



*Boston Authors Club*

## March 2024 News

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## In Memorium: Dr. Alan Dobrow



The Boston Authors Club has lost a treasured friend, dedicated supporter, and former member. Dr. Alan Dobrow died on January 30, 2024, after a long and rich life, loving books, music, medicine, and his family. Born in New York in 1930, Alan went to medical school at NYU and then trained in psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital and the Menninger Clinic before developing a private practice in Manhattan and Great Neck, NY. Patients of Dr. Dobrow's from years past wrote him notes of appreciation many years into his retirement.

Alan loved the world of letters from an early age, especially the legendary literary neighborhood around New York's 10<sup>th</sup> Street neighborhood, where he grew up, with its proximity to the Strand Book Store, one of many he frequented. After he and his wife, Vicki, moved to Massachusetts to be closer to their children and grandchildren, Alan became a member of the Boston Authors Club. Alan loved the BAC's place in local literary history and spent hours researching former members and what they'd written. He valued his time as a BAC member, carefully reviewing books on a great variety of topics for consideration of the Julia Ward Howe prizes and hand-writing thoughtful assessments that Vicki would type up for him. It was at Alan's insistence that his daughter became a member of the BAC.

As his children wrote in a tribute to him, Alan "was a true book lover and collector, an avid reader until his final days, even remembering startling details about books he had read in the 1940s. Alan believed mightily in the power of reading to make one's life bigger, better, and deeper. He especially loved F. Scott Fitzgerald, and he cherished the first editions of Fitzgerald titles he collected. Alan always saw the green light shining across the bay." He was extraordinarily proud that all three of his children became published authors, including his daughter, Julie Dobrow, current President of the BAC and author of *After Emily: Two Remarkable Women and the Legacy of America's Greatest Poet* and the upcoming *Crossing Indian Country: The Wounded Knee Massacre and the Unlikely Marriage of Elaine Goodale and Ohiye'Sa (Charles Alexander Eastman)*.

In the final years of his life, Alan and his granddaughter, Mira, were the sole members of their own book club. The genesis was a review Alan had read in the newspaper of a book he correctly suspected would be at the intersection of their interests. In just a few years together, they read about a dozen books, especially enjoying nonfiction works about medical care. Many of these selections were by Danielle Ofri, a physician

and essayist who has authored many books about her experiences training and providing care at Bellevue Hospital. The books they read reminded Alan of stories from his own professional life, and they often led to discussions about Mira's current research; Mira is a sociologist writing a dissertation about digital technology and psychiatry. Mira wrote: "Alan's love of reading was a lifelong passion and a testament to his enduring curiosity and intellect. This love was a legacy he passed on to our whole family. It was a special joy to share it with him in this way in his final years."

The Board of the Boston Authors Club deeply appreciates Dr. Alan Dobrow's family for a generous donation made to the BAC in honor of their father and grandfather. His dedication to the BAC will live on.



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***Betsy Groban made her recent debut as a children's author following a distinguished career in publishing and creative work that included serving as the Deputy Director of MASS Creative, the Senior Vice President & Publisher of Books for Young Readers at Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and the Managing Director, WGBH Enterprises. In this interview, Betsy talks about her transition from publishing to writing children's literature and being on "the other side of the desk."***



***Q: Could you share some of the highlights and lessons learned during your work in publishing that you think are relevant for published and aspiring authors?***

A: For me, it was almost an unbelievably good experience to work as a publisher before becoming an author, not least because I was already intimately familiar with the publishing process. I know only too well how other first-time authors react when they learn, for instance, that the book they've already written may not be published for another two years! That said, the vast majority of publishers have no interest in writing their own books; they prefer to help authors publish the very best version of theirs. My best advice, not always easy to follow, is to form a close bond with your editor. In addition to helping you creatively, your editor is the invaluable in-house champion for your book.

***Q: What motivated the transition to your current focus on being a consultant, advisor, and not least, to authoring your first children's book?***

A: When I left HMH, I remained passionate about literature, and got involved in all sorts of literary activities, as well as an advocate for the arts in general. I became the book review editor of the Jane Austen Society, I write a column about reading to kids for Publishers Weekly, and I serve as a judge for the MA Center for the Book, the Associates of the BPL, and others. When I worked at GBH between publishing gigs, I reviewed books -- children's and adult -- for the *New York Times*. After HMH, I was free to review books again, and I started with *The Boston Globe*. My "beat," if I have one, is cultural reporting, "Story Behind the Book" pieces, author interviews, and even literary travel pieces (literary gravesites and the reopening of Emily Dickinson's house, for example).

