

THINGS TO DO > BOOKS

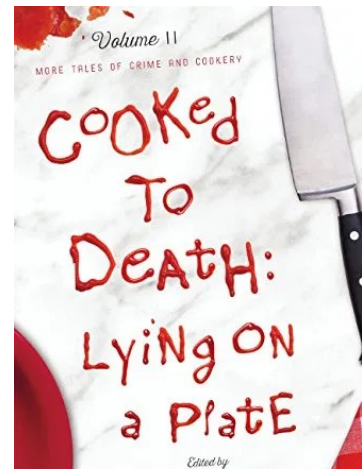
These four books from Minnesota authors make for good reading

By [MARY ANN GROSSMANN](#) | mgrossmann@pioneerpress.com | Pioneer Press

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A book based on one of Minnesota Public Radio’s most popular shows, stories about food to die for, a Joseph Campbell-inspired novel and one of the season’s most-praised children’s picture books offer today’s potpourri of good reading.

“Cooked to Death: Lying on a Plate,” edited by Rhonda Gilliland (Wise Ink Creative Publishing, \$17.95): When the crime anthology “Tales of Crime and Cookery” came out last year, it was a hit with local readers. Made up of stories by Minnesota mystery writers in which nefarious folks killed or tried to kill their antagonists with culinary delights, the book was so popular editor Gilliland gathered a new group of 15 authors to participate in this delicious second volume, “Cooked to Death: Lying on a Plate.” Each tale is accompanied by a recipe for the food that played a role in the story.



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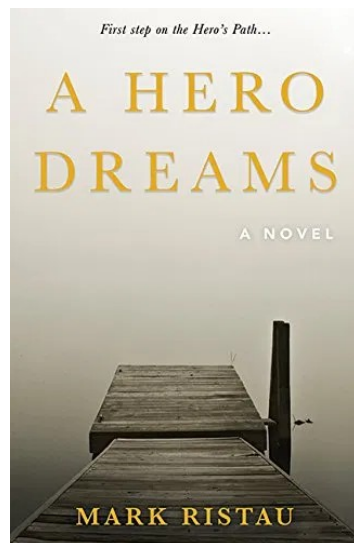


In her preface Gilliland points out that some of the authors are using familiar protagonists from their series, including Brian Lutterman's Pen Wilkenson, Susan Koefods' Arvo Thorson, and Nancy Tesler's Carrie Carling. Others are stand-alones, with plots ranging from a pastor who doesn't know how to handle domestic violence, to murder at a pie shop that involves blueberries, and shrimp and artichokes in wine that have a relationship to a scary spider.

The stories range from poignant to creepy, and some are funny. In Marlene Chabot's "Serving Up a Surprise," a police officer asks 200-pound Gertie whether she denies she brought the deadly baked pineapple dish.

Gertie replies: "Why would I? It's a great dish. Who wouldn't enjoy eating a surprising dessert filled with pineapple, grated cheddar, and crunched Hi Ho's?" The accompanying chicken wild rice soup recipe is from Keys Cafe and Bakery in Roseville, where they never use measurements

This is a tasty candidate for an under-\$20 holiday gift.



"A Hero Dreams" by Mark Ristau (Beaver's Pond Press, \$19.95): Mark Ristau's new novel can be read as a coming-of-age story about a sensitive 8-year-old who has visions that come from his vivid imagination. Or it can be read as a Joseph Campbell-inspired journey into the unknown.

Ricky is devastated by the death of his father, which led to his mother drinking a lot. She sends Ricky, a small and often-scared kid, to summer camp with his popular younger brother. Ricky isn't good at making friends and when he does feel comfortable with a couple of other boys, he doesn't speak up when one of them is hung on a nail by his shorts by some older boys. This isn't "Lord of the Flies," but there's a lot of young male cruelty in this camp, although there are a couple of adults who try to help Ricky.

When the campers have to take part in the traditional Ultimate Race, in which they are divided into two teams, Ricky is assigned to the swim portion and he's horrified because he nearly drowned when he was 4 years old and he's terrified of water.

On one level this is the story of a kid who overcomes his worst fear and matures when he realizes nobody cares about the secrets he's been trying so hard to disguise. But there are also elements of mysticism in Ricky's visions, including hearing his father's voice, seeing an angel in the face of a girl camper, and "seeing" a terrorist

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In the end, Ricky finds himself in a new place, preparing readers for the second book in Ristau's A Hero Dreams series.

