

# Skipping Christmas

As a kid, I was a very avid reader – I would always read myself to sleep. Somewhere in my 20's though, I lost sight of my reading hobby; I guess that's when I got too busy and too tired to lie in bed awake at night and read. During my last pregnancy, however, I started reading before bed again, and it's something that I really enjoy, even though I often get too tired to make it through more than a few pages per night.

When I recently began reading again, I started by reading mostly non-fiction; it was really fun for me to unwind at night and learn something at the same time. I read a book about an Afghan girl who stepped on a land mine, lost her leg, and fled the Taliban by coming to America. I read a book about a family that bicycled across the country – they had kids who were 13, 11, and 3 years old, and they made it from New Jersey to Colorado on their bikes. There was also the book about the Burnham's; they were husband and wife missionaries who were held hostage in the Philippines for almost a year. The wife wrote a book about their daily struggles as hostages – it was fascinating. Then I switched to a few fiction books by Christopher Pike, an author best known for his young adult horror novels. I read those as a teen, so as an adult, I decided to try his novels for adults – one I really liked and one wasn't so good – *Falling* and *The Blind Mirror*, respectively. I then started a book about the plight of Terri Shiavo, a woman who collapsed in the early 90's and suffered brain damage. Her case was in the national spotlight because her husband insisted that she would have never wanted to live hooked up to machines while her parents disagreed. The governor tried to help, and even the President of the United States tried to step in, but ultimately Terri's right to live became just another case in the courts and her husband won. Her feeding tube was removed and it took her almost 14 days to slowly starve and dehydrate to death. The

case fascinated me at the time, and I found this book about it written by Mark Fuhrman of the OJ Simpson murder trial fame. Except that I'm having trouble reading the book since it's about a rather dark and depressing subject, and that's not really how I want to unwind before bed. Though I did learn something interesting from Mark Fuhrman: according to him, a coroner is an elected official who doesn't even necessarily have to have a medical degree. Hmmm...

A friend recommended the author John Grisham, and the other day I ran into the library, trying to be very quick since the family was waiting in the car. His books looked so large and lengthy and intimidating, so I grabbed the smallest one I saw called *Skipping Christmas*. I began to read it, and it's about a family called the Krank's who decide to skip Christmas one year. That sounds familiar, I thought, and after a quick trip to [imdb.com](http://imdb.com), I discovered that the awfully panned movie of 2004 called [Christmas With The Krank's](#) is indeed the movie based upon John Grisham's book, *Skipping Christmas*. So far the book is ok, but nothing that keeps me looking forward to reading it or anything. I have Grisham's only work of non-fiction on hold at the library, maybe I'll get up there today to get it because maybe I'm sick of fiction and it's time to go back to non-fiction... I hate to admit it, but I really like to read true-crime books before bed, mostly about murder. True, murder is a dark and depressing subject, but not in the same way as the story of Terri Shiavo; it's hard to explain. And it sounds kind of strange, but true-crime books are the ones I seem to be drawn to and I can't watch true-crime on tv in bed anymore – too many nightmares for my husband and I. One of the best true-crime books that I ever read was *The Stranger Beside Me* by Ann Rule. If you don't know, Ann Rule is a famous true-crime writer, and this book was extra-fascinating because it chronicles her relationship with the famous psychopathic serial killer, Ted Bundy. Ann Rule was actually friends with Ted Bundy – they met working at a suicide hotline together. The book chronicles their

friendship while working at the hotline, while the murders were taking place, and after Ted was caught – very interesting read, and crazy that one of the most famous crime writers had a friendship (unrelated to her ever writing a book about him) with one of the most prolific serial killers of all time.

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## **An Afgan Girl on the Other Side of the Sky**

I just finished reading a really interesting book about a girl named Farah Ahmedi. She grew up in Afghanistan, and when she was only 7 years old, she stepped on a land mine and was almost killed. She was one of the wounded children chosen to get medical care in Germany, so she had good medical care for 2 years, but it came with the price of loneliness because her family had to stay behind in Afghanistan, she didn't speak German, and no one at the hospital spoke her language. Her leg was amputated, and her other leg was rebuilt without a knee, leaving her unable to bend it. When she returned to Afghanistan as a 9-year-old, the Taliban was starting to take over, and a rocket hit her house, killing her father and two sisters. Her brothers were forced to try to flee to Pakistan in fear of being drafted or executed by the Taliban, and she hasn't heard from them since. Since she and her mother were the only members of her family left, they were forced to flee the Taliban also – we've all heard about how the Taliban don't treat women very well, and women couldn't even go out in public without men. This was difficult for Farah and her mother since they didn't have any men left in their family. They spent 4 years as refugees in Pakistan until they were finally granted approval into the World Relief's American Refugee program. After the long process of applying and

finally getting approved, they were waiting to leave for America when September 11, 2001 happened, and their trip was cancelled as no foreigners were being allowed into the country. Within 6 months however, the program was reinstated, and they came to America.

The book chronicles all the adventures, trials, and tribulations it took for Farah to become the successful American citizen she is today. It was a VERY interesting read; from the details of life in Afghanistan under the Taliban to the struggles of an Afgan widow and her daughter getting used to the American way of life. In fact, they had been through so much, that when they got to America, they were certain that their American hosts were actually slave owners who were trying to imprison them. It's a wonderful story about the triumph of the human spirit, and I recommend the book to anyone who likes learning about different parts of the world, other cultures, or just likes reading a good non-fiction life story. In fact, her book was published when she entered a Good Morning America contest and became a finalist. I heard about it because Farah attended the rival high school to the one where I went, so for me, it was interesting to read about the area I grew up in as seen through the eyes of someone who had been through as much as Farah and was seeing the area for the first time as an immigrant. [Check it out!](#)