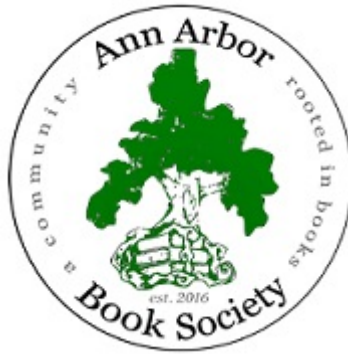


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## October Newsletter

[a2books.org](http://a2books.org)

### October Book Event Highlights

**Wednesday, October 4th at 7 pm:** NPR librarian [Nancy Pearl](#), author of the novel *George & Lizzie*, appears at Nicola's Books, 2513 Jackson Rd.

**Thursday, October 5th at 5 pm:** [UM's 2017 Wege Lecture with Bill McKibben](#), Hill Auditorium, 825 N. University

**Friday, October 6th at 7 pm:** [NoViolet Bulawayo](#), author of the novel *We Need New Names* (shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize), with Barbara Mhangami – Ruwende, Nicola's Books, 2513 Jackson Rd.

**Friday, October 6th through Sunday, October 8th:** [Michigan Hemingway Society Fall Conference](#), Petosky.

**Sunday, October 8th at 7 pm:** Pulitzer Prize-winning author [Jeffrey Eugenides](#) comes to Ann Arbor in support of his first short story collection, *Fresh Complaint*, sponsored by Literati Bookstore, Rogel Ballroom, 530 S. State St.

**Tuesday, October 17th at 7:30 pm:** CNN's [Van Jones](#) in conversation with WUOM's Zoe Clark on his book *Beyond the Messy Truth*, sponsored by Nicola's Books, Rogel Ballroom, 530 S. State St.

**Thursday, October 19th at 7 pm:** [Aunt Agatha's 25th Anniversary Celebration](#) at the Downtown branch of AADL, 343 S. Fifth Ave.

**Friday, October 20th at 5:30 pm:** [Charles M. Blow](#), *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist and author of the award-winning memoir *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, Rackham Auditorium, 915 E. Washington.

**Tuesday, October 24th at 7:30 pm:** [Trivia night fundraiser event](#) for Ann Arbor Book Society: Could You Have Passed the Borders Test? Aut Bar, 315 Braun Ct.

**Tuesday, October 24th at 7:30 pm:** [Hillary Clinton](#) promotes her new book, *What Happened*, at Hill Auditorium, 825 N. University.

**Saturday, October 28th from 10 am to 10 pm:** [Spooky Free Comic Book Day](#) at Vault of Midnight, 219 S. Main St.

**For more book-related events in October and beyond, visit our [events calendar](#).**

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### Event Photo Highlight



Motte & Bailey's owner Gene Alloway (front left) and his reading group History of Books and Printing, which has been meeting continuously since 2001. Join them the first Wednesday of every month at 7:30 pm.

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## Bookstore Road Trip!



### The Book Beat: Oak Park

The Book Beat sits on the corner of a strip mall off of I-696 amidst a sea of concrete. That is the first thing you notice. The second is the cracked concrete planter filled with flowers. The third is the artist trees lining the shop windows. We don't have a word for that mythic edge, where concrete ends and trees begin, but we know there is something there.

The Book Beat is a place you can spend hours. Their collection spans from books about art to artist books, sci-fi to punk rock, folklore to politics. The walls are filled with masks and oddities. It is a locus of literature, art, and music, and you can feel it. At its foundation is the corner labeled in neon letters: KIDS.

I sit down with co-owners Colleen Kammer and Cary Loren on a Sunday evening, the sun still filtering through the windows and the booksellers bustling to close up shop. When I ask about their collection, they say it is simple. They sell what they like and what their readers like.

"The book as an object is an authentic thing. It is something you can hand to someone, something you can give," Cary says.

He hands me the compiled *Destroy All Monsters* zines from 1976-1979, when the band was active in Ann Arbor, reprinted in a garage somewhere in Detroit. The pages are pulpy. The dystopian images and texts imprint on me like an Eisenstein montage.

We start talking about the future of independent bookstores, Amazon, mass markets, electronic books, the nature of freedom, and I begin on a tangent, easily primed by dystopian imaginings. But Colleen has a way of centering the conversation on distilled pieces of wisdom. “It is our choices that define where we live, what our communities look like.”

“I’m a little person, in a little bookstore, doing little things to move things forward. That is all I can do,” she adds.

When author Kwame Alexander was scheduled to read in Detroit, she called up the parents. Just a week prior to the event he had been awarded the Newberry Medal for his novel, *The Crossover*. One father took his son out of school for the event.

Colleen hands me a book she advocates to have put in school libraries. It is titled *Random Kindness & Senseless Acts of Beauty* and is illustrated by Mayumi Oda, an anti-nuclear activist from Japan. She says the illustrations are a bit subversive, so several libraries declined, but that it’s an important work. I thumb the pages. There are scenes of violence: machine guns, tanks, fire, a dead tree, and two characters, frogs, who have been made victims. But there are also scenes of hope. *The steps we take now decide what kind of earth that will be. In every moment we live we have the choice to fight the fight or make delight. We have power. It’s a circle. So start the dance.* I carefully set the book on my lap and come to suspect that the little things Colleen has done to connect authors, readers, parents, children, schools, and libraries are an intricate web that extends far beyond the highways of metropolitan Detroit.

After the store closes, Colleen and I walk through the section labeled KIDS, but where we are both at home. She opens the tomes of pop-up artist Robert Sabuda. We flip through Coretta Scott King Award winners, past and present. She picks up a copy of *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls*, and says, leafing through the pages, “Imagine if you were a little girl and this was your bedtime story.” An illustration of Frida Kahlo catches my eye, a woman I didn’t *know* of until I was twenty, and I do imagine. I imagine the stories of women I still don’t know of.

There was one only thing Colleen and Cary asked me to write down in the time that I was there, one thing that should be part of the record, the wise words of fellow bibliophile, customer, and friend, Toby Holtzman, who had recently passed. *Read to your children and grandchildren. Take them to libraries and bookstores!*

The Book Beat just celebrated 35 years. When I asked Colleen what her recipe for success was she noted *details*: the names of people, the books they read. Then she made a gesture toward the rows of shelves with an open palm. “This is what we believe in.”



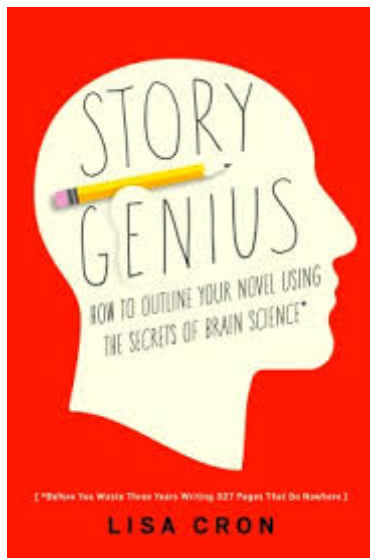
The Book Beat is located in the Lincoln Shopping Center at 26010 Greenfield Rd. in Oak Park. For more information, visit their website [thebookbeat.com](http://thebookbeat.com). But it would be even better if you made a trip to see for yourself what has kept them going strong for 35 years!



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**On the Shelf**

**Little Free Library**



*Story Genius: How to Use Brain Science to Go Beyond Outlining and Write a Riveting Novel*  
by Lisa Cron  
Ten Speed Press, 2016

Story Coach Lisa Cron has updated her writing handbook, *Wired for Story* (Ten Speed Press, 2012) with this new edition that builds upon and expands her earlier book. Her premise is that the human brain craves story—it is as necessary as air and water. I, for one, agree.

She also posits that what we crave is not beautiful language, or skillfully executed techniques (those are bonuses) but the deeply held misbeliefs of characters and the chain of cause and effect linked by character motivation because of those misbeliefs. Not surprisingly, a great deal of background detection to uncover those misbeliefs must happen before the writer begins page one. I call this going backward to the beginning.

The writer is sent packing into a character's childhood because that is where most of the misbeliefs



A few years ago I began spotting these adorable little libraries popping up all over Ann Arbor. They came in all sorts of sizes and were carefully designed and painted to match the unique personalities of their stewards. I've always been an avid reader so I started perusing the shelves of these neighborhood libraries whenever I was looking for a good read, and I was rarely disappointed. Finding a new Little Free Library or one that I have never visited before became something of a hobby for me on the weekends, or when I was running around town doing errands. I always carry a couple of books in the trunk of my car so I adhere to the “take a book, leave a book” philosophy. I've been grateful to find an eclectic array of titles that have kept me awake well into the late hours of the evening.

There have been many times throughout my life when books saved me. They provided hope, escapism and the knowledge to make sense of the chaos swirling around me. A couple of months ago my husband, our 12-year old son,

about ourselves are rooted. As the character matures this misbelief is reinforced as truth. That is, the misbelief, in some way, serves the character well and explains the workings of the world. Finally, a flawed, and very real, character can enter upon page one. From this point on, it is that character's worldview that will influence the plot and will lead to the heart of the story—the shattering of that deeply-held worldview and replacement of it by another.

*Story Genius* is a hard taskmaster, but it's a writer's guide I know I'll return to time and again. It should be on every writer's bookshelf.

--Ann Arborite Shutta Crum's latest novel is *William and the Witch's Riddle* (Alfred A. Knopf/Random House). Her next book, *Mouseling's Words* (Clarion/HMH), is due out December 2017.

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and I moved into a new house on the southeast side of Ann Arbor. One of the first things I noticed was the absence of a Little Library on our street or in the immediate area so I ordered one, painted it and filled it with titles that have made an impact on my life in the hopes that they will do the same for someone else. It's been a great way to meet all of our new neighbors and build a sense of community.

--Sekai K. Ward is a therapist in private practice with Lotus Consulting. She lives with her husband and their son in Ann Arbor. When she's not driving around town in search of Little Free Libraries, Sekai can be found reading on her living room couch.

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## Changing Hands



*Meagen Kucaj*  
*New General Manager at Nicola's Books*

Congratulations to Linda Caine, who recently retired from her position as general manager of Nicola's Books.

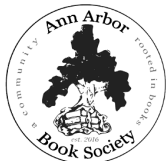
As a true book lover, Linda will remain on the staff.

A FUNDRAISING EVENT FOR  
THE ANN ARBOR BOOK SOCIETY

# TRIVIA NIGHT

Oct 24

Could You  
Have  
Passed



the  
Borders  
Test



Tuesday, October 24th at 7:30 pm  
AUT BAR | 315 BRAUN COURT

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DONATION AT THE DOOR**

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## Save the Date!

November 4th:

[David Sedaris at the Detroit Opera  
House](#)

November 5th:

[Fifth Avenue Press Book Release  
Reception](#)

December 2nd and 3rd:

[Friends of AADL Book Shop Holiday  
Sale](#)

December 13th:

[Joe Biden at the Michigan Theater](#)

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## In the News

The [2017 National Book Award](#)

Current Nicola's Books staff member and longtime Ann Arbor bookseller Meagen Kucaj has been named as the new general manager and moved into this role in early September. Meagen has been working in the Ann Arbor book scene since 1995. She came to Ann Arbor to work for Borders and was a manager at their downtown and Arborland locations. After leaving Borders she worked at Shaman Drum Bookshop, as a publicity and events manager, until the store closed in 2009. Shaman Drum was a magical and life-changing experience that gave Meagen a deep love for independent bookstores. She met her husband at Shaman Drum, becoming one of five co-worker couples to marry there.

Her son became the fifth "book baby" from these unions, which she thinks is an incredibly cool legacy for the renowned store. She started working at Nicola's Books a few years ago and is very excited to take the helm of the beloved independent bookshop. After devoting her entire career to the book industry, she is thrilled to be working with such an incredible staff of dedicated book lovers in Ann Arbor.

**Be sure to welcome Meagen to her new position on your next trip to Nicola's Books!**



[longlist](#) has been announced! The finalists will be announced on October 4th.

The [2017 Man Booker Prize shortlist](#) was announced September 13th. The winner will be announced October 17th.

The National Book Foundation has announced its [2017 5 Under 35 Honorees](#).

## Snapshot of the Past

# BOOKS

The downtown bus was so crowded that those of us standing in the aisle were practically holding hands on the overhead railing. Glancing at the hand closest to mine, I saw a ring with — could it be? — two female symbols entwined. I looked more closely, carefully shielding my excitement. Yep, no doubt about it, I was standing next to, nearly leaning against, a lesbian. At 15, I knew I was gay and had a girlfriend my own age, but had never met an adult lesbian. While I struggled to come up with something to say, she pulled the exit cord and got off the bus. Being an avid reader of mystery novels, I knew just what to do. I casually followed her off the bus and then trailed her at a half-block's distance. Lucky for me, she wasn't going to the grocery store or to the Laundromat but rather to a bookstore. And not just any bookstore — a women's bookstore with a sizable lesbian literature collection. I had never even imagined such a place.

That day marked not only my entry into the lesbian community but also my first encounter with an independent specialty bookstore. In ensuing years, I was to have many more such joyous encounters with small bookstores, discovering along the way the political and academic ideas that have since shaped my life. These days, when I'm looking for substance or spiritual sustenance, I go to Common Language Bookstore. For offbeat periodicals, I peruse the extravagant selection at Little Professor. And, when a long hard day of seemingly fruitless activism leaves me with a specific craving for a book that is absorbing but not too taxing, entertaining but not completely brainless, and above all affordable — I head for Aunt Agatha's to pick up a mystery novel.

Upon entering the store, I am greeted by the always affable Jamie Agnew who, along with his partner Robin Agnew, owns and operates the store. Rounding out the Aunt Agatha's crew are Assistant Managers Margaret (age 4) and Robert (age 1.5). They all swear they're not related to Spinoza; Robert is most adamant on this point and I, for one, believe him. Unshelved books and garage-sale furnishings (the big Batman clock is my personal fave) combine to give the store a literary yet playful atmosphere, which is entirely appropriate to its offerings.

