

President's Greetings

Whether displaying books for lobby sales or working at one of our three-day book sales, I am always amazed at the number of science-fiction, mass-market paperback books we have for sale. Interestingly, the avalanche of these paperbacks we and the world enjoy can be in good part attributed to the work of Betty Ballantine who died on February 13 at the age of 99. As her NY Times obituary states, Betty was "half of a groundbreaking husband and wife publishing team that helped invent the modern paperback and vastly expand the market for science fiction and other genres through such blockbusters as *The Hobbit* and *Fahrenheit 451*."

In the United States in the 1930s, most paperbacks were pulp novels. But Betty and her husband Ian who had studied and married in England, knew that British Penguin editions of good literature sold well in train stations and small stores. They became U.S. distributors for Penguin, then opened their own Ballantine publishing company. They sold reprints of classics and new works by contemporary authors for as little as a quarter each in railroad stations, drugstores and dime stores.

Gradually, the Ballantines focused more and more on fantasy and science fiction. They enjoyed their big break financially and as members of the publishing profession when their editor, Stanley Kauffmann, later a film critic, obtained the rights to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. This was a major addition to works they published by Arthur C. Clarke and H.P. Lovecraft.

In a Locus fantasy magazine in 2002, Betty said, "We really and truly did publish books that matter. And science fiction matters because it's of the mind, it predicts, it thinks, it says, 'Look what's happening here. If that's what happening here and now, what's it going to look like 10 years from now or 50 years from now, or 2000 years from now?' It's a form of magic. Not abracadabra or wizardry. The minds of human kind make this magic."

Florence Pritchard

Citations and information for this article were taken from NY Times obituary: "Betty Ballantine, who helped popularize modern paperback, dies at 99, by Hillel Italie, February 19, 2019.

Focus on Freedom

Susan Reid's annual gift of audio books for the library sent me to the Internet to learn more about them. There I found teacher Kimberly Moron's* explanation of audio-book benefits to struggling readers which I've condensed below.

In grades 3–8 these readers lose ground more rapidly in learning new information. Access to human-read audio books can support their reading skill development. Audio books:

1. Improve vocabulary.

They help these readers move beyond decoding and right into learning. The more words they learn, the better able they will be to access grade-level materials.

2. Build background knowledge.

Audio books expose students to academic vocabulary, help build their background knowledge and help them develop higher-order thinking skills. If students read only materials at their reading level, they lose opportunities to access information that represents their capabilities and intellect.

3. Reduce working-memory deficit.

By eliminating the focus on decoding, students are able to remember, and understand content, and respond to questions about the text more readily.

4. Remove decoding anxiety.

Anxiety plays a huge part in a struggling reader's entire school experience, so the introduction and regular use of audio books can help students enjoy school more.

5. Increase comprehension.

When students can hear the story or information as a whole, comprehension increases. Reading books word-by-word doesn't help create a whole experience.

6. Develop grade-level knowledge.

Audio books bring information to students when they are ready for it, not when they can read it.

7. Increase educational independence.

Students with the audio-book advantage keep up with their peers. Peer relationships can develop normally and students can feel more like insiders.

Clearly, Susan Reid's gift has the potential to do much for patrons whose children may be struggling with reading.

*weareteachers.com/audiobooks-benefit-students/

On the Horizon

The Brainstorming Committee chaired by Pat Russell needs a very large plate because they are putting a host of projects and activities they are designing on it. These projects and activities fall into two categories: those related to the 2020 celebration of the Friends and the Library's twentieth anniversary, and those related to fundraising for the digital sign in front of the library. A look at decisions the committee has made thus far at its February 20 meeting clearly indicates how much there is to do and how much we are going to need every active member to contribute in time and talent.

At this point, the theme for our twentieth anniversary will be 20/20 Vision. In a sense this signals our readiness to embark on our next 20 years of supporting the library and our intent to plan and act with clarity. The committee sees three major events during the year 2020. These are a ribbon cutting ceremony for the digital sign, a day of celebratory events for children, and a day of celebration for adults. Invitations to the ribbon cutting ceremony will be sent to county commissioners, HQ administration Freedom staff, and community members.

Fundraising activities for the digital sign will include seeking donations from groups in our service area. Pat Mac and her team are currently working out a calendar for these meetings. The committee has also scheduled monthly fundraising events as follows:

March – Pop-up Lobby Book Sale

April – Annual Book Sale

May – Open

June -- "Best Book" Voting Event

July and August – Open

September -- JR's Surprise

October -- Crazy Hats Mocktail Party

November – Open

Please plan to help with one or more of these events. Friends who are currently heading them up will call upon you at our March 4 meeting to assist. Let's make 2020 a show stopper for our library and our Freedom Friends!