

Colorful crates carry arts and communications retireeâ??s tools to better the brains of children

Description

default watermark

> *If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.*
>
> *Albert Einstein*

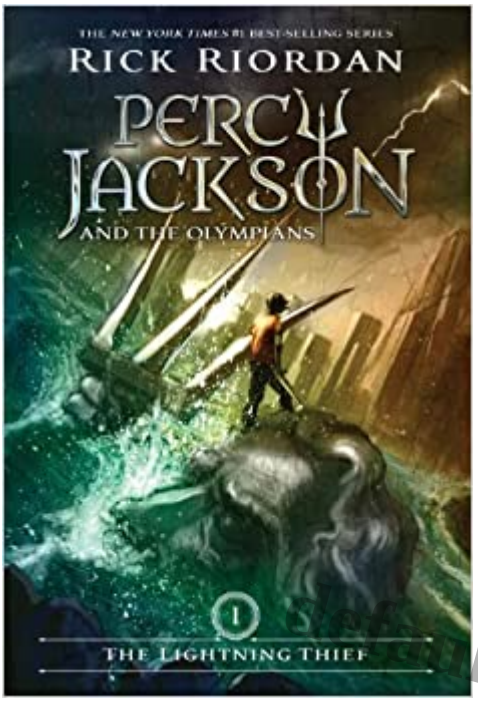
Suzanne Korey loves giving away books to kids. By her latest count, sheâ??s handed off 22,650 over the last two years. She loads her silver, 6-foot-long van with hundreds of books and heads off to spread the words at least nine times a month.

She takes her â??Book Wagonâ?• to the Mission and Bayview neighborhoods, and nearby parks, schoolyards, special events, and select sidewalks, attracting scores and sometimes hundreds of kids and adults. The books are for infants, toddlers, and children up through their early teens.

The books are discards from the San Francisco Public Libraryâ??s Community Redistribution Program, which she taps twice a month and sorts into color-coded crates. The colors indicate reading levels: Yellow ones for very simple books with lots of pictures, meant for an adult to read to a child, with titles like â??Donâ??t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus.â?• Yellow crates hold those with chapters and plots for young teenagers.



Suzanne Korey, right, and a helper drag a cartload of books to their next giveaway site. She gets the books from the San Francisco Public Libraryâ??s Community Redistribution Program. (Photo by Colin Campbell)



lt watermark

The one gray crate, for readers 12 and up, is filled with books that feature more adult themes like dating and relationships, or tough topics like addictions, or fantasy and science fiction. Harry Potter books, once precious, have faded in popularity, Korey said. â??They are easy to find and not always asked for.â?• They have been supplanted by the Percy Jackson series, about an adventurous young son of a human mother and the Greek god Poseidon.

A mighty cart

When Korey arrives at a giveaway site, she hefts the crates into the Book Wagon, a blue, four-wheeled cart sturdy enough to haul a large, heavy load.

â??I called it the Book Wagon because I didnâ??t want it confused with the libraryâ??s Bookmobile,â?• said Korey, a 74-year-old retired community college instructor. Bookmobiles are buses carpeted inside and lined with bookshelves. They make stops around the city to accommodate adults and kids. But they donâ??t give away books; they loan them.



Korey, right, stands by as a visitor selects some items from the Book Wagon. (Photo by Colin Campbell)

Korey lives on a tree-lined street in the Mission District â?? her van is parked outside. Her trove of books â?? â??too many to countâ?•â?? is downstairs ready to be loaded. Itâ??s a weighty chore and she often does it alone: thatâ??s 16, 15-pound book-crammed, plastic crates, the 23-pound Book Wagon with its clumsy wheels, plus chairs and tables. Volunteers generally lend a hand at the destination.

Her motivation for starting this nonprofit is simple, she said: Books are good for the brain, but they sure cost a lot.

She had sketched out a giveaway plan to friends and co-workers 17 years ago. But it wasnâ??t until two years ago that she had what she needed: a Ford C-Max van, the blue wagon, and crates to carry books. She bought the van to visit family near Sacramento and realized it was perfect for the long-postponed book wagon project.

Korey is a transplanted New Yorker and amateur musician who plays the piano and the harpsichord. She founded and ran a print shop for five years, taught printing at City College of San Francisco, and is a volunteer at a soup kitchen.

She seemed headed for a career in music, showing promise at the piano as a five-year-old and studying at a prep school affiliated with the prestigious Julliard School of Music. But she changed directions at the University of Wisconsin and earned a bachelorâ??s degree in history.

She came to San Francisco in 1970 and founded Jungle Press, a union print shop on Folsom Street. She ran it until 1980 when City College hired her as a part-time printing instructor.

default watermark

The common good

While teaching, earned a masterâ??s degree in industrial arts at San Francisco State University, then was promoted to chair of CCSFâ??s graphic arts and communication department. She retired from there nine years ago.

Although her volunteer gigs take up much of her time, she maintains contact with a group of women who have been meeting since they were all young mothers 45 years ago. â??Itâ??s companionship,â?• she said.

Korey, a widow, has two grandchildren. Theyâ??re good readers, she said, adding that they live too far away to help.



A child chooses a book at Koreyâ??s free distribution event. She makes sure to include books in Spanish and Chinese as well as English. (Photo courtesy of https://www.bookwagonsf.org/

Korey picks books meticulously at the public libraryâ??s redistribution center, making a point to select titles in Spanish and Chinese as well as English. Books culled after new library inventories arrive are up for grabs for qualifying agencies and nonprofits such as the Book Wagon. But they must be used for â??the common good;â?•. only the library can sell them.



â??Itâ??s a brilliant operation and attracts people from all over. It may be the only one (of its kind), I think,â?• said Korey. â??They want me to take as many as I can, and I am very choosy. We need a big selection.â?• Also popular are Judy Blume titles for ages 8 to 11, and the â??Elephant and Piggyâ?• series â?? in green crates â?? for ages 5 to 8.

default watermark

Korey uses Instagram â?? she has 130 followers â?? to announce where and when the Book Wagon will be next. The best response, she said, came from an excited youngster who exclaimed: â??This is the best bookstore ever!â?•

The rain that pummeled the city in January merely pushed Koreyâ??s giveaway sessions indoors, but that only increased attendance.

â??I get about 200 inside and 50 when I am outside,â?• she said. â??Sometimes the tables are absolutely mobbed, and we are overwhelmed.â?• Other times, crowds have to be coaxed, particularly Spanish-speaking families.

A suitable size

They often approach the tables cautiously and stay a distance, Korey said, â??until one of my Spanish-speaking volunteers invites them to come closer and look at the books. Then they do.â?•

In her first year, she had two Spanish-speaking assistants, but they moved on to seek careers.

Ideally, she would like to have a business partner. â??But I donâ??t want to get any bigger,â?• she stressed.



The Book Wagon setup, with colored crates for different levels of childrenâ??s books. (Photo courtesy of https://www.bookwagonsf.org/)

Korey herself is a veteran volunteer. She has helped out at the Martin de Porres House of Hospitality soup kitchen on Potrero Avenue for 40 years. Among other duties, sheâ??s the crew leader of the groupâ??s Thursday lunches. Sheâ??s also a key voice in the nonprofitâ??s policy-making group.

As she chats with a visitor at her home, Korey moves into the living room, passes her piano, and stops at her harpsichord, tapping out a Bach riff. Playing keeps her â??mind sharp,â?• said Korey, who still practices piano, plays duets with a violinist, and occasionally performs at the Community Music Center on Capp Street.

Category

1. All Posts

Date Created
28/01/2023
Author
tom-carter