



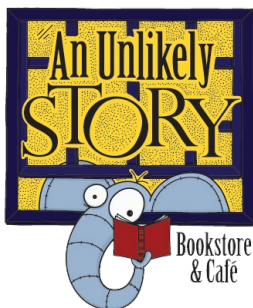
Boston Authors Club

August 2020 Newsletter

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Featured Bookstore: An Unlikely Story



*BAC recently reached out to **An Unlikely Story Bookstore** in Plainville, MA. General Manager Deb Sundin and Marketing and Events Manager Kym Havens opened the store together five years ago with owner Jeff Kinney. Deb and Kym pooled their knowledge to answer our questions. Thanks for joining us Deb and Kym!*

Five Questions for An Unlikely Story Bookstore

What do you love most about working in an independent bookstore? What are some of the biggest rewards and tallest challenges?

What I love most about working in an independent bookstore is the people that work there. Whether they are booksellers, or in our case, baristas or gift merchandisers, everyone is committed to the success of the store and each other. I have never worked in an industry where the people care so much about each other. When I first started in the book business 20 years ago, I remember a bookstore owner saying to me that it is so rewarding to be a bookseller in every way except financially, she was right. From the customers that appreciate your recommendations, to being the community meeting place, to sharing favorite books with the people you work with, it is so rewarding and fulfilling. The challenge is always staying one step ahead of the companies that want to undercut you and coming up with innovative ways to make the numbers work. In our case, it helps to have a bestselling author who is creative and supportive as the owner.

What are your favorite reads this week?

Over the last month I have read 3 books that are on my favorite list: *Afterlife* by Julia Alvarez is the story of a retiree still working through the death of her husband, when she is presented with an opportunity to help someone in trouble. It is poetic, and full of compassion and grace; *Little Family* by Ishmael Beal is a coming of age story of a young girl who belongs to a makeshift "family" living in a burnt out airplane in the poorest part of town. It is told with grace and humor. The last is *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummings, a harrowing story of a woman and her child escaping their Mexico town from the cartel in fear for their lives, and desperate to make it to the United States. Is it a compelling and unforgettable story.

What can an author do to support independent bookstores?

We absolutely love authors who: have a link to independent bookstores on their websites, tweet and post about their events with us to their fan base well in advance of the event and up to the event, and just have fun at our store. One of the nicest things an author can do is offer to personalize books ordered through their local independent bookstore's website on a regular basis. I think authors have always been big supporters of the independents. Of course, they could always start a bookstore of their own!

What can an author do to make you excited to book them for an event? What should they not do?

I think the best thing an author can do is to engage with the store, and with their fans, letting them know how excited they are about their event through social media. It makes such a huge difference when they help promote their event, and you feel supported as a bookstore and event manager, and know you're not just another stop on their tour. We do our best to promote our events, through our email newsletter, social media, press releases, and talking up the events with customers in the store, but that added blast from the author can make a huge difference in the size of the audience. We had an actor who had written a children's picture book, and we expected a huge crowd. However, they didn't promote it at all to their followers, so it was a little disappointing.

What is your ideal book event? (You must have event stories. Can you share a smashing success story and some lessons that you think made the event amazing? Or can you share a crashing failure event story as a cautionary tale with advice on how to avoid a bad book event?)

One of my favorite events was with Henry Winkler, when he was touring with Lin Oliver for their middle grade novel. It was a completely sold out event, and we were all so excited to meet "the Fonz". A couple of hours before the event, the media escort called to ask for a local restaurant recommendation, because they were in Boston for a televised interview. I then got a frantic call from him, as he got in the car and saw how long it was going to take him. I told him not to worry, and I ordered a bunch of cold subs and sandwiches from our favorite local restaurant. Next thing I know, I'm being paged and told Henry Winkler is on the phone. He asked what I had ordered, and then I asked what he wanted instead! Meatball sub, extra sauce, side of meatballs for Lin, salad for his wife. We ran out to grab the food, set the table in the conference room, and had it all ready just before they walked in the door. There was something so special about being able to serve dinner to them before the event. For some reason, it just made me relax and enjoy the event that much more. The great thing about working for Jeff Kinney, is that he's always coming up with new ideas, many of them spur of the moment. The result is that we're always calm and cool, and ready to come up with alternate plans on the fly. We never panic (well, almost never), and I think the authors appreciate that. The best advice I've received from an author is from Ann Patchett. She told me that every author, no matter how famous, has had an event where no one showed up. They're all used to it. The thing that will make them uncomfortable is the booksellers being apologetic and stressed out about it. It was a good lesson!

