

Check It Out!

Sewing Things Up!

by Melody Sky Eisler, Library Director

I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're doing something. —Neil Gaiman

EVER WANTED to learn how to do something new but were not sure where to start? Or the idea of it seemed overwhelming, or you were afraid of making mistakes and messing things up?

I have felt this way for years about learning to sew. My father's side of the family is Mennonite, and I have fond memories of tracing the patterns of hand stitches on my parents' wedding quilt when I was little. The women in the family had a literal sewing circle and made wedding quilts for their relatives. The quilts were some of the only examples of color they had in their monochromatic homes. To my childhood mind, they were akin to Dorothy's going from black-and-white Kansas to full-technicolor Oz.

This year I became a first-time aunt, and this maternal moment inspired me to learn how to sew. I wanted my new niece to have a baby quilt handmade by me. The library has been checking out sewing machines for the last couple of years as part of our collection, Unusual Items to Borrow, made possible in part by the Friends (ptpubliclibrary.org/UsingTheLibrary/equipment/equipment.html). The



Melody's "Spin Art" quilt block and the library's sewing machine.

collection runs the gamut from birding adventure backpacks and bear vaults to American Girl dolls and cake pans, to robots and a telescope, and more.

I checked out a sewing machine, took the time to read the instructions, checked out a couple of basic quilting books, watched a few YouTube videos, and signed up for learn-to-sew classes at a local fabric store. My next step was to attend the library's twice-monthly Fiber Arts Night. This program connects fiber artists to work on projects together and share tips and tricks.

My quilting dream would not have been as doable without the library. I didn't have a sewing machine and felt overwhelmed at the prospect of learning to sew and quilt. Being able to check out the machine

and books made learning that much more accessible. Sharing the generosity of spirit at Fiber Arts nights has given me a community of support for those times when I'm realizing how important it is to keep "your sewing machine close and your seam ripper closer."

I hope the joy and excitement I felt during my own learning journey is how our library patrons feel when trying or learning something new that they found at the library. I love that we inspire our community to always learn and create. 📖

Fiber Arts Night: 6:30–8:30 PM, first and third Tuesdays of the month, Port Townsend Public Library. Come enjoy an evening of handiwork with other fiber artists. All fiber arts projects are welcome; please bring your own supplies.

Behind the Book Sale Scene, It's *Still* the Volunteers

BY LYNN NOWAK

LONG BEFORE each Friends of the Port Townsend Library book sale in March, June and October, a veritable hive of workers springs into action behind the scenes, where all understand their purpose and busily get to the job at hand. Industrious volunteers sort donated books every week year-round, and they know that the success of the Friends' sales depends significantly on their unseen efforts.

Community members who regularly attend the sales likely have no idea of the time and care given to the cause before they set foot

in the Port Townsend Community Center where the book sales are staged. Neither would they guess that unsold volumes are whisked away afterward so that books can be given a second, third, or fourth life in new readers' hands.

Every sale starts from scratch. New batches of books are constantly being donated to the Friends, and no leftovers are saved for the next sale. [You may donate books in the bin located near the library entrance. See the story in *Check It Out's* summer 2018 issue and the poster inside the entryway.]

Volunteers' desire to help starts, naturally, with a love of books and reading. "Books have gotten me through life," said volunteer Wayne

Shaver. He shows up at regular book-sorting sessions, at which a team of knowledgeable bookies pore through as many as 20–30 boxes of donated books, which are dropped off each week at the sorting site by still more volunteers who haul them on a regular basis.

Deb Vanderbilt and Linda Martin coordinate the weekly sorting gatherings. Vanderbilt said that with their jovial crew, sometimes a party atmosphere prevails. But

there's no mistaking how these volunteers get to business sorting books into a myriad of categories. Some have library backgrounds. Some are specialists in certain genres, such as cookbooks or poetry. Some are generalists who have broad-ranging interests and expertise. All are readers.

Vanderbilt explained that there is no way incoming books could be categorized on the morning of each sale. It would simply take too long. "We try to keep ahead of it," Vanderbilt said. Separation into genres makes for sales where buyers can easily browse and locate the type of volume they might want.

Friends secretary Paula Zimmerman said it's fun and interesting to see what surfaces at the weekly sorting. "It's like finding treasure!" Sorters might discover books that aren't politically or culturally relevant anymore. Or they could, and do, run across topics ranging, for example, from World War II to Rembrandt, higher mathematics, Irish travel, and sex. "It's fascinating to see what the community is reading," added volunteer Alexandra Feit.

Occasionally, the workers find something extraordinary, such as a recent collection of first-edition poetry chapbooks, which was identified and sold separately to benefit the Friends' library program budget. Other specialty books are sometimes nabbed for resale in this way.

Volunteer Pat Copland believes that a particular benefit of the book sales is the affordability of children's books. The sales are a good source for building family libraries, since children should have access to many books, she said. She likes getting children's literature into the community: "It makes my heart happy."

Generally, books that are too badly damaged or are highlighted, dirty, or mildewed are not accepted for the sales. Sorters weed these out. Books that likely won't sell for whatever reason are donated to Goodwill if they're still in fair condition; the worst are recycled or tossed.

If books reach the book sale tables at the Community Center but remain unsold, they are usually drafted into service once again. For the last several years, Lisa Ferenz has taken on the task of what to do with these remaining



Friends vice president Deb Vanderbilt (left) and Linda Martin are co-coordinators of book sorting and categorizing. They are in charge of making sure a steady supply of good-quality books is ready for every sale.

books. As owner of the Shop, a thrift store in Port Hadlock, she buys reduced-price books for her store at the “bag sale” offered toward the end of every book sale. But since hundreds of volumes may remain, she arranges for their collection by a company called Discover Books.

Discover Books’ motto is, “Let the stories live on,” which it accomplishes by resale, redistribution, and recycling. It aims to put used books into the hands of people who want and need them most, rather than send them to landfills or let them languish unread. Through this program, Ferenz said, “these books get another chance to make a positive difference.”

“Literacy is so important to opening minds,” Vanderbilt said. “It’s one of the most important things we can do for people.”

And why volunteer? Book sorter Richard Inman said simply, “I love the library.” 📖

Lynn Nowak is a Port Townsend-based writer, a former copyeditor at the Port Townsend & Jefferson County Leader, and for 26 years the unofficial secretary of her book group.

Photos by Lynn Nowak



Friends secretary Paula Zimmerman (above left), Melanie Reynolds, and Wayne Shaver (at right) decide whether books are suitable for the Friends’ book sales and sort them by genre. A team of volunteers pores through scores of books every week.



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Don't miss this
last sale of 2018!

What Friends Are Reading

Book reviews on these pages have typically been written by Friends board members, whose names and roles appear on the back page. This fall, we introduce what we hope will be the first of many reviews contributed by a non-board member. We hope yours will be next. Please e-mail the editor at 4ellenwchu@gmail.com. Thank you!

◆ In Praise of “Mindless” Reading

There is a great deal of difference between an eager man who wants to read a book and a tired man [or woman] who wants a book to read. —G. K. Chesterton

My response to the present state of the world has been to escape. Escape into uplifting films, into “mindless” bedtime reading. Not really mindless, though, and always well written.

Over the past year or so, I finally finished ***The Eternal Frontier*** by Tim Flannery (2001), a fascinating tale of North American ecological history, including of its peoples, and launched into Charles C. Mann’s ***1491*** (2005), an introduction to the vast and powerful civilizations of South America before Europeans arrived. But as daily news got worse, and I got more tired, I put down *1491* and devoured some eight of John Le Carré’s Cold War-era spy novels, as well as the 1982 BBC miniseries ***Smiley’s People*** on DVD, starring the late and truly great Alec Guinness. But Le Carré’s masterful works can also feel rather too close to home in these odd times.

Less gut wrenching are books by Edgar Award-winning writer Laurie King (who wrote the Mary Russell mysteries featuring Sherlock Holmes, starting with ***The Beekeeper’s Apprentice***, 1994, and the stand-alone novel ***Folly***, 2001, about a woman woodworker seeking redemption in the San Juan Islands). With richly realized suspense and intelligent writing, King’s books rarely end in tragedy, so you can inhabit the places and people she details without fear of a bad end. ***Touchstone*** (2007) and ***The Bones of Paris*** (2013) vividly evoke Cornwall and the 1920s arts and literary streets of Montparnasse, respectively. Her latest stand-alone novel, ***Lockdown*** (2017), tells the story of a school shooting, in which another too-close-to-real series of events brings out more courage than agony.

