

NEWS YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU NEEDED

Carla Cotropia



A BOOK THAT IS TOO GOOD TO MISS

The New York Times listed the top ten fiction books for 2020. One of these books is Deacon King Kong. I do not like romantic books; anything mushy or what would be referred to as chick lit is a no-way for me. I like murder mysteries. No lawyer books, I have had enough of that in real life. I like detective novels where the protagonist solves the crime and finds the murderer. This fictional book, Deacon King Kong, is out of my comfort zone but I can't express how much I enjoyed it. Reading a chapter the other night I laughed out loud. I can think about that passage and chuckle to myself. When is the last time you had a good belly laugh by reading a book?

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The author of Deacon King Kong, James McBride, is an acclaimed award winning American author. In Deacon King Kong, McBride has created a fictional story, set in a housing project in Brooklyn, with the many lovable characters that live there.

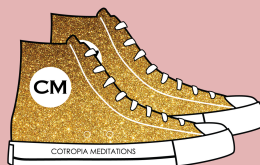


JAMES MCBRIDE - PHOTO FROM SLATE.COM

McBride grew up in the projects so although fictional it has a ring of truth. McBride weaves a tale of a mystery with a murder, coupled with the crazy antics of the inhabitants while they exhibit endearing love and protection for each other.

The protagonist is called Sportcoat, who although suffering much throughout his life, always has a positive attitude. The projects, where they all live, is next to the 5 Ends Baptist Church. An Italian mobster, called “The Elephant” is next door operating an illegal enterprise on the port.

Every year the 5 Ends church members contribute small sums for safekeeping to Hedio, Sportcoat’s wife. At Christmas time, Hedio would distribute the “Christmas Money” to the participants for them to buy gifts for their children. She was in charge of safekeeping the money.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

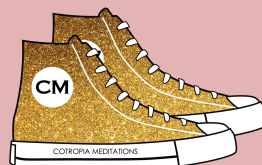
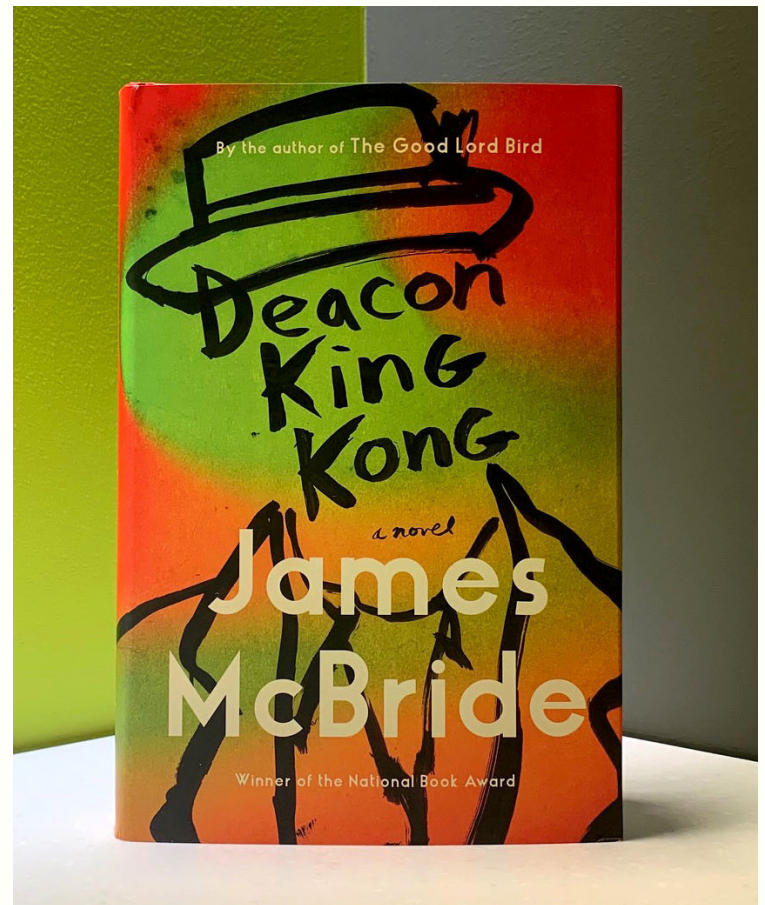
The only problem is Hedio drowns early in the book and never told Sportcoat where she hid the Christmas Money. This becomes a big problem for Sportcoat.

