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Friends to present first in the 'Mary Jo Johnston Children's Author Series'

Mary Jo Johnston would be delighted with the special program chosen this year by Friends of the Kankakee Public Library to promote reading for children.

As program chairman of The Friends, Mary Jo worked tirelessly to help garner good speakers, but the spring program that involved children was her favorite. As a retired educator, she well knew how important it is to interest children in reading. Over the years she brought in such fine, award-winning children's authors as Richard Peck and Lois Lowry.

Because of her efforts, The Friends' board has named the children's author program for her. The first in the "The Mary Jo Johnston Children's Authors Series" will be presented in her honor on at 7 p.m. March 13 at the Kankakee Public Library.

The program will feature award-winning children's author Christopher Paul Curtis, a writer Mary had mentioned as a possibility. In her stead, librarian Cindy Fuerst and her staff have worked assiduously in obtaining Curtis for this special program.

Curtis' first book, "The Watsons go to Birmingham-1963," published in 1995, was called an "exceptional first

novel" by Publishers Weekly. His second novel, "Bud, Not Buddy," written in 2000, is the first book ever to receive both the Newbery Award Medal and the Coretta Scott King Author Award. It was on the ALA's Best Books for Young Adults and School Library Journal Best Books of the year, among others.

"Mr. Chickee's Messy Mission" was published in 2005, and his latest work, "Elijah of Buxton," will go on sale March 25.

Many of Curtis' books take place in Flint, Mich., where the author was born. Attending school there, he loved to read, but says he couldn't find books "that were about me." Perhaps that is why his books offer the viewpoints and perceptions of children and are interlaced with a gentle humor.

"To me the highest acco-



lade comes when a young reader tells me, 'I really liked your book.' The young seem to be able to say 'really' with a clarity, a faith, and an hon-

esty that we as adults have long forgotten. That is why I write." Curtis says.

Curtis worked for 13 years on the assembly line at Fisher Body Plant in Flint. He took a year off work to complete his first book which he wrote in longhand in the children's room of the Windsor Public Library. Appropriately, his son Steven typed his words into a computer and served as its first reader.

Curtis will appear twice in Kankakee on March 13. He will talk with middle school students in the Kankakee School District and will culminate his visit with a talk for both adults and children at the library. Copies of his books will be for sale at the Library that evening.

Today Curtis takes opportunities to speak to children and educators alike to promote the importance of reading. He also has written a tutorial on his Web site to help teachers make his books more effective for children in the classroom.

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Mary's two daughters, Julia and Karen, have been invited to introduce the author. It should be an extraordinary evening.

Artist creates innovative photo designs



Chris Shoup of Kankakee has a degree in writing and literature from Columbia University, but it is his minor in visual arts that is taking center stage these days.

Shoup, a Bonfield native who moved back to the area in 2000 to teach middle school, soon found that writing wasn't what he enjoyed most.

Speaking at the Kankakee Public Library Jan. 24, he admitted that "I found writing to be difficult and really time-consuming."

Although passionate about teaching his fifth graders at King Middle School, he wanted to express himself artistically in some way. A few years ago he came up with an idea to combine his love for nature with his interest in visual arts.

The result has been astonishing.

Using a 35 mm camera and lots of imagination, he has created a series of intriguing designs borrowing from the technique Greeks used to make decorative mosaic tiles. He explained his complicated process using a power point program that featured photos he took of himself at work.

He first selects a subject, takes dozens of photos from all angles and then selects a few that will best carry out his design. He makes multiple prints of these and attaches them to a piece of foam core placing each picture next to its mirrored image. The finished design gives almost a kaleidoscopic effect. He then frames the artwork himself.

He tends to work in series and always takes his pictures locally. His first series involved nature, but in 2005 he did a series of designs based on architecture. He used the Kankakee Public Library, the Bradley House, the Kankakee Depot, the Shapiro clock tower and the Kankakee River dam.

Last summer he took dozens of photos of fireworks and has plans to use them for another series of colorful designs.

He says he has become very inventive in his use of the camera in order to achieve many dif-

ferent effects. Sometimes he shoots into the sun or leaves the shutter open to create unique lighting designs. "I'm always trying to improve," he says.

Recently he used the light of the full moon, moving his open shuttered camera to form shapes of the letters of the alphabet on the camera's exposed film. He then placed the shapes in separate boxes to achieve a unique design.

Shoup has found that this type of art can be just as time-consuming as writing. "It took me about seven months of full moons to get the whole alphabet," he said with a grin.

And the process takes dozens of rolls of film because he takes so many pictures at different angles to be sure he has enough choices to make a design with optimal visual appeal. But it's a labor of love for him because he feels his artwork, in addition to his passion for teaching, is a true expression of himself. "It's who I am," he said.

As Shoup's collection of pictures grows, he hopes more galleries will take an interest in showing and selling them. He has several on permanent display at the Kankakee Public Library and has shown artwork at the Gretchen Charleton Gallery in Kankakee; Smith Home Gallery in Manhattan; Peter Jones Gallery and John Gait Gallery, both in Chicago; and the Sanctuary Gallery in Clifton.



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Friends, libraries, books, authors, programs and friends

Meet the author: Tony Romano

Another award-winning author will be the guest of a program sponsored by Friends of the Kankakee Public Library Feb. 28.

Tony Romano will speak at 7 p.m. on the first floor of the Kankakee Public Library. He has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes and is a two-time winner of a PEN Syndicated Fiction Project.

His fiction has appeared in many publications, including the Chicago Tribune, and his stories have been produced for National Public Radio's *The Sound of Writing* series. His debut novel, "When The World Was Young", was featured in the Chicago Tribune as one of the best books of 2007.

A description of "When the World Was Young" on Publisher Harper Collins' web site gives a glimpse of the fascinating book he will discuss:

"Chicago, 1957. Italian-American immigrants Angela Rosa and Agostino Peccatori still cling to their old ways even as they cope with raising a family in an unfamiliar land.



"Angela Rosa has devoted her entire adult life to her children, while Agostino runs the corner social club and tavern, and often indulges his weakness for the ladies.

"Their oldest son Santo, newly graduated from high school, agonizes over becoming like his father, while his 16-year-old sister, Victoria, secretly meets boys and smokes cigarettes.

"But the conflict between tradition and assimilation is overshadowed when heart-break strikes—a tragedy that sends the family on colliding and intersecting paths, and indelibly marks their lives."

The subject of the book is one dear to Romano's heart because in many ways it parallels his own life. His father immigrated from Italy when he was 37, established himself as a tailor and then sent for his wife and children, a son, 5; and Tony, who was 11 months. His parents never conquered the English language, and Tony never learned more than enough Italian to hold basic conversations with his parents. He says he missed being able to hear their stories or share their feelings. The book he has written uses the Peccatori family to create an imaginary world of a boy, who like Romano, struggles to come to grips with life.

Copies of "When the World Was Young" will be available for sale at the Library on the evening of the program.

Friends annual book sale; not too early to sort your books

Time to check shelves, stacks or anywhere else you'll find "gently used" books for the ANNUAL FRIENDS BOOK SALE. The sale will be part of the Community Arts Council's *Strawberry Festival*, JUNE 8, at the Civic Auditorium. Please call Evie Torchia, 932-4062, if you would like to volunteer to work, sort or sell books. If you have books to donate, please call Burma Mathews at 937-4128.





A little gem... a book review from a friend

The Shadow Catcher by Marianne Wiggins

In December Julia Keller from the Chicago Tribune wrote a column about her choice of the best book of 2007, *The Shadow Catcher* by Marianne Wiggins. The review was so enthusiastic about Wiggins' writing and so very convincing that I determined to find the book at our library, which I did.

Using her own name, Marianne Wiggins creates a fictional author. She interweaves two tales, one of Edward S. Curtis, the turn-of-the-twentieth-century photographer, the other of a mysterious father who an emergency room nurse insists is Marianne's father when the fact is that Marianne's father had already been dead thirty years.

Marianne Wiggins has written a biography of Edward S. Curtis, the turn-of-the-century icon whose mission was to photograph all Native American tribes before they disappeared. Which as we know didn't happen. In the course of her research she learns that Clara, Edward's wife, was his muse. Without Clara's knowledge of the arts and without her business sense, Edward would have never taken flight in his photographic art. Edward was totally self-absorbed and frequently absent from home. So much so that after his youngest daughter was born, he never saw her again until she was eighteen.

In order to clear the identity crisis about her father Marianne drives from her home in California to Las Vegas where the mysterious father lies near death. The drive gives time for musings about her father and her family life. She writes a poignant set of thoughts about loneliness in families. A portion from this set says: "When loneliness exists inside a family, it havens its own silence. Families breed loneliness that's disguised as shyness, or as boredom; or as sleep." The miles unravel more reflections about places and history along Route 66. The identity crisis is resolved in intricate ways with the imagined

reasons for Edward S. Curtis' absences. Wiggins' skill weaving the Edward S. Curtis story into that of the mysterious father is fascinating.

I loved this novel, everything about it. It just could not be put down. The characters were believable and honestly drawn. The narration was laugh aloud at times. Her commentaries about the American West, about our treatment of Native Americans, about families and memory were insightful and wise.

Julia Keller knows where to lead us on the book shelves.

-submitted by Evie Torchia

Editor's note: Ms. Keller writes a weekly column in the Sunday Chicago Tribune. It is call Lit Life.

A POET FRIEND

Today

If ever there were a spring day so perfect,
so uplifted by a warm intermittent breeze

that it made you want to throw
open all the windows in the house

and unlatch the door to the canary's cage,
indeed, rip the little door from its jamb,

a day when the cool brick paths
and the garden bursting with peonies

seemed so etched in sunlight
that you felt like taking

a hammer to the glass paperweight
on the living room end table,

releasing the inhabitants
from their snow-covered cottage

so they could walk out,
holding hands and squinting

into this larger dome of blue and white,
well, today is just that kind of day.



-Billy Collins
Nine Horses: Poems
2002

Director's comments

A gift that keeps on giving . . .

If you haven't been to the Library lately, come by to see a masterpiece in the making. Onnie Kahlenberg of Eggallery Designs is painting a one of a kind mural in the café area on the first floor of the Library. The mural is an artistic interpretation reflecting our community's proud history, as well as our bright future.

Onnie was born into a family of artists. Her mother was a respected artist who attended the Art Institute of Chicago, and her great, great grandfather, Fredrich Gelschach, was an esteemed artist and muralist in Germany. Onnie made the most of her talents by attending the Art Institute of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida for Interior Design where she won the highest achievement award. Her artwork can be seen throughout Chicago and the suburbs as well as in Miami, Naples, Las Vegas, and Fort Lauderdale.

This public art which will be appreciated for generations to come has been made possible because of two Friends of the Library, Betty and Art Oberlin. Mr. and Mrs. Oberlin were avid library users, and strong library advocates. Betty was membership chair for the Friends for many years. Unfortunately they passed away before we moved to our new facility, but they remembered us in their will and they continue to have a positive impact on our Library. Our community has a proud history, and a bright future to depict in this mural because of people like Betty and Art... and you.

*Happy Reading,
Cindy*

Let's talk books...

Books— what's new, and perhaps, most important, what have friends been reading?

Here's a short list of new mysteries:

- ! **THE APPEAL**— John Grisham returns to his more familiar and popular genre, the legal thriller.
- ! **BLEEDING KANSAS**— Sara Paretsky deviates from her V.I. Warshawski detective series to write “a timely tale of fear and conflict in heartland America.” (Publishers Weekly)
- ! **BLONDE FAITH**— Walter Mosley writes the 10th book of his very popular Easy Rawlins mystery series.
- ! **7TH HEAVEN**— The seventh in the Women's Murder Club thriller series by James Patterson.

While titles by such blockbuster authors are destined for the bestseller list, other titles are less boisterous. Often the best books are those that make it into the hands of readers through word of mouth. A book such as Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen, a tale of circus life during the Great Depression, is a good example. The Ha Ha by Dave King is another. This novel tells the story of a disabled Viet Nam veteran and a young boy that is as unique as it is unforgettable.

And Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson. When an American fails to climb a mountain in Pakistan, is

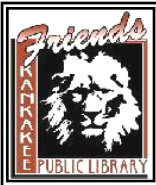
lost and injured and is taken in and cared for by the people of a poor small village, he vows to build a school for girls. Considered an inspirational read, this book demonstrates the author's view “that the U.S. must fight Islamic extremism in the region through collaborative efforts to alleviate poverty and improve access to education.” (Publishers Weekly)

These are precisely the books that more people should hear about. And that is exactly what Friends want to encourage. This can be done when we take the time to write a short review of a book that you think others should know about. Think of it as “trading” book suggestions and recommendations.

Mary Jo lived and loved books so much that she created a list of book reviews: *Little Gems of Authors and Books You May Have Missed*.

In order to continue this immensely popular project, please consider sending a book review of a book that you think others would enjoy as much as you did (or is at least of note). Send your reviews to Vickie Romein, romein@comcast.net. The reviews will then be compiled and the list will be available at the annual meeting.

Friends, readers, Library patrons, as well as Library staff find *Little Gems* to be a valuable tool in promoting reading. Surely, you'll want to get on this bandwagon.



BOOKMARKS

NEWSLETTER
OF THE FRIENDS

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FRIENDS EVENTS *SPRING 2008*

FEBRUARY

- 20-Wednesday, Friends board meeting, 5:00p.m., Small Conference Room, 1st floor @the library

- ! 28-Thursday, 7:00 p.m., Friends present Chicago author, **Tony Romano**, who will talk about his first novel of an Italian family in 1950s Chicago. @ the library on the 1st floor. (Please, see page 3 for more information)

Copies of Mr. Romano's book will be on sale at the program.

MARCH

- ! 19-Wednesday, Friends Board Meeting, 5:00 p.m. Small Conference Room, 1st floor @the library

- ! 13-Thursday, 7:00 p.m., Friends present the inaugural *Mary Jo Johnston Children's Author Series* program, featuring award-winning author **Christopher Paul Curtis**, 1st floor @the library.

Copies of Mr. Curtis' books will be on sale at the program.

APRIL

- ! 5- Saturday, **Friends Annual Meeting**, 10:30 a.m., 3rd floor meeting room @the library. See page 5 for information on how to send a review for *Little Gems of Books and Authors You May Have Missed*

MAY

- ! -21, Wednesday, Friends Board Meeting, 5:00 p.m., Small Conference Room 1st floor @the library