



## ***Beyond the Region: New York City***

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**Keywords:** *New York, literature, imagination*

**Citation:** Friedman, R. (2016). *Beyond the Region: New York City*. *PNLA Quarterly*, 80(3).

*PQ Editorial Note: This is a series of regular columns in PNLA Quarterly focused on ideas or travel outside the PNLA region.*

As fall approaches--the New York City streets finally calming from the summer swelter and the parks grown a little raggedy with use--my home borough of Brooklyn ramps up for one of my favorite weekends of the year. More than 250 authors and thousands of fans cram into municipal buildings, lecture halls, bars, and bookstores (and synagogues and museums, and just about anywhere else you can accommodate a pack of glasses-wearing book lovers) for the Brooklyn Book Festival, a yearly celebration of literature for all ages. Events range from a panel discussion of the legacy of science fiction writer Octavia Butler to multimedia flash fiction workshops to an hour of readings by poets laureate past and present. For the sprawling subject matter, the unbridled enthusiasm, and the opportunity to hear authors and other literary types (including librarians!) speak on carefully curated panels, I anticipate this overwhelming weekend for months. In truth, though, it requires no major event or annual festival to catch a glimpse of a favorite author or illustrator. The reality of living in New York is high-density literati, an urban stomping ground, breeding ground and graveyard of generations of writers.

The concentration of creators stretches outside the city limits. One week after the Brooklyn Book festival, kids, parents, and other fans of literature for young people will flock to the Chappaqua Children's Book Festival, an annual event in the small Westchester County town north of New York City where I work as a public children's librarian. For six hours on a Saturday, more than 90 writers and artists--ranging from around-the-block locals to those driving in from an hour away--will read and sign books and answer questions. These two free festivals take up only a portion of the space in New York's expansive literary calendar, a schedule dominated by events like Book Expo America (mostly, but not always in the city) and New York Comic Con.

Wonderful authors and illustrators live in and write about communities throughout the US; smaller publishing houses produce fantastic works from cities all over the country (and many more across the globe). But New York still has a lock on the nation's literary imagination and creators still gravitate toward the city with laptops and sketchpads in tow. The proximity means that librarians here often get opportunities to meet writers and artists--to learn about a new illustration technique or get an inside look at a research process--and gush, complain, beg for a sequel, whatever. And it's not only the names on the book jackets we see out here. With the five largest publishing companies in the United States headquartered in New York, the city teems with book people: editors, designers, and publicity mavens.

Librarian previews, a regular activity for some in the New York area, mark one major point of access to publishers. Two or three times a year, publishing houses throw open the doors for librarians to examine upcoming titles, hear pitches from editors and grab advance reader copies. Some companies showcase original artwork from picture books

and most invite an author or two to deliver a talk about their writing, research, or inspiration. Many librarians have learned to look beyond the headlining creators to the editors and marketing folk to seek information or put in a plea; previews also provide the chance to describe the holes we find in our collections, the books we'd love to buy, if only someone would publish them. Editors can answer questions about the evolution of a story, the fact-checking in a text or new books appearing even farther on the horizon. Marketers have insight into social media efforts and book tours.

And those book tours always include New York, giving enthusiasts an opportunity to see many authors and illustrators who make their home in another part of the world. Within walking distance of my apartment, I can reach half a dozen independent bookstores, each with regular author readings and book talks. A ten minute stroll in another direction takes me to the Central Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library, with its own calendar of Pulitzer Prize winners, poetry scholars, science writers, and more. Watching a movie at a local theater recently, I realized I had sat down next to a couple of well-known graphic novelists; I just barely avoided collision with a Caldecott Award winner on my block the other day. Proximity often leads to interaction and the connections between academics, writers, artists, book industry folk and us, the librarians, contribute a literary foundation to the whole city and help spark the production of ever more material in, around, and about New York. This town brims with creators, book professionals, and dedicated readers of all kinds--making it one of many wonderful places to be a librarian.



## Best Job in the World

**Catherine Claveau Berner**, Fairbanks, AK

**Keywords:** *book mobile, careers, outreach, community*

**Citation:** Berner, C.C. (2016). Best Job in the World. *PNLA Quarterly*, 80(3).

A year ago in August, I was in Duluth, Minnesota, my home town. On one particular morning I was seated in a family lounge at St Mary's Hospital. I had just spent a long night at my father's bedside and both of my brothers and my sister had arrived to bring breakfast to me and to spend time with dad themselves.

One of dad's nurses came in to tell us we were free to return to his room if we liked. She began to make small talk and soon was asking questions:

"Had we grown up in Duluth?"

"Where did we live now?"

I left that conversation to them, content to sit off to the side with my own thoughts, my coffee, and the glazed cranberry-orange scone they had brought for me.

Before long though, the sound of my name pulled my attention from that scone as I heard my brother say, "Oh. Kitty's the one of us with the best job."

Then my sister followed up immediately with "Yeah. She's got *my* dream job!"

Both brothers nodded and looked at me.

The nurse looked at me.

Then my other brother threw in that it's his wife's dream job too.

I had just been awake for the entire night and this was a little much for me to take in. I narrowed my eyes a bit and continued to chew.

Now, both brothers and my sister-in-law have fine lives, jobs, and careers. And my sister, it's safe to say, is a musical and stage celebrity in Duluth. Whenever I visit, I can't go anywhere with her without running into people who stop and say, "Mary Lee! It's great to see you!" and when they find out I'm her sister, they say, "I just love your sister! What a great voice and personality. She's so kind. And talented. She taught Devon to play the saxophone. She's just great." I simply nod and agree with them. But here she was saying her dream job is in my life.

One brother said, "Well, tell her what you do Kitty."

They were all very enthusiastic and I may have rolled my eyes as I pulled them from the scone.

I could see in the nurse's eyes that she was imagining the possibilities, asking herself, "What job could possibly be so cool that this quiet scone- obsessed person could do?"

Her expectations were high and I didn't know exactly how to frame a response to honor such a build-up. So I swallowed and simply came out with it: "I'm a bookmobile librarian in Fairbanks, Alaska."