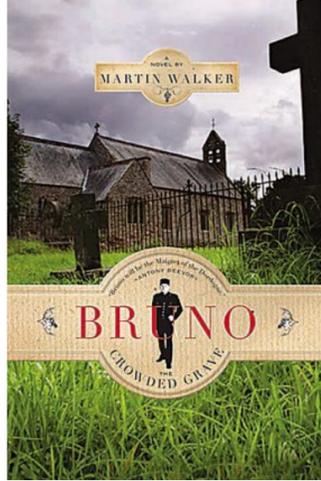
Projection: Encounters with My Runaway Mother by Priscila Uppal, Thomas Allen, 288 pages

My favourite book of 2013 was *Projection* by Priscila Uppal, a poet and novelist living in Toronto. Uppal's memoir tells of the reunion with her mother, who abandoned the family 20 years ago. Uppal decided to reconnect with her mother after seeing her profile, along with pictures of herself and her brother, on the Internet. Her mother, now living in Brazil, invites Uppal to visit, expenses paid. Uppal's anger and resentment make her reluctant, but curiosity wins out. Who she meets is a woman who has absolved herself of all blame, a self-centred woman who will not engage in any serious conversation. The book gives readers an opportunity to observe the relationship not only through Uppal's eyes but, more objectively, through their own. – DONNA TONE, Deerfield, N.S.



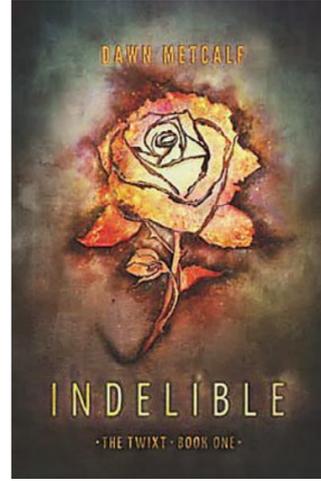
The Crowded Grave by Martin Walker, HarperCollins, 368 pages

I love New Brunswick, even in November, but the chance to journey to the Dordogne region of France via Martin Walker's *The Crowded Grave*, the fourth book in his Bruno series, was a great treat. You just can't help liking Bruno, chief of police for St. Denis. Actually, he's the only policeman in the village, and in *The Crowded Grave* he has to deal with Basque separatists who threaten a Franco-Spanish summit, while never failing to look after his foie gras, vin de noix and two beautiful women. Bruno is well-aware of the laws of the land but he also has his own concept of honour and justice. Thumbs up for the charming policeman who gets the job done with style. – NORMA JOAN PAUL, Sackville



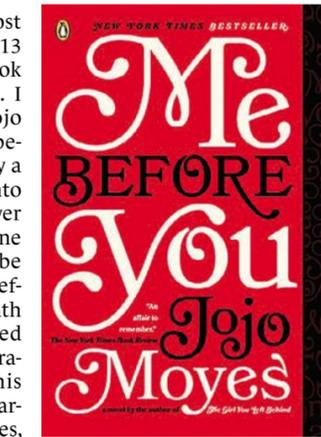
Indelible by Dawn Metcalf, Harlequin Teen, 384 pages

It was the fiery rose on the cover of *Indelible* that made me pick it up, but it was the amazing story that kept me from putting it down. *Indelible* is book one in the captivating *Twixt* series by young adult author Dawn Metcalf. The story follows Joy, a strong and likable protagonist, and her love interest, Ink, a boy from a different world, as they try to unite and save both their worlds from evil. This book is a hauntingly beautiful love story, filled with spellbinding action and though the author wraps things up quite nicely at the end of this book, yet I found myself desperately wanting more. If you enjoy teen fantasy, pick up this book. You will love it. – SAMANTHA MACKIE, Saint John



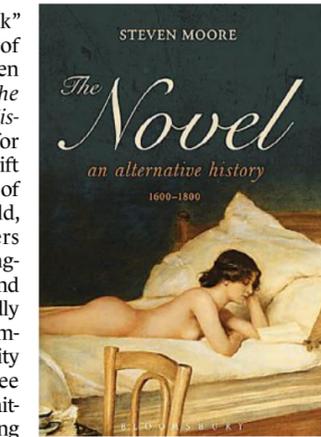
Me Before You by Jojo Moyes, Penguin, 400 pages

For me, one of the most satisfying reads of 2013 was *Me Before You* a book by a British novelist. I had never heard of Jojo Moyes, and I read the book because it was recommended by a friend. I can't put the story into a category, because I have never read anything quite like it. One of its central themes would be "the bravery and sustained effort needed to redirect the path of a life once it's been pushed off course." Will Traynor, a paraplegic, and Louisa Clark, his caregiver, are the central characters. It's a tear-jerker at times, but well deserving of its place on bestseller lists in Britain. – ELIZABETH WILBY HARVEY



The Novel: An Alternative History, 1600-1800 by Steven Moore, Bloomsbury Academic, 1,024 pages

