



FRIENDS OF THE PALM SPRINGS LIBRARY

BOOK CLUB



FOPSL Book Club: June 19, 2020

Book: *The Library Book*

Author: Susan Orlean

Discussion leader: Mary Marks

In June, Mary Marks led the discussion of Susan Orlean's *The Library Book* (2018) a narrative of the Los Angeles Public Library. The downtown Central Library was built in 1925 and is often referred to as "Goodhue" in honor of its architect, Bertram Goodhue. It has since been renamed the Richard Riordan Central Library Complex following the 1993 construction of the Tom Bradley Wing designed by Norman Pfeiffer. Docent led tours of the Goodhue building and Bradley wing are free <https://www.lapl.org/branches/central-library/docent-tours-central-library>, but are cancelled until further notice due to the COVID-19 virus. You may want to download a pdf of a self-guided tour at www.lapl.org/sites/default/files/media/pdf/central/guidedtour.pdf

Susan Orlean is the best-selling author of *The Orchid Thief* (1998) and a staff writer for *The New Yorker* magazine since 1992. She is known for her exhaustive research skills as evidenced by the numerous people she interviewed for *The Library Book*. (For a list of the book's subjects by chapter, visit https://www.bookcompanion.com/the_library_book_character_list.html)

Among her interview subjects was the former Library Director, Elizabeth "Betty" Teoman, who served at the time of the 1986 fire which consumed 400,000 books, damaged 700,000 more, and became the principal story in the book. Teoman retired in 2006 after a 30-year career in Los Angeles at the LA Public Library and moved to Mission Hills in Rancho Mirage. She became Library Director for the Rye Free Reading Room and the Rancho Mirage Library before retiring for the last time in 2007.

Coordinator: David Kelly, DavidJaxKelly@gmail.com

Friends of the Palm Springs Library Book Club meets online

Palm Springs Library, 300 S. Sunrise Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262

Harry Peak, a suspect in the fire investigation, died in 1991 of AIDS. In an interview with the *Paris Review*, Orlean said she was "shocked, because he wasn't very old. My first thought was, That's a huge obstacle to writing the book....Sadly he came of age as a gay man at a moment when AIDS was an absolute death sentence." In the book's acknowledgments Orlean credits Harry Peak's sisters Debra and Brenda and a former lover, Demetri Hioteles. Orlean reports in her book that Peak spent his final days in Palm Springs.

Another subject of Orlean's investigative eye is former Library Director (1905-11) Charles Lummis. More than colorful, Lummis' story is a commentary on toxic male behavior and a rationale for the "Me Too" movement. Without Orlean providing the history of the Central Library as a context, Lummis' story would probably be among the 400,000 volumes reduced to ashes (figuratively, of course).

Like Orlean, many of the book club members shared their earliest memories of visits to the library as a child. For some, it was the first place their parents trusted them to go to unaccompanied. For most, the library cemented their love of books. COVID-19 has been as devastating as a fire for lovers of libraries. Hopefully, we will all get to return to our beloved repository of books soon.

A five-minute video news report about the fire featuring Susan Orlean with vintage footage can be found at <https://youtu.be/zcJ0mogemM4>.

David Kelly