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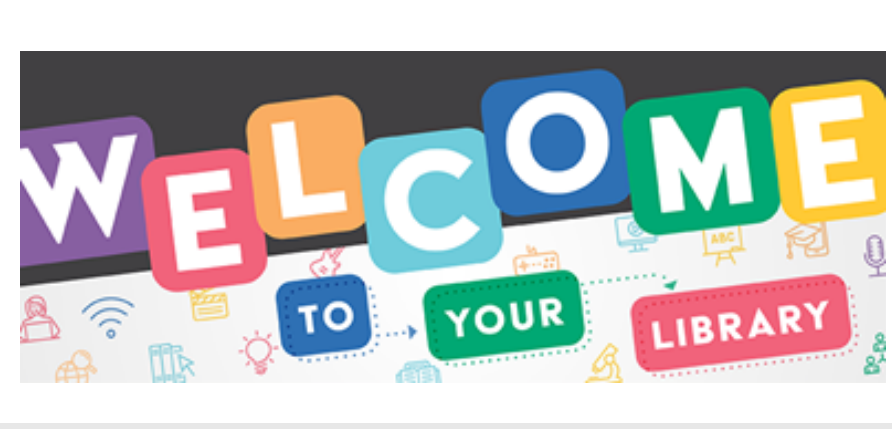
Among Friends

Summer 2021



Close-up: Larkspur author Jasmin Darznik talks to Catherine Pyke

Bestselling author Jasmin Darznik has loved libraries from her earliest days. She was five when her family came to the United States from Iran, moving to Marin where her parents operated a motel. Her most recent book, *The Bohemians* (Ballantine Books, 2021), is based on the life of the young Dorothea Lange and her circle in 1920s San Francisco. Darznik's first book, *The Good Daughter, A Memoir of My Mother's Hidden Life*, became a New York Times bestseller in 2011. In 2018, *Song of a Captive Bird*, her first novel, was inspired by the life of Iran's iconic woman poet, Forugh Farrokhzad and became a *Los Angeles Times* bestseller. Her books have been published in seventeen countries.

Jasmin lives in Larkspur with her husband and son. In this brief conversation with Catherine Pyke, she reflects on some of the elements of her life in Marin that have helped her to become one of the nation's rising authors and a mentor to countless aspiring writers.

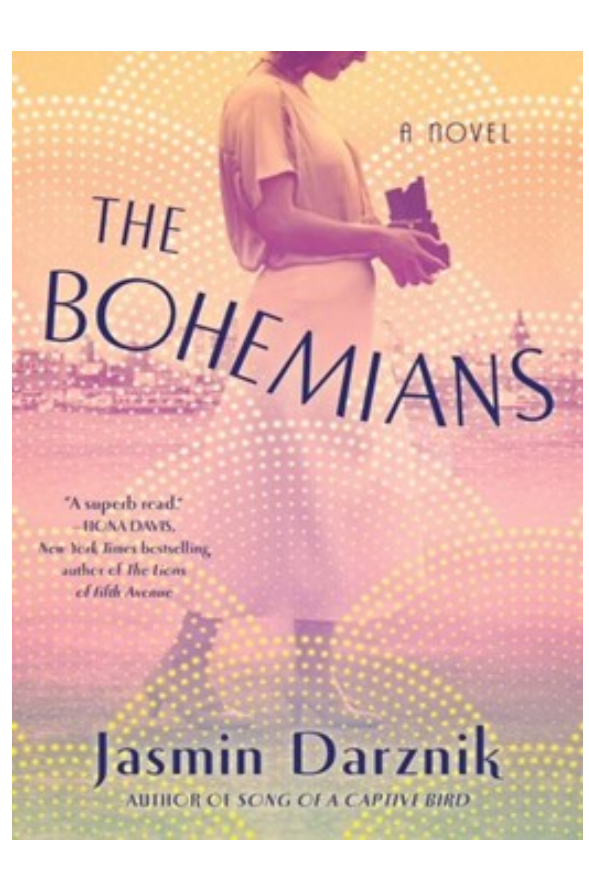
CP: Were libraries a part of your life growing up in Marin?

JD: My mother had many responsibilities when I was growing up. She basically used the library as a babysitting spot. She couldn't pick me up from school, so I'd go to the Tiburon library. My family members were not readers. I spent many hours there. I loved being immersed in books. Growing up in the stacks, I naturally developed an affinity for books. I used all the Marin libraries. When I was in law school, I used the Larkspur library, and I studied there for my entrance exams to graduate school.

CP: You did your undergraduate work at UCLA, graduating summa cum laude, and received your JD from Hastings College of Law in 1997. How did you shift gears?

JD: After law school, I passed the bar and worked in law in the city for a while, but I knew I didn't want to be a lawyer. I wanted a life in books and literature. I went to Princeton for my PhD in English literature in 2008, and later earned my MFA from Bennington in 2014.

CP: How did you do your research for The Bohemians *and how did you decide to write about Dorothea Lange?*



JD: The greatest pleasure of writing is researching. My research for *The Bohemians* involved fortuitous developments. I read constantly, everything I can get my hands on. I let myself be free when I'm researching. It's not mapped out. I was intrigued by a book called *Women in the Everyday City* by Jessica Ellen Sewell. Sewell explores the lives of women in turn-of-the-century San Francisco and the way public places shaped their lives.

The modern city was the first place that welcomed women. Women didn't walk in public spaces before the invention of the city. Working in the city, I started to think about how a city is laid out. I was interested in the 1920s, and more compelled by working class women than upper class. Dorothea Lange, a portrait photographer, fit the bill. The Chinese American character of Caroline Lee in my book must maneuver her way through public spaces that weren't designed for her. Through Caroline, Dorothea gains entrée into Monkey Block, an artists' colony in what was then the bohemian heart of the city but is now the financial district.

CP: How did you start writing?

JD: I wasn't supposed to be a writer. Nothing in my first-generation immigrant background supported it, and so much impeded it. Still, I was a reader. As a child, I left my small-town library with novels stacked up to my chest and under my chin. I'd go home and luxuriate in the possibility of disappearing into different worlds. Beyond that was the twenty-room motel my parents bought when we came to America, a place of struggle and uncertainty. Books were my way out.

As I read Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on the Road*, I found myself profoundly moved by the feeling these writers weren't just telling me a story—they were telling me who they were.

A neighbor told me she'd enrolled in a creative writing workshop through our local independent bookstore, Book Passage. That same day I walked over to Book Passage and signed up for a spot in the writer's workshop my neighbor recommended. For two years, on Friday nights from 6-9 pm, I showed up at a workshop taught by Linda Watanabe McFerrin. It was a time of discovery, in some ways the sweetest time of my writing life so far. I wasn't writing to publish anything, though that might have shimmered as a distant dream; I was wholly taken up by the urge to make something beautiful and to connect with other people.

CP: Does being a New York Times best-selling author put pressure on your choice of writing projects? How do you decide about your next books?

JD: I'm always reading, and if you look at anything long enough, it opens up a world for you. I love fun back doors into history.

The only way I can let go of a project is to think the next one will be better. My biggest leap was moving from memoir to fiction. I overcame that fear in writing *Song of a Captive Bird*, that looks at a whole life, the life of a poet.

CP: You are a professor, currently teaching in the Writing and Literature programs at California College of the Arts in San Francisco. Do you have thoughts about how the proposed new Larkspur library, The Commons, might nurture young writers?

JD: We're so fortunate in Marin to be surrounded by writers. I wouldn't have written a word if I hadn't had the chance to see and get to know writers like Isabel Allende and Annie Lamont at Book Passage and other venues. Young writers in Marin have so many advantages. But it's also important for writers to be accountable to each other.

The blank page, even three books in, is terrifying.

The greatest growth happens when writers are accountable to each other. My good friend, Rebecca Foust (Marin County Poet Laureate, 2017-19), whom I met in the Book Passage writing workshop, and I, do that for each other.

Larkspur needs spaces where young kids, perhaps future writers can hang out.

CP: Given the inspiration of Jasmin Darznik, Larkspur's brilliant literary star, the future for aspiring young writers in Marin seems especially bright.

Books on the Fly:
Carrie Burroughs reports from Hawaii

Nearing the end of a trip to Honolulu, I was in a panic facing the prospect of a long flight home with nothing to read. Coincidentally, the president of the Friends of Larkspur Library, Barbara Friday, was in Hawaii, staying down the street from me. Barbara came to the rescue, and we were able to swap books. I gave Barbara the compelling and intense novel *A Place for Us* by Fatima Farheen Mirza, a debut novel about an Indian-Muslim family in Northern California. Barbara gave me *Under the Eye of the Storm* by John Hersey (a gripping adventure heavy on sailing terminology) and *Montana 1948* by Larry Watson (a short coming of age novel about power, justice, and truth). One of the best things about serving on the Friends of the Larkspur Library board is the exposure to books through the broad and vast interests of fellow board members.

Meet New Friends Board Member
Diana Saint James

Diana Saint James has lived in Larkspur for five years, having moved from Marinwood, where she lived when her children were young. "More space," she explains. But now space is not as important as walking downtown to get a cup of coffee. "Larkspur"— with its walkability, choice of coffee establishments, and intriguing history— "is perfect."

She's even more pleased with her town in these soon-to-be-post-pandemic days. The proscribed outdoor dining "has brought an even more European look to Larkspur, and I hope it continues once we get back to eating inside. Every time I walk by The Left Bank, something new has been added."

Diana was born in Southern California and lived at Cape Canaveral as a child. "Mine was the only dad on the block not connected with the space program." Among the perks of living in a space-oriented community: "In elementary school, we got to watch rocket launches from the school playground."

Diana says she has "always had a passion for reading. We'd go to the library once a week when I was a child. My first library was in Palos Verdes, and it was gorgeous, so I thought all libraries were that beautiful. "

But although she had a passion for books, another passion interfered with her literary life. In 1982, Diana and her husband sold everything they had and traveled around the world for two years. "I got sidetracked by travel," she says, and that led to a 30-year career in the travel industry. At first, Diana worked in sales for two Bay Area adventure tour operators, including SOBEK (white water rafting) and Backroads (biking and hiking). In 1999, she joined Dimensions in Travel, a travel agency in Novato, and later bought the agency in 2008.

Diana's ongoing relationship with the Larkspur Library began in 2010 when she began a series of live "travel night" presentations she and Dimensions in Travel put together for patrons at Larkspur and other Marin libraries. Her relationship with the Friends began when she donated to the library and got a thank you note from Barbara Friday to which Diana responded, to which Barbara responded, and the two became "almost pen pals."

During the pandemic. Diana and her staff adapted travel nights to Zoom experiences, virtual events meant "to keep the spirit of travel alive." For Diana's agency, "the hardest part of Covid was undoing all the vacations we had planned."

Right now, she says, "people are bursting at the seams" to travel. Her advice to post-Covid travelers: "Be flexible. There may be staffing issues at hotels, restaurants and airports. It won't be like the last time you were there. But likely it will be less crowded!"

What is she reading now? *Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See, a selection inspired by book talks hosted by Teresa Capasso at the Larkspur Library. But, she adds, "romance novels, pure escapism, took me through the worst part of the pandemic. These books are like old friends whom I can come back to visit." Her favorite romance novelists? "Nora Roberts, Robyn Carr, and Susan Mallery. They write hopeful stories about small towns like Larkspur but filled with much more intriguing gossip!"

She is a fan of the Larkspur Library Book Club. "I like to see what they recommend." Recent recommendations include *The Night Watchman* by Louise Erdrich and *Ordinary Grace* by William Kent Krueger.

Diana has two children. Her son, DJ, teaches 7th grade Social Studies in Prague. "He is part of the International school system and can teach all over the world. I love to travel to see him". Previously he taught in Beirut, Lebanon. "He really got the travel bug from me."

Her daughter, April, is the manager of Picco, and shares a home with Diana in Larkspur. "She loves to travel, but she is my 'nature girl.' She'd rather go camping than do an urban walking tour or visit a museum."

Diana says her role model is her 89-year-old mother, who worked as a nurse practitioner until she was 82. "She'll be pushing us in wheelchairs," says Diana. Her dad was at one time marketing director of MUNI. "He loved cable cars, so he got to realize a fantasy." Both parents "loved reading, and their passion trickled down to me."

Her future travel plans include walking the Camino de Santiago with her brother Brian this August. Pre-pilgrimage, they heard about a Rooftops of Madrid walking tour they can't wait to try. "My brother is a great travel companion - flexible with a great sense of humor, but we can also go our own way some days and meet up at happy hour with fun stories to share."

Little Libraries Everywhere
By Diana Saint James

What could be better than a new book to enjoy while your mom or dad does the laundry? The Friends of the Larkspur Library has partnered with iDoLaundry in Larkspur (469 Magnolia Avenue) to make books available to children as part of this weekly chore. Bill Howard, iDoLaundry owner, says "Kids love to learn and reading is a great way to find out about things that matter. Reading should start at a young age and the sooner it starts the better for them and the world. A mini-library in my laundromat doesn't take up much room but it is a great way to help young people find joy in reading."

Readers of all ages can find books in Spanish and English to enjoy at the laundromat or take home. Each book comes with a "treasure map" to lead the reader to the big library just steps away.
New books have been generously donated by Joanne Vosmek, manager of Copperfield's Books in San Rafael and Larkspur. Gently used books are donated by the Friends or purchased using donated funds to the Friends of the Larkspur Library. Access to books is the defining factor in reading success. Little Libraries Project addresses this critical need on a hyper-local level.

