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“Living Library” Debuts in Santa Monica

Norman Oder -- *Library Journal*, 10/20/2008

- Movement started in Europe
- Opportunity for half-hour dialogue with the "other"
- Next stop: Bainbridge Island, WA

The “Living Library” movement, allowing library visitors to book half-hour meetings with individuals with special interests, beliefs, or experiences, has arrived in the United States from Europe, with the organizers proclaiming success for an inaugural effort Saturday at the [Santa Monica Public Library](#), CA.

Response to the event was “overwhelming,” organizers [said](#), noting that all “the Living Books” were quickly reserved and that the event drew international news coverage. Among those offering themselves were a Buddhist, a teenager, a celebrity publicist, a person of Oaxacan background, a nudist, and a raw foodist. (Photos by [FabianLewkowicz.com](#))



One visitor, a Southern California librarian, wrote on her [blog](#) about meeting with a homeless advocate, who advised her that giving food coupons to homeless people is better than money and why Santa Monica has such a large homeless population. The advocate ultimately imparted a moving story about how she had become homeless herself and, after she got back on her feet, dedicated herself to advocacy work. “What started off as just a curiosity — so what happens at the Living Library, anyway? — ended up being a profound experience,” wrote the librarian.



The Santa Monica library produced a [whimsical warning](#) aimed to reinforce good behavior: “The Reader must return the Book in the same mental and physical condition as borrowed. It is forbidden to cause damage to the book, tear out or bend pages, get food or drink spilled over the book or hurt her or his dignity in any other way. The Reader is responsible for preserving the condition of the Book.”

SMPL said it will host another such event in April 2009. Co-coordinators of the Santa Monica Public Library – Living Library are Rachel Foyt and Julie MacDonald. (In photo, Living Library founder Ronni Abergel is pictured with all the “books.”)

Next event

This Saturday, the Bainbridge Island Library of the Kitsap Regional Library, WA, will hold the second U.S. “Living Library,” featuring, among others, an antiviolence activist, a former gang member, a person who is quadriplegic, a Muslim U.S. Marine veteran, and an atheist. The event is presented in conjunction with the library’s One Community, One Book project to read *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

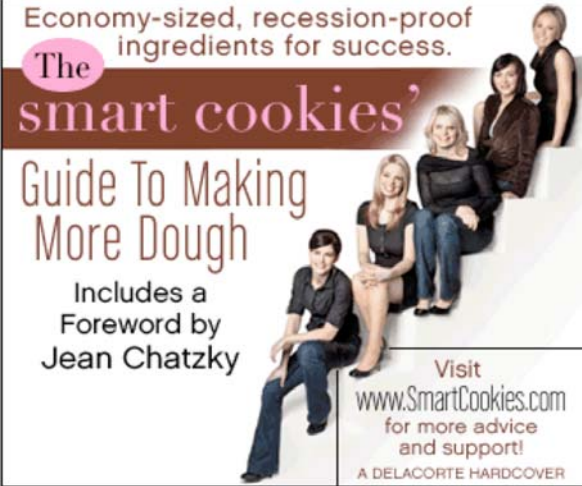


Danish antiviolence campaigner Ronni Abergel, who founded the project in 2000, has brought it to at least a dozen countries. “We live in a time where we need dialogue,” he [told](#) the Christian Science Monitor in June. “With dialogue comes understanding and with that comes tolerance and that’s the mission of the Living Library: to promote understanding and tolerance through dialogue.” He was present at the Santa Monica event and will be at the Bainbridge Island Library.

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