

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

Our libraries express something more than learning; they link us with the past, the present and the future in a way that is portable, affordable and aesthetically pleasurable. Even the information revolution and the invasion of the CD-Rom cannot displace our attachment to books.

That should perhaps be our credo for being engaged with the Friends of the Library (FOL). Because the FOL committee is committed to making our five libraries in Grahamstown better places and central to all the communities they serve. Yes, we are now five, as recently Extension 9 got its own library. Such was the enthusiasm that a crowd of children descended as the shelves were being stocked to see if they could claim library cards! One of our FOL friends said the other day that since education in the Eastern Cape is in such a dire plight the libraries play an even more important role in supplementing the school education that many children are missing.

The down side to our work this year has been the lack of communication with the Municipal Library Committee. When councilor Michael Whisson was in charge, we met regularly and always got replies to our queries. This year, we have only met once and pleas for meetings have fallen on deaf ears. When we look at the infrastructure of the Hill Street library hall for example, we see a lot that needs attention. A lavatory door that is off its hinges, an expensive air conditioner which needs maintenance work, a main door which does not close properly and a carpet which needs a thorough clean and is beyond the ministrations of the library cleaner. All this comes under the aegis of the Municipality. We realize that it is hard to police the users of the hall, as many organizations use it so perhaps a deposit should be required in order for willful damage such as the lavatory door to be paid for by the perpetrators.

I mentioned last year about library closing times and the frustration of

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

ROSEMARY VAN WYK SMITH

some of the libraries being closed on a Saturday morning, meaning that working parents cannot accompany their children to the library. This seems to be a big gap in service. And people working in town cannot get to the library after work as it closes at 5pm.

While being very sympathetic to librarians struggling with getting home in the dark in the townships, surely this could be adjusted in the summer or a have a roster worked out. However, some Journalism students are investigating the problems and hopefully coming up with some suggestions.

The mobile library is now in use and elsewhere in this newsletter you can read more about it. How good it is to know that many people in rural areas without easy access to transport can now go to a library. Last year there was an article in the newsletter about the school libraries supported through the Henderson bequest. It has been very exciting this year to hear about the work done in these school libraries by our committee members in partnership with the schools. Read more about it elsewhere in the newsletter.

Our lectures on Monday evenings have been a huge success. We seem to be answering a need in Grahamstown for some "extra culture" and have attracted large and varied audiences. In the financial report you will see how much money has been gathered in this way and a list of topics appears in this newsletter. We are immensely grateful to the speakers who give of their time so freely and cheerfully, and look forward to an exciting programme in 2013.

Finally, a big thank you to all the members of the Friends committee. Each member has a specific task and without these tasks being performed, all the work would not be done.

Thank you.



NOVEMBER 2012

INSIDE

Who are FOL? 02
Calendar 2012

Samuel Ntsiko library 03
now ready to roll

Of books and other 04
passions

New librarian on the 05
block

Talking to the 06
librarians of G'town

FOL grapple with 10
setting up Ntsika
school library

School libraries 13
desperately in need of
updating

Whose time is it 14
anyway?

Books (are) on the 15
move

My 6128 favourite 18
books



**Without books,
history is silent,
literature dumb,
science crippled,
thought and
speculation at a
standstill.**



Barbara Tuchman
(American Historian)

Who are the Friends of the Library?

The Makana Friends of the Library started 12 years ago in an attempt to fundraise for the libraries of Grahamstown so that more books, equipment and educational games could be bought. At that time the Eastern Cape provincial government was being very slow in its stocking the libraries with these things. Through running a series of lectures on diverse topics and an annual Fête, the Friends have been able to amass considerable funds for the buying of books, equipment etc. Everything is bought in consultation with the individual libraries, and the Friends have a rule of thumb that all purchases must enhance and enrich the libraries. The Friends of the Library is a civil society organization consisting of members who pay an annual subscription fee, and it is run by an organising committee.

Who was on the 2011/2012 committee?

Chairperson

- » Rosie van Wyk Smith
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Secretary

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LECTURES IN 2013

- » Films on Rothko and Picasso
- » South America and the Inca Trail
- » The Cape Floral Kingdom
- » A journey by motor bike through Africa
- » Tibet
- » The Schreiner family

2012 EVENTS CALENDAR

JANUARY

30 JAN – Dr Rouhani: *The ABC of Religion*

FEBRUARY

06 FEB – John Forbis: *From the Desert to the Heart. A brief history of Monastic Spirituality*

13 FEB – Harry Owen: *Searching for the Music of the Marriage – with dogs!*

27 FEB – Russell Kaschula: *Revisiting Nongqawuse and the early German settlers though a short story entitled 'Displaced'.*

28 FEB – Committee meeting at Duna Library.

MARCH

12 MARCH – Paul Walters: *Cranemere, Eve Palmer and the Plains of Camdeboo.*

17 MARCH – Mini Fête

26 MARCH – Paul Maylam: *Saint or sinner, savior or sell-out? Some perspectives on Nelson Mandela.*

27 MARCH – Committee meeting at Fingo library.

APRIL

No lectures or meetings because of Public Holidays and Rhodes graduation

23 APRIL – Tim Bull: *Re-inventing the wheel – Community policing in London.*

MAY

7 MAY – Tim Huisamen: *Jolly Roger and Jolly Jack Tar. English folk songs of the sea.*

14 MAY – Sam Naidu: *Cracking Down on Crime: Crime and Detective Fiction in SA*

29 MAY – Committee meeting at Community Library.

JUNE

11 JUNE – Sukhmani Mantel: *Devil's darning needles and other river insects: what rules them and what roles do they play?*

18 JUNE – Pat Irwin: *The Battle of Grahamstown, 22nd April 1819*

JULY

17 JULY – Committee meeting at Hill Street Library.

23 JULY – Jamie McGregor: *A Composer's Midlife Crisis: Wagner before and after Schopenhauer: Part I*

AUGUST

6 AUG – Malvern Van Wyk Smith: *Syria and Jordan: A Slide Show*

20 AUG – Rudi Marx: *Why do we live so much longer?*

28 Aug Committee meeting at Hill Street Library.

SEPTEMBER

17 SEPT – Pat Irwin: *Elephants in War.*

25 SEPT – Committee meeting at Hill Street Library.

OCTOBER

8 OCT – Professor Gavin Keeton: *The World and the South African economies in the wake of the European crisis.*

15 OCT – Professor Andrew Buckland: *The fool who ran away to Cirque du Soleil.*

23 OCT – Committee meeting at Hill Street Library.

NOVEMBER

12 NOV – AGM

HOW DO I JOIN FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY, AND HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

If you would like to join the FOL please contact any one of the committee members listed on this page, but preferably our subscriptions manager, Katy Marx (k.marx@telkomsa.net).

Members are required to pay a small yearly subscription fee. The fee structure will be reviewed at this year's AGM.

Samuel Ntsiko library now ready to roll

By Karlien van der Wielen

Samuel Ntsiko Primary School may not have water, but at least its learners now have books. With their fledgling library operational, learners will have access to their very own collection of books and educational toys and games.

