

Executive Director's Annual Retreat Report

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Heathman Lodge, Vancouver, WA

One year ago, I arrived at the annual retreat a bit dazed from the recent death of my father. The board dynamic was in flux, having lost one of its own to the other side while another had just announced her early departure from the table for ascension to the ABA board. And it snowed. The weather sent us scurrying home 24 hours early, much less accomplished than we'd hoped, and a little out of sorts.

Despite the uneven start, we found our footing and 2019 turned out to be an outstanding year for the Association. By the time we reached the spring meeting in April we'd fortified our group with two members who stepped up to reprise their former roles as PNBA directors and helped settle our ranks. The board's support of the holiday catalog digital newsletter program following the mini-workshop and Q & A with Jenn Risko was an important tone-setter for that project and the further efforts of this group throughout the rest of 2019.

Looking ahead—the big programs:

Book Awards continue to be a steady stream of positive PR for the Association and have shown to affect sales this year. Ted Chiang's *Exhalation* shot into the top ten early in the year and has remained. Additionally, Brick & Mortar Books, Redmond, WA, is thrilled to be hosting his plaque acceptance event. Big win all around. Individual member participation proved a bit squirrely this past year, but under the management of current chair, Alexa Butler, people and process were wrestled into shape.

The Spring Forum could be in transition as ABA evaluates outreach efforts and travel commitments. They will not offer a formal education session this year but will host a forum, likely soliciting input from booksellers regarding future programs and member rapport. This was, as you may remember from my late November written report, an approach they took with the regional directors at our annual meeting, in Miami. PNBA will look into producing an opening session, possibly on utilization of the holiday catalog campaign.

The changes in Tradeshow programming received a great deal of praise in 2019 and what made it to me in terms of criticism was constructive and forgiven as natural growing pains. The Big Pitch was a big hit with reps—Christine gets first pick this year! As planned for the agenda, we will also discuss the decision to move ahead with a bookstore Tradeshow travel reimbursement for this year's show.

The holiday catalog Give Books program which underwent a serious but ultimately quite smooth evolution in 2019 will, I expect, notch-up another level in 2020. If history can be trusted, ad sales will see an upturn, and participation in the newsletter program should also see

growth. In 2019 we added 95,000 potential digital impressions and I hope to increase that number by 20% - 25%.

Looking ahead—This year's projects:

When I took over the ED job I essentially began to work with the board that hired me, a group that amassed a lot of experience and understanding about the operations of PNBA. As we've turned over members, it's become apparent that we need to provide a more thorough introduction/orientation for incoming board members. The office move actually helped clarify this process, as we unearthed an archive of materials that have been presented in the past. These will be updated and ready for this year's new members at the spring meeting.

Social media accounts (FB/Twitter/Instagram) have been set up for PNBA member communication (pacificnwbooksellers). We will promote in Feb. Footnotes and break them in relation to the spring forum. Administrative access will initially lie with myself, Tegan Tigani, for coordination with NWBL, and Jerril Nilson. Jerril has been PNBA's designer for almost 20 years (holiday catalog, NWBookLovers, PNBA website, Book Awards). She will help me learn the ropes and will help with content as prescribed by PNBA.

If you happened to look at the footer details of the Give Books newsletters this year, you may have noticed language identifying the sponsoring store as a member of PNBA and touting our collective mission:

“The Give Books guide is a special project of your local independent bookstore in partnership with the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association, which supports indies across the myriad landscapes and perspectives of the great Northwest, our shared reading paradise.”

This new language came about after a conversation with Laura Delaney regarding the discrepancy between the individual store and the larger association. We've also experienced changes in the consumer landscape in recent years regarding indie awareness. The old philosophy was to keep PNBA out of the spotlight and to promote the catalog as a project of individual stores. These days, with stores promoting strong individual brands and consumers increasing understanding and appreciation of the power of associations and of buy local philosophies. It was time to put a modern spin on our relationship and efforts.

Similar language, with the likely addition of a direct buy local bent (which was built into the newsletter branding), will be integrated into the presentation of the physical catalog beginning this year, allowing stores to shout both their independence and strength in numbers, simultaneously.

Thanks for your work and support,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian".