



"Do You Like to Read?"

by Beverly Ryle

On my nightstand is Arthur Herman's 700-page dual biography of Winston Churchill and Mahatma Gandhi. I'm almost finished with it and when I'm done I'll move on to John Matheson's new biography of Margaret Fuller, the editor of the transcendental journal, *The Dial*. In the queue after Margaret is a book I've waited 8 years to hold in my hands, the fourth volume in Robert Caro's monumental biography of Lyndon Johnson.

My taste in reading is not very surprising. As a history major I spent my undergraduate years doing research in the Roanoke College library. In fact, I spent more time there my senior year, preparing to write an honors class dissertation on the 1948 election between Franklin Roosevelt and Wendell Wilkie, than I did in my dorm room.

The highlight of this exhaustive endeavor was finding a Wilkie campaign song, which I sang in the middle of presenting my paper to Dr. Poindexter, a brilliant but deadpan scholar, earning both a much coveted smile and an A-.

In graduate school at Georgetown University I was one of hundreds of students assigned to research various topics for big names in the Kennedy Administration, such as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Jules Davis, who I suspect maintained professor status because it provided them with a small army of eager students to collect material in the Library of Congress for the books they were writing.

I found working for someone I could barely see in the front of auditorium-size classroom much less satisfying than the intimate, small group, Oxford-like tutorial experience I'd enjoyed at Roanoke, but I loved being in the building where, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, its founder, "everything which related to America" was housed.

The towering rows of mahogany bookshelves always reminded me of the cool welcome of a dense forest on a hot day. Had my life proceeded in a straight path, I would have always had history books on my nightstand.

For me, however, it was several decades before I circled back to the bright, curious and engaged learner I had been in college, and even then emerging from a long stay in an intellectually void cul-de-sac was painfully slow.

Five years after I left Georgetown, I was a full-time homemaker with four children under the age of five, living year round in a summer cottage with no washing machine. I was married to an alcoholic contractor, which meant our income occasionally flowed after the sale of a house and frequently ebbed between jobs and in the long winter months.

The demands of daily living quickly became all consuming and reading, along with most of my other creative and intellectual pursuits, slipped away.

Eventually, my only mental stimulation came from watching cop shows and counting the number of beers my husband consumed. It was as if I were a horse wearing blinders racing endlessly around the same track. Eventually I could see nothing else in my life but the drinking!

The only time I read a book a book cover-to-cover was when emotional stress took its toll on my body and I ended up with something dire. I would ignore my symptoms to the point of collapse and instead of going to the Emergency Room, I'd seek help from Dr. Sal, a neighbor.

He would examine me, sigh and give me a lecture on taking better care of myself. Then he would order me to go to bed and his wife would hand me a book, some best seller she'd just finished reading, usual by James Michener.

While recovering from pneumonia, I was so absorbed in reading *Centennial* that I felt as if I was crossing the plains in a Conestoga wagon and the kids raising hell downstairs were Indians attacking.

It was wonderful to be transported again. At no other time in my life had Emily Dickinson's words, "There is no frigate like a book; to take us lands away," been more true for me, but I had only booked passage because I was flat on my back.

When I separated from my husband I didn't know what to do with myself. My attention had been fixed for so long on him I didn't have a clue how to rebuild my own life. The therapist I was seeing asked me what I liked to do. I couldn't answer.

Undeterred, she continued, "Do you like to read?"

"I use to," I said, so softly she had to ask me to repeat it. Building on this tiny glimmer, she tasked me with going to the library to a get a book before our next session.

As I walking through the front door of the Bethel Library, it struck me that I had not been in the adult section of a library for almost 20 years.

It was terrifying. I stood there watching people, find and delight in books that would nurture their interests. It was an act totally beyond my capability at that moment. Yet, some instinct prompted me to open and close a few of the wooden drawers of the card catalogue, even though I didn't know what I was looking for and could not remember how the system worked.

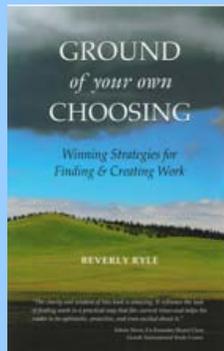
Then I wandered aimlessly through the stacks for as long as I could stand it and left without a book. My therapist insisted I try again.

On my return trip, a librarian who was shelving books in a back corner where I was hiding saw my dazed look and asked if she could help me find something. She had no idea what she was taking on and I'm sure I told her more of my sad story that she wanted to hear. She asked me what I'd studied in college. When I replied history she said I might enjoy Michener.

It was as if someone had just shone a flashlight on a dark path in the woods. "Why, yes, I had enjoyed Michener in the past," I said excitedly and with great pride in the accomplishment of having a book in my hand I checked out **Chesapeake**.

I gave up on it after 100 pages of paddling with an Indian all over the Maryland coastline now famous for crab cakes. When I took the book back I asked the librarian to suggest a biography of a woman who had overcome great difficulties in her life. She directed me to **A Woman Called Moses**, a novel based on the life of Harriet Tubman. As I read it my world and the possibility of being free grew – a page at a time.

An Invitation to Break Out of the Pack and Try Something Different!



Available at
[Ground of Your Own Choosing](#)
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In her professional roles as a career counselor and business consultant, Beverly Ryle has been helping corporate professionals, business owners, and people-in-transition achieve their full potential through education and empowerment for over twenty-five years.

Her ability to guide clients through a professional development process is built upon expertise in transition, communications, negotiations, Gestalt training and long-term experience as the only recovering person in a dysfunctional family. Her integration of business, counseling and spiritual disciplines has made her a vital resource for clients seeking to grow professionally by overcoming habitual patterns in order to claim greater authenticity in their work and interpersonal relationships.

In her first book, *Ground of Your Own Choosing: Winning Strategies for Finding & Creating Work*, she focused on ways of achieving self-leadership in your professional life.

In her second book, *Standing Alone* (now under development), she turns her attention to helping people enhance their potential for leadership within the context of family dysfunction, including rampant, multi-generational addiction and mental illness. *Standing Alone* is a collection of memoirs and short essays in which she tells both her own personal story and the more universal story of the possibility of renewal and joy whatever your life circumstances.

She will launch a website to preview the book before it is published (and to honor her 68th birthday) in mid-November.

Her blog can be found at www.beverlyryle.com/newsletter-blog.

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