Like many of us, I've had an intense and abiding passion for literature since I was a young child. Studying English literature in college and then working in book publishing followed naturally. I always wanted to be around and work with books, so publishing them, reviewing them, and then writing one myself felt completely organic. When the idea for my book, *Pizza for Pia*, came to me, it felt very full circle in the best possible way.

***Q: Did your perspective about authorship change while writing and publishing *Pizza for Pia*? Are you planning to write more books for young readers?***

A: I find it incredibly fulfilling and fun to be on the other side of the desk. I had the good fortune to connect with a wonderful editor, Siobhan Ciminera, at S&S. She not only bought my book and worked with me to make it as strong as possible but has stood by my side through the entire publishing process, including the selection of an illustrator -- a crucial decision in any book for very young readers. Everyone should be as lucky as I've been with Siobhan. I look forward to writing more books for young readers, including early readers for kids just learning to read independently. It's an important and delightful category between picture books and chapter books that's often overlooked (I speak as a former publisher), despite containing gems like *Frog and Toad* and *Little Bear*. I've submitted a follow-up to *Pizza for Pia* and have my fingers crossed...

**Q: Your LinkedIn profile describes your work as “At the intersection of creativity, commerce, and community.” That’s a terrific summary of the many aspects of your career. How does the BAC community fit into this intersection?**

The creativity part speaks for itself for any writer, and I’m especially keen on being part of a community of writers. BAC, among other organizations, does a great job of fostering that. I’ve also worked as an arts advocate and believe in the transformative power of the arts to enhance and improve civic life. Creativity, culture, and the arts should be valued and fiscally sound aspects of everyday life, economic drivers, as well as individually soul-satisfying endeavors. We’re lucky to have a vibrant arts community and, going back centuries, a vital community of writers in and around Boston. I’m proud as Punch to be part of it and a new member of the BAC.

*Interview by Mary J Cronin*

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## SPRING EVENT!

### Authors After Hours, March 28

The Boston Authors Club is excited to host its spring "Authors After Hours" event on Thursday, March 28th, at Whitelam Books in Reading, MA, from 7-9 PM.

BAC members are encouraged to RSVP **early** using this [form](#). Advance registration increases the chance that Whitelam Books will have your titles on hand to sell that evening!

Anyone wishing to learn more about the BAC or to chat informally with published authors is welcome to attend!

THE BOSTON AUTHOR'S CLUB  
PRESENTS:

# "AUTHORS AFTER HOURS"

AT  
WHITELAM  BOOKS



Sip, nibble, & chat with your favorite authors!  
Win prizes and signed books!

Thursday, March 28th  
7:00 - 9:00 PM  
610 Main St.  
Reading, MA



## President's Note: Putting Books Back on the Shelves



In many public schools across America, March is a specially designated reading month. Many schools celebrate with themed reading, read-a-thon sessions, or calendars marked with reading activities for each day. So it seems only appropriate in this month's column to think about the things that have actually taken books out of circulation in schools: book bans, regulations, and censorship occurring in many districts across the country that are prohibiting children from having a full choice of reading materials. There have been many stories – too many stories – dotting the news over the past year or so documenting these trends. But recently, I read a story in the *Washington Post* that offered a hopeful sign for those of us who write, read, and support a full spectrum of book choices for children.

In 2022, a small independent bookstore in Asheville, North Carolina, received eight tons of books from the Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Florida. These books had been banned under Florida state laws that prohibit classroom discussion on topics of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Many of the books came from a collection called "Essential Voices," curated by a company called Perfection Learning that's based in Iowa. Duval County had ordered 180 titles from that collection but, according to the *Washington Post* article, subsequently found at least 48 of them to be out of compliance with Florida laws. So Duval, like other Florida districts, had to figure out what to do with these books.

Dave Jacks, VP of operations for Perfection Learning, still felt strongly about the potential of these banned books, which included one about the history of the rainbow Pride flag, a story about a family that escapes enslavement, and a picture book about Rosa Parks. (Our own MA Congressman Jim McGovern even read this last book into the *Congressional Record* to help call attention to the growing problem of school districts eliminating books). Jacks took a crew to Jacksonville, collected the outsourced books, and packed them away in a semitrailer. And then, he worked to find new homes for them.

