

Gigging in Pacific County

*Astoria author Matt Love recently toured the
Timberland Regional Libraries in Pacific County,
Washington — and the experience left an impression*

It was 10:50 a.m. on a Thursday morning in early February. I sat alone in the Ilwaco Library meeting room wondering if a single person would attend my 11 a.m. presentation about my writing and publishing career.

At long last, after 14 years and almost 1,000 gigs around Oregon in support of the books, I would finally suffer the indignity of zero attendance at one of my events.

Virtually every author has a “no one showed up at my gig story,” and now mine was about to unfold. *See what you get for venturing outside your familiar territory*, Matt, I thought to myself. *Washington is going to deliver some pain and humiliation.*

And to make matters worse, two hours after the Ilwaco non-gig, I had to drive to the Ocean Park library for another event. I would be the only author in history with back-to-back gigs in the same day where no one showed up!

10:55 ... room empty ... I was walking the plank, a perfect metaphor since Ilwaco is a sea-faring town.

Six months earlier I had arranged a Pacific County tour that called for stops in Ilwaco, Ocean Park, Naselle, South Bend and Raymond during February. I no longer recall what sort of delusional state led me to pitch such an insane idea. In my mind, I had no readership in Washington, but the folks at the Timberland Regional Library System responded immediately and happily set up the schedule. I was even guaranteed \$50 an appearance, which would just about cover expenses for each gig.

At 10:58 a.m., a couple walked in and sat down. A minute later, another person and a library employee joined the group. I did the show, a great conversation among friends rather than a show, and sold five books.

A few hours later, I left the Ocean Park Library in a daze after that presentation. Sixteen people attended, they bought 16 books, and I scored a free, groovy coffee table book from the 1970s about whales.

I did a little calculation: the first two events of the Pacific County Tour had yielded the highest percentage of attendees to books sold (105 percent) in my career. In Washington?

A few days later, seven people attended my evening presentation at the Naselle Timberland

Library. The staff provided sugar cookies and strong coffee. I sold 11 books — another sales record for the number of people at an event. I didn’t know what to make of it.

The tour ramped back up a couple weeks later with a 2 p.m. Saturday show at the Raymond library. I had never visited Raymond before and misjudged how long it would take to drive there, so I ended up arriving two hours early. Yes, I had two hours to kill in Raymond, and I killed them with glee.

I bought two cassettes from a thrift store, drank a Washington beer in the Pitchwood Inn, and bought a \$350 purple electric guitar from a mystic or madman; I couldn’t decide his status.

At 1:57 p.m., I sat alone in the basement meeting room of the Raymond Timberland Library, surrounded by a real or fake plant and forlorn bean bag chairs. This was it. The streak was over. It hit me! I actually didn’t want anyone to show up! If someone did, I would tell them to leave. GET OUT! I needed the no-show story for my new book about gigging.

With one minute to go, two older women walked in the door, and then we were joined by a library employee. The gig was fun, interactive. We shared Raymond stories, and I had one to share. I sold six books and did a little jig heading to the truck. On the way home, I celebrated my success by stopping in at the Dock of the Bay in Bay Center for an oyster burger.

The following Saturday, I arrived 90 minutes early in South Bend for a 2 p.m. show at the library. I killed time by hitting an antique shop and buying a double California Jam II rock album and a vintage Hamm’s Beer light.

At 1:59 p.m., I was in the library thumbing through my Astoria book, trying to choose what piece to read. Not a single person was in the audience, if you didn’t count the man reading the newspaper in the front row of chairs who seemed oblivious that an author was about ready to read from his work. He asked me, “What’s going on?”

I told him. He didn’t care, but he didn’t leave either.

Could I count this man as an attendee and continue the streak?



Submitted photo

At the South Bend Timberland Library, the audience included a man who read a newspaper throughout author Matt Love’s authors presentation. notforsale

Photo by Matt Love

Astoria author Matt Love recently held a book tour at Timberland Regional Libraries in Pacific County, Washington.



With 30 seconds to go, a woman walked into the library and sat down in the second row. Then my two close friends, Tim and Angie, showed up in all their medicinal dankness and took up the back row. A couple minutes into the show, another woman arrived and found a seat. The man kept reading the newspaper throughout the gig, occasionally dropping it to blast me with invectives like, “You’re pontificating,” or, “You’re lucky you have an old dog that will listen to you.”

It had come to this: Someone at a gig heckled me about my old husky!

I took it all in with a smile and rolled the man into the show. A lively discussion about gentrification ensued, and a few times I had to reel the man back into the stream of narrative of the event. That was no problem for me. I’m a teacher and do it in the classroom all the time.

Tim, a fine poet who goes to the body

of poetry like Rocky did to Apollo Creed’s ribcage, recited one of his poems to end the gig. When the show concluded, Tim bought my rain book for the man and I bought Tim’s book of poetry and gave it to the heckler as a gift. Why not? “Turn the other cheek,” someone once said in an old book. The man seemed enthusiastic to receive the gifts. He told me to keep up my hard work in the classroom.

I sold another book to one of the ladies and donated some of my titles to the library, as I had done at all the other stops on the tour.

Thank you coastal southwest Washington, for the quirkiest mini-tour of my literary life. The library staffs were nothing short of wonderful in their treatment of a local author. I set sales records and walked into some of the best stories in recent memory.

I’ll be back.

Matt Love teaches at Astoria High School and is author/editor of 14 books. They are available at coastal bookstores, through nestuccaspitpress.com and local libraries.

the arts

VISUAL ARTS • LITERATURE • THEATER • MUSIC & MORE

Story by MATT LOVE