

# BERKELEY BOOKMARK

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MARCH 2026

## More Than a Bookmark: A Conversation with Harry Robertson

By Cathy Brown

If you've been to our bookstores, you've probably noticed and taken one of our bookmarks. It's not uncommon for customers to stand at the counter looking at the bookmark to say "I've read that one, and that one, and I've always meant to read that one!" as they examine the colorful image of stacked books. How did the bookmarks come to be, and who created them? They were created by the Friends' own Harry Robertson. Here's the story behind the bookmarks:

Cathy: Harry, how did the idea for the bookmark design start?

Harry: They've become sort of a preoccupation for me lately. I got the original idea at a meeting of the Friends publicity committee where we were discussing what text to include on the Friends bookmark.

We needed to convey basic information, like locations and hours, but it seemed like the piece could also be made more interesting visually.

Cathy: How do you decide which books to include?

Harry: Curating which books to include has been the best part. Initially they were all books I'd read and enjoyed but with suggestions from friends and customers, I expanded the selection to be more diverse and more closely reflect the tastes of our bookstore.

The idea for the bookmark with the authors' faces came to me out of the blue one day. I realized it had to be authors people would recognize. The guy with the bag on his head is photo-shy Thomas Pynchon, the way he is depicted on "The Simpsons."

Lately, I've fooled around with some other ideas. I



made one using famous first lines from books ("Call me Ishmael," "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." etc). Some of them can be seen at [https://www.flickr.com/photos/harry\\_the\\_horse/albums/72157717857063836](https://www.flickr.com/photos/harry_the_horse/albums/72157717857063836)

Cathy: What's the process for designing the bookmark?

Harry: The pictures came from my own library and the bookstore. A couple were found online. The images are also chosen with an eye towards creating a visually pleasing bookmark.

For Harry, this project has been a lot of fun. For the Friends, the bookmarks have proven to be very popular: to date we've given away about 7,000 of them. A delightful piece of marketing! ❖

### SAVE THE DATES!

Sunday, May 31  
Bay Area Book Festival  
11am-5pm  
Downtown Berkeley



Wednesday, June 17  
Friends Annual Meeting  
& Luncheon  
11am-1:30pm  
Northbrae Community Church

# Letter from the Editor

Greetings Friends,

Lots of things have been happening in and around our Library this season.

On February 22, the 23rd annual Authors Dinner, “Libraries Light the Way,” was held at Central. As usual, it was a sold-out event. See page 3 for pictures of the gala.

In a December 9 front page story in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on the benefits of reading to older adults, our own Diane Davenport appeared in the north branch. She reported worrying that some friends who have dropped the habit of reading were diminishing their lives. “If your mind isn’t working your body isn’t working. It’s all tied together for me.” Read the whole story here:

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/health/aging-longevity/article/read-brain-health-benefit-21224747.php>

Recommendation: “The Librarians,” a current and important documentary in which librarians across the country examine how restrictions on library content are shaping communities. When lawmakers seek to review a list of books, librarians find themselves on the frontlines of a national battle. Across the U.S., librarians face the impact of uniting against library collection standards that include restrictions on race-related and LGBTQIA+ content. Drawing on historical context, “The Librarians” explores the broader implications for education and public life. See it on the PBS app or here:

<https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/the-librarians/>

We note the passing of former Friends President Mary “Midge” Kraetzer on page 6. —*Marion Abbott*

## A New Youth Poet Laureate for Berkeley



2026 Youth Poet Laureate  
Nolawit Ketema

For the third year in a row, Berkeley has a new Youth Poet Laureate. The program was initiated by the Berkeley Public Library in 2024, in partnership with the National Youth Poet Laureate Program. Additional community partners include the City of Berkeley Civic Arts Commission and Berkeley Public Schools. Teens who live and/or attend school in Berkeley are eligible to



apply to the program. The Friends funded the national license fee and the snacks enjoyed by family and friends at the January 14 reception and poetry reading in the Central Library’s Teen Room. Nolawit Ketema was selected

as this year’s Youth Poet Laureate, and Rachel Dunn is the Vice Youth Poet Laureate. Nolawit described her process: “writing, especially poetry, is how I make sense of emotions and experiences I don’t yet know how to say out loud.” The finalists read their poetry at the reception, where Librarian Robyn Sweet noted “the feeling of support and positivity in the room was a real highlight, despite the heavy themes of some of the poems.” Making sense of the world with words – it’s a powerful gift. The kids are alright.



l to r: 2025 Vice Youth Poet Laureate Adalilly Chu, 2026 Vice Youth Poet Laureate Rachel Dunn, 2026 Youth Poet Laureate Nolawit Ketema, 2025 Youth Poet Laureate Anita Marie Júlca.

## Hands Off Our Libraries! – Update

In the May 2025 issue of the *Bookmark*, we reported on the Executive Order that would cut funds to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), affecting state, rural, and tribal library systems. Thanks to a coalition of attorneys general, American Library Association (ALA), and others who filed lawsuits to protect funding for IMLS, the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island struck down the administration’s efforts, and by December 3, 2025, IMLS had reinstated all federal grants. Thanks to ALA for this welcome news! ❖

## Celebrating the Library

The sold-out 23rd Annual Authors Dinner was held February 22 in the magically transformed Central Library. Authors and special guests were honored and everyone noted the importance of the library to their personal experience. Indeed, “Libraries Light the Way” was the theme, and the giant LED sculpture put an exclamation point on that! Lucky Friends raffle

winners included: Sandy Speier, Ellie Erickson-Goldstein, Gianne Gimian; Ray Shiflett; Diane Kuderna, and Jan Murota. The Friends are a major sponsor for this truly unique event and we congratulate the Berkeley Public Library Foundation for putting on a spectacular party! ❖



*The Reading Room aglow*



*Fran Sheppard, Ellie Erickson-Goldstein, and Gianne Gimian*



*Sandy Speier and Aaron Marcus*



*Little Library auction item*

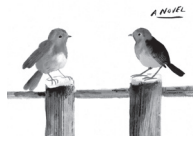


*Cathy Brown and Jim Novosel*

# What We're Reading

## *The Correspondent* by Virginia Evans

NATIONAL BESTSELLER  
 "A rare combination." — *San Francisco Chronicle*  
 The  
 Correspondent  
 VIRGINIA EVANS



Most mornings our correspondent, 76-year-old Sybil Van Antwerp, sits down at her writing desk with a cup of tea to write and send letters. Sybil is a distinguished lawyer, retired. She's an opinionated, prickly woman who is going blind, so corresponding has become her manner of living.

You'll love the strength of Sybil as she examines and re-examines her life. You'll be reminded of the gift of letter writing: laboring over words and then the long wait for postal replies. And, as a bonus, it will make you want to go back and re-read *84 Charing Cross Road*, the epistolary novel of 1970 by Helene Hanff! — *Diane Davenport*

## *Joyride: A Memoir* by Susan Orlean

JOYRIDE  
  
 SUSAN  
 ORLEAN  
 A MEMOIR

A fascinating tour through the works and workings of Susan Orlean, author of countless *New Yorker* pieces and profiles as well as several books including *The Orchid Thief*, *Rin Tin Tin*, and *The Library Book*.

Not only does Orlean's account of a writing life offer a trove of indispensable gleanings, it's also a practical guide to embracing any creative path. She takes us through her process of dreaming up ideas, managing deadlines, connecting with sources, chasing every possible lead, confronting writers block and self-doubt, and crafting the perfect lede, an Orlean specialty. — *Marion Abbott*

## *Museums of Other People: From Colonial Acquisitions to Cosmopolitan Exhibitions* by Adam Kuper

The  
 Museum  
 of Other  
 People  
 Adam  
 Kuper

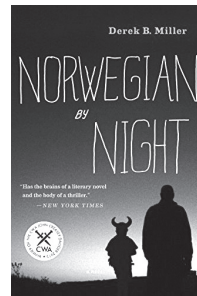


This is the story of how materials and artifacts from non-Western cultures have been displayed in European and North American museums, tracing the evolution of those displays with that of philosophy and attitudes towards other peoples. Early museums were greatly influenced by the concept of Social Darwinism,

the idea that cultures evolved from the most primitive to the most complex and most developed, the pinnacle of which was Western civilization as embodied in Europe and North America. Most of us are old enough to remember art from Africa and Oceania being labeled "primitive." That term is no longer acceptable but art historians and anthropologists continue to struggle to find one which is both respectful and accurate.

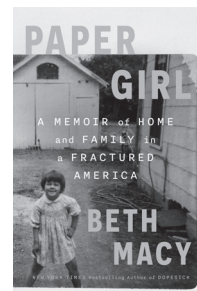
The book also discusses the enormously complex issue of repatriation of cultural items to their countries of origin. The famous Elgin Marbles are not the only subject of rancorous debate between museums in Europe and North America and their countries of origin. Many governments want their artifacts returned. Kuper delves into not only the role of colonial governments in taking artifacts but also the willing cooperation of African rulers in facilitating such removal. Kuper includes a chapter about NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 1990), an American law mandating the return of skeletal remains to Native Americans who can establish items' cultural affinity. Having worked in this field, I have experience about its implementation. In a few words: difficult, full of conflict, and few returns. UC Berkeley has roughly 9,000 skeletons which are poorly inventoried; proving that they belong to particular tribes is notoriously challenging. — *Mara Melandry*

## *Norwegian By Night* by Derek Miller



This one's been around for a while but still holds up. A modern, funny thriller involving a recently widowed 82-year-old Jewish-American watchmaker who moves to Oslo to live near his granddaughter and her Norwegian husband. He overhears the dispute and murder of an Albanian woman in his apartment house. Rescuing her young son, they flee the murderers. Cultural and historical juxtapositions and ironies light up this wild, funny tale. — *Jan Murota*

## *Paper Girl: A Memoir of Home and Family in a Fractured America* by Beth Macy



Macy, author of *Factory Man* and *Dopesick*, never lost touch with her hometown of Urbana, Ohio, and her family and friends who stayed. The rural town suffered loss of blue-collar industries, diminished civic engagement, cuts to education and healthcare, and a shift to MAGA politics and conspiracies. Still, educators, coaches, social workers, and librarians (yes!), struggled to keep kids from sliding into poverty and despair. Macy listens to everyone to find out what is turning Urbana into a "poorer, sicker, angrier, and less educated place." She cites reduced educational opportunities (like Pell grants) and loss of local journalism as major threats to prosperity and truth. Well written, deeply personal, and highly readable. — *Cathy Brown*

# *Book Burned, Lost, Found, and Returned to Berlin*

By Dianne Leonard

Editor's Note: Dianne Leonard was a volunteer at Channing, overlapping frequently with Gary Brown. She was inspired to write up this amazing recollection after reading Sandy Bails's tribute to Gary in the November Bookmark.

I used to work Saturday mornings and he always showed up well before the 1pm end of my shift, so I interacted with him a good bit. Several years ago, I found a book in the donations that looked like it had been burned and then immersed in water—in other words, badly damaged and very fragile. You know how you sometimes get that feeling with a book: "I don't know what this is, but somehow I think it's important"? The book was clearly in German (not one of my languages), so I put it aside for Gary, who I expected in an hour or so. I pounced on him as soon as he arrived. Long story short, the book turned out to be a survivor of the Hirschfeld Institute of Sexology bibliocaust of 1933. Nobody knew how it had gotten to our bookstore. Gary knew of an organization in Berlin that was trying to reconstitute that library so he wrote to them. In a week they responded. The book was exceedingly rare (if memory serves, the only copy of that title still in existence) and the Berlin group offered a substantial sum to us to return it. Gary and I discussed the book with the rest of the Saturday crew and the verdict was unanimous: it belonged back in Berlin, and, no, we would not accept any payment for it. I bubble-wrapped it, took a few dollars out of the cash drawer, and walked up to the post office to dispatch it. A few weeks later, we got another email saying the book had arrived and that conservators would be working on it, but that it was likely too damaged to circulate or even use for research. They did, however, believe it could be displayed at some point, and sent us a mock-up of a plaque thanking the Friends for returning the book to where we all believed it rightfully belonged.

I remember how gobsmacked I was when Gary told me that the book was from the Hirschfeld Institute. He seemed very matter-of-fact, but I remember having to sit down because I was so shocked that anything had survived. "I thought they burned it all down," I told Gary. He then told me rather absently about the group in Berlin.

Gary did a lot more things like this, but that's the one that hit me the hardest. Gary was magnificent and I'll never forget the incident!

Postscript: I just finished reading *The Einstein of Sex: Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, Visionary of Weimar Berlin* by

Daniel Brook (a New Yorker Best Book of 2025). (<https://wwnorton.com/books/9781324007241>) It goes into some detail about what happened to the Institute building and how some materials survived. I don't read many biographies, but this one was really good. Just recently I was recounting the story to my nephew on the phone and I started crying—because of the bibliocaust and because I'd held such a precious survivor in my hands. ❖



Matvii Petrov, with Cathy Brown, collecting books donated by the Friends for Ukrainian children

## *Restoring Ukrainian Libraries*

Last November, Matvii Petrov, a 4th grade student Lin Pleasanton, emailed the Friends asking if we could contribute children's books for a project. His goal was to collect 10,000 English-language books for children in Ukraine whose schools and libraries have been destroyed by war. Matvii likes to go to his local library and it made him sad to know that so many children did not have access to the books they need for reading and learning. Of course, the Friends were very happy to support Matvii's project and we gathered several boxes of gently used children's books – picture books, early readers, graphic novels, series. We learned that this was not Matvii's first project to help Ukrainian children. Last year he collected school supplies and presents in time for Christmas. The spirit and generosity of this young man is truly exceptional and we're confident he will reach his goal. ❖

## In Memoriam: Mary “Midge” Kraetzer

Those of you with eagle-eyes will note a number of donations to the Friends made in honor of Midge Kraetzer in this issue. Midge died at the age of 87 in November 2025.

Midge grew up in Berkeley, graduated from Berkeley High School, went to UC Davis, and then returned to Berkeley to marry and raise her family. Her life-long love of reading led her to join the Friends of the Berkeley Public Library. She became Vice President of the Friends in 1976 and President of the Friends in 1978. Her leadership there led her to be appointed to the Board of Library Trustees in 1981. In that same year she became President of the Friends Division of the California Library Association. Because of her many leadership roles with the Library and with the Friends, her family suggested that donations in Midge’s name be made to the Friends to honor her passing.

We honor Midge and thank her family for this remembrance. – *Diane Davenport*



## Write Your Will for Free Through the Library

Did you know that the Berkeley Public Library Foundation has partnered with FreeWill, a secure, trusted, and free online tool that makes writing a will simple—and takes just 20 minutes? More than 1.2 million

**FREEWILL** 



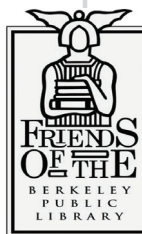
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people nationwide have already used FreeWill to plan for their loved ones and the communities they care about. By including the Foundation in your plans, you’ll join our Legacy Society, continuing a tradition of library support that began in 1903. Legacy gifts have helped fund storytime rooms, teen spaces, renovations, the Charlie Cart mobile kitchen, STEM resources, job seeker tools, and more. Every gift—large or small—helps make a great public library even greater.

For more info see: [https://partner.freewill.com/berkeleypubliclibrary?utm\\_source=partner&utm\\_medium=eblast&utm\\_campaign=202508\\_berkeleypubliclibrary\\_mawm\\_soft\\_impact\\_launch](https://partner.freewill.com/berkeleypubliclibrary?utm_source=partner&utm_medium=eblast&utm_campaign=202508_berkeleypubliclibrary_mawm_soft_impact_launch)

## Thank you, Bob Stern!

We don’t know you, but we’re grateful for your generous donation that comes to the Friends via the National Philanthropic Trust. We scoured our membership list, queried our Board and called the grants team that issued the check, but could not elicit any information about you. If you’re reading this, please accept our sincere thanks. We are also seeking to connect an auto-deposit from Benevity/American Online Giving with the name of the generous donor. Seriously, all we want to do is send you a thank you card, and ensure that you receive our wonderful Bookmark, mailed quarterly. Please email the Friends at [berkeleylibraryfriends@gmail.com](mailto:berkeleylibraryfriends@gmail.com). We truly appreciate these donations that appear on a regular basis, like magic! ❖



**Editor:** Marion Abbott  
**Layout/Design:** Annie Higgins

The *Bookmark* appears quarterly; we welcome your letters & your ideas for articles. Contact us at *Friends Bookmark*, 2031 Bancroft Way, Berkeley, CA 94704, or via email: [berkeleylibraryfriends@gmail.com](mailto:berkeleylibraryfriends@gmail.com)

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Contact us with any aspect of membership at [berkeleylibraryfriends@gmail.com](mailto:berkeleylibraryfriends@gmail.com). We deeply care about

## Welcome to New Members

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Sarah Izzo	Shaotran Family Foundation
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Jeanette Lim	P.C. Storr
Martha Little	Lee Vadnais
Karen Miller	Casey Weiss
Adam Mitchell	Laura Wisland

## Renewals at \$25

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Rose Marie Ginsburg	Ina Potter
George Gorman	Anna Presler
Charlotte Gray	Kaye Sankey
Miriam Gross	Ann Singer
Rachel Hall	Marsha Skinner
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Michael Koved	Tracy Thompson
Jerry Long	Virginia Warheit
Robbin Lou	Elisabeth Watson
Jeanne Marecek	Autumn Woish
Andrea Moss	

## Renewals and/or donations from \$200 up to \$499

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Dan Bellm	Laureen O'Brien
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Gary Brown	Therese Powell
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Amy Hawthorne	Wendy Simon
Trish and Tony Hawthorne	Bob Stern/Wineland Fund
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Patricia Kates	Rob and Lisa Walker
Stephen Lazzareschi	

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Diane Davenport	Judith Lubman
Elizabeth Edelstein	Karen Miller
Calvin Eng	Carole Schloz
Judith Justice	

## Renewals and/or donations over \$1,000

Claudia Berger	Arvil Nagpal
Tim DeWolf and Cristina Campbell	Vern and MaAn Renshaw
	Sheila and Toby Schwartzburg

changes of address, misspellings, inaccurate or incomplete info (see our message to Bob Stern). If you are renewing by check, please include your email address – you'll receive an email invitation to the June 17 Annual Meeting & Luncheon! Thank you! ❖

## Renewals and/or donations from \$26 up to \$199

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Andrea and Bill Foley	Andrea Pearlstein
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Naomi Janowitz and Andrew Lazarus	Margi Stromberg
Kitty Kameon	Elsa Tranter
JoAnn Lorber	Thomas Trippe and Kirsten Berg
Thomas Lynch	Vita Wells
Deborah and Joe McBride	Michael Wild
Laura McCrea	Laura Wisland

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Mary O'Neill from Mary Hurd Margi Stromberg David D. O'Neill	
Nicole O'Hay from Barbara O'Hay Norine Nomura from Debbie Carton	

## Donations in Honor of....

Dorothy Witt's 100th birthday from Michael Wild  
Sidney Guthrie from Nancy Bissell  
Therese Powell from Karen and Richard Cook  
Claudia Bugatto from L. Morimoto  
The Storytime Band from Tim DeWolf and Cristina Campbell

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