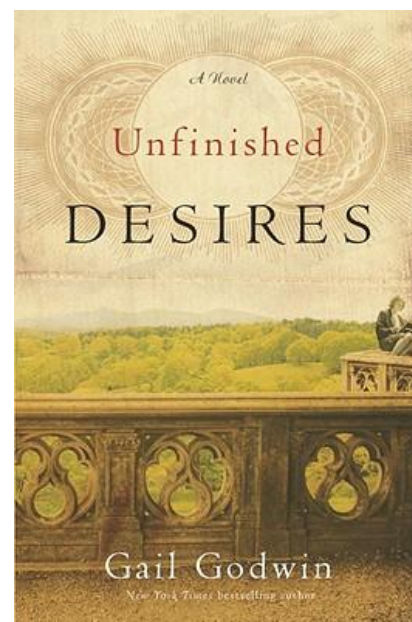
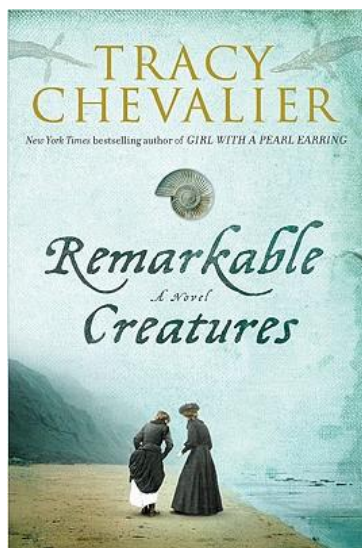


**“Unfinished Desires” by Gail Godwin.  
Random House, 2009. 396 pages, \$26.00**

The setting for Gail Godwin’s latest novel is a parochial girls’ school, Mount St. Gabriel’s, located in Mountain City, North Carolina. Godwin poignantly tells the story of two students, Tildy Stratton and Chloe Starnes, while exploring the issues of friendship, loyalty, emancipation, and rivalries. The aging headmistress, Mother Suzanne Ravenel and a young school teacher are key characters in the plot. The prologue opens as the octogenarian mistress is in Mountain City for an annual month long visit. She is a houseguest of a former student. She has been persuaded to draft a memoir of the school which closed in 1990. As she reflects on her tenure at the school, she remembers that the class of 1951 was a “toxic year” and many of the 9<sup>th</sup> graders were poisonous elements. She reflects that it was “a year better forgotten.” Mother Ravenel is legally blind so she dictates her memories. She starts the tape with a prayer and questions the Lord how to begin. The words start flowing unraveling the school’s history. The year that haunts her will be studied and analyzed restoring her soul. For Mother Ravenel, that is reason enough to take on this oral history project at her age. The novel switches back and forth from 1951 to the first decade of this century somewhat seamlessly. I think Godwin’s fans will enjoy the read. Gail Godwin has also written “Evensong,” “The Good Husband,” and “The Finishing School.” She lives in Woodstock, New York.



**“Remarkable Creatures” by Tracy Chevalier. Penguin Group, 2010. \$26.95, 310 pages.**



This book has some familiar trappings. If you liked the 1996 movie “Phenomenon” with John Travolta, you will enjoy this book. Main character Mary Anning lives in Lyme Regis and she knows she is different. She was struck by lightning as a child. As she matures, she discovers she has a gift that is quite unusual and controversial. She can locate fossils no one else can see. In 19<sup>th</sup> century England, a female having this talent is problematic for the mostly male academic types as well as to the local religious leaders. The townspeople gossip about her and her existence is lonely until she meets Elizabeth Philpot who accompanies her on her expeditions along the craggy beach line looking for fossils. Elizabeth and her siblings are visiting the area and nature is her focus. The novel has the quaint charm of British writers and is captivating with lines such as “I feel an echo of the lightning each time I find a fossil, a little jolt that says, yes, Mary you are different from all the rocks on the beach.” If you skipped the novels of famous British female authors in high school, this book will introduce you to that genre. Tracy Chevalier has written five other novels including the “Girl With A Pearl Earring” and lives in London with her family.

Susan Benning is the Head Librarian at May Memorial Library. Visit us online at [www.alamancelibraries.org](http://www.alamancelibraries.org).