The library at Samuel Ntsiko Primary School was officially opened at the end of last year by Dr Elna Barnard, Deputy Chief Education Specialist for Tele-collaborative Teaching and Learning at the Department of Education. At this point, however, the converted classroom's pine shelves were largely bare and only the colourfully painted walls hinted at what was to come.

In 2011, a few Samuel Ntsiko teachers attended a library workshop, during which they met members of the Friends of the Library group and discussed the needs of the school. After a further meeting with the school's principal, Nombulelo Koliti, the Friends of the Library agreed to help Samuel Ntsiko create a library with funding from the Henderson bequest. To start the process, FOL handed Ntsiko a grant of R20 000. Books, shelves, paint and blinds were bought with this money, but the library still needed an organising element. This is when the Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Association (GADRA) stepped in and recruited Lindi Arbi, a teacher and an artist, to get the library up and running.

At the suggestion of Cathy Gush from Friends of the Library, Arbi started her project by visiting ITEC, a non-profit organisation involved in education and training in East London. ITEC offers library services to their community and helps schools wanting to start their own libraries, to resource materials and train staff.

"They were incredibly useful," Arbi explains. "They gave me a carload of books, and I came back with armloads of generosity. It's just mind-blowing. For someone who has actually very

little idea, but two hands, I came back with quite a lot of direction, and just got cracking."

Arbi visited the library on Tuesdays for a period of six weeks. In conjunction with her helpers, John Mbekela and Phumeza Sonjeke, books were slowly amassed, sorted, catalogued and primed for reading.

Mrs Nombulelo Koliti, the principal of Samuel Ntsiko Primary, feels very positive about the impact the library will have on her learners.

"There's a need to improve the literacy of the learners, a very, very high need," she explains. "At present we have book corners in the classrooms, but the feeling is that it is not enough. We need to give more attention to reading."

She hopes the library will provide a different environment for her learners, in which they can engage with books on less stressful terms than in the classroom.

"We need to let children read for enjoyment," she says. "When you take them to that library, they begin to feel that the space is quiet, and you can teach them the rules about books. It's giving them a different view of how a book is used."

Arbi, the school's library committee and the school itself faced many challenges. Since May last year, the school has been without water. Despite numerous attempts to solve the problem, such as appeals to the municipality and R12 000 spent on maintenance, there has been little progress. Learners are forced to relieve themselves in a field adjoining school grounds.

The presence of the library stands in stark contrast to this predicament. Its cosy interior is a testament to the school's determination and the generosity and interest of volunteers. Throughout its journey, the Samuel Ntsiko library has been supported by various organisations, as well as the Department of Basic Education. Arbi has been lauded for her hard work and engagement.

Now that the library
is ready for use, the
school is left with the
problem of getting
someone to open and
supervise it every day.



"With the presence of Lindi here, which is a blessing, we are moving forward faster than we thought," Koliti says. "She has started doing some of the work that would have been done after a workshop had been held. And the library people on our staff, they sort of take turns to go and assist Lindi as she is doing that, and in the process they learn about starting this library, cataloguing books and all that."

Now that the library is ready for use, the school is left with the problem of getting someone to open and supervise it every day. As it is, the teachers follow a roster to bring their classes to the library, and the library committee members take turns to open it.

"We are thinking of getting some people who can volunteer," explains Koliti. "Like parents who are not working. We can get them trained with us, so that they can offer this service. If we could have funds we could employ a person on a stipend."

However, Koliti says that the school's budget cannot accommodate this new expenditure. "We need an outside intervention. Our budget is too limited, and fundraising does not give us much to work with."

Now that most of the work is done, Arbi is looking forward to personally introducing Samuel Ntsiko learners to the library. "The library is now ready to rock 'n roll," she says.

Of books and other passions

Rosemary van Wyk Smith is not only chairperson of the Friends of the Library committee, but also a published author.

By Brendan Ward

The grandfather clock ticks loudly against the wall in front of me. The floor-to-ceiling bookshelves that cover the far side of the room are a dead giveaway: this is the house of a reader. Not just a reader, a bibliophile. As the chairperson of the Friends of the Library and a published author, Rosemary van Wyk Smith is exactly that.

"I'm a keen reader and so I thought that joining the Friends of the Library was worth doing," she tells me over a cup of tea. "I had lots of ideas and so I was drawn onto the committee and gradually into becoming the chair. It just happened."

I ask her about the history of Friends of the Library, and she shows me an old minutebook. In October 1999, it says, friends of the various libraries across Grahamstown decided to organise themselves in order to assist the hard-pressed staff in ways ranging from buying new books to helping them connect to the internet.

Trying to define exactly what the Friends of the Library does is relatively simpler: "We are there to be friends," said Smith. "We go to the libraries and look to see what they need and try to provide."

"The reason we started was that books weren't coming through from the distribution points. The libraries just weren't getting interesting books," said Smith. Since then, the Friends of the Library have been assisting the six Grahamstown libraries: the Hill Street, Community, Duna, and Fingo Libraries and now the new Modular Library in Extension 9 as well as the Mobile Library in raising money for the purchase of new books. One of the first initiatives

in the early 2000s was to raise funds through the sale of the extensive collection of old books that were not being read at the Hill Street library.

"Many of the books would rank as antiquarian books. As a combined effort of the FOL and the Hill Street Library collectors were brought in and the books were evaluated and sold," explained Smith. Only the unread books were sold to collectors. "This provided a very nice nest-egg for buying books."

As chairperson of the Friends of the Library, Smith has first-hand experience of the challenges facing libraries in Grahamstown. "You need three quotes before the municipality can provide anything, be it water pipes or new books."

Smith expressed dissatisfaction with the almost complete lack of meetings of the Municipal Libraries Committee, which should meet three of four times per year as a space for representatives of the libraries, the Friends of the Library and the Municipality to discuss issues ranging from maintenance to book supply. "It has only had one feeble meeting this year!" she lamented. "I have

many issues. We fought for an aircon that doubles as a heater in the Hill Street Library hall, but the electrical firm tells us it can't work as the pipes need restoring. It's a municipal job." Without these meetings, it is hard for the libraries to request what needs to be done.

Smith also expressed concern over the lack of internet access at the Duna Library in Joza, and the issue of library closing hours. The libraries all close at 5pm, and many do not open on a Saturday morning. She would like to see conversations happening around these issues.

"Closing late can be quite hard on the staff in winter, where they would have to go home after dark. There were also safety concerns, but now that summer is coming, evenings will be lighter," she said. "And on Saturdays, why not take shifts? Not all the librarians and library staff need to be on duty all the time."

Libraries aren't the only thing she cares about. Smith has written a book called *Swimming with Cobras*. "It's a memoir. A slim one," she jokes. "The title is a metaphor, although we did swim with one once!" In it she talks about coming to South Africa from England after marrying her husband, Malvern Van Wyk Smith, who was a lecturer in English at Rhodes. "It's about how I came here as an alien and gradually got sucked in! It's mainly set during the Apartheid period, and speaks of my involvement in the Black Sash." We speak at length about South Africa, and for a while she takes over, asking me about my studies. It would be easy to forget I'm a journalist and slip back into being merely a 20-something.

UNSHELVED

BY GENE AMBAUM & BILL BARNES



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There is a new librarian in town. She is feisty, determined and well-connected, and as the new director of library services for Rhodes University and the recently-inaugurated president of the Library Association of South Africa (LiASA), **Ujala Satgoor** packs quite a punch.



New librarian on the block

By Karlien van der Wielen

Ujala Satgoor left the Jacaranda-lined streets of Pretoria for Grahamstown after only visiting here twice. She brought with her over 20 years of experience in the Library and Information Services sector, and has been involved in various efforts to improve the state of libraries in South Africa.

Satgoor began her library career in 1980, when she started working as a Library Assistant at the Pietermaritzburg Municipal Library Service. "I was based in a container library that serviced a community of 20 000 and experienced first-hand the impact a library had on an economically deprived community," she reminisces.

"I chose to pursue a career in librarianship as it gave me an opportunity to contribute to the intellectual development of an individual. I have always found it extremely rewarding to connect people to the information they seek and to be able to engender a curiosity for more!"

Today, Satgoor strongly advocates the idea that libraries can play an exceptional role in the development of communities. At LiASA's 14th annual conference, which took place during the first

week of October, Satgoor was inaugurated as president.

In line with this year's conference theme – "Libraries: empowering communities, building a nation" – Satgoor suggests that libraries should be transformed into centres for the community, where members can feel safe and empowered.

"We have a critical role to play in developing an informed nation," she says, "because schools are not succeeding."

Although Satgoor has not yet had a chance to delve into local matters, she is heading up several national projects that she hopes will bring positive change to the sector. In addition to her LiASA presidency, she is also the project leader of the Centre for Library Leadership, which is a \$1 million project funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The project seeks to provide training for mid and senior level South African librarians who demonstrate leadership potential.

Satgoor believes that libraries have the capacity to become the kind of civic spaces that South Africans need. "The role that we can play in communities is as a trusted partner," she explains. "Studies internationally show firstly

that a library is regarded as a safe and a comfortable space. Secondly, that the information you get in a library can be trusted."

According to Satgoor, libraries in South Africa can provide communities with much needed educational resources. In addition, she believes they can be spaces for community gatherings and engagement, where people feel secure enough to empower themselves through the knowledge libraries offer.

"We always talk about corporate social responsibility," she explains. "But I think that because of what is currently happening with South Africa, we have a huge social responsibility. It's not just a service that we're providing: we really are contributing to the mental and intellectual development of our communities, and we need to take that seriously – we need to understand what we are doing."

In the mean time, Satgoor is adjusting to her new, smaller surroundings. "Having been predominantly a resident in major cities," she says, "it is a huge change to a small town environment. One has to re-prioritise choices and habits. But I'm slowly getting to grips with living in Grahamstown."

MEET SOME OF GRAHAMSTOWN'S LIBRARIANS

The personalities in between the bookshelves

Librarianship is a calling. In a profession where four years' study can still result in a clerk's salary, professionals would necessarily have to be passionate to approach their jobs with the vigour and excitement exhibited by these Grahamstown librarians. However, change might be on the horizon. The Library and Information Association of South Africa (LiASA) plans to make librarianship a statutory profession, which will establish basic requirements in terms of education and salary.

Karliën van der Wielen went tête-à-tête with some of the librarians in Grahamstown to find out how they feel about their jobs and the possibilities that might lie ahead.

Photos by Karliën van der Wielen and Julien Fievez





ZANDILE PININI – LIBRARIAN AT FINGO LIBRARY

“You have to be someone who is clued up on everything”

Zandile Pinini fits in well at Fingo Library. Among the colourful walls and neat displays, she constantly sports a bright smile. It's there when she's humming to the radio or stacking books in their proper places, but it's especially wide when she talks about helping people through her role as librarian.

“You feel so great when you help,” she said, with her characteristic smile. “At times it's not just helping [library users] with information. There are other social problems that you come across, and when you come across those social problems, you get the relevant help for them. So it feels great because you're doing something for the community, not just helping them with information.”

Zandile's interest in librarianship was awoken when she went to study at the University of the Western Cape. While Library and Information Sciences was not her first choice, she became more and more involved in the profession as she learnt the intricacies of being a librarian. In 1999, with her

Diploma in hand, she started working at the Rhodes University Library. After a few years she decided to continue her studies, and when she returned to the professional world in 2009, she came to Fingo Library.

During her studies, Zandile became aware of just how much learning one needs to do in order to become a librarian. When she was young, she thought that anyone could be a librarian, because the public librarians she knew were not professionally qualified.

Now, Zandile hopes that making the profession statutory will ensure some recognition for librarians. She finds that people often undermine the profession because they think that anyone can be a librarian.

“To be a librarian you have to be somebody who is clued up about everything,” she advised. “People come to the library not knowing what to do, so you must know about almost everything. You must know current affairs.”

Experience is key

REUBEN JWAYIZA – ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN AT FINGO LIBRARY

Reuben Jwayiza loves books and reading. His favourite part of being an Assistant Librarian at Fingo Library is recommending good books to library members. He has a particular knack for identifying taste and introducing readers to new favourites. “I like to work with books, searching information for people, and also I read a lot,” Reuben explained. He loves non-fiction books about real life and biographies, but he's quick to assert that he would read anything.

Reuben studied Library and Information Sciences at the University of Fort Hare, and after he graduated he volunteered at Duna Library for six months. In 2009 he started work at Fingo Library, and has stayed there since. Another thing Reuben enjoys about his job is that he learns from the library

patrons. He said, “If they want something, you have to look up that thing, so then you end up knowing that thing that they wanted.”

Experience is key in Reuben's opinion. He suggests that this can make up for a professional qualification. “If you've been in a library for more than five years, what would you not know about the library? Nothing. If you've been in the library for many years and you can help people, then I think that is fine.”

To succeed as a librarian, Reuben suggests that you become computer literate and learn more than one language. He took extra courses to learn how to work with computers, and obtained an International Computer Driving License from Fort Hare, as well as a certificate in Information Retrieval.



“I like helping today’s youth”



SIVIWE (SVA) LUTSCABA – LIBRARY ASSISTANT AT DUNA LIBRARY

Siviwe (Sva) Lutscaba enjoys working in the library because it gives him the chance to help students and work with computers.

Sva started volunteering at Duna Library in 2004, right after finishing a Project Management course at Damelin College. After a period of volunteering, Sva applied for an internal position and became a library helper.

“I thought it was useful,” he explained, “and I like helping people to get educational experience. When I was in high school, there were not a lot of libraries, so I like helping today’s youth.” Sva suggests that to work well in libraries, you have to be friendly and computer literate. “I like working with computers. For a person to be a librarian, you need to be computer literate,” he says.

“You also have to be friendly with people,” he explains, “because you deal with them a lot. As you know, customers and patrons know that the customer is always right. So even if they are wrong, they will expect your tolerance.”

Even though Sva loves helping students with their products, he says the least pleasant thing about his job is repeatedly having to tell children and high school students to be quiet. Otherwise, Sva is optimistic about Grahamstown’s Matric prospects, because of the amount of sedulous students that use the library and work hard on their projects with the library staff. “So in that way, I think Grahamstown is going to do well in the Matric exams,” he says with proud grin.

NOMTHANDAZO NONTSHONGWANA – LIBRARIAN AT HILL STREET LIBRARY

Librarianship first appealed to Nomthandazo Nontshongwana while she was still in high school. She started volunteering at the Uitenhage Library after school and decided that librarianship was the job for her.

“It was about the books and helping the kids with their homework and projects,” she explained. “Just the look on their faces made it worth it.”

Nomthandazo studied Library and Information Sciences at the University of the Western Cape after she matriculated. She finished her Diploma at Port Elizabeth Technikon and started working at the Uitenhage Library in 2001. In 2009 she came to Grahamstown to help start up Fingo Library.

Like many librarians, Nomthandazo’s love for books keeps her going in the profession. She especially loves reading new books that come into the library so that she can process and catalogue them.

“I love my job,” she said. “I am doing what I love.”

Nomthandazo would, however, appreciate the recognition librarianship would gain were it made a statutory profession.

“People don’t recognise that librarianship is a profession: they think that anyone can be a librarian,” she explained. “We really do need the recognition, because if you say that you’re going to study librarianship, people look at you and say, ‘Why?’”

Nomthandazo asserts that having Matric is not enough to function as a librarian. You need the background that higher education provides in order to be a successful librarian.

For now, Nomthandazo is just happy to continue working in a library where she can encounter new books and read her favourites. Her preferred section is 364 – where the true stories are shelved.

364

*Where the
true stories are
shelved*



“It’s never too late to learn. You are never too old.”



MELANIE DANIELS – LIBRARIAN AT THE COMMUNITY LIBRARY

Librarianship runs in the family for Melanie Daniels of the Community Library. Her mother used to work in the same library, and Melanie spent her childhood coming and going among its tall shelves.

When Melanie started working at the Community Library in 1996, she did not yet have a professional qualification. Her mother motivated her to apply for the job nonetheless. Shortly after she was employed, she started studying Library and Information Sciences through Unisa to get her Diploma.

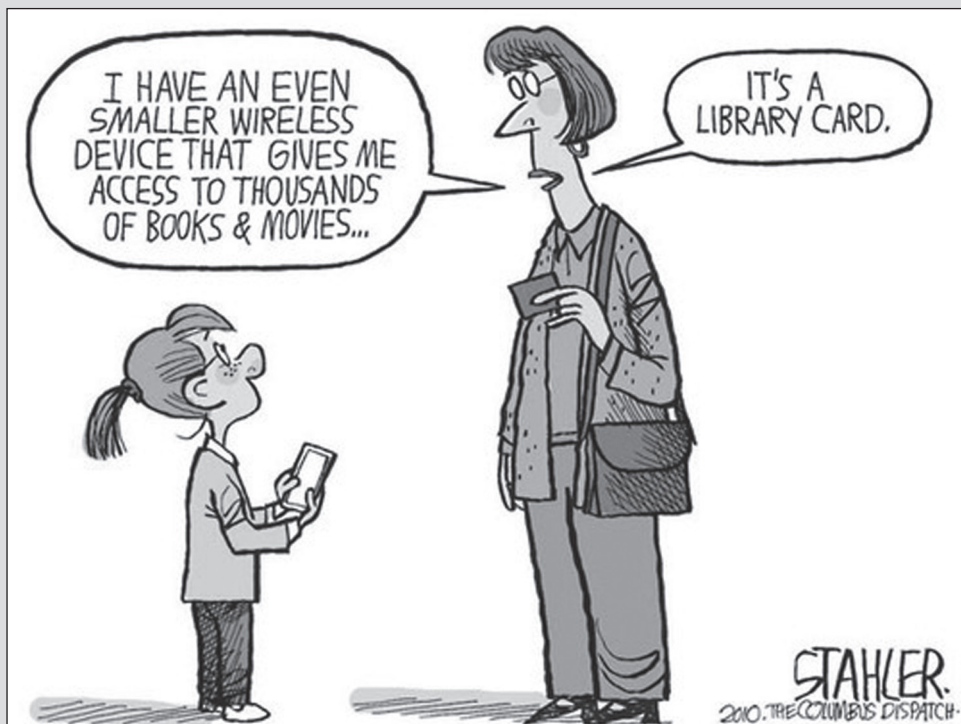
“Only then did I start to enjoy my job,” Melanie explained “because then everything started to make sense.”

Melanie believes that librarians should make a difference in their community. She enjoys helping people, especially children, by motivating them and giving them the information that they need. She also participates and organises various projects and interac-

tions that involve the community. “I like to motivate people,” Melanie asserted. “Most of the time people are so down, and then they visit the library and I will talk to them. And at the end of the day, when they leave the library they will feel better, and you also feel better, because you did something for them.”

Melanie is supportive of LiASA’s efforts to make librarianship a statutory profession. “You need to provide the most appropriate information to the user, so you need to have the background [a qualification]. At the end of the day you need to do your bit.”

Melanie is keen to continue doing her bit for the community. After attending a Nal’ibali workshop, Melanie decided to start a book club for school children at the library. The club meets every Friday afternoon and encourages young children to read. The library is not just for children though, Melanie says, “It’s never too late to learn. You are never too old.”





Friends grapple with setting up Ntsika school library

By Kate-Lyn Moore

In a dimly lit room, a group of high school learners huddle around a young woman working at a single computer. They crane their necks to watch her, attentive and alert.

The centre of attention is Nondimoso Fenu, an IT Honours student at Rhodes University. She is also one of the founders of the Ulwasi Outreach project of the IT department, which seeks to help local libraries with their accessions systems.

Teacher-librarian Thandi Funani stands somewhat hesitantly just behind the group. He too watches, concentrating and listening closely.

"Can you see, Mr Funani?" asks Rhodes University English lecturer,

Dr Samantha Naidu, sitting to the side of the group and making careful notes.

The room is situated in Ntsika High School, which has partnered with the Friends of the Library in order to establish a functioning high school library. Until now, the possibility of this has been largely unattainable.

Despite perceptions that a school library is an unnecessary luxury, school libraries form an integral part of the school-learning curriculum. For this reason, a library period is scheduled into many a school timetable. However, when comparing the library stock of privately funded and ex-Model C Grahamstown schools to those of the public Ntsika High School, the differ-

ence is striking and a cause for concern. Working with both public and school libraries, the Friends of the Library group is aware of the problem and has made it their mission to help redress the imbalance. The project at Ntsika High School is headed up by Naidu.

Kate Birkinshaw is a member of the Friends of the Library. "These school libraries are basically a dumping ground for old books," she explained.

Setting up a school library is not easy. It is important, Naidu noted, to empower people to create and sustain such endeavours themselves. The process has been slow, long and difficult and although the project has been underway for well over ten months,

Opposite: Empty shelves at Ntsika School library.

This page: Sam Naidu at work sorting and cataloguing books.

Photos by Kirsty Makin

At Ntsika High School there is a dedicated library with very adequate shelving, but only about 500 books. Many of these are old and outdated.



there is still a great deal of work to be done.

At Ntsika High School there is a dedicated library with very adequate shelving, but only about 500 books. Many of these are old and outdated. There is no meaningful cataloguing system and no means of keeping track of the books taken out and returned. Carefully arranged, the books stand unused, a distorted monument to learning. The room is a perfect metaphor for the work that still needs to be done to eliminate the deep inequalities ingrained in the South African education system.

Naidu has been working with the school throughout the year, trying to get the library functional. Hands clasped, she explained the difficulties in working on the project. She emphasised the necessity of letting those the project seeks to aid, develop and manage it themselves in the way that they think would be best. There is absolutely no point of sweeping in and doing things for them, she noted. People must be taught how to help themselves. Only then can these projects be sustained by the community, who will be able to share skills and perhaps set up projects of their own in similar situations. However, this is not a mindset shared by all, she added.



It is unthinkable that these schools have such underdeveloped libraries since, according to Naidu, there is a significant chunk of money allocated for this very purpose. "Forty percent of schools do not even have libraries. There is a budget set aside for this. Why is that money not being used?" Naidu asked. Expressing her frustration she said, "It is like we have a huge potential reserve. The taxpayer's money is sitting there unused. It doesn't make sense. There is a great deal of short-sightedness here and who suffers? It is these kids."

TECHNOLOGICAL BARRIER

Across the room from the group are four computers, unplugged and unused. This is a problem not easily solved. According to principal of Ntsika High School, Madeleine Schoeman, there is a single individual at the District Office in charge of fixing the computers at all of the Grahamstown schools. Unfortunately, Schoeman noted, "He just does not have the time, no matter how willing he is."

The problems run deeper though: teacher-librarian Funani does not know how to use a computer. The electronic accessioning of the books, which Funani has thus far done on paper, therefore

cannot be processed through the computer.

Both Funani and the group of students who are training as library monitors are being given the necessary computer training. This training is being given by Fenu of Ulwasi Outreach, who is also currently trying to help get the library computer system working at the Hill Street Library. It is essential, explained Naidu, for the group to be able to continue the running of the library once Friends of the Library are no longer involved at the school.

Very little help is available to the group of volunteers working at the Ntsika High School library. The Tele-Collaborative Learning and Technology Education division of the DoE is only able to provide basic library training, as well as a document called 'Library Policy'. This document is designed as a kind of guideline for school libraries.

The Department of Education (DoE) merely monitors school libraries. Fortunately, however, they were able to provide a library computer system for the Ntsika High School library, which is available nationally. Further difficulties have arisen, said Naidu, since many of the volunteers have never used this computer system before. "The volunteers are all retired," she said, "Few of them are actually professional librarians by qualification. The technology is difficult for them as well. I am learning myself."

To solve this technological barrier, volunteers Birkinshaw and Meg Hartzenberg were given a one-on-one intensive training workshop in order to familiarise them with the system first. Only then would they be able to pass the skills on to Funani and his students.

"We are working with senior citizens, school kids and school principals. All kinds of different people are working on the same project," said Naidu.

OLD AND OUTDATED

"What year was it published?" asked Fenu, demonstrating how the book is to be inserted into the library system. Hartzenberg responds: "1978."

Painfully aware of the predominately old and outdated books that line the shelves of the current school library, Naidu plans to utilise funding from the Henderson bequest to purchase books based on a wish list to be submitted by Funani. Books in isiXhosa are absolutely essential.

"A lot of these old books won't be used at all," said Birkinshaw. Principal Schoeman gave the two volunteers permission to get rid of all the old and outdated books. Since Afrikaans is not taught at Ntsika High School, books in

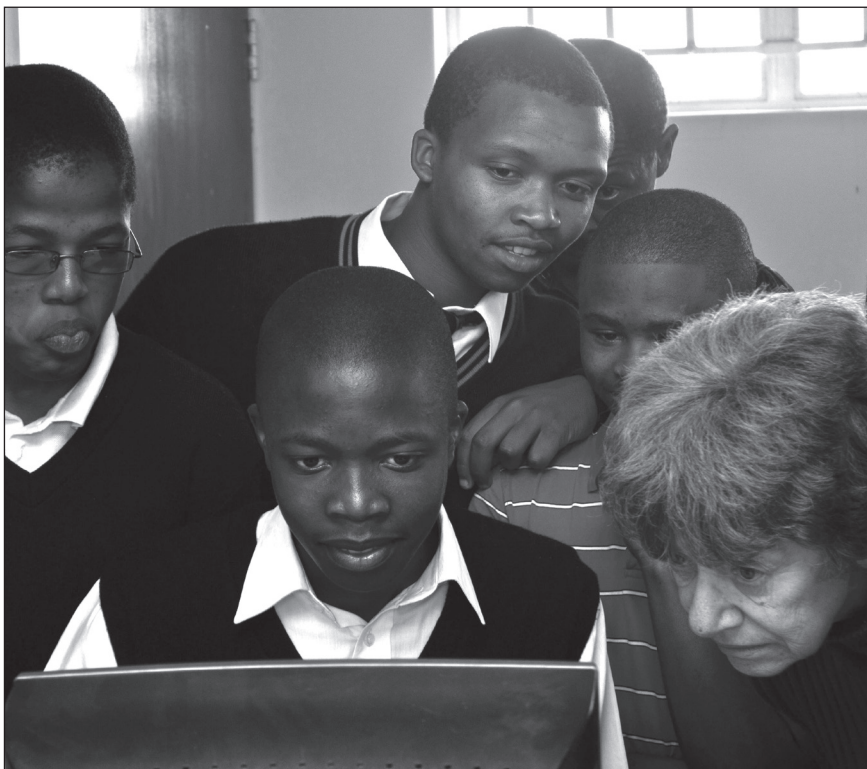
Afrikaans have already been removed and donated elsewhere.

A HUGE UNDERTAKING

The volunteers spend most days accessioning books at Ntsika High School. Working alongside Birkinshaw and Meg Hartzenberg are Betty Hartzenberg and Kay Marx. Preparing the books with covers, labels, pockets and then accessioning the books is a lengthy process and difficult work. This work has taken weeks thus far. "When we have broken the back of it, we'll show Mr Funani," said Birkinshaw. Although this hand-over is necessary, Naidu is concerned that she will over-burden Funani with this work, as he also teaches English.

The progress of the project is not swift. "The process is long and at times difficult," said Naidu, expressing her frustration, "It can be a challenge to remain motivated."

Despite the frustrations, Naidu aims to set up a reading club for parents, who will thereby be encouraged to read to their children. A similar club is envisioned for students, where they will be able to read from and discuss books. Speaking as a quintessential English lecturer, Naidu explained how such an endeavour would encourage not only literacy but also literariness.



Stalwart Friends of the Library committee member Kate Birkinshaw works with enthusiasts from Ntsika High School on a cataloguing system for the school's revamped library.

Photo by Kirsty Makin

School libraries desperately need updating

By Kate-Lyn Moore



He points to a series of books, their pages yellowing: The Hardy Boys. Teacher-librarian Mangoliso Nkwinti recommends series such as this to learners at Nathaniel Nyaluza Secondary School. It is one of a few he thinks they would enjoy and considers to be relevant to them.

However, the role that the school library plays in the education of students at Nathaniel Nyaluza Secondary School is uncertain. Interestingly, Nkwinti locks the doors as he leaves the library, meaning that its use is entirely dependent on his being there at all times. Unfortunately, this is not a possibility.

There is no specific time set aside for library use in the school. Nkwinti notes that some students use the library during break time, generally when they need to work on a specific school project. Furthermore, Nkwinti explained how he is unable to stay after school every day to keep the library open.

"Our library is non-functional. There are seriously old books. They are not helpful to learners for research. Some of them are irrelevant," Nkwinti said, pointing to a book about agriculture. "These learners do not know anything about agriculture. The books need to be something relevant to what they are learning to help them with their studies."

Consequently, Nkwinti prefers to refer learners to the Fingo Library, which is not far off. He feels more confident that there, students will be able to access material that is beneficial to their studies.

This assertion was reiterated by a group of students during a focus group on library use. Rather than using the school library, the group noted that they prefer to use the facilities at public libraries, where they are able to find some information for their studies.

However, the facilities at these libraries are not always available to the public. In Grahamstown, libraries close at 5 pm daily and are not open on Sat-

urdays, meaning that a significant proportion of the population, particularly those that work during the week, are barred entrance. With such an obstacle in place, it is significantly more problematic that school libraries are unable to perform to the required standard, particularly since those who are school-going appear to be most affected by the unusual library closing times.

Nkwinti has been working as a librarian for six years. Having received two years of training from 1982-1983, he is a part of the minority of teacher-librarians, most of whom have little or no training in librarianship.

This was not always the case. In the 1990s librarianship was considered to be a suitable profession, the training for which was therefore regarded as a worthwhile endeavor. Currently however, a salary for school librarians is not set aside in the Occupation Specific Dispensation (OSD) for teachers.

The lack of monetary reward available is mirrored by the number of training opportunities for school librarians. Only two universities in South Africa currently offer training for teacher-librarians: the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the University of Western Cape. These offer Advanced Certificates in Education, with a possible library

specialisation.

"There is not an actual librarian," said Nathaniel Nyaluza Secondary School principal, Zak Tayla. "It is an extra-curricular activity taken on by a teacher." Consequently, the library at Nathaniel Nyaluza Secondary School doubles as a classroom for grade 12 English teacher Nkwinti, and as the school library. This is the case for a great number of Grahamstown schools, Mary Waters being another example.

"The library is functional in some sense. We have got the structure and we have got the material," Tayla said. "It is not necessarily up to date. We have to focus on other projects as well," he continued, going on to explain how the school is focusing its energy in preparing for its 75 year celebration. "The library will be the next challenge."

Equal Education, an activist organisation headquartered in Cape Town, is spearheading a campaign, "1 school, 1 library, 1 librarian" to ensure that every school in South Africa is equipped with a fully functioning library. This means that libraries should be stocked with a minimum of three books per learner, as well as other visual and digital forms of media. Importantly, libraries should not be a mere storage unit for books, they should be a space where students are able to study, or to read for enjoyment.

This campaign also asserts the need for qualified library administrators, with the equivalent of one year of university training, as well as the need for fully qualified librarians with a degree in Library and Information Science.

However, without monetary incentive schools as well as teacher-librarians have no motivation to push for the official position of school librarian to be established as a full-time and fully paid position.

When faced with a multitude of issues, the library is not the top priority at many schools. Tayla noted that, "Other schools do good without libraries. We're lucky to have one."

Whose time is it anyway?

By Brendan Ward

Last year, the Makana Municipality began a process to alter the closing time for all of Grahamstown's public libraries. The libraries had requested that they close at 5pm during winter, as the later closing hours meant that librarians were leaving work in the dark. Safety concerns for both library patrons and employees were raised.

The process included a period where members of the public were invited to comment on whether or not they approved of the proposed changes. The results of this process weren't made public, but the changes to the library closing times were approved, and libraries in Grahamstown have continued to close at 5pm ever since, regardless of the season.

However, closing times may be presenting problems for some people. Those who work until 5pm, as well as learners at schools that have sport or other extra-mural activities in the afternoon, are not able to use the libraries any more. This is further complicated by the fact that all libraries except the Hill Street Library are closed on Saturdays.

Alongside Friends of the Library, a group of us conducted a survey of

48 residents from all across Grahamstown, ranging from high school pupils to pensioners. This was in order to get a sense of how people felt about the issues of closing times and access to libraries. The results show some interesting trends.

The new closing times have not had a significant effect on the majority of the people sampled. However, the number of people who were adversely affected was actually quite high: 21 of our respondents, close to 44% of the total, said that they could not use the libraries conveniently. Those unaffected included retired people as well as many who finish work early, or can reach a library during their lunch break. More concerning is the fact that just under 80% of the people polled did not know anything about the public deliberation process that had taken place around the changes.

While the library closing times may not have been a concern for the majority of those polled, the lack of accessible libraries in the township was a serious concern. 64% of our respondents said that they would use a library if it was open on a Saturday, and some from Hill Street Library expressed concern for

those who belong to the other libraries.

A better sign, however, is library service. The overwhelming majority of the respondents reported that libraries across Grahamstown supply excellent service. Reservations over the range and quality of the books explain some of the negative feedback from the small percentage who had complaints. Many of the complains related to books being out of date, and a desire, particularly among some of the younger respondents, for more recent fiction books. On the other hand, many respondents praised the quality of the library staff.

It is clear that the change in closing times has affected quite a large proportion of library users, based on our surveys. The low awareness around the process of when they were changed is disappointing, but it does show that further conversations around library closing times might be needed, as a revision of the change would benefit many people, especially students and people who work long hours. Grahamstown is fortunate to have such a large number of libraries, and these results have stressed the popularity of library services and a desire to make the best use of them.

UNSHELVED

BY GENE AMBAUM & BILL BARNES



Books (are) on the move

By Brendan Ward

With nearly all of South Africa's population either owning or at least having access to a cellphone, it is arguably the country's golden technology. It puts the book to shame. Prices for individual books put them out of reach for a majority of the country's children and teens, and many schools do not even have enough textbooks, never mind a library for leisure books. All the while, teens have access to sms and instant messaging services like MXit.

This may seem like an obstacle to reading. Certainly, cellphones tend not to encourage teens to explore good writing practices, but rather put the emphasis on speed and accessibility. Yet, if viewed differently, cell phones provide an enormous opportunity for a majority of South Africans, the segment of the population that bookstores do not cater for. The FunDza Literacy Trust is making the most of this through a creative solution: using cellphones to distribute mo-books.

A mo-book is a seven-chapter book that is accessible using a cellphone with connection to the internet, with one chapter released daily for a week. MXit users can subscribe to FunDza, joining over 150 000 registered users, and receive the chapter as it comes out. "It's a library on your phone which you can take wherever you go," said Dorothy Dyer, FunDza's literacy specialist. The form was pioneered by Yoza.mobi, who began distributing books in mobile form. FunDza has adapted the idea to complement their distribution of actual books to schools.

Dyer used to teach English at LEAP Science and Maths School, which caters for students from underprivileged backgrounds. She wanted to share her love of reading with her students. "The kids I taught didn't come from a reading culture. They didn't see reading as relevant to their lives. They wanted a new approach to books, one that was relevant. These students wanted to see their stories reflected in books."

However, even if teens from a township background could have access to books, the stories they'd find would not necessarily be relevant. "There isn't really popular literature aimed at this demographic," said FunDza trustee Mignon Hardie. "South Africa has some fantastic writers, but they're put into the textbook or Exclusive Books market, serving a small, middle class market." FunDza's mobi books focus specifically on the issues and life stories of South African teens in township settings.

The demand for human-interest dramas and autobiographies is huge. "It helps them reflect on their own lives and feel less alone," said Hardie. This is not only from reading stories similar to their own. The readers can comment on the stories that they read, engaging with each other and with the producers of content. "This is the most important thing. We can see people coming back to read every day," said Dyer. Readers can also send in their own stories, which can be published in a special section of the mobi site called "FunDza Fanz".

This interaction has shown the extraordinary connection fans have with what they read. The story *Nobody*



Will Ever Kill Me, the autobiography of 18-year-old Mbu Maloni was incredibly popular, and evoked many comments from teens who were inspired by the story of his journey from the streets of Masizakhe and Masiphumelele townships to finishing his Matric and becoming a published author. Many readers responded with their own feelings of hopelessness and their hopes to rise, as Maloni did. Another much-discussed fictional story was narrated by a girl who discovers she is lesbian. Many of the readers found themselves viewing issues around sexuality, corrective rape and homophobia in a completely new light. "Part of the power of reading is the way it makes you connect with people," said Dyer. "It forces people to empathise with someone they normally would not."

Do teenagers not want to read? FunDza seems to prove that they do, by making reading accessible to the average South African teenager in a revolutionary way. Teens certainly want to read, and write, and comment. What is important is filling the gap in content. Hardie firmly believes increasing local content about the lives of these teenagers is what is most important. "Any technological initiative, be it with Kindle, iPad, or cellphones, without immediate, relevant content is just like a library of books not being read."

Duna library users stranded on the information superhighway

By Zintle Ngubeni

Eight computers installed at Duna Library in Joza over two years ago have still not been plugged in. But, there is some hope that this might change.

The computers were brought to the library by the Cacadu District Municipality in 2010 with the aim of equipping library users with access to the internet and other information technology services.

The connectivity problem began in 2010 when Telkom installed high speed ADSL lines in Joza, only for the cables to be stolen. A Cacadu District Municipality division called Connect with Cacadu then delivered the computers, but the second batch of ADSL cables were also stolen.

Telkom refused to install a third set of ADSL lines.

This left the Duna Public Library at an impasse, with dormant computers

lying unplugged and unused. "There are no programs on the computers and no one has access to the internet," said librarian Sizwe Lutshaba, motioning towards the black screens.

A sign on each of the screens reads: "Do not sit here. This is still being fixed."

"People keep asking us what the situation is with the computers," said Lutshaba.

Although little progress had been made in the past two years, local information technology experts have pointed to alternatives to ADSL.

"Getting wireless internet would require some cabling and because the lines were stolen, that would be null and void," said Ryno Schoeman of Rhodes University's IT division.

"They could maybe get routers from MTN or Vodacom," continued Schoeman.

"They would need wireless adapters

for all the PC's and this option would be SIM card-operated."

Another possibility which exists is to install satellite broadband. In that instance, a satellite dish would be installed at the Duna library and would pick up a signal, connecting the eight desktop computers to the internet.

"Depending on the infrastructure, it could take a few weeks to set up," said Kevin Koekemoer, a sales representative at IT Solutions.

Costs for the venture would vary, depending on the chosen pricing plan.

Connect with Cacadu have, in light of recent developments, emerged as a key party in resolving the impasse. After being presented with the information, the Cacadu District Municipality has indicated that they could possibly foot the bill through some of their funding channels.

UNSHELVED

BY GENE AMBAUM & BILL BARNES





Photo by Phillip Wilson

Bringing reading to the people

By David Williams

The Makana Municipality has launched a mobile library service which aims to reach the far-flung communities of the Grahamstown district. "It was decided that in order for the people who live on farms to get to a library service, that a mobile library must be established" said Zodwa Nikelo, head of the mobile library.

"It took a lot of time to do research in terms of what kind of people are to be served, literacy levels, language, where the mobile library would be stationed and what kind of vehicle must be purchased" said Nikelo.

The project was officially launched at the Extension 9 hall on 18 September, where the MEC for Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture, Xoliswa Tom delivered the keynote address, and there were also activities such as reading and poetry.

The Makana Municipality aims to implement two more mobile libraries in the future to accommodate the outlying areas. "As this is a new project, we want to start small, take baby steps and grow," said Nikelo. The mobile library will operate fully once a driver has been appointed.

My 6128 favourite books

By Joe Queenan
The Wall Street Journal

I started borrowing books from a roving Quaker City bookmobile when I was 7 years old. Things quickly got out of hand. Before I knew it I was borrowing every book about the Romans, every book about the Apaches, every book about the spindly third-string quarterback who comes off the bench in the fourth quarter to bail out his team. I had no way of knowing it at the time, but what started out as a harmless juvenile pastime soon turned into a lifelong personality disorder.

Fifty-five years later, with at least 6,128 books under my belt, I still organize my daily life—such as it is—around reading. As a result, decades go by without my windows getting washed.

My reading habits sometimes get a bit loopy. I often read dozens of books simultaneously. I start a book in 1978 and finish it 34 years later, without enjoying a single minute of the enterprise. I absolutely refuse to read books that critics describe as "luminous" or "incandescent." I never read books in which the hero went to private school or roots for the New York Yankees. I once spent a year reading nothing but short books. I spent another year vowing to read nothing but books I picked off the library shelves with my eyes closed. The results were not pretty.

I even tried to spend an entire year reading books I had always suspected I would hate: "Middlemarch," "Look Homeward, Angel," "Babbitt." Luckily, that project ran out of gas quickly, if only because I already had a 14-year-old daughter when I took a crack at "Lolita."

Six thousand books is a lot of read-

ing, true, but the trash like "Hell's Belles" and "Kid Colt and the Legend of the Lost Arroyo" and even "Part-Time Harlot, Full-Time Tramp" that I devoured during my misspent teens really puff up the numbers. And in any case, it is nowhere near a record. Winston Churchill supposedly read a book every day of his life, even while he was saving Western Civilization from the Nazis. This is quite an accomplishment, because by some accounts Winston Churchill spent all of World War II completely hammered.

A case can be made that people who read a preposterous number of books are not playing with a full deck. I prefer to think of us as dissatisfied customers. If you have read 6,000 books in your lifetime, or even 600, it's probably because at some level you find "reality" a bit of a disappointment. People in the 19th century fell in love with "Ivanhoe" and "The Count of Monte Cristo" because they loathed the age they were living through. Women in our own era read "Pride and Prejudice" and "Jane Eyre" and even "The Bridges of Madison County"—a dimwit, hayseed reworking of "Madame Bovary"—because they imagine how much happier they would be if their husbands did not spend quite so much time with their drunken, illiterate golf buddies down at Myrtle Beach. A blind bigamist nobleman with a ruined castle and an insane, incinerated first wife beats those losers any day of the week. Blind, two-timing noblemen never wear belted shorts.

Similarly, finding oneself at the epicenter of a vast, global conspiracy involving both the Knights Templar and the Vatican would be a huge improvement over slaving away at the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the rest of your life or being married to someone who is drowning in dunning notices from Williams-Sonoma. No matter what they may tell themselves, book lovers do not read primarily to obtain information or to while away the time. They read to escape to a more exciting, more rewarding world. A world where they do not hate their jobs, their spouses, their governments, their lives. A world where women do not constantly say things like "Have a good one!" and "Sounds like a plan!" A world where men do not wear belted shorts. Certainly not the Knights Templar.

**I once spent a year
reading nothing but short
books. I spent another
year vowing to read
nothing but books.
I picked off the library
shelves with my eyes
closed. The results were
not pretty.**



I read books—mostly fiction—for at least two hours a day, but I also spend two hours a day reading newspapers and magazines, gathering material for my work, which consists of ridiculing idiots or, when they are not available, morons. I read books in all the obvious places—in my house and office, on trains and buses and planes—but I've also read them at plays and concerts and prizefights, and not just during the intermissions. I've read books while waiting for friends to get sprung from the drunk tank, while waiting for people to emerge from comas, while waiting for the Iceman to cometh.

In my 20s, when I worked the graveyard shift loading trucks in a charm-free Philadelphia suburb, I would read during my lunch breaks, a practice that was dimly viewed by the Teamsters I worked with. Just to be on the safe side, I never read existentialists, poetry or books like "Lettres de Madame de Sévigné" in their presence, as they would have cut me to ribbons.

During antiwar protests back in the Days of Rage, I would read officially sanctioned, counterculturally appropriate materials like "Siddhartha" and "Steppenwolf" to take my mind off Pete Seeger's maddening banjo playing. I once read "Tortilla Flat" from cover to

cover during a nine-hour Jerry Garcia guitar solo on "Truckin'" at Philadelphia's Spectrum; by the time he'd wrapped things up, I could have read "As I Lay Dying." I was, in fact, lying there dying.

I've never squandered an opportunity to read. There are only 24 hours in the day, seven of which are spent sleeping, and in my view at least four of the remaining 17 must be devoted to reading. A friend once told me that the real message Bram Stoker sought to convey in "Dracula" is that a human being needs to live hundreds and hundreds of years to get all his reading done; that Count Dracula, basically nothing more than a misunderstood bookworm, was draining blood from the necks of 10,000 hapless virgins not because he was the apotheosis of pure evil but because it was the only way he could live long enough to polish off his extensive reading list. But I have no way of knowing if this is true, as I have not yet found time to read "Dracula."

I dread that awkward moment when a friend hands you the book that changed his or her life, and it is a book that you have despised since you were 11 years old. Yes, "Atlas Shrugged." Or worse, "The Fountainhead." No, actually, let's stick with "Atlas Shrugged." People fixated on a particular book cannot get it through their heads that, no matter how much this book might mean to them, it is impossible to make someone else enjoy "A Fan's Notes" or "The Little Prince" or "Dune," much less "One Thousand and One Places You Must Visit Before You Meet the Six People You Would Least Expect to Run Into in Heaven." Not unless you get the Stasi involved.

Close friends rarely lend me books, because they know I will not read them anytime soon. I have my own reading schedule—I hope to get through another 2,137 books before I die—and so far it has not included time for "The Audacity of Hope" or "The Whore of Akron," much less "Father John: Navajo Healer." I hate having books rammed down my throat, which may explain why I never liked school.

It's also a way of foisting an unsolicited values system on another person. If you hand someone whose mother's maiden name was McNulty a book like

"Angela's Ashes," what you're really saying is "You're Irish; kiss me." I reject out of hand the obligation to read a book simply because I share some vague ethnic heritage with the author.

Writers speak to us because they speak to us, not because of some farcical ethnic telepathy. Joseph Goebbels and Albert Einstein were both Germans; does that mean they should equally enjoy "Mein Kampf"? Perhaps this is not the example I was looking for. Here's a better one: One of my closest friends is a Mexican-American photographer who grew up in a small town outside Fresno, Calif., and who now lives in Los Angeles. His favorite book is "Dubliners."

This is how I feel about my favorite writers. If you are an old man thinking of taking early retirement, read "King Lear" first. Take lots of notes, especially when the gratuitous blinding of senior citizens starts in. If you're a middle-aged man thinking of marrying a younger woman, consult Molière beforehand. If you're a young man and you think that love will last forever, you might want to take a gander at "Wuthering Heights" before putting your John Hancock on that generous pre-nup.

Until recently, I wasn't aware how completely books dominate my physical existence. Only when I started cataloging my possessions did I realize that there are books in every room in my house, 1,340 in all. My obliviousness to this fact has an obvious explanation: I am of Irish descent, and to the Irish, books are as natural and inevitable a feature of the landscape as sand is to Turegs or sand traps are to the frat boys at

Myrtle Beach. You know, the guys with the belted shorts. When the English stormed the Emerald Isle in the 17th century, they took everything that was worth taking and burned everything else. Thereafter, the Irish had no land, no money, no future. That left them with words, and words became books, and books, ingeniously coupled with music and alcohol, enabled the Irish to transcend reality.

This was my experience as a child. I grew up in a Brand X neighborhood with parents who had trouble managing money because they never had any, and lots of times my three sisters and I had no food, no heat, no television. But we always had books. And books put an end to our misfortune. Because to the poor, books are not diversions. Book are siege weapons.

I wish I still had the actual copies of the books that saved my life—"Kidnapped," "The Three Musketeers," "The Iliad for Precocious Tykes"—but they vanished over the years. Because so many of these treasures from my childhood have disappeared, I have made a point of hanging on to every book I have bought and loved since the age of 21.

Books as physical objects matter to me, because they evoke the past. A Métro ticket falls out of a book I bought 40 years ago, and I am transported back to the Rue Saint-Jacques on Sept. 12, 1972, where I am waiting for someone named Annie LeCombe. A telephone message from a friend who died too young falls out of a book, and I find myself back in the Chateau Marmont on a balmy September day in 1995. A note I scribbled

to myself in "Homage to Catalonia" in 1973 when I was in Granada reminds me to learn Spanish, which I have not yet done, and to go back to Granada.

None of this will work with a Kindle. People who need to possess the physical copy of a book, not merely an electronic version, believe that the objects themselves are sacred. Some people may find this attitude baffling, arguing that books are merely objects that take up space. This is true, but so are Prague and your kids and the Sistine Chapel. Think it through, bozos.

The world is changing, but I am not changing with it. There is no e-reader or Kindle in my future. My philosophy is simple: Certain things are perfect the way they are. The sky, the Pacific Ocean, procreation and the Goldberg Variations all fit this bill, and so do books. Books are sublimely visceral, emotionally evocative objects that constitute a perfect delivery system.

Electronic books are ideal for people who value the information contained in them, or who have vision problems, or who have clutter issues, or who don't want other people to see that they are reading books about parallel universes where nine-eyed sea serpents and blind marsupials join forces with deaf Valkyries to rescue high-strung albino virgins from the clutches of hermaphrodite centaurs, but they are useless for people engaged in an intense, lifelong love affair with books. Books that we can touch; books that we can smell; books that we can depend on. Books that make us believe, for however short a time, that we shall all live happily ever after.

UNSHELVED

BY GENE AMBAUM & BILL BARNES

