



EZRA TISHMAN TALKS TO CUSTOMERS IN THE BOOK BUS

PHOTOS BY SHELLEY DEADMOND

BUS OF BOOKS

If your soul is feeling like a frozen sea within you, Franz Kafka would recommend you read a book to serve as an axe for the ice — and Eugene-based nonprofit Books to the People wants to be there with a carefully selected collection of axes for you to choose from at no cost to you.

Ezra Tishman and his team of dedicated volunteers are on a mission to bring free books to people on wheels via “Gertie,” a 29-foot long book bus. Wandering Lane County, Books to the People frequently visits rural towns such as Monroe and Veneta, is a regular in the Whiteaker neighborhood on last Fridays of the month and had a weekly presence at Eugene’s Kesey Square on Wednesdays in October by invitation from the city. Books to the People will be fundraising at Cozmic on Nov. 17.

“Gertie” is named as such “not because we like to name our vehicles after beautiful women,” says Books to the People founder and director Tishman on a damp Wednesday afternoon at Kesey Square, “but because the bus is a *Gerstenslager* library bookmobile” he says with an exaggerated German accent. Tishman looks every bit the aficionado in a black beret, small spectacles and a T-shirt that reads “I can’t live without my books.”

Why free books? Why not is more like it. “I remember a day back in 1970; I was working at Harvard University and I took all the books I had and went out on the street with a taxi horn and I stood there without saying any words and just honked and gave them away to people. I got such a thrill out of that, that was 40 years ago.”

Tishman and his wife, a UO literature professor, purchased the bus in 2007 and began selling discount books out of it. A book dealer by profession, Tishman says he realized he could still operate his private book business while also serving a community need, so he donated 9,000 books to get started. “At a certain point, I wanted to do this nonprofit ... you know how they say ‘be the change you want to see?’ I remembered that this is like doing your part, a lot of times books are too expensive for the people who really need them.”

At 62, Tishman exudes a youthful enthusiasm. “I consider books to be portals. Portals to parallel universes, portals to possibility — you can change your life by taking in a book.” He says as he shuffles among the shelves that line the interior of the bus, rearranging and organizing books with a focused quickness. A few people browse the shelves and chat amongst themselves as Johnny Cash plays in the background.

“The majority of books here are ones that you can really sink your soul into,” says Tishman as he wanders over to the classics section: Ivan Turgenev, Herman Melville, Margaret Mead. Books should be available to everyone, he thinks, regardless of their circumstances: “They’re not necessarily limited to people who are economically poor, because sometimes we’re idea poor at the same time, right — and we’re inspiration poor. So the people that really need them are anybody that feels stuck.”

Books to the People received its official nonprofit status in August of this year, has an active board of directors and is seeking new volunteers to expand capacity. “We really need a social network coordinator, a webmaster; we need volunteers for this organization,” Tishman says.

As the nonprofit grows, it is rumored that Gertie’s girth may be too large for Kesey Square, but Tishman says that they really like it there and is optimistic that a good relationship with the city will lead to a good outcome, whether at Kesey Square or elsewhere downtown.

Books to the People will hold its second annual fundraising event at 6 pm Nov. 18 at Cozmic that will feature local bands Mood Area 52 and Tara Stonecipher and the Tall Grass. There will also be a silent auction featuring items including a signed and framed poem by Wendell Berry. Tickets will be sold at the door on a sliding scale ranging from \$15-\$25 by donation. For more information about Gertie the book bus, her whereabouts and how to get involved check out bookstothepeople.org — Shelley Deadmond



BOOKS TO THE PEOPLE AT KESEY SQUARE

ACTIVIST ALERT

- “The **PERS Picture in Oregon** and Springfield” will be the topic at Springfield City Club at 11:45 am Thursday, Nov. 15, at Willamalane Center, 250 South 32nd St., Springfield. Panelists will include John Thomas, Brett Yancey and Bob Duey.

- The LCC Peace Center and CALC are sponsoring a forum, “**Debunking the Myth of the Muslim Tide**,” at 1 pm Thursday, Nov. 15, at LCC Building 19, Room 26. Retired UO professor Dan Goldrich will speak on U.S. post-WW II foreign policy actions that have had an impact on the Middle East. LCC sociology instructor Nadia Raza will emcee the panel. For more information contact Michael Carrigan of CALC, 485-1755.

- Washington state **Poet Laureate Kathleen Flenniken** will be reading from her book *Plume* at 7 pm Thursday, Nov. 15, at the First United Methodist Church, 1376 Olive St., Eugene. Flenniken grew up next door to the Hanford Nuclear Reservation and worked as a civil engineer at Hanford. She wrote her book after declassified documents revealed the hidden dangers of Hanford. Book signing and refreshments will follow the reading. See oregonwand.com

- **No Coal Eugene** is hosting a teach-in and open forum at 6 pm Thursday, Nov. 15, at 100 Willamette Hall on campus. No Coal Eugene encourages local citizens to assert community rights over corporate power. Speakers will talk about the impacts of coal trains, present short films, and an open forum will discuss solutions and mobilizing. Contact nocoaleugene@gmail.com or visit nocoaleugene.org for more information.

- An Elliott State Forest **mushroom hike** is planned for 10 am Saturday, Nov. 17, sponsored by Forest Web of Cottage Grove and Cascadia Forest Defenders. “Learn about the fungus native to our bioregion, enjoy a hike through a beautiful area and bring home some of the bounty of the forest!” say organizers. Hikers will meet up near Reedsport, at the turnout where Loon Lake Road meets 7700 at Cougar Pass Road. Eugene car-pool will meet at 8 am at 17th and Charnelton. For more info, call (530) 574-1105.

- Volunteer training for the **Egan Warming Centers** will be from 10 am to noon Saturday, Nov. 17, at First Christian Church, 1166 Oak St.; 6 to 7 pm Tuesday, Nov. 20, at Trinity United Methodist Church, 440 Maxwell Ave.; and 10 am to noon Saturday, Nov. 24, at Ebbert Memorial, 532 C St. in Springfield.

- Quaker peace and justice activist **Peg Morton** will launch her new book *Feeling Light Within, I Walk* from 1 to 3 pm Saturday, Nov. 17, at Eugene Friends Meeting, 2274 Onyx; from 4 to 6 pm Sunday, Nov. 25, at Tsunami Books, 2585 Willamette; and distribution of pre-purchased books will be from 2 to 5 pm Saturday, Dec. 1, at 510 Van Buren St. Morton can be reached at 342-2914.

- The Coalition for Justice is planning a return of **Abolition Project**, a two-night fashion show beginning at 7 pm Monday and Tuesday, Nov. 19-20, at UO’s EMU. Ten local designers will show their talents with 100 models, with the help of 230 volunteers. Proceeds go to Hope Ranch Ministries, a local safe house for victims of human trafficking. Find ticket information at the Abolition Project Facebook page or email alishag@uoregon.edu