Every day he argues with Hedio-she appears although dead- about where she hid that money. Sportcoat compensates by staying drunk on the local moonshine called King Kong.

Sportcoat is a deacon at the 5 Ends church-hence the title of the book-although it is never clear what exactly he does as a deacon.

Sportscoat's best friend is Hot Sausage who is in charge of the decrepit boilers in the basement of the projects.

Sportcoat, in a deluded drunken stage, shoots-not kills-the local drug dealer Deems Clements. This causes the mob to seek revenge on Sportcoat who is indifferent to the situation, not only because he doesn't remember doing it but because he just doesn't care/believe it. This results is the church ladies and Hot Sausage doing their best to protect him, and from there it goes on and on and on.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME



The conversations between Hot Sausage and Sportcoat are hilarious. You get a ring- side seat to the many crazy interactions between the characters as they enjoy life, tease and generally harass each other.

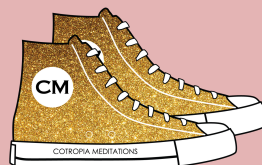
Don't take my description of the book too literally because I am doing it a great injustice.

This book is one of the best written, entertaining and just plain enjoyable books that I have read in years.

Warning, Deacon King Kong uses vernacular that wouldn't be appropriate in any setting but these characters do it in a way—well I just need to stop there.

Do yourself a favor and read it or listen to it like I did on Audible.com.

I loved it!!



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

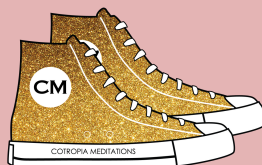
CONFESSIONS OF WHY I AM ADDICTED TO GETTING A BOX OF SOMETHING NEW IN THE MAIL

Ok I admit it. I realized I was giving myself an endorphin hit by having something coming in the mail . It was something to look forward to, which is pitiful and embarrassing to admit. I realized or justified to myself, with free returns there wasn't really a downside to it or at least I thought so.



Except one of the downsides is that item you have been thinking about buying- something frivolous like a new purse-now keeps popping up every time you go to google something.

Recently I broke down and ordered a new MacBook Air. Did I really need it since mine was only two years old? Of course not, but to try to ease my Italian guilt I actually googled these words, “Does it make sense to replace a 2019 MacBook Air with a new MacBook Air?” Believe it or not an article popped up that expounded the virtues of the new one. I think I have taken Tom’s comment about purchases that “advance your trade or tools of your trade” to a new level.



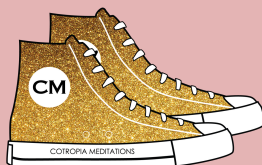
SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

So wanting to justify my purchase I told Tom about it and brought up his theory that “tools of the trade” purchases are good. What I really was doing was trying to ease my Italian Guilt; (actually mine is Italian Catholic Guilt which is a double whammy). It was a misguided attempt because I didn’t get the approval I was seeking. Tom sees through BS and wasn’t buying anything about a “tools of the trade” justification. Instead responding, “Did you just want one in a different color?” Ouch! But it was good because it made me reflect and an article showed up that was right on point.

The article was written by Joshua Becker and is titled “*Can I Afford It? is a Terrible Filter.*” Joshua Becker has a blog called becomingminimalist.com. As collector I lean away from minimalism so I wasn’t reading his blog, but my guardian angel must have wanted me to read it because it landed right in front of my nose.



This article did impact me so I want to share. Here goes: Just because you have money in the bank doesn’t mean you can afford to buy it. For one thing circumstances change all the time and it is a harsh reality that “things can turn on a dime”.
Point taken.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

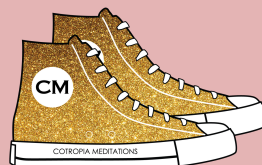
I like these concepts better. One is when you buy something the price tag isn't the full cost. Whatever you buy and bring into your home creates more issues, costs and upkeep never mind where it is going to live. Every item takes up space in your home and in your mind. More things to keep up with. (For example Carla, your collection of antique tins requires quite a bit of dusting that wouldn't be necessary but wait I love those tins....)

The next concept is this: what other thing could you have used that purchase price to buy which you might enjoy better? Becker says you should ask yourself these questions:

1. Does this purchase support my goals?
2. What are my motivations for this purchase?
3. What do my trusted friends think about this?
4. Is there something else I would like to spend my money on?
5. What would my life look like if I said no?

So in my case for the MacBook Air purchase I can say to #1-yes it supports my goals and I believe will make my job better.

For #2 Motivation-I admit my motivation is wanting to own the newest Apple product. (Am I an Apple addict?)



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I bet I could get support on this from my law partner Robert Booth and fellow lawyer Joe Ahmed. Allegedly they set their alarms to 3:00 am so they could wake up and be first online for the release of the Apple watch. Thinking this makes me feel better that I am not an Apple addict since I didn't do this.



For #3-my trusted boyfriend's view has already been vetted.

For #4 -yes there is something else I would like to spend my money on like the purse I have been eyeing on the internet but I can justify my guilt with a computer being "tools of the trade."

For #5-My life would have been fine if I had said no BUT...

My life is going to be really fine when my new MacBook Air arrives in a box on my door front. The joy of the endorphin hit. However, by doing Becker's 5 questions I do feel less guilty. And for the record I did get the new one in a different color, but that was just a coincidence I promise.



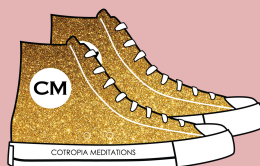
SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

ANOTHER GREAT BOOK ABOUT HOW YOUR HOME HAS EVOLVED THROUGH TIME

Bill Bryson is an incredible author. He writes in such a down-to-earth fashion he makes facts easy to understand, interesting and enjoyable to read. I just finished his book *At Home: A Short History of Private Life*. Bryson lived in an English country house and he decided to write about the history of his house and houses in general and the rooms in them. Each chapter of the book addresses a different room. Chapters include the hall, the kitchen, the scullery, the drawing room, the dining room, the cellar, the garden, the stairs, the bedroom, the bathroom, the nursery and the attic.

The book begins by going back to prehistoric times and ends up in the Industrial age. For centuries and centuries things were rough with people living in squalor and filth. Slowly over time as things improved, people began thinking about comfort rather than survival. Only problem was—among many problems—even when comfort became more available, such as gas lights in the 1800s, the Victorians, had a weird aversion to comfort.

The Victorian era lasted from 1837 to 1901. It was important in the Victorian's minds to suffer. Women wore numerous garments that could weigh up to 40 pounds and they were squeezed into corsets. But women weren't the only ones burdened with discomfort in the name of fashion.

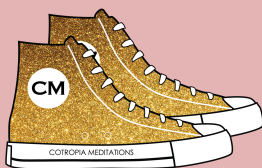


SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME



Even earlier in the 1700s, men shaved their heads to wear very uncomfortable wigs that had to be curled and groomed. Some wigs got very nasty and became infested with insects. Yuk! All in the name of fashion. And by the way, men wore those uncomfortable wigs for 150 years before they finally fell out of fashion. The only remnants of the wigs are the ones the barristers wear in English court.

In Bryson's chapter on the Bathroom, things get really interesting/odd. For centuries people didn't bath. Actually they were afraid bathing harmed them. The Victorians would bath once a month, maybe. According to Bryson, it all started with the Romans and their bathhouses. As Christianity caught on there were suspicions about what was actually going on in those bathhouses. In other words, sexual stuff instead of bathing. Anyway, this morphed into a Christian aversion to bathing. In medieval times to achieve a high honor you took a vow not to wash. In the Middle Ages there were plagues which caused people to reach the wrong conclusion about their source.

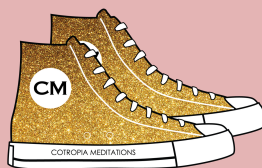


SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

They believed bathing opened the skin's pores which encouraged deathly vapors to invade the body. The best way to prevent this, they believed, was to plug the pores with dirt. For the next six hundred years most people didn't wash, or even get wet if they could possibly help it. People would go a year easily without bathing. A popular English proverb was "wash your hands often, feet seldom and your face never". Queen Elizabeth I once said she faithfully bathed once a month "whether she needs it or not". In France, King Louis XIII went unbathed until almost his seventh birthday, in 1608.

As you can imagine having a filthy skin didn't promote good health. We think we have it bad with Covid-19 which of course we do, but they had cholera that killed you and smallpox that if it didn't kill you left you covered in scabs that became deep divots on your skin. Women who survived smallpox used a lead base substance to putty in the divots which perhaps made them look better if this didn't kill them first.

Bryson's chapter on the Stairs is also jolting if not scary. The stairs are the most dangerous part of the house and in fact, one of the most hazardous environments anywhere. The number of people that still die because of stairs is big, although no one keeps count for some reason.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

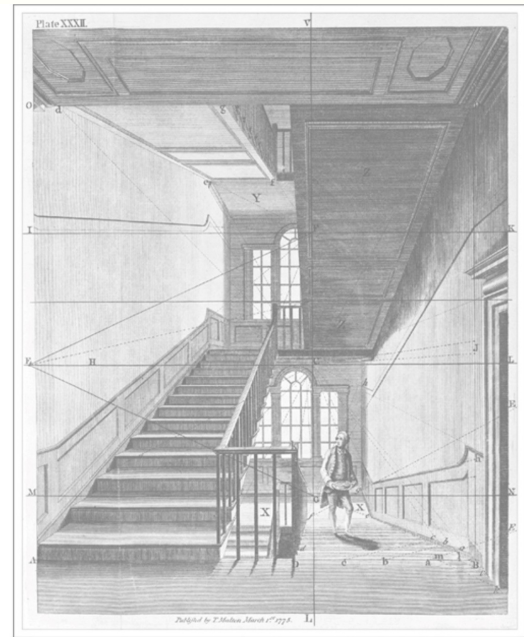
All it takes is for the tread to be slightly off, and boom you are tumbling down.

According to Bryson's research, deaths by falling down stairs is the second most common cause of accidental death, well behind car accidents, but far ahead of drowning and other misfortunes.

I used to live in a tiny carriage house behind a historic house in Galveston. It is called a carriage house because below was where the carriage was kept, way too small for a modern day car.

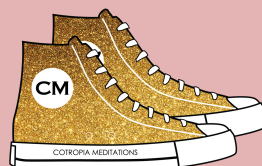
This tiny carriage house was like a doll house and was fine except it had no heating and the steepest of stairs. I was afraid of those stairs. One night on the town—I was young OK so no judgment--I came home and going up those stairs took a wrong step and ended back down on the floor at the bottom of the stairs.

God protects children and drunks so I survived but since then I have had the upmost respect for stairs.



"Perspective of a staircase" by Thomas Malton ([photo credit 14.1](#))

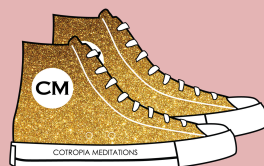
Everybody trips on stairs at some time or other. It has been calculated that you are likely to miss a step once in every 2,222 occasions you use stairs, suffer a minor accident once in every 63,000 uses, suffer a painful accident once in every 734,000, and need hospital attention once every 3,616,667 uses.



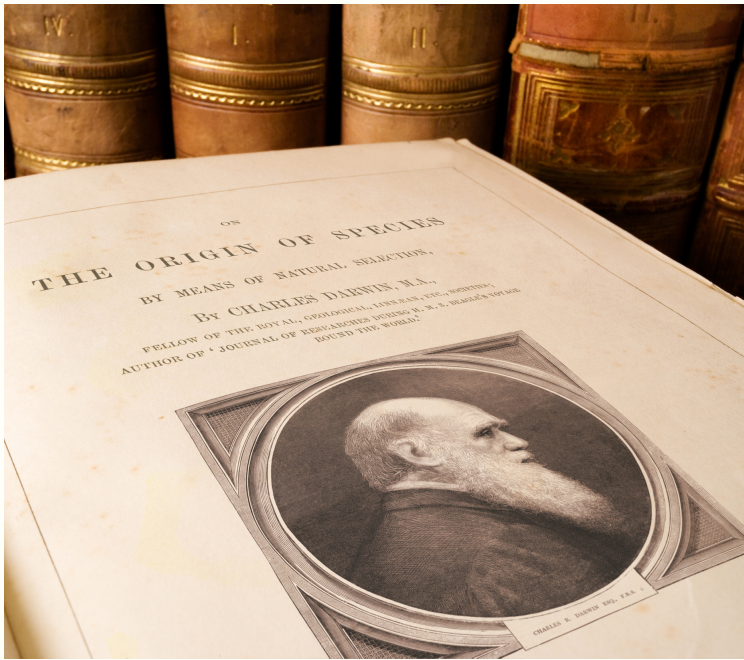
SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

In the chapter on the Nursery, Bryson writes about how mean people were in the 1900s to children, working them in coal mines and the worst perhaps making them be chimney sweeps. The chimneys were narrow so it became a job for children, some as young as four. To be a poor child in the Victorian age was hard, but rich kids didn't have it so good either. The Victorians lost so many children to disease and childbirth it became the fashion to not get "attached" to them since they might die. The grand houses of the wealthy had nurseries where the kids were stationed under the direction of a nanny who could be mean as hell. There are accounts of Victorian children of the well-to-do describing how they were forced to put salt on their food or being beaten to "toughen them up". Never mind emotional support. The Victorians didn't believe in pampering, the tougher and rougher it was, the better you were as a person.

Another interesting fact is children had to do whatever their parents said regardless of their own feelings. Children were expected to do as they were told and to continue doing so even after they were adults. Elizabeth Barret wanted to marry Robert Browning, but her father objected and when she married him anyway her father never spoke to her again and disinherited her. Lucky for her, her husband became famous as a poet and she had plenty of money.



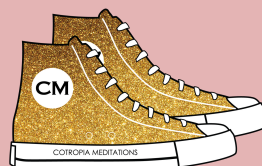
SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME



Another amazing example is Charles Darwin. As a young man he was offered the chance to join a sea voyage. His father turned down his request and Darwin complied. Even though he desperately wanted to go, going against his father's will was unthinkable.

Lucky for mankind his father relented and Darwin went on the voyage bringing back hundreds of animal and plant specimens which ultimately led to his famous book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life.

Another amazing fact is Darwin put the book in a drawer and waited sixteen years before releasing it. Darwin knew the world wasn't ready for this amazing revelation. When it was released, It turned conventional thinking upside down. Some theologians even tried to argue the newly discovered fossils and remains of ancient man had been put there by God and didn't represent evolution.

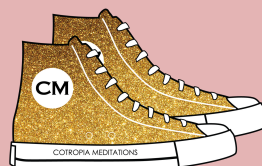
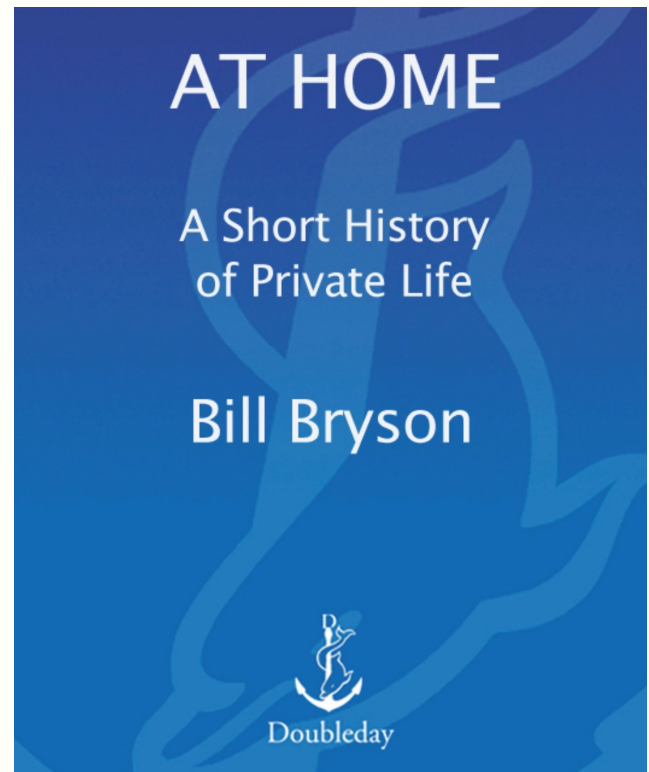


SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME

The Victorians were stubborn and rigid in their beliefs. Bryson points out it is perhaps no coincidence at the end of the Victorian Age, the beginning of psychoanalysis began. I am sure everyone needed it by then. Being hard on yourself is another gift the Victorians passed on to us.

The Victorians also thought poor people deserved to be poor. Many of the Victorians had a shriveled-up heart towards the poor. When we see people today being mean and heartless towards others, there is a long history of this suggesting to me, human nature hasn't really evolved very much.

This blog only touches on all the interesting things in this book. Check it out and you will be wiser and smarter as a result, plus realize how lucky we are to live in this time.



SETTLING CASES TWO SNEAKERS AT A TIME