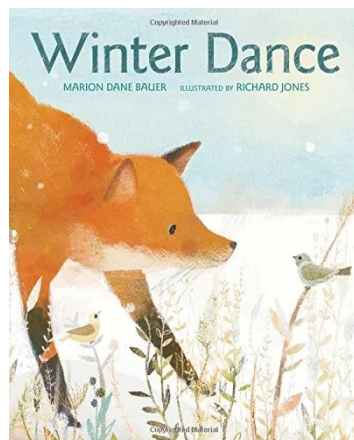
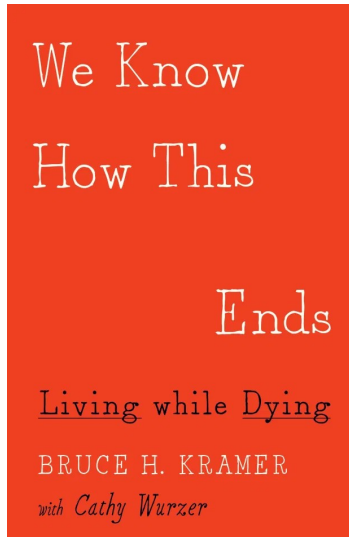
Although this novel is not marketed for young adults, it would be an interesting read for boys who will certainly empathize with Ricky's struggles as an outsider at camp. But there's a graphic boy-to-boy rape scene that makes it suitable only for older and very mature teens.

"We Know How This Ends: Living While Dying" Bruce H. Kramer with Cathy Wurzer (University of Minnesota Press, \$11.95):

A lot of listeners were mesmerized when Bruce Kramer shared his experiences living with ALS with Cathy Wurzer during more than three dozen stories heard on Minnesota Public Radio's "Morning Edition" show.

In 2015 Kramer and Wurzer co-authored this book, first published in hardcover and now released in paperback.

Kramer was dean of the college of education, leadership and counseling at the University of St. Thomas until two years after he was diagnosed in 2010. He created "The Dis Ease Diary," a blog about life with ALS, which became the basis for "We Know How This Ends." Throughout the book, Wurzer also shares her journey as she deals with her father's Alzheimer's disease. Kramer died in March 2015.



"Winter Dance" by Marion Dane Bauer, illustrated by Richard Jones (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$16.99):

And speaking of holiday gifts, if you're looking for a children's picture book made up of beautiful prose paired with beautiful pictures, check out this poetic story by one of Minnesota's deans of children's writers about what animals do to get through the winter.

It begins with a single snowflake floating through the air and landing on the nose of "a fine red fox." Winter is coming and he asks other animals and birds what he should do. The woolly caterpillar suggests, "Wrap yourself in a shiny chrysalis / so you'll wake / for a butterfly spring." Turtle urges him to go "down down, down to bury yourself / in the slick, cool mud." He meets squirrel, bat, geese, none of which offer a solution. Then a "fine red fox" tells him what to do. And they dance in the snow, which Bauer says really happens.

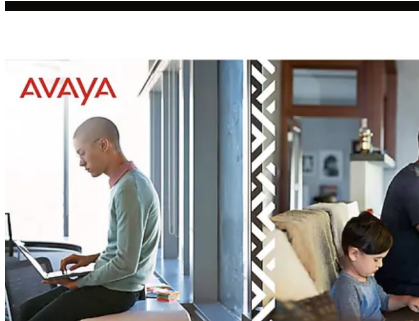
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“Winter Dance” earned starred reviews from Publishers Weekly, Kirkus and Booklist, which said “the regular pattern of Bauer’s text provides excellent support for pre-readers and Jones’ softlined, textured illustrations ... cast beautiful forest scenes across the page.”

Bauer is the author of more than 80 books of fiction and nonfiction, including the Newbery Honor book “On My Honor.” Jones, who lives in England, has worked in the [Twelve Books](#) as a children’s librarian for more than a decade.



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Mary Ann Grossmann

Mary Ann joined the Dispatch-Pioneer Press in 1961 when there were two papers. She has been a fashion writer, a women's columnist and the women's department editor who brought "society" pages into the 20th century. She was named book editor in 1983, just when the local literary community exploded. She has won the

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