The inspiration for this project came from Libraries Without Borders, an international non-profit organization based in France with a goal of expanding libraries around the world. Their mobile libraries have served more than 500,000 marginalized, displaced, and underserved people in the past ten years, including those in refugee camps and disaster zones. The goal of their Wash and Learn Initiative (WALI) encourages community-based organizations, like Friends of the Larkspur Library, to advance lifelong learning while families do their laundry.

Why the laundromat? Laundromats are ideal places to find and engage with busy families who may need educational resources. Laundromats are safe, well-lit, and temperature-controlled spaces. Parents generally return weekly to their local laundromats and their children often wait an average of 90 minutes as the family laundry is washed, dried, and folded. Offering a selection of children's books is an engaging alternative to boredom or electronic gadgets.

Next stop for the "Little Libraries Project" is the Emergency Department at MarinHealth Medical Center. K.C. Fernandez, Certified Child Life Specialist, will offer children ages 4-7 a book to read and take home, adding a bit of comfort to their visit.

Let us know at friendsoflarkspurlibrary@gmail.com what you think of this project and if you have donations of children's books only, or other little library sites to recommend.

Copperfield's Books
CELEBRATING 40 YEARS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Looking for a special book gift?

Shop at our local Copperfield's Books in Marin Country Mart, which supports Friends of Larkspur Library with book donations to our Little Libraries Project.

The Commons Foundation
Fund, Build and Sustain A New Larkspur Library

Unexpected Death of The Commons Architect

Dear Friends:

It is with profound and deep sadness that I have to inform you that our friend and close collaborator Scott Lockard has died.

Scott, working with Chris Hartzell and myself, created the drawings we have been using for the Commons at Larkspur and the new modern Library.

Scott was a talented, generous, humble, and deeply creative soul and I will miss him.
We will keep you informed as we learn more about his family's plans.

Joe Jennings
President
The Commons Foundation

Letter to the Editor, New York Times, May 3, 2021

Money for Public Libraries

To the Editor:

In "Infrastructure Isn't Really About Roads. It's About the Society We Want" (Opinion guest essay, nytimes.com, April 26), Eric Klinenberg argues that strong public infrastructure — places where communities can gather, learn from one another and grow after over a year of isolation — is the key to our resurgence and renewal, just as it was during the New Deal.

We strongly agree and cite public libraries as the ultimate example: trusted, welcoming community and civic spaces offering education and opportunity for all. These beloved neighborhood institutions and their free and irreplaceable services, classes and programs will be central to our recovery.

We ask the Biden administration to support the Build America's Libraries Act, which calls for federal investment in libraries across the United States. Public libraries, the most democratic of institutions, have $26 billion in capital need nationwide; New York City libraries alone have $1.1 billion.

We must ensure that libraries are in good condition and equipped with the technology, flexible space and modern amenities needed to serve today's patrons.

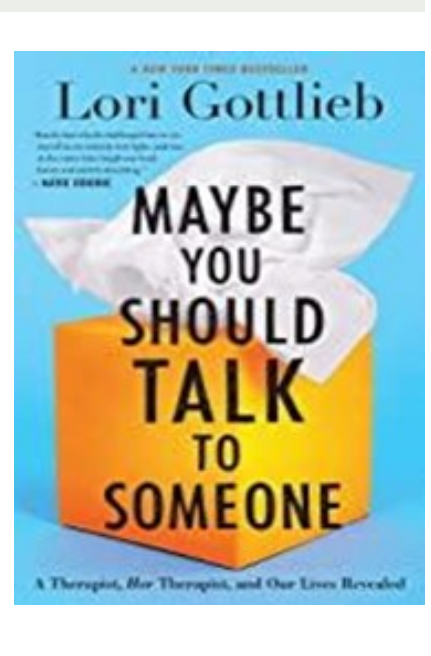
Anthony W. Marx
Linda E. Johnson
Dennis M. Walcott
The writers are presidents of the New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, and Queens Public Library, respectively.

The Human Library
From Wikipedia

The Human Library is an international organization and movement that first started in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2000. It aims to address people's prejudices by helping them to talk to those they would not normally meet. The organization uses a library analogy of lending people rather than books. These people have "experienced prejudice, social exclusion or stigma," and participants can ask them questions to "learn about the other person and challenge their own prejudices." The Human Library Organization is active in over 80 countries, in which there are a few permanent Human Libraries, but most happen as events.

