

For Immediate Release

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2006 "ReadingTogether" Book Selection Announced

Community-wide selection committee chooses Tim O'Brien's brilliant collection of short stories: *The Things They Carried*.

Kalamazoo Public Library, 315 S. Rose St., announces the selection of *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien as the 2006 "ReadingTogether" title. ReadingTogether invites people of all ages from all walks of life to read and then discuss important issues raised by a single book. Thousands of county residents participated in the three previous ReadingTogether programs.

Kalamazoo Public Library leads ReadingTogether with the collaboration of libraries, educational institutions, health and social service agencies, cultural, civic and religious organizations, businesses, the media, and local governments throughout Kalamazoo County. The Kalamazoo Community Foundation helped the library launch ReadingTogether with funding for the first three years with grants from their "BetterTogether" initiative. The Foundation continues to be involved and supportive.

ReadingTogether programming will take place from February 14 through March 21, 2006, culminating with a visit to Kalamazoo by author Tim O'Brien, partially funded by a grant from the Friends of the Kalamazoo Public Library. Book discussions and special events will take place throughout this five-week period. Check www.readingtogether.us regularly for information. Details about the author visit, special events, and book discussions will be posted as they are planned.

ReadingTogether coordinator, Joan Hawxhurst, feels the selection of *The Things They Carried* will encourage even broader participation from across the community, especially those touched by any of the wars fought by the U.S. in the past 60 years. "The selection committee felt that *The Things They Carried* offered everything we look for in a ReadingTogether book: well-crafted writing, meaty issues that will provoke deep discussion, and accessibility to readers of all levels. This book will appeal to a wide spectrum of county residents and will draw new participants into the ReadingTogether program."

Copies of *The Things They Carried* are now available at all Kalamazoo Public Library locations and at other libraries and bookstores throughout the county. For more information on the reading campaign or to learn how to organize a book discussion with your neighbors, friends or coworkers, contact ReadingTogether coordinator, Joan Hawxhurst, at 553-7913 or email readingtogether@kpl.gov.

About the Book Selection Process

This year's book selection process was the most comprehensive and democratic yet. A list of more than 100 titles was compiled from: suggestions from library patrons and staff solicited over the library website and at all KPL locations, suggestions gathered from last year's evaluation process, librarian recommendations, other community reading programs' selections, and suggestions from community leaders. Then 30 community members, including school principals, teachers and librarians, college, university, special and public librarians, and representatives from businesses, the media, and 10 different community groups, were asked to serve on the selection committee. Each committee member chose ten titles from the 100+ offered. All top ten lists were then compiled into a short list of 13, plus an additional 11 titles that were recommended by committee members.

The committee members gathered for two hours of intense discussion on October 6 and voted on the list of 24 books. When the votes were tallied, one book emerged as the clear favorite of the committee. Library staff then confirmed that multiple editions would be available from book vendors and engaged the author for a visit to Kalamazoo.

About *The Things They Carried*

One of the first questions people ask about *The Things They Carried* is this: Is it a novel, or a collection of short stories? The title page refers to the book simply as "a work of fiction," defying the conscientious reader's need to categorize this masterpiece. It is both: a collection of interrelated short pieces that ultimately reads with the dramatic force and tension of a novel. Yet each of the twenty-two short pieces is written with such care, emotional content, and prosaic precision that it could stand on its own.

The Things They Carried depicts the men of Alpha Company: Jimmy Cross, Henry Dobbins, Rat Kiley, Mitchell Sanders, Norman Bowker, Kiowa, and of course, the character Tim O'Brien who has survived his tour in Vietnam to become a father and writer at the age of forty-three. They battle the enemy (or maybe more the idea of the enemy), and occasionally each other. In their relationships we see their isolation and loneliness, their rage and fear. They miss their families, their girlfriends and buddies; they miss the lives they left back home. Yet they find sympathy and kindness for strangers (the old man who leads them unscathed through the mine field, the girl who grieves while she dances), and love for each other, because in Vietnam they are the only family they have. We hear the voices of the men and build images upon their dialogue. The way they tell stories about others, we hear them telling stories about themselves.

With the creative verve of the greatest fiction and the intimacy of a searing autobiography, *The Things They Carried* is a testament to the men who risked their lives in America's most controversial war. It is also a mirror held up to the frailty of humanity. Ultimately *The Things They Carried* and its myriad protagonists call to order the courage, determination, and luck we all need to survive.

-- Book synopsis from the Random House website, publisher of *The Things They Carried*.

www.randomhouse.com

About Tim O'Brien

William Timothy O'Brien was born in Austin, Minnesota, in 1946. When he was in the fourth grade, his family moved to Worthington, Minnesota, the "Turkey Capital of the World" as he describes in *If I Die in a Combat Zone*. O'Brien credits his library-board-member father and his elementary-teacher mother with fostering his love for books and his belief in the power of stories to tell truths. His budding literary interests, plus his devotion to baseball--he played shortstop on a little league team coached by his father--led to O'Brien's first writing attempt at around the age of 10: "Timothy of the Little League"!

At 18, O'Brien left Worthington for Macalaster College in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he majored in political science. He became active in campus politics and was elected president of the student body during his senior year. As the Vietnam War escalated during O'Brien's college years, he took part in some minor anti-war demonstrations, but those demonstrations were not yet of the intensity of the protests that would soon rock college campuses--including Texas State, where in 1969, a group of students who became known as "the San Marcos 10" were suspended for engaging in peaceful protest against the war in Vietnam.

The summer after O'Brien graduated from Macalaster, he received his draft notice, and in February 1969, he was sent to Vietnam. He served a 13-month tour of duty, during which he earned a Purple Heart, a Bronze Star (for rescuing a wounded comrade under fire), and the Combat Infantry Badge.

After his discharge from the Army, O'Brien studied American military intervention at Harvard, worked as a journalist for *The Washington Post*, and continued writing about his war experiences, which he had begun to do while still in Vietnam.

Tim O'Brien is the 2005-2006 Roy F. and Joann Cole Mitte Endowed Chair in Creative Writing at Texas State University, San Marcos. He is the author of *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, *Going After Cacciato*, winner of the 1979 National Book Award in fiction, and *The Things They Carried*, which was named by *The New York Times* as one of the ten best books of 1990, received the *Chicago Tribune* Heartland Award in fiction, and was a finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. In 1993, the French edition of *The Things They Carried* received the prestigious Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger. His book *In the Lake of the Woods* was named by *Time* magazine as the best novel of 1994. The book also received the James Fennimore Cooper Prize from the Society of American Historians and was selected as one of the ten best books of the year by *The New York Times*. His other books include *Northern Lights*; *The Nuclear Age*; *Tomcat in Love*; and his most recent novel *July, July*.

--From The Common Experience Home Page at Texas State University, San Marcos.
The Common Experience engages students campus-wide in discussion based on themes raised by their campus Summer Reading Book.
www.txstate.edu/commonexperience

More on Tim O'Brien may be found at:

University of Texas, San Antonio, Common Reading
www.utsa.edu/lc/commonreading/Biography.cfm

Interview with The Artful Dodge, a Wooster, Ohio-based literary magazine
www.wooster.edu/artfuldodge/interviews/obrien.htm

Chicago Public Library, One Book, One Chicago
www.chipublic.org/003cpl/oboc/things/biography.html