Dear Friends,

It’s been just over a year since the pandemic caused much of our country to shut down. The Lisa Libraries has weathered changes, including twice having to suspend our volunteer program, leaving the running of our organization primarily to the indefatigable Ellen Luksberg. During this time, book donations to us continued, as well as requests for books, although the nature of both of these aspects of our operations changed - so, like many of us, we’ve been doing some soul-searching and reflecting.

The Lisa Libraries has now been collecting new books and distributing them to underserved children for thirty years. (See the timeline featuring some of our highlights on the back page of the newsletter.) We’ve built long-lasting relationships not only with the generous publishing companies, agents, editors, reviewers, booksellers, authors, and illustrators who regularly supply us with books, but with some of the organizations that receive books as well. While most organizations receive a one-time-only donation, for example, to establish a library, others have come to us many times for books to give to children to take home and keep - participants in summer reading programs, children in the foster care system, and kids taking part in some highly imaginative projects. Read about three of these organizations on the next pages, including one run by an incredible seven-year-old girl.

A million thanks to all of our donors. You are the ones who have enabled us to put books into the hands of kids since 1990.

Gratefully,
Ann Martin

Volunteer Corner

What do you do when you move to a new town to start a new life, but have nothing going on just yet? If you’re Jess Strunk, you cross your fingers and Google local places needing volunteers. Luckily for us, Jess’s move brought her to Kingston, NY, and her Google search led her to the Lisa Libraries where she quickly became a valued member of our team. She’s passionate about literacy and can be counted on to help with anything from hefting boxes of books to choosing books for outgoing libraries, deftly judging which titles will be most appealing for the age group served.

Jess grew up in Knoxville, TN, and attended the local university, UT Knoxville, earning her BA in anthropology and Spanish. Craving a change from working in bars and restaurants after graduating, she packed up her car and moved to South Florida to pursue a career in the yachting industry. She spent the next six years working and traveling the world as a stewardess and deckhand on power and sailing yachts. In her time off, she travelled solo around the world and earned certifications in Yoga and Permaculture Design.

In 2019, she spent a weekend in Kingston, NY, fell in love with the area and soon settled down here. She now lives with her partner Jess (yes, they’re both named Jess, and in town are known as “the Jesses”) and their two cats Zoe and Gus in an apartment uptown with a gorgeous backyard. Jess works freelance as a studio assistant for furniture makers and is also growing her own Yoga therapy and holistic wellness business serving women and the LGBTQ+ community. Jess’s passions are gardening, drawing and painting, cooking, and reading a good book. As a nature lover, she also lives for swimming and nature walks. We are lucky to have her on the Lisa Libraries team!

You can find Jess at www.jessstrunk.com.

WISH LIST

Books

Now more than ever, our biggest need is simply for . . . new books. After the shutdown, donations to us slowed as most of our friends in the publishing industry began working from home. But requests for books never stopped. We need anything you can send us. Our greatest need is for easy readers and board books. Thank you!

Amazon Smile

Amazon donates .5% of the price of eligible purchases to the Lisa Libraries. Start shopping at Smile.amazon.com. Enter “The Lisa Novak Community Libraries,” as your charitable organization and shop as usual. Start future Amazon visits at Smile.amazon.com, and you will continue to support the Lisa Libraries.

Are you following us on Facebook?

Have you visited our new website?

LisaLibraries@gmail.com
www.LisaLibraries.org
www.facebook.com/lisalibraries

Spring 2021
Woodville, Alabama, a rural town with a population that hovers around 750, boasts a small but vibrant public library. The Lisa Libraries was first contacted by Karen Chambers, the librarian, in 2012, requesting children’s books. She wrote that most of the town’s population had a limited income, and that over 40 percent of the children qualified for free lunch with another 35 percent qualifying for reduced rate lunch. She added that the budget for the library was a modest $15,000, which covered “materials, supplies, paper, ink cartridges, magazine subscriptions, books for adults” - but did not extend to children’s books. Nevertheless, the children’s programs at the library were flourishing, in particular the Summer Reading Program. So the Lisa Libraries sent 100 books to be given away to the children who would be participating in that summer’s program.

