



Great Books: “An Integral Part of My Life”

We recently received this lovely email from long-term supporter Helen Smith.

My association with Great Books began in 1948 when I joined a leader-training group at the Providence, Rhode Island public library. In those days most of the reading assignments consisted of the entire work, not excerpts, and all selections were from the Western world.

There we learned the method of asking questions dealing with fact, interpretation, and evaluation—techniques that served and continue to serve me well in my own leading, teaching, and reading. When I was a young mother at home raising my family, I formed a group among my neighbors. I remember one participant’s amazement that she was discussing Shakespeare—even though she hadn’t graduated from high school.

I continued to stay involved in Great Books throughout my life. I credit the groups for my ease with graduate course work. When I taught Honors English at Sienna College in New York, the syllabus was, of course, the Great Books reading and discussion

program. Later, when I became the executive dean of a community college in Pittsburgh, I led a Great Books group in my office for faculty, including a philosophy professor!

As a retiree, I formed a group at the Salisbury, North Carolina public library. When we moved to Texas I became active in programming at the Round Rock Community Center (now The Baca Center) and started a group there in 1995. Although members have come and gone through the years, the group has continued without pause and is going strong with 16 active members.

Through the years we have run the gamut of your catalog: *The Adult Great Books Reading and Discussion Series*; *Introduction to Great Books* (at least twice); *Great Conversations 1–5*; *The Seven Deadly Sins*; 4 volumes of *The 50th Anniversary Series*; and now *Counterparts*.

Great Books has always been an integral part of my life. As a stay at home mom, Great Books provided me with an outlet where I could talk about issues beyond the



Helen Smith with daughter Janet.

mundane topics of child rearing and housekeeping. As a teacher and administrator, I always found that Great Books groups gave me greater insights into my students and colleagues than I would otherwise have had. Now, as a (really) senior citizen, Great Books continues to provide me not only with the challenge to keep mentally alert and to remain concerned with vital issues, but it has also given me a cadre of like-minded individuals, many of whom have become my closest friends. Thank you.

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Great Books in the Community

In partnership with several Chicago cultural organizations, the Great Books Foundation is conducting two community events under the title, **Home Is Where the Art Is**. Each event features an appearance by an author whose work is included in GBF's recently published *Immigrant Voices: 21st Century Stories*, with each event held at a community center that reflects the author's ethnic heritage. Collaborating with the Foundation are two Chicago museums, the Chicago Cultural Alliance, and Public Narrative—an organization specializing in helping nonprofits tell their stories.

Made possible by generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the project showcases writers whose work gives voice to the concerns of their communities and creates opportunities for authors to interact personally with their readers. This past April, the award-winning writer Edwidge Danticat spent a day with an audience of close to 100 at the Haitian American Museum of Chicago. Ms. Danticat read from her short story "Hot-Air Balloons" and



Professor Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes.

participated in a storytelling workshop with members of the audience.

The second **Home Is Where the Art Is** event took place on October 22, 2016, at the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture. The featured author was Puerto Rican scholar Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, whose writing and teaching at Michigan State University focuses on LGBTQ Latinx culture and literature. His story "SJU-ATL-DTW (San Juan-Atlanta-Detroit)" was the focus of an enthusiastic discussion.

GB Chicago 2017

Join us May 5–7, 2017 for Great Books Chicago—*Her Own Accord*, an inspiring and fun weekend of book discussions, friendly gatherings, and cultural events in the Windy City! Discussions will center on our new anthology of contemporary works, *Her Own Accord: American Women on Identity, Culture, and Community* and Willa Cather's great novel *My Ántonia*. We will also attend a Chicago Shakespeare Theater production of *Shakespeare in Love*. Visit greatbooks.org to register today or for more information.

#GivingVOICE on Giving Tuesday

On Thanksgiving Day, we eat; on Black Friday and Cyber Monday, we shop until we drop; on #GivingTuesday, we give back. Please join us on Tuesday, November 29 this year by donating to our #GivingVoice Classroom Fund, which will bring Junior Great Books programs to students, teachers, and classrooms. For more information or to donate at any time, just visit us online.

Inspiring Lives, Spreading the Word

Dear Friend of the Great Books Foundation,

Thank you. For nearly 70 years you and others like you have helped generations of young and old develop a love of reading and a passion for sharing ideas.

You deserve credit. As a member of the Great Books community, you joined us in selecting powerful texts and writing discussion questions that challenge and engage the mind and heart. Together we nurtured and benefited from thousands of discussion leaders. Our efforts have brought inspiration, cherished experiences, and lifelong learning to countless participants.

In schools, an estimated 350,000 teachers have practiced Shared Inquiry in their classrooms, effecting unrivaled improvements in reading and language arts curricula, while introducing millions of students to exciting new worlds of authentic conversation and enduring literature.

Over the years we have initiated numerous community outreach programs, forging partnerships with educational and community organizations to explore shared concerns and common ground through reflective, respectful discussion.

All of this activity has been made possible by powerful programs, grants, and generous contributions from Great Books group members,

teachers, parents, and lifelong learners—people like you.

Now, on the verge of our 70th Anniversary in 2017 (and, after 30 years, my own retirement!), I want to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting this work—your work—not only through your contributions, but more importantly by making Great Books an important part of your life.

Thank you. Your participation in the Great Books community helps spread the word that reading and discussing great literature does indeed make a difference. It inspires lives.

Steven Craig
Vice President,
Great Books Foundation