

More than Books

How communitywide reading got its start

In 1988, when Librarian Nancy Pearl was the director of Seattle Public Library's Washington Center for the Book, she wondered, "What would happen if everyone in Seattle read and talked about the same book?" and developed a program to answer her question.

Nancy Pearl's "If All of Seattle Read the Same Book" endeavor has been recreated thousands of times nationwide, by communities of all shapes and sizes. Whether it has been called a citywide book club, a statewide reading campaign, or a "One Book, One City" program, the result is people coming together through the reading and discussion of a common book.

The "One Book, One City" program debuted in Freeport in 2011, with the memoir, "Playing with the Enemy" by Gary Moore. That same year, Nancy Pearl was named Librarian of the Year by "Library Journal," the premier trade journal for library professionals.

Nancy retired from Seattle Public Library in 2004. Since then she has become even more visible as an advocate for reading. Libraries nationwide enlist her assistance as a consultant and speaker. She is a frequent commentator on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition," and the author of several books, including "Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every Mood, Moment, and Reason." Her official website is www.nancypearl.com.

I appreciate Nancy's egalitarian approach to literature. When she writes or talks about "good books," she quickly explains, "By good, I don't mean any literary canon but just books that you might enjoy. A good book is a book someone likes, and a bad book is one they don't like."

Nancy acknowledges that librarians used to be gatekeepers, as they were in my youth, but libraries have evolved into more democratic institutions. However, she continues, "I do believe that the more well-written books you read, the less tolerance you are going to have for bad writing, but the hardest thing to define is a well-written book."

"I think the more you read, the better person you become, because you can see how other people respond, the way they think, and the way they behave in various circumstances," she maintains.

Nancy believes the book will never disappear as a piece of narrative fiction or nonfiction, but that its format, i.e., the way it is delivered, is changing. Although she still prefers the experience of reading a physical book, she owns both a Kindle and an iPad.

Right Here in Freeport

The "One Community, One Freeport" initiative of 2011 was a great success. I'll bet a lot of readers of this column still own and treasure their copies of "Playing with the Enemy." The book lent itself to some exciting book discussions and a range of special programs, including ones from Negro Leagues Baseball Legend Art "Superman" Pennington and U-505 Submarine Expert Keith Gill.

Over 1,000 copies of "I Came A Stranger: Growing Up at Hull House" by Hilda Satt Polachek, were given away, courtesy of the Library Foundation, for the 2013 "One Book, One Freeport" program that included the Smithsonian exhibit, "Journey Stories."

The 2013 kick-off presentation by Clark Kidder, who talked about his grandmother's experience as one of the Orphan Train children, drew a standing ovation from a standing-room only crowd. So many people were turned away from his original talk that he was scheduled for an encore presentation the following week.

Free Book Day

Pick up a free copy of the 2015 "One Book, One Freeport" selection, "Rocket Boys" by Homer Hickam, between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., at the library, on either Saturday, February 21 or Saturday, February 28. The February book giveaway will be followed in March and April by a rich variety of programs suggested by the historical context of the book. It is the heart-felt story of a coal miner's son who was inspired by the 1957 launch of Sputnik and grew up to become a NASA engineer.

More information about "One Book" programs and events will be forthcoming. I'd like to suggest that, in the meantime, you take advantage of the Lindo Theatre's Classic Film Series, which is featuring films about the Cold War.

Lindo's Classic Film Series

The series opened with January 7 with "The Manchurian Candidate." Really, really creepy! Next up, on February 4, is the 1964 movie, "Fail Safe." It and the March 4 selection, "Dr. Strangelove," have the makings of a lively comparison/contrast discussion about which is the better – and scariest - film about nuclear war.

The April 1 film, "October Sky," is based on "Rocket Boys." The title is an anagram of "Rocket Boys." If you've read the book before you see the movie, you'll have fun noting the differences between them.

The films are on at 1 p.m. and again at 7 p.m. There's a series bonus on April 29, a showing of "The Russians are Coming, The Russians are Coming." To my mind, however, the real bonus is the introduction before each movie and the discussion following it, led by Dr. Ed Finch, former executive director of the Stephenson County Museum, and Alan Wenzel, retired speech communication instructor at Highland Community College.