I also read three books by Anne Hillerman, daughter of renowned mystery writer Tony



Hillerman, who has kept alive Navajo Police Department characters—and the magnificent geography of the Navajo Nation—in her continuing Leaphorn, Chee, and Manuelito series. I’ve always liked Tony’s books because they let me glimpse contemporary Navajo life, and Anne’s books do the same.

Not mindless at all, and full of soul, are two novels by my all-time favorite novelist, Barbara Kingsolver: ***The Lacuna*** (2009) and ***Flight Behavior*** (2012). The first is fictional history, featuring the artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera and anti-Stalin revolutionary Lev Trotsky. The second is natural history, a scientifically accurate and deeply human story centered on a fictitious Appalachian apparition of a wintering colony of monarch butterflies.

Finally, just in time for the third PBS season of *The Durrells in Corfu* this fall, I binge-read (or reread) my favorites among Gerald Durrell’s many books about his passion for animals: ***My Family and Other Animals*** (1956), which I bought and first read while on a Greek island myself in 1972; ***A Zoo in My Luggage*** (1960), the story of a trip to the Cameroons, where Durrell collected the animals that became the core of his own private zoo on the English isle of Jersey; ***The Whispering Land*** (1961), in which he travels to Argentina for South American species for his zoo; ***Menagerie Manor*** (1964), which tells how he finally sets up his Jersey zoo; and ***Fauna and Family*** (1978), the last volume of his Corfu trilogy on which the television show is based (volume 2 is ***Birds, Beasts, and Relatives***, 1969).

If you also find yourself wishing to escape this winter (and can’t afford Hawaii), try one of these authors or titles. You’ll not be disappointed.

—Ellen W. Chu

◆ *Exit West*

Mohsin Hamid (2017)

When I saw that *Exit West* bore a sticker saying, “10 Best Books, the *New York Times Book Review*, 2017,” I had high expectations for this selection for my book group. I read it in three days, not because it is a real page-turner but because it is so well written and brings up so many topics that I know the group will dive into: migration, war, insecurity, relationships, and the nature of “home.”

Although *Exit West* is not a dystopian novel per se, it does deal with a world where cities are made unlivable by national wars, local violence with nativists killing migrants, and general fear for one’s safety. This world is difficult to escape—unless one can find a darkened doorway that, when walked through, opens into another place, far from home yet safer.

In spite of the widespread violence, choosing to leave was not easy for the two main young characters, Saeed and Nadia. “It might seem odd that in cities teetering at the edge of the abyss young people still go to class—in this case an evening class on corporate identity and product branding—but that is the way of things, with cities as with life, for one moment we are pottering about our errands as usual and the next we are dying, and our eternally impending ending does not put a stop to our transient beginnings and middles until the instant when it does.”

The relationship between Saeed and Nadia develops as they go through several magical doorways to find a place they might call home. As they cross through one doorway after another, I pondered where our book group might go on the topic of migration. In a chapter near the end of the book, we read, “We are all migrants through time.”

The topics Hamid raises are timely. “It was as if Hamid knew what was going to happen to America and the world,” says the *New York Times Book Review*, “and gave us a road map to our future. . . . At once terrifying and . . . oddly hopeful.”

—Ellen Dustman



◆ *The Philosopher's Flight*

Tom Miller (2018)

This debut novel by Tom Miller might be categorized as historical fantasy or science fiction, but I was so convinced of Miller’s underlying premise of human flight that I read it as historical science fact. Robert Weekes is a practitioner of empirical philosophy, an arcane and female-dominated branch of science that can summon the winds, heal the injured, and take humans into the air without wings or machines. Set in a slightly altered America of the early twentieth century, the Great War raging in Europe, this is the story of an individual struggling against gender stereotypes, determined to prove his talents to his fellow (mostly female) students at Radcliffe College, and attain his dream of joining the elite Sigilry Corp Rescue and Evacuation Department. Robert is fighting more than prejudice, however, as there are those who are bent on ensuring that every last philosopher is wiped out. This book is so imaginative, yet it feels entirely authentic, a fantastical journey that will have you gazing skyward and thinking, “I wonder if I could . . .” If history didn’t actually happen this way, it certainly should have.

—Kristine Kaufman, a new Friends member, was a bookseller for nearly forty years before moving to Port Townsend with her husband and entirely too many books



Ranie Keithahn
ranie@olympus.net

◆ *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*

Anya von Bremzen (2013)

This is not a cookbook, which is probably just as well, since we're talking about Soviet cooking here. Yet the story does revolve around food and cooking and their political and social importance—and especially around the emotional longing for food in a time of scarcity. In this memoir of growing up in the Soviet Union and emigrating to the United States, food is the long thread that weaves its way through children's relationships at school and around family gatherings and interactions with neighbors and relatives. It is also the eternal link to a distant homeland.

As a child, I could envision the Soviet Union only in black-and-white images that resembled the ones I had seen on television news. With her first-hand perspective of growing up in the Soviet Union, von Bremzen is able to breathe life, color, and the aroma of cooking into those images. You can almost taste the *salat Olivier*.

Reading this book made me wonder how food is featured in Russian literature, which led me to other books, including Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. I am thankful to von Bremzen for the entertaining full-sensory trip to the Soviet Union and for the resulting journey into Russian literature.

—Christine Heycke



◆ *The Master and Margarita*

Mikhail Bulgakov (50th-anniversary edition, 2016)

In 1928, Mikhail Bulgakov started writing what would later be called one of the greatest Russian novels of all time. After burning the first manuscript, he started over in 1930 and continued writing and revising until his death in 1940. A censored serial version of *The Master and Margarita* was released in 1966, while the full version circulated secretly, but it was not until 1967 that the manuscript was published as a book.

The novel alternates between two seemingly unrelated stories that eventually intersect. In the first story, Satan and his entourage (including an oversized black cat) wreak havoc in 1930s Moscow. The second story features the Master, a frustrated author of an unpublished novel about Pontius Pilate and Jesus. The Master is confined to a mental hospital, while his girlfriend, Margarita, seeks to free him with the help of the devil.

No plot summary of *The Master and Margarita* could adequately convey the power of the composition. You can fully enjoy it on first reading, but similar to Russian nested dolls, many levels wait to be discovered, with symbolism and references to politics, freemasonry, literature (particularly Goethe's *Faust*), and music—all underlying the themes of courage and cowardice, muddled good and evil, and strength of the human spirit.

I was so moved by this book that I read a second translation, listened to a third as an audio book, and ordered the eight-hour Russian TV miniseries with English subtitles. Still, I was surprised to discover that a novel that only became available in the 1960s has inspired plays, ballets, artwork, and over 200 musical works, from operas and symphonies to the Rolling Stones' song "Sympathy for the Devil" and Patti Smith's album *Banga*. —CH

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Welcome, New Members!

We are delighted to welcome the following Friends who have joined since our June 2018 newsletter:

Rebecca Christie
Jana Edmondson
Kristine Kaufman
Dan & Anne Kelly
Anneke van Krieken
Molly Mandel
Joebob Moore
Jeanie Murphy
John Porter
Linda Lee Tatro
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Who We Are

THE PORT TOWNSEND PUBLIC LIBRARY was founded in 1898 by volunteers and, thanks to continuing community support, has remained an active Carnegie Library since its present doors opened in 1913.

The Friends of the Port Townsend Library, established in 1978, funds programs, services, and materials beyond what the city's library budget covers. Every year we support reading programs, events, and activities for all ages; we also hold three book sales and publish three newsletters. Newsletters are available in the library, around town, or at ptpubliclibrary.org/SupportYourLibrary/FriendsoftheLibrary.

Our support comes primarily from memberships, donations, and book sales. We invite anyone to become a member and attend our monthly board meetings, which take place on the second Wednesday of each month, 3:30 PM, at the Library Learning Center (corner of Lawrence and Harrison). You may contact us by e-mailing friendsofptlibrary@gmail.com.

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