



3-5-2014

Dan Gilbert, Levan Professor of Ethics and Management

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Abstract

In this latest edition of *Next Page*, Dan Gilbert, the David M. LeVan Professor of Ethics and Management, shares with us books that inspired his teaching career, his love of baseball (1,100+ games and counting!), and the activities he's looking forward to as he shakes off the Gettysburg winter and settles into retirement in sunny Southern California. We will miss you, Dan!

Keywords

Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, reading, books, interview

Disciplines

English Language and Literature | Library and Information Science

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In this latest edition of Next Page, Dan Gilbert, the David M. LeVan Professor of Ethics and Management, shares with us books that inspired his teaching career, his love of baseball (1,100+ games and counting!), and the activities he's looking forward to as he shakes off the Gettysburg winter and settles into retirement in sunny Southern California. We will miss you, Dan!

In looking back over your teaching career, what book had the biggest impact on you as a teacher and why?



Dan Gilbert

This is a four-way tie for first place. Each book has inspired and informed my teaching and writing at the intersection of civil society, organizations, and local civilian life.

[*Out of This Furnace*](#), by Thomas Bell. In a casual faculty conversation, years ago and at another college, a history-professor colleague recommended to me this story about three generations of a Slovak family settling into American civil society in the steel cities of Western Pennsylvania. The third section ("Mary") is as moving a literary passage as any I have encountered. Recently, Jack Ryan and I have been talking about Braddock, Pennsylvania, one of the steel cities in the book, in conjunction with local efforts to revitalize civil society in Braddock.

[*The Shipping News*](#), by E. Annie Proulx. One of Proulx's characters ("Billy Pretty") describes a Newfoundland fishing village as "a joinery of lives." *Joinery* is a vivid concept about living in a local place. *Joinery* actually inspired me to get involved five years ago in two volunteer activities in the Gettysburg community: adult literacy tutoring for the Adams County Literacy Council (ACLC) and mediating conflicts for Mediation Services of Adams County. I thank Bob Daniels at ACLC and Jan Powers at both organizations, for their encouragement in these civic activities.

[*Olive Kitteridge*](#), by Elizabeth Strout. One of Strout's characters remarks to her husband on a drive through their Maine town during the December holiday season, "All these lives. All these stories we never know." One of those mysteries involved her husband, she learned that evening. My wife Kate gave me this book after hearing me talk about what I observe and wonder on my daily walks around town and in our neighborhood. With this book, I guide students to inquire about eccentric behaviors and unusual life choices that energize a civil society. I was delighted to learn that Robin Wagner is a fan of *Olive Kitteridge*.

[*The Unquiet Earth*](#), by Denise Giardina. This is one of the numerous "coal mining novels" that I have taught

in my time. Giardina's characters "Dillon Freeman" and "Rachel Honaker" struggle to preserve the natural place in Appalachia that they call home. Their antagonist is childhood classmate "Arthur Lee Sizemore," who ascends to the presidency of the coal company. This is the most instructive management text that I have ever taught. The angst that continually infuses managerial practice is vivid as "Dillon" ponders how "Arthur Lee" will respond to a building crisis, "...he lives here. He will stay awake the nights."

Now that you are looking forward to your retirement in sunny, southern California, what are you are reading to help you get to know your new community?

Years ago, during my first summer in Southern California, I embarked on a reading program about California civil society and the organization of water in this arid place—and it is always arid in the West. Early texts in this project included [The Great Thirst](#) (Norris Hundley, Jr.), [City of Quartz](#) (Mike Davis), [Beyond the Hundredth Meridian](#) (Wallace Stegner), and [California: The Great Exception](#) (Carey McWilliams). Kevin Starr's multivolume history of California followed. This reading project is ongoing. Last summer, as my wife and I toured the Owens Valley and traced the course of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, I read [The Land of Little Rain](#), by Mary Austin.

You are a big fan of baseball. Is there a certain book you would recommend to anyone interested in learning more and/or developing a better appreciation for the sport?

I will answer this in three parts. There is a common thread. With each passing year, I find myself inventing new ways to experience a Major League Baseball game in person. I draw inspiration from works of baseball fiction to look past the typical measures of baseball performance—such as World Series wins, all-time individual records, and Hall of Fame elections—and to connect the game with particular civil and civilian experiences and pursuits. This question takes me back to my doctoral program years at the University of Minnesota. My thesis adviser Ed Freeman and I made numerous trips to The Hungry Mind Bookstore in St. Paul, Minnesota, down the street from the Macalester College campus. There is where a whole new literary world opened up to me: baseball fiction.

The Conduct of the Game, by John Hough, Jr. This novel traces the journey that "Lee Malcolm" takes from teenage umpire in Cape Cod to the pinnacle of his profession: Major League Baseball umpire. Then "Malcolm" learns that the game is embedded in a complicated politics. Umpires are involved in every play in a baseball game. Still, they receive little recognition at the ballpark. Major League teams are now so invested in branding their team identity that they give scant attention to others who do not quite fit into the brand: most notably, the visiting team and the umpires. Inspired by Hough's book, whenever I attend a Major League Baseball game (now 1,100-plus games, and counting), I listen for the introduction of the umpires. At many stadiums, I hear the announcer hurriedly mutter the four umpires' names while rock music blares and the scoreboard leads cheers for the home team. It is done differently at Camden Yards in Baltimore. Several minutes before the game begins, without music blaring, the public address announcer calmly introduces the umpires as "Mr. Tim McClelland, Mr. Laz Diaz..." How civil, I think.

The Greatest Slump of All Time, by David Carkeet. The leftfielder in this book is "saddened by foul balls." Foul balls are routine in baseball. On any pitch, the great hitter and the mediocre hitter alike could hit a foul ball. Foul balls are intriguing because they are not synonymous with total failure. A foul ball does involve making contact between bat and ball. So, the significance of a foul ball is something for player and spectator alike to ponder. Through foul balls, I have learned to look at the game in terms of disappointments. (This might derive from the fact that in three years of high school baseball and two summers of American Legion baseball, making foul contact was an accomplishment for me. When asked about my weakness as a hitter, one coach responded, "Any pitched ball.") After reading Carkeet's book, I kept an unconventional scorecard

at a Baltimore-Minnesota game in Minneapolis. Before I ran out of room for making notations, I recorded 125 foul balls in a single game.

It Looked Like Forever, by Mark Harris. Harris's "Henry Wiggins"—protagonist in such earlier Harris works as [Bang the Drum Slowly](#)—approaches the end of his long and successful playing career. With "Henry Wiggins" in mind, I now also watch the game in terms of how playing careers end. In the off-season—the six months when there are no baseball box scores published in the daily newspapers—I return to my records of games that I have attended and I research how players' careers ended.

All Major League Baseball playing careers end. Many end ingloriously. I was reminded of this when I read recently in the *Los Angeles Times* about the final game pitched by Greg Maddux, newly-elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame. His last Major League performance was not the triumphant departure associated with fictional ballplayers "Roy Hobbs" and "Billy Chapel." For every season-long farewell celebration accorded retiring players such as Carl Yastrzemski in 1983, Cal Ripken in 2001, and Mariano Rivera in 2013, there are the sad attempts to "hang on" by Steve Carlton (five teams in his final three seasons, amassing a 15-29 record) and Fernando Valenzuela (affiliations with California, Baltimore, Philadelphia, San Diego, and St. Louis teams, after his storied years with Los Angeles). For many ballplayers, the endings come in mid-season, when they are "released" (from their contracts) or "designated for assignment"—i.e., publicly fired—never again to play in a Major League game.

There is an opportunity—I think, while at the ballpark—to ask ourselves: Where in General Education at Gettysburg College does each Gettysburg student learn to inquire intelligently about disappointment and endings? A subject for another day, I think. (A reading list might begin with: [Falling from Grace](#), by Katherine Newman; [The Cliff Walk](#), by Don J. Snyder; *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown*, by Sean Safford).

Is there a particular book or article that has inspired you to take some sort of action?

Ongoing, too, is my reading project about contemporary multiethnic California. [The Tortilla Curtain](#), by T. C. Boyle, is often in my thoughts as I embark on one of my retirement activities: tutoring underprivileged grade-school children in an after-school program affiliated with a school district. In February, 2014, I will complete training to resume adult literacy tutoring through a public library.

In both tutoring endeavors, my thoughts turn to the article that Jack Ryan brought to my attention, and that Kerri Odess-Harnish and I discussed (at a First-Year Advisory Council meeting chaired by Jack Ryan) as the impetus for this interview: "This Land is Not Your Land: Deciding Who Belongs in America," by Ted Genoways, in the February 2013 edition of [Harper's Magazine](#).

Who is your favorite writer of all time?

This is a tie: Wallace Stegner and John McPhee.

Whose next work are you awaiting?

Anne Matthews ([Bright College Years](#); *Where the Buffalo Roam*), and the Culture Clash theater troupe based in Los Angeles (*Chavez Ravine*; *Water & Power*).

Posted 5th March by [Musselman Library, Gettysburg College](#)

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