Here's where the feel-good part of this story comes in.

Jacks heard about Firestorm Books in Asheville and contacted its owners. The store, which normally houses just 8000 books, agreed to take on the many, many boxes from Florida. They rented a storage unit to house most of them.

Meanwhile, back in Jacksonville, the debate over removing books from schools continued. A substitute teacher posted a video online showing rows of empty bookshelves in one of the Duval schools. He was fired, but the video went viral, garnering more than 5 million views. Here's an interview with him about what happened: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3PQCjd1Sng>

Firestorm Books offered to ship the banned books free of charge to people who wanted them and filled out an online form. Their "Banned Books Back!" initiative is still going strong (<https://firestorm.coop/bannedbooks.html>). Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the requests for books (more than one-third, to date), have come from families in...you guessed it, Duval County, Florida.

So, as we enter into March Reading Month, I encourage you all to do what you can to support book access everywhere and, of course, to read on!

Julie Dobrow  
BAC President

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## Yesteryear: Calculus of the Imagination

David Thompson Watson McCord (1897-1977) joined the Boston Authors Club in 1929. During his lifetime, McCord was best known professionally as a prodigious fundraiser for Harvard. His lasting reputation in the literary community stems from his being a prodigious author of children's poetry. He was the first recipient of the National Council of Teachers of English Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children and received Harvard's first honorary doctorate of humane letters.



Regarding writing children's poetry, McCord is quoted in the New York Times as noting, "Whatever may be said about this small but graceful art, three things should be remembered: good poems for children are never trivial; they are never written without the characteristic chills and fever of a dedicated man at work; they must never bear the stigma of I am adult, you are a child."

In an interview with Lee Bennett Hopkins, Hopkins asked McCord to define poetry; McCord responded that he could not answer on the spot and offered to send a written reply. Hopkins, himself an author of poetry for children, was so enthusiastic about the definition that McCord provided that he quoted it in full. We follow his example by including it below:

Poetry is so many things besides the shiver down the spine.  
It is a new day, lying on a new doorstep.  
It is what will stir the weariest mind to write.  
It is inevitable to say something so casually that the reader or listener thinks he said it himself.  
It is the fall of syllables that run as easily as water flowing over a dam.  
It is fireflies in May, apples in October, the wood fire burning when one looks up from an open book.  
It is the best dream from which one ever waked too soon.  
It is Peer Gynt and Moby Dick in a single line.  
It is the best translation of words that do not exist.  
It is hot coffee dripping from an icicle.  
It is the accident involving sudden life.  
It is the calculus of the imagination.  
It is the finishing touch to what one could not finish.  
It is a hundred things as unexplainable as all our foolish explanations.

There is undoubtedly something in there for the poet in each of us. My poet was particularly taken with "(Poetry) is the calculus of the imagination," a system for connecting ideas so that their synergy holds them together. Another lengthy interview with McCord that's well worth reading was conducted by David A. Dillon and was published in the March 1978 edition of *Language Arts*.

McCord wrote poems in many forms and invented one of his own that he called symmetrics. It is a five-line form, a quintain or a pentastich for those who know about such things, like a limerick. I think this is an example---at least it's by McCord and has five lines---but I invite the Boston Authors Club poets to set me straight. The poem is titled "Cocoon."

The little caterpillar creeps  
Awhile before in silk it sleeps

It sleeps awhile before it flies,  
And flies awhile before It dies,  
And that's the end of three good tries.

McCord lived at the Harvard Club in downtown Boston, where an urban legend has it there is a niche in the library known as McCord's Corner.

*By Scott Guthery*

**authors!**  
**AUTHORS!**

*The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month except for the summer months. Please send news about your upcoming events, awards, and new books to [bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com](mailto:bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com) by March 26 for publication in the April edition.*

*Members are reminded that they are welcome to add an author profile to the [Boston Authors Club Gallery](#). This is an opportunity to promote your books and refer visitors to your website and your social media presence.*

## **Your BAC Membership for 2024**

***BAC membership dues are \$50 for the calendar year. You can join or renew online by [clicking here](#). If you would rather pay by check, please make your check out to the Boston Authors Club and mail it to the following address:***

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