This was the beginning of the Lisa Libraries’ association with the Woodville Public Library. Through phone calls, letters, and emails from Karen Chambers, we watched as the town and the library weathered changes and challenges. By 2014 the funding for the library was down 40 percent. In 2016 the Lisa Libraries continued to donate books for the summer program, and also donated 500 books to fill library shelves - shelves which had yet to be built. Then came 2020. The library closed at the beginning of March due to Covid, and the reading programs were suspended. And “On a Sunday night,” Karen wrote, “over four inches of rain came into our library and did over $15,000 worth of damage.” The flooring was ruined, drywall needed replacing, and painting and other repairs were necessary. Worst of all, many of the books were destroyed. By May, the town council considered permanently closing the library. Nevertheless, the people of Woodville persisted, and somehow funds were raised for repairs to the building. Amazingly, in February of this year, Karen wrote to say that the summer reading program would be up and running, albeit virtually. And the restocking of the shelves could begin. The Lisa Libraries made a donation of 100 books for the shelves of this resilient and inspiring library, followed by another 100 after the board thanked us for the “first class” donation!

Persistence and Resiliency

Best of luck to our former volunteer Heidi in all of her new adventures!
Two years ago the Lisa Libraries first heard from Dr. Teena Chopra, an infectious disease specialist working with several hospitals in the Detroit area. She wrote to say that her 5-year-old daughter Simran Adnani, an avid and early reader, had started a campaign called Bridges With Books. It all began when Chopra read books about Martin Luther King, Mohandas Gandhi, and other historical figures with her daughter, and Simran found heroes in many of them. She also began to wonder if other kids, especially those in her native India, had the same advantages she did. When she learned that many did not she decided to change that. She and her family raised enough funds to open six Little Free Libraries in villages in India. Simran didn’t stop there. Her mother told her about the babies in the neonatal intensive care unit at the Children’s Hospital of Michigan, 80% of whom are from underserved families in Detroit, and Simran wanted to help them too. So the Lisa Libraries donated 50 board books to her campaign. That was the start of our association with this incredible little girl. Simran has begun a new initiative, called SIMRAN - Science, Innovation, Math, Reading, Art, and eNgineering. Her mother reported that Simran now hosts a book club, again for underserved children in Detroit, that meets every Saturday via Zoom, and that she wanted to collect multiple copies of books so that each club member could have a copy to read, reread, and share with their siblings. Of course that was just what we sent her. We hope our association continues for many years. After all, Simran is only seven years old!

In Michigan, the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home (KCJH) serves as a secure short-term placement for young people ages 11-17 (80% of whom are eligible for free lunch when in their communities) who are awaiting court hearings or more permanent placements. The home is aided by the KCJH Foundation whose mission is to support and enrich the lives of the residents and their families. To that end, they’ve implemented everything from music therapy to workshops in Tai Chi to literacy programs at the home. The “Late Show” began as an evening story hour, with a volunteer reading to residents over the intercom once a week. It became so popular that weekly book clubs were started, as well as the “Diversions” program offered to families of the residents to improve literacy skills. The Lisa Libraries first heard from Jaishree Khatri, the Residential Treatment Services Manager, in 2019, requesting 100 books to be given to residents to keep when they leave the facility. Since then, we’ve donated the same number of books every few months. Jaishree wrote in her first letter to us, “For many of the youths this is the first book that they will own; we are honored to help them get their personal libraries started.” And the Lisa Libraries is honored to be a part of that process.
Lisa Libraries Timeline

1990 – the Lisa Libraries, operating out of a spare bedroom in Ann Martin’s NYC apartment, donates its first library to an organization on the Lower East Side of Manhattan

1992 – we outgrow our location and move to warehouse space on Bergen Street in Brooklyn

1998 – on the move again as we relocate to a 100-year-old mixed-use former garment factory in the Hudson Valley

1999 – this year, we donate over 10,000 new books to nonprofit organizations benefitting children in need

2008 – this year, we donate over 28,000 books

2009 – we donate to 45 organizations serving underprivileged children

2010 – we received a generous donation of packaging tape from Tapeworks (tape-works.com) and they have continued to support us over the years – our good friend Debbie Jensen helps us set up a Facebook page

2011 – we are thankful to start receiving support from ColorPage of Kingston, NY, for our newsletters – 1.5 million dollars worth of books have been given away since 1990

2013 – over 2,500 books donated as part of Hurricane Sandy relief

2014 – United Healthcare of Kingston holds a book drive to benefit the Lisa Libraries and brings us over 800 books

2015 – this year, we donate 2200 books to summer reading programs alone

2017 – we are excited to work with the newly established AJ Williams-Myers African Roots Center in Kingston, NY, whose mission is to promote literacy through learning about the African roots experience

2019 – we send books to an Alaska foster care system to help the children retain their native culture, and to a storm ravaged after-school tutoring program in Puerto Rico

2020 – we didn’t let a global pandemic shut us down – despite many challenges we send out 90 donations – both locally and across the country

2021 – we are already off to a great start, shipping 50 libraries to organizations across the country – covering 20 states

Thank you to some of our largest book donors