Visit An Unlikely Story Bookstore at <https://www.anunlikelystory.com/>

Interview by Kelly Carey

BAC Discovery Award Updates

Judges at Work - Winners Will Be Announced in September!

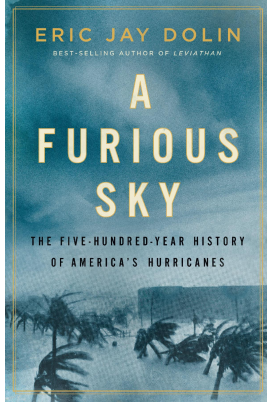
The first BAC Discovery Award contest was launched without a hitch. Thanks to everyone who entered! We received many wonderful entries. Our judges, Nandini Bajpai, David A. Kelly and Heather Lang, are hard at work selecting the winners, and an announcement will be made in September Stay tuned!



A Furious Sky Launches This Month

CONGRATS to Eric Jay Dolin for his new book, ***A Furious Sky: The Five-Hundred-Year History of America's Hurricanes*** coming out on August 4.

In sharing this announcement, Eric notes, ***"This is, by far, the strangest and most troubling time to launch a book. Most of my talks are virtual or have been***



postponed to next year. **Getting used to Zoom, but not nearly as satisfying as being in-person.**“ More on the book below. (<https://www.ericjaydolin.com/events>)

ABOUT: *A Furious Sky: The Five-Hundred-Year History of America's Hurricanes*

Bestselling historian Eric Jay Dolin presents the five-hundred-year story of American hurricanes, from the nameless storms that threatened Columbus' New World voyages, to the devastation wrought by Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and the escalation of hurricane season as a result of global warming. Weaving a story of shipwrecks and devastated cities, of heroism and folly,

Dolin introduces a rich cast of characters, including Benjamin Franklin, Ernest Hemingway, Katherine Hepburn, and Steven Spielberg, and puts us in the middle of the most devastating storms of the past, none worse than the Galveston hurricane of 1900, which killed at least 6,000 people, the highest toll of any natural disaster in American history. A necessary work of environmental and cultural history, *A Furious Sky* will change the way we understand the storms on the horizon of America's future. To learn more about this book, and its author, please visit www.ericjaydolin.com.

authors!
AUTHORS!

**Share your news!
Email your publication
and event news by August
30 to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com
for the September
newsletter**

BAC President's Note

Dear BAC members,

April 21 was National Library Worker's Day, but I'd like to use the occasion of this month's president's note to suggest that we all do something to celebrate the librarians in our life once again. Librarians have been an indispensable source of importance during the past five months of the pandemic for those of us who depend on books and library services. Though mostly working remotely, they are still "here" for us to find and procure books and to answer questions of all sorts. Many local librarians have spent hours figuring out what best practice regarding the use of books is at this time (how long they need to be in quarantine, how do you exchange them, etc.) And many have gone into their empty buildings to sort incoming orders, organize shelves and even offer a curbside pickup for their patrons.



I want to share with you three stories of how librarians and archivists have been unbelievably helpful to me over the past few months. These are just a few profiles of the many, many unsung heroes and heroines of the stacks in local, state and national libraries.

A lot of what I've done this summer is to begin the research for my next book. I'd planned to go on a trip out to South Dakota, Minnesota and Wyoming to gather sources. Clearly, that wasn't going to happen. Instead, I have sat on my screen porch and been amazed at how much material I have actually been able to access online. I've been in touch with archivists at places as diverse as the National Archives in Kansas City, MO, the South Dakota Historical Society, the University of Minnesota Archives, Dickinson College Carlisle Indian School Project, the Forbes Library in Northampton, MA, the Knox College archives in Galesburg, IL, the National Boy Scout Museum and Archives in Cimarron, NM and many other places. I've found that though most archivists aren't in the office, they're willing and able to give prompt and incredibly efficient help.

My second example is a shout-out to Miriam McLean at the Belmont Public Library. Though all in-person programming obviously ceased, Miriam and her colleagues worked to put together a series of "Books and

Bites” (maybe “Bytes” would be more appropriate) author talks for their patrons on Zoom. I recently did a book talk for this series and found a large, interested audience who asked extremely good questions – really much the same experience as I’d had doing an in-person event at the Belmont Public Library a year before. Kudos to Miriam and all the librarians who have worked tirelessly to ensure that literary programming for their patrons continues.

And my third story has to do with our own Julia Ward Howe awards. We recently needed to reconstitute the group reading the many fiction entries we received for the 2019 prize. Thanks to BAC Board member Nancy Tupper Ling who activated her network of local librarians, we’ve had a fantastic and enthusiastic crew of readers step up to help.

So please, BAC members, join me in saying a word of thanks to librarians and archivists around the world. They might not be considered “essential workers,” but truly, their work couldn’t be more essential for so many of us.

Stay well,
Julie Dobrow
BAC President

Yesteryear at the BAC by Scott Guthery *Julia Ward Howe's (almost) Last Words*

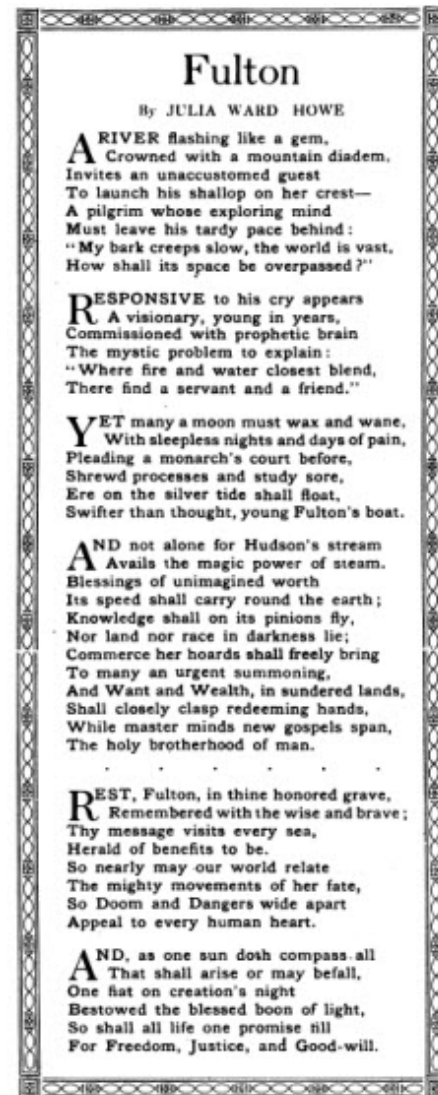
“She went to Greece in 1926 to return Lord Byron’s helmet ...” As a lead-in this isn’t quite as riveting as “It was a dark and stormy night” or “April is the cruellest month” but does bring to mind a bunch of questions which is after all the purpose of a lead-in. The ‘she’ is Maude Howe Elliott, the youngest daughter of Julia Ward Howe. Maude became a member of the Boston Authors Club in 1903, shortly after its founding. Maude and the next older daughter, Laura, received a Pulitzer Prize in 1917 for *The Life of Julia Ward Howe*.

A less well-known book by Maude is *The Eleventh Hour in the Life of Julia Ward Howe* which, as might be expected, is a collection of twilight anecdotes that convince the reader that JWH was a force to the end. ***The story that caught my fancy was about the poem that the then 90-year-old Julia wrote for, and delivered in person to, the 1909 celebration of “the 300th anniversary of the discovery of the Hudson River ... and the 100th anniversary of the first successful application of steam to navigation upon that river...”*** (Yes, it has a Wikipedia page. No, there wasn’t a celebration in 2009.)

The poem simply called *Fulton* starts out “A river flashing like a gem/Crowned with a mountain diadem.” Not exactly the Battle Hymn of the Republic but then discovering the Hudson and putt-putting around in a steamboat doesn’t command the same level of attention as an artillery barrage. What’s curious about the poem is the story of the last stanza.

Maude, it seems, wanted to surprise her mother by having the poem published in *Collier’s Weekly* during the same week as the celebration. She, Maude, secretly sent a copy of the poem to Collier’s editor, one Mr. Hapgood. What Maude didn’t know at the time was that Julia was having trouble with the ending of the poem so that the poem that was sent to Mr. Hapgood lacked its final stanza. Maude writes:

The poem had given her a good deal of trouble, the last couplet in especial. The morning of the celebration, when I went into Mrs. Seth Low’s spare bedroom to wake her, she cried out: “I have got my last verse!”



Followed by

“She was much distressed that the poem appeared in Collier’s without the amended closing lines.”

The poem that appears in the 714-page report of the 1909 Hudson-Fulton Celebration is exactly the same as the poem that appeared in the September 25, 1909, edition of Collier’s, illustrated above. I have visited a small random sample of the hundreds of poetry sites including Poets.org and none of them list *Fulton* as being part of Julia’s oeuvre let alone revealing the poem’s last stanza.



So here’s the challenge to readers of the BAC newsletter:

The first person to send in a copy of the poem with the missing last stanza (with some assurance that they didn’t fanfiction the conclusion themselves) will receive an author-signed copy of Mildred Buchanan Flagg’s Notable Boston Authors: Members of the Boston Authors Club (1900-1966). If that’s not incentive enough, do it for Julia! Submit your entries to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com.

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

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