What the Friends are Reading and Recommending

Jim

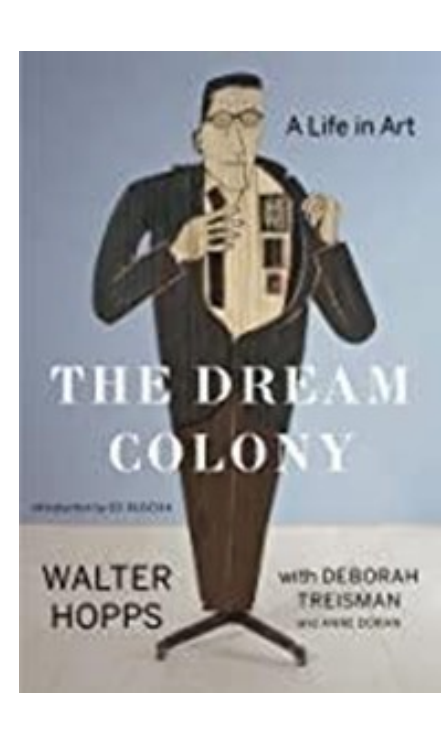


Maybe You Should Talk to Someone, Lori Gottlieb

I liked this book for several reasons: short chapters, lots of dialogue, and some good bullet points. For instance, "Happiness equals reality minus expectations." The author is a psychotherapist and writes about what is happening in her office. Then the next chapter is about what is happening when she is seeing her therapist. The book is a good read and held my attention.

Alice

The Dream Colony: A Life in Art, Walter Hopps, edited by Deborah Treisman, from interviews with Anne Doran, Introduction by Ed Ruscha



Walter Hopps knew *everyone* in the Los Angeles art world — artists, collectors, curators, gallerists — and was "in the room where it happened" from the 1950s through 2005, with the artists who made it happen, over and over. Hobbs seems to have won over artists like Ed Ruscha and Ed Kleinholz (he gave them both their first shows) and collectors including Dominique de Menil (he was founding director of the Menil Collection) by coming from a place of pure love and enormous knowledge (self-taught!), paired with a discerning and super-adventurous eye. Read this book to marvel at Hopps' life story, stay for the up-close-and-very-personal chapters on the groundbreaking, now-legendary Ferus Gallery (he was a founder), and on Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, and Marcel Duchamp. To quote the jacket copy, "A panoramic look at American art in the second half of the twentieth century, through the eyes of the visionary curator who helped shape it."

Dyan

Food Rules, An Eater's Manual, Michael Pollan
Illustrated by Maira Kalman

Written in 2011, Pollan's words about eating have become part of our everyday language about how food contributes to our health and wellness – or not.

His mantra: "Eat food (real food, not processed). Mostly plants. Not too much" — is a helpful reminder as we emerge from the pandemic and possible indulgence in comfort foods that we now carry as extra weight around our hips or in our stomach.

Here are a few gems:

- "If it came from a plant, eat it; if it was made in a plant, don't."
- "Shop the peripheries of the supermarket and stay out of the middle."
- "Avoid food products containing ingredients that a third-grader cannot pronounce."
- "Eat with other people whenever you can."
- "Place a bouquet of flowers on the table and everything will taste twice as good."

Kalman's whimsical paintings delightfully set off Pollan's words as well as her own. Referring to her painting of fresh-shelled peas, Kalman writes, "I like going back in time. It gives me more time to walk around and savor the world and the food in it. At Monticello, I walked around Thomas Jefferson's Garden. He was crazy about peas. Here is a painting of his vegetable tureen full of peas. Peas. Peas. We should all eat peas. (Not at every meal, of course.) May we all eat well and flourish."

And that is what this book is about. Eating well and flourishing.

Dulcy
Meet Me at the Museum, Anne Youngson

"I married the father of the child I was expecting and became bogged down, quite literally, in the life of a farmer's wife," writes Tina Hopgood to the curator of a Danish museum housing the Tollund Man, a man from the early Iron Age whose perfectly preserved body was discovered in a Danish peat bog in 1950. As a child in the 1960's, Tina and a friend were deeply moved by the story and pictures of the Tollund Man and vowed one day to make the trip to Denmark, but her friend has died and now Tina is looking closely at her life and unmet dreams. The developing correspondence between Tina and the recently widowed curator is precisely calibrated in this pitch perfect novel, as the two cautiously reveal themselves and their personal histories. Rich, surprising, and believable, this character-driven tale unfolds with warmth and the complete absence of sentimentality. It will likely stay in readers' minds long after the last page is turned.

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Mission Statement

The Friends are a dedicated group of members who raise money for library programs, plan events, and work as ambassadors to the community for the Larkspur Library.

The Friends of the Larkspur Library are committed to supporting the library’s programs, cultural events, books, and materials. We strive to instill the love of reading and the excitement of learning in library patrons of all ages.

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