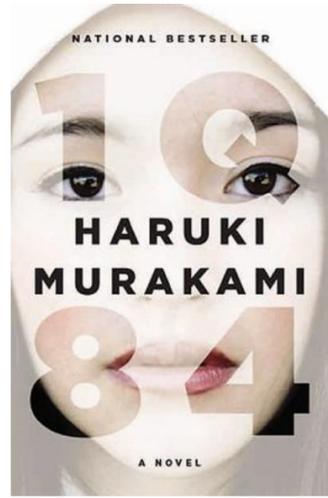
For me, any "best book" encourages new ways of thinking. This year, Steven Moore's 1,000-page *The Novel: An Alternative History, 1600-1800* is my choice for best read of the year. A terrific gift for any bibliophile, it is a survey of writing from around the world, filled with unfamiliar writers from, among other places, England, Germany, Spain, France and China. Thanks to Moore's friendly and accessible style, concise summarizing and an admirable ability to put books in context, we see what riches from the past lie waiting for rediscovery while learning how the novel has been around far longer than imagined. Thanks to Moore's enthusiasm, my bookcase is groaning with new titles. – JEFF BURSEY, Charlottetown



1Q84 by Haruki Murakami, Anchor, 1,184 pages

A lot happens in *1Q84* by Haruki Murakami, but briefly: Aomame and Tengo meet in elementary school and bond. Twenty years later, they long to reconnect. He teaches and writes novels. She is a gym instructor and kills sex offenders who are beyond the reach of the law. Independently they find themselves opposing the same well-known cult.

It is Tokyo in 1984, but it is an unsettling, parallel world where most things are like our world – but others are not. The multi-layered plot fits together in unexpected, satisfying ways. Murakami is a great storyteller with a warm heart. For 1,184 pages, you are carried away. You always want to keep reading. – FORREST ORSER, Fredericton

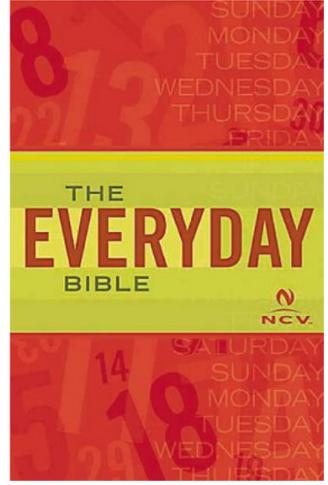


The Everyday Bible: New Century Version, Thomas Nelson, 1,184 pages

I've read many books in 2013, but the one that stands out for me is the Holy Bible. I prefer the New Century Version – it's easy to understand. I read my Bible on a daily basis, which enables me to draw closer to God.

Proverbs 30:5 says that every word of God is true, and, as you read the Bible, you'll discover what that truth is. For instance, we reap what we sow. I've discovered this to be true. Whether I sow encouragement, kindness or money it reaps back. Someway, somehow, that's just how it is.

There's no other book like the Bible. It's timeless, its words are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Dig into it, you'll be pleasantly surprised by what you'll find. – ANNE-MARIE, Fredericton

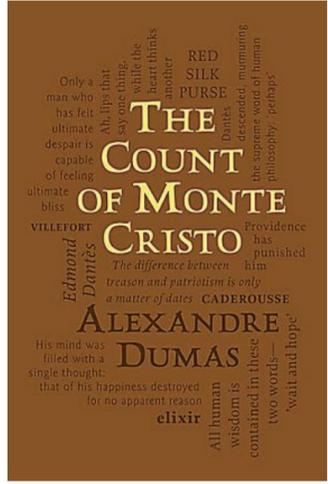


The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexandre Dumas, Canterbury Classics, 1,112 pages

More than 1,100 pages long and 150 years old, most folks think *The Count of Monte Cristo* is going to be a slog to read. "No thanks," you think, "I'll stick to Dan Brown." I urge you, dear reader, to reconsider!

Alexandre Dumas' mysterious count is like Batman, if Batman brought shipwrecked sailors into his underground lair and went on hallucinatory hash trips with them. This is not your typical 19th-century Jane Austen nonsense, where they spend 600 pages talking about marriage. This book has passion, prison breaks, poisonings, politics, pistol fights, pirates and protagonists posing as priests in preposterous plots. And that's just the P's.

Do yourself a favour and pencil this rollicking adventure into your 2014 reading list. – JEREMY CHIASSON, Hampton



My Sister's Journey: From Headache to Heartache by Barb Parker, Essence, 144 pages

I have read both *My Sisters Journey* and *The Choice* by Barb Parker. Barb's love and compassion for her sister, and her advocacy for her sister's care, was so beyond anyone's expectation. I am inspired by Barb's message to never give up, even when everything seems too much to handle. Barb clearly knows who she is, and her sister Deb would have been so comforted to have such loving support. Thanks, Barb, for both of these books, and the reminder that love heals. – MONICA MCNALLY, Fredericton

