

OLAQ

OLA Quarterly

Volume 5
Number 2
Writing Oregon (Summer 1999)

July 2014

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MaryKay Dahlgreen
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Recommended Citation

Dahlgreen, M. (2014). The Oregon center for the book at the State Library. *OLA Quarterly*, 5(2), 13+. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1519>

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OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

The Oregon Center for the Book at the State Library

by MaryKay Dahlgreen
Oregon State Library

Because it is more a state of mind than a place, the Oregon Center for the Book at the State Library is perhaps the least known service of the Oregon State Library. The Oregon Center for the Book (OCB) was created in 1986 as an affiliate (there are currently over thirty state centers) of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress.

In fulfilling our purpose "to stimulate public interest in books, reading and libraries," the Oregon Center for the Book is involved in a variety of activities which provide opportunities to work with individuals and organizations around the state and nation.

The Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse, an activity of OCB, provides intellectual freedom information to libraries and gathers accounts of challenges to public and school library materials. A report detailing those challenges is produced annually. The Clearinghouse was created in 1978 by Jim Schepke and Mary Ginnane.

The OCB participates in *Partners in Literacy*, which promotes and advocates for collaborative linkages between Oregon's public libraries and family support programs, including the child care and education community, to ensure optimum language and literacy development, social and emotional development, cognitive development, and the physical well-being of children. *Partners in Literacy* is an outgrowth of the national Library/Head Start partnership sponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. Oregon's participation in this partnership was begun in 1993 by Ellen Fader, who was Coordinator of the Oregon Center for the Book at that time. *Partners in Literacy* networking has resulted in a variety of collaborations between Oregon libraries and Even Start, Head Start, and other family literacy and early intervention programs.

Since 1995, the OCB has worked with Literary Arts, Inc., sponsor of the Oregon Book Awards, to promote the Book Awards in public libraries around the state. Participating libraries are provided with bookmarks, sample press releases and selected complimentary copies of the Award finalists. The libraries promote the award through displays and other means in the month before the Awards are announced. Multnomah County Library is also a

partner in this activity and has provided the printing for the bookmark for the past two years.

One of the most successful and far-reaching projects of the OCB is participation in the *Letters about Literature Contest*. This contest is sponsored nationally by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and *Weekly Reader Magazine*. In Oregon the co-sponsors include OLA's Children's Services Division and Oregon Young Adult Network, Oregon Educational Media Association, Oregon Council of Teachers of English, and Oregon Reading Association. The contest asks students in grades 4 to 12 (divided into two levels, 4 to 7 and 8 to 12) to write a letter to an author explaining the impact the author's work has had on the student's life. In 1999, 532 Oregon students entered the contest. A panel of judges reviewed Oregon's 58 semi-finalists and selected a winner, runners-up and honorable mentions for each level. The students were honored in April at a celebration at the Capitol Building during National Library Week.

In 1997 and 1998, the OCB began a cooperative project with the Oregon State Poetry Association which brought together Oregon poets and families in thirteen public libraries around the state. At each day-long event, two Oregon poets conducted a poetry writing workshop for child/adult pairs, and books containing the participants' poetry were produced. Poet honoraria and materials were funded with grants from the Oregon Community Foundation and the Collins Foundation. Local library staff time was an in-kind contribution and each community matched the amount allocated for materials. Additional programs are currently being planned for 1999-2000.

In 1998 the OCB began another exciting project for families that was created and disseminated by the Vermont Center for the Book. *Mother Goose Asks "Why?"* provides at-risk parents with a series of discussion/activity programs combining quality children's literature and science activities which they can then share with their children at home. The Vermont Center for the Book obtained funding in 1998 from the National Science Foundation to expand the model to 14 other states for a three-year pilot project. Oregon will reach 100 parents during each of those three years through the work of Renea Arnold in Early Childhood Resources at Multnomah County Library, BJ Quinlan at the Salem Public Library and Kim Wolfe and Pat Blair at the Jackson County Library.

The Youth Services Consultant, MaryKay Dahlgreen, currently devotes approximately 10 percent of her time to the coordination of the Oregon Center for the Book, while Phyllis Lichenstein, former OS� Board of Trustees member, volunteers her time to OCB projects on a regular basis.

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Two Stories

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tral Library in Portland, safe in the stacks, and the book ends with this thought: "We are all pilgrims traveling a path that frequently is filled with suffering. But if we share St. Christopher's loving helpfulness with each other, wild flowers will bloom along the way."

But this story doesn't end where Lloyd's life ended. It ends like this: on his last day at home, as his wife scurried to pack his suitcase for the hospital, Lloyd made his way outside to the garden, and there she found him on his knees, with a spoon, awkwardly planting flower bulbs.

"Lloyd," she said, "you will never see these flowers bloom."

He smiled at her. "They are not for me," he said, "they are for you."

The salmon coming home? They are for you. The calls of wild geese? They are for you. The last old trees? They are for you and your children, to the seventh generation and beyond. They are all blooming into being for you.

When I was a visitor in Venice, my Italian friend Pino Zennaro, whose family has been in that city for 700 years, was showing me a series of drawings he had made as a young man. His drawings showed his love for the light, the water, the bridges and windows, the boats and the soft sunlight on his native place.

"Why," I asked him, "do you not do this art now?"

He looked at me. "When I was young," he said, "I would observe things, and make a drawing of them. I would do art on paper, and give it away. I liked that work very much, but it is not enough alone. Now, I am an architect. I restore the buildings of my city. Venice is the city of history, and the city of the future. There are old ways to do things here that will be the model for the new. We are making the future vision of how people can be together. My art is my city."

We can say this: My art is my city. My art is Oregon. My art is the seventh generation. The problems of our time are political, economic, and environmental, but their solutions are cultural. For the solution to war is not war; it is knowing other people as neighbors, as common citizens of earth. The solution to poverty is not wealth; it is learning true value. The solution to environmental crisis is not scientific only; it is following the stories of our lives in this place to some convergence with the many lives sharing this place. Who will bring the two stories into one? Who will become native to this place? Who will plant the roots of color and plenty for another generation?

The true citizens of this place are those who say it this way: My art is the place I live and the people I live with. I have a job, but my art surrounds it, goes beyond. My art is my family, my tribe, my valley, my watershed: my long embrace of the Columbia's waters. Two stories? One life. This place says over and over, "My friend, I am not for me. I am for you." **Q**

Kim Stafford is Director of the Northwest Writing Institute at Lewis & Clark College. This article originally appeared in the Oregon Quarterly, Winter 1996, and is reprinted with permission.

The Oregon Center

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So it seems that the Oregon Center for the Book doesn't house "the book" but is in the business of doing what we can to see that books, reading, and libraries remain in the public consciousness. **Q**

Oregon Center for the Book:
www.osl.state.or.us/libdev/ocftbpurp.html

Center for the Book at the Library of Congress:
lcweb.loc.gov/loc/cfbook