

## Books: The Original and Final Refuge for Mental Wellness

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**“Some people can’t see the use of studying or even reading history ... learning by the mistakes of others is a far simpler and less expensive process than making them all yourself!”**

- 1920 May 27, American Machinist: A Practical Journal of Machine Construction, Volume 52, Number 22, What to Read for the Man in a Hurry

For the past six years I have traveled the world as a Special Operations Combat Medic for the US Navy. My name is Kyle Miller.

If you get to know me, we are sure to entertain conversations about trauma medicine and how to provide care during challenging situations. However, deployments are not always action packed—ironically, the downtime proves most difficult. When free from physical stressors, intense monotony threatens one’s wellbeing. Once boredom begins knocking at the door, we scramble to find ways to keep our minds sharp. Many pursue academic studies carried over from the states, possible only if (1) we have the luxury of an internal access point at our disposal, and (2) we are strong enough to overcome the temptation for easy distraction by television and video games.

How can we stay mentally engaged? When we have no access to technology for our online classes, how can we compete with peers back home at universities, who continue to progress in their studies?

The answer is simple but frequently forgotten on dusty shelves, in the shadows of modern-day television, tablets and computers.

Books...

When did we stop reading? The average American reads twelve books a year, the median being four. As medical professionals, we will never forget the fundamentals of hemorrhage control. So why have we forgotten analytical thinking skills and creativity — so easily cultivated by reading books?

Centuries of firsthand accounts and life lessons are immediately available to us if we simply crack the pages and put forth only a small effort. In doing so, we gain much more than common knowledge. Reading enhances a multitude of complex cognitive functions and is arguably one of the healthiest behaviors for mental health and wellness. History, science, bibliographies, novels and poetry have been staples of my development as a professional and as a person. I passionately advocate for the benefits of reading to patients, peers, and students in their journey to wisdom and wellness.

I have written a poem that encompasses the diverse adventures that have come across my desk. I hope you enjoy reading it and can recognize some of the novels intertwined into the poem. Can you name them all?

### “An Appreciation For Literature”

I am a man, a literate man with a book in each hand  
who opens worlds whenever he can.  
A Steppenwolf with no other plans,  
I sit in my chair on adventures most grand.  
Flying with Peter to Neverland  
and fighting with Katniss to take a stand.  
Because I am a man...  
a literate man with worlds in my hands.

A portrait hangs covered on the wall,  
hiding a man that will make your skin crawl.  
In the Gatsby mansion the green light shines on,  
as animals figure out what went so wrong  
after old Majors speech and Mr. Jones was gone.

It kills me to think Holden calls me a phony,  
but boy you should have seen Phoebes up on that pony.  
As night turns to day and I lay awake,

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historical books are about to be baked.  
It was a pleasure to burn as the clock struck thirteen.  
Big brothers' eyes will haunt my dreams  
and watch me as I run from IT  
in Stephen Kings old horror hit.

So...

Perhaps something cheerful is next in my queue.  
This Brave New World has me left me quite blue  
and I will miss Lenny with each day more,  
as his body lays in its innocent gore,  
on the riverbank where Huck tells his story.  
And Atticus defends, in court he  
stands for justice and helps restore me  
the humanity lost from that century.  
With all its unjust and its bigotry's.

Another book opens and I go on to play  
with mystical creatures who fly me away.  
To show me the dangers of Frodo's ring  
as I rule next to Lucy when Aslan is King.  
Until my hands start to tremble, my letter is here and

I'm off to Hogwarts to drink butter beer.  
Casting spells and playing Quidditch  
and finally calling Ms. Umbridge a... terrible lady.

When people talk, listen completely,  
most people never listen...so I keep on reading.  
And fall in love with women's sundresses.  
That made Bukowski confess, and addresses  
The Bluebird that's trapped inside of our hearts.  
If you won't go all the way, then don't even start.

It began as a mistake this world that I found  
the bars were all closed and there was no one around.  
So, I picked up a book and started to read  
and never looked back at the life that I'd leave.

You can keep all your tablets; your phones and TV's  
just leave me alone in this library seat.  
To reflect on life's lessons and see how I've grown  
as I put these books down and write one of my own.

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For all of you students of life sitting alone in the  
depths of a library — if you are wondering where every-  
one is, we are here. We are studying and reading right  
beside you. Keep going. You are not alone.

-KCM