



# Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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## Celebrating Books

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on JANUARY 28, 2019

I just read *The Yellow-Lighted Bookshop* by Lewis Buzbee. The book, subtitled a memoir and a history, is a celebration of bookstores—from ancient times to the present. Today's reflection is a mini-celebration of books, inspired by Buzbee's book.

What makes books so wonderful? First, they are durable. When you borrow a book from the library, imagine how many other people have read it before you, and how many will read it after you. That means dozens, hundreds, or even more people will be reading this particular book you have in your hands! Or you yourself can read the same book again and again, and the book is not depleted. Books are flexible. You can take them anywhere. They require no electricity. They won't



crash or freeze. If the spine breaks and the pages begin to fall out, just grab a rubber band to hold them together. Unlike shoes and clothing, books never go out of style either.

Books are democratic. As long as you can read, you can enjoy books—no matter your age, gender, occupation, social status, religion, political leanings, or language. Reading a book is ordinarily done alone. But if the same book is read by others, it can stimulate lively discussion among its readers. Books are different from movies. Movies present images on a screen. Books create images inside your head. To me, this phenomenon is the real magic of reading.

## About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame,  
teacher, student, author,  
speaker, listener, friend,  
poet, farm girl.



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## About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality—the everyday kind of spirituality that includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.



Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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Neurologists tell us books are good for the brain. When we watch a movie or TV, our eyes remain idle, focused straight ahead. But when we read, our eyes move back and forth across the page. This physical movement supposedly stimulates our brain. Buzbee says a book is a “Stairmaster of the mind.”

Books are powerful. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is sometimes credited with laying the groundwork for the Civil War. The book was not a treatise against slavery. It was a story of a particular slave, a story that showed the cruelty and inhumanity of slavery.

Books can be so powerful that, throughout human history, government

leaders have often banned or burned certain books. One of the most famous book burnings was carried out in Germany and Austria by the Nazis in the 1930’s. Other famous book burnings occurred in China, the Mayan civilization, and ancient Alexandria. (See Ray Bradbury’s novel *Fahrenheit 451* to learn more about book burnings. The title is the temperature needed to burn a book!) Even our Catholic Church had the *Index*, a list of forbidden books. It ceased in 1966.



A current confirmation of the power of the written word was *Time* magazine’s decision to choose journalists as their Person of the Year. All the journalists on the four different covers were either killed or are in prison for what they wrote. Every despot knows, control books and the news, and you control the minds of your citizenry.

A few more facts about books:

+ There are 2.2 million books published annually in the world. In the U.S. between 600,000 and 1 million books are published each year. Most of those books will sell less than 250 copies. Half the books published in the U.S. are self-published.

+ Research shows that Americans read a mean average of 12 books a year. But that number is inflated by avid readers. Americans read a median average of four books a year.

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*Do you like e-books?*

+ Let's say you buy a book for \$25. Where does that money go? On average, the author makes \$1.88; the printer \$3.00; the publisher \$8.87; and the bookseller \$11.25. If an author has an agent, the agent earns 10% to 15% of the author's share. The publisher and bookseller earn a larger share of the money because of all their costs: payroll, rent, supplies, etc.

+ Unless you write a best seller (like Michelle Obama recently did!), you will not get rich writing a book. Most successful writers have other jobs to supplement their writing income. Many teach. A writer friend of mine wrote car manuals for General Motors on the side.

+ Used book stores are examples of recycling at its finest.

+ I love books so much, I find it almost impossible to throw one away.

So, what about you?

*Do you love books?... What books do you own?... How many books do you read a year? ... Do you belong to a book club?... What books have made a deep impact on your life? What books have you read more than once?... Is there anything in this reflection on books that struck you or surprised you?*

**PS:** I ask for your prayers for the retreat I'll be leading aboard the Royal Caribbean cruise ship from Feb. 7-12. We have over 65 people making the retreat. I know some of you are on the retreat! We sail from Fort Lauderdale and make two stops: Havana, Cuba and Puerto Costa Maya, Mexico. My retreat theme is "Finding God in the Ordinary and the Amazing." I'll give four conferences on finding God In Nature, in People, in Pain and Sorrow, and in Hope. I'm looking forward to this unique experience. Thank you for your prayers!

