

Book Club

Sabotaging summer reading

During the FBI's Operation Backfire investigation, agents accused the eco-saboteurs of meeting several times for "Book Club." As it turns out, it seems that everyone involved in this case was rather bookish.

According to the federal prosecutors, the participants in the five Book Club meetings learned about lock picking, reconnaissance, computer security, manufacture of incendiary devices and other skills. Not every participant in Book Club engaged in the arsons.

The Backfire court dates became a sort of book club of their own; each day prosecutors, defendants and the judge discussed their recommended reading.

The prosecutors kicked off the discussion when they accused the defendants of using works by Native American author Leslie Marmon Silko and fantasy writer Ursula K. LeGuin to pass coded messages about Club meetings.

This code, the prosecutors said, used a series of numbers and a chosen book—Silko's *Ceremony*, for example—to create the messages. The series of numbers would direct the member to a page and then to words on the page in order to spell out a message.

The prosecution also named several works put out by Earth and Animal Liberation Front activists. These guides were originally distributed as photocopied pamphlets and in 'zines; later they were made into downloadable pdf files.

These works include: *The Final Nail: Destroying the Fur Industry — A Guided Tour #2*; *Setting Fires with Electrical Timers: An Earth Liberation Front Guide*; *Arson-Around with Auntie ALF: Your Guide for Putting the Heat on Animal Abusers Everywhere*; *The ALF Primer: A Guide to Direct Action and the Animal Liberation Front* and *The Black Cat Sabotage Handbook*.

The manuals contain instructions ranging from how to make an incendiary device to how to create cruelty-free glue from wheat

flour for posting flyers.

The government said these works were "malicious" and cited supposed involvement in producing them as part of the defendants' criminal background.

It is against federal law to distribute, teach or demonstrate the making or use of a destructive device, explosive or weapon of mass destruction if you know or intend for a person to use that information in a crime.

The Eugene Public Library carries *The Anarchist Cookbook*, which includes instructions for

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making explosives and drugs. It is currently listed as missing with three holds. The book is available, along with the U.S. Department of Defense's *Improvised Munitions Handbook*, which explains how to create grenades, fuses and detonators in your own home, from Amazon.com.

For those who like to use pithy sayings as fashion statements, Amazon.com has also been known to offer T-shirts and mugs emblazoned with the saying, "Factories don't burn down by themselves — they need help from you."

The defendants all stated at their sentences that they no longer advocate for the use of arson or violence, and many have been reading a different sort of book lately.

Chelsea Gerlach was inspired while in jail by *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*, a work by Pema Chödrön on how to bring order to your life from a Tibetan Buddhist point of view. And Amanda Lee, Daniel McGowan's attorney, began her arguments by quoting Gandhi: "You need to be the change you wish to see in the world."

There's even some reading for the kids:



From McGowan's website you can order a fundraising children's book called *The Secret World of Terijian* in which "elves" and children seek to save a forest from destruction.

Aiken suggested for inspiration while in prison that the defendants turn to works like *Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy* by Sarah Ban Breathnach. Perhaps they can find comfort in advice from Ban Breathnach like, "Be grateful for the home you have, knowing that at this moment, all you have is all you need."

Aiken also quoted from *A Defiant Life: Thurgood Marshall and the Persistence of Racism in America* by Howard Ball and gave advice on the importance of education from the writings of Marian Wright Edelman. Edelman was the founder of the Children's Defense Fund and the first black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar.

Go East, Young Man: The Early Years: The Autobiography of William O. Douglas was another of the works cited by Aiken. Douglas, a Supreme Court Justice, was an early supporter of the environmental movement. He is often quoted by champions of civil liberties: "Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions. It is the one un-American act that could most easily defeat us."

The power of writing was made clear when Aiken applied the terrorism enhancement to eight of the 10 defendants based on her reading of the communiqués sent after each arson.

The Backfire investigation seems to have inspired some books of its own. Writers are clamoring to write the first best seller about the arsons. Potential authors who have contacted defendants include journalists Alice

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Judge Ann Aiken was not to be outdone when it came to citing books. As each of the 10 defendants was sentenced, she had a story or a book suggestion for each of them, from folktales to self-help.

Tallmadge, Allyn Harvey, Will Potter and former *EW* reporter Kera Abraham, who won a national award for her "Flames of Dissent" series. At least three documentary filmmakers have thrown their hats into the ring as well. **EW**



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