

Making Ripples

Summer Reading Recommendations

Beat the heat with books about a better world

by Amanda Bancroft

It's not too late to sign up for the all-ages summer reading programs at the Fayetteville Public Library, and this year's theme is "build a better world." They have great prizes for those who turn in their reading logs, but the true reward is knowledge itself. This column is part of a personal project called Ripples, in which my husband Ryan and I attempt to make a difference with various aspects of our life. Very little of that would be possible without inspiration and wisdom from books. Undoubtedly, there are better, newer books than these which meet a wide palate of tastes in many genres, but these are the ones that boosted us towards making a difference.

If you're wanting a mystery novel, *The Cottage Tales of Beatrix Potter* by Susan Wittig Albert is an eight book series based on true events in the life of renowned children's author and illustrator Beatrix Potter. It's biographical fiction, and the plot follows how she overcame the death of her fiancé by moving to the Lake District of England to purchase and preserve old farms, saving over 4,000 acres from impending tourism development.

How to Live Well Without Owning a Car by Chris Balish explores the ways in which commuters thrive while being car-free. In many ways, it's an inconvenient lifestyle, but has big payoffs of better health and more money to spend on enjoying life. We lived for three years without a car, and can attest to the value of this book.

Building Green: A Complete How-to Guide to Alternative Building Methods by Clarke Snell and Tim Callahan covers earth plaster, straw bale, cordwood, cob, living roofs and more. Full-color photographs help the concepts sink in. This was a great introduction for us when we began our off-grid journey.

Maybe One by Bill McKibben challenges the stereotypes and assumptions about only children, providing the history behind the myths and the science behind the truth that having a single child may be the best option for sustaining the planet and optimizing child development.

Brad Lancaster's *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond* comes in several thick illustrated volumes, and is a fantastic introduction to catchment systems, rain gardens, erosion control and related topics.

For reference to our local natural world, there are guides to help you discover more wonder than ever before. These should get you started: *Arkansas Butterflies and Moths* by Lori A. Spencer and the Ozark Society Foundation, *Trees of Arkansas* by Dwight Moore and the Arkansas Forestry Commission, and *Arkansas Mammals: Their Natural History, Classification, and Distribution* by John A. Sealander and Gary A. Heidt.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.