Today's song is an old favorite of mine, a song I first heard when it was recorded 40 years ago by B.J. Thomas: "I Need to Be Still (And Let God Love Me.)" For decades I used it for talks and retreats. And I keep going back to its beautiful message: We must make time in our busy lives for God to love *us*!



I invite you to respond below to this reflection and/or song. I'd love to hear your thoughts about books!

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**Thomas DeFreitas** January 28, 2019 at 4:17 am



Do I love books? Oh, heavens, yes.

What books do I own? Several hundred, perhaps 500. Notably: Dylan Thomas's poems; Marianne Moore's prose; books by Merton and Nouwen and Fr Groeschel; several books by the late and keenly lamented Mary Oliver; several by Ted Kooser (former US poet laureate); E E Cummings; some beautiful Anglican and Orthodox books; books of Jewish wisdom; at least 40 books on the Rosary (Robert Llewelyn

and Gabriel Harty have written well about this venerable devotion); Hearts on Fire (a compilation of Jesuit prayers); some helpful books by Robert Waldron (especially prized, his *Walking With Henri Nouwen*). And two books, be it noted, by Sr Melannie Svoboda! (*Confession: I've taken wee nibbles around the edges, but haven't "plunged in" yet!*)

One of my favourite books, currently, is the self-published volume of poems called *Turning Earth*, by my friend Elena Lee Johnson. Her poems consistently amaze me with their serenely attentive artistry, their felicitous phrasings, their warmly human perceptions.

REPLY

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**John Hopkins** January 28, 2019 at 5:43 am



I can't be sure of what I'm about to write, but I believe C.S. Lewis said, "We read to know we are not alone." I really, really like that! Yes, I love books, and during my teaching days (English), I tried desperately to get my students to discover the joy and pleasure of reading. I'm not sure how successful I was with that exhortation, but I tried. I would tell them that you will never be bored with a good book. The act of reading is a rich, contemplative experience. Right now I'm reading Jon Meacham's "The Soul of America: the Battle for Our Better Angels." Reading this book is part of my morning routine – coffee, silence, book. How good is that!

To Tom DeFreitas: I, too, lament that loss of the great Mary Oliver! If you haven't already read it, I recommend her collection of poems, "Thirst."

Good luck, Melannie. Those sixty-five are so lucky to have you as a spiritual guide!

REPLY

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**Thomas DeFreitas** January 28, 2019 at 6:55 am



"Thirst" was the first for me! Along with "Evidence," it contains, to my mind, Oliver's most affecting work.

REPLY

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**Denise** January 28, 2019 at 6:15 am



Dear Sister,

My earliest memories are of books...before I could read! I loved the pictures and would turn the pages and be absorbed into the colors and imagine a story. I knew there was something "more" because of books.

Books were and still are a large part of my socialization as I tend to isolate and feel uncomfortable in busy social settings.

Mary Oliver's books are some of my most favored and always a good go to gift no matter the occasion. Rita Mae Brown , Pat Conroy, and Elizabeth Berg...good friends though we've not been formally introduced.

I'm too squeamish for book clubs, it's like attending an autopsy. lol

REPLY

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**Kathleen Magiera** January 28, 2019 at 6:17 am



Good Morning Sr. Melannie!

I too love books. I also married into a family of readers. We would each bring a book on our family vacations and read throughout our time together.

I have trained teacher candidates to tutor struggling readers. It opens up a whole new world for these youngsters.

God bless you on your retreat.

Kathleen

REPLY

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**Ed Johnson** January 28, 2019 at 6:20 am



I am reminded of a TV commercial from years past: RIF...Reading Is Fundamental. Nothing like spending time with a good book! My favorite spiritual authors include classic authors Henri Nouwen, C.S. Lewis, St. Benedict (The Rule). Contemporary favorites are