Established in 1991, Aunt Agatha's stocks a wide selection of new and used mysteries as well as a smaller collection of "true crime" books. Patterned after "Uncle Edgar's" in Minnesota, it's one of a new breed of bookstores devoted to the mysterious.

If you're not a mystery fan, you may be thinking, "Wide selection of mysteries? A mystery is a




PHOTO: JUNE REED

## Aunt Agatha's: For the Love of Mystery

By Patrice Mauer

mystery, right?" Well, yes and no. It's true that all mysteries include some sort of puzzle which the protagonist tries to solve, but the variations on that basic theme are virtually endless. So, at Aunt Agatha's, "hard-boiled" detectives share shelf space with quirky lesbian activists, high-powered attorneys, out-of-work dancers, cartoon characters, and every variety of nosy neighbor that ever peeked through a window. The puzzles themselves generally revolve around murder or mayhem, but may also involve mundane or arcane subject matter concerning anything from art to zoology. I recently read a mystery in which each of the main characters was an economist from a different school of thought and in which each character acted as his or her theory would predict. Some books are plot-driven potboilers in which a mystery is simply set up and solved while others are nuanced novels in which complex social, political, or emotional issues are explored along with the more tangible mystery which drives the story.

The genre novel, like the sonnet or the three-act musical comedy, is a sort of template. The format provides the frame within which the artist works. Within the parameters of the genre — in our case, the mystery and its resolution or lack thereof — anything goes. This has its advantages and its disadvantages. For example, recent mysteries revolving around racist violence, domestic assault, and police brutality have brought progressive analyses of the issues involved in such crimes to readers who would not pick up more explicitly "political" books. On the other hand, the "blank slate" provided by the genre has all too often been used to inscribe racist and sexist ideologies.

This is, of course, true of novels in general.

JANUARY 1995—AGENDA—11

However, there is a sort of built-in "law and order" orientation within the mystery genre and especially within the sub-genre in which the solver of the mystery is a police officer or other government agent. This has been offset in recent years by an upsurge of mystery writing by women, people of color, and others less invested in maintaining the status quo. In these novels, the government and its agents aren't portrayed quite so glowingly. Even so, mystery novels, like conspiracy theories, do tend to emphasize individual evil at the expense of exposing institutional forces. Still, much of the new writing is refreshingly progressive — often even more so than "serious" literature dealing with similar themes.

"True crime" is also a genre of sorts, although not so flexible as the mystery. Here, while some readers express a healthy disrespect for authority by identifying with the criminals rather than the police, the "law and order" orientation of the authors is almost unrelenting. More disturbing is the genre's decidedly unhealthy emphasis on the lurid details of horrific crimes against women. While I can appreciate that the occasional female reader may gain a sense of psychological mastery of her fear of such violence, it troubles me to know that most of the readers are male and that most of them are getting a thrill by reading detailed depictions of brutality towards women. Overall, I think such books contribute to the social atmosphere which tolerates violence against women and I wish Aunt Agatha's wouldn't recycle them.

With that exception, I've been delighted by both the books and the atmosphere at Aunt Agatha's. The store exemplifies much of what is best about independent specialty bookshops. Whenever I want a book they might carry, I go there first, not only because it's a fun shop and I might save some money by buying a used copy, but also because it feels like the right thing to do. Jamie and Robin, like most proprietors of small bookstores, certainly aim to make a living (they hope to break even this year) but just as certainly don't expect to get rich. They are in it for love as well as for money, and it shows. When Jamie has set aside a book he thinks I'd like, I can tell that his pleasure in matching person to book outshines his satisfaction at making a sale. When Robin strikes up a casual conversation, it's clearly more out a natural "neighborliness" than a calculated attempt to cultivate a customer. So, I figure, better for my money to go to them than to some big corporation, the stockholders of which might, for all I know, be passing their share of the profits along to Jesse Helms.

So, if, like me, you already enjoy books you can "play along" with by trying to solve the mystery before the protagonist figures it out, or if you're bored with your usual "entertainment" reading and are looking for a change of pace, then pay a visit to Jamie and Robin at Aunt Agatha's. Strike up a conversation — you never know where it'll lead you...

Agenda Publications, January 1995. Courtesy of the [AADL's Old News Site](#). (Click on the image to read it.)

Aunt Agatha's celebrates its [25th anniversary](#) on October 19th at the Downtown branch of the Ann Arbor District Library, 343 S. Fifth St., at 7:30 pm. Congratulations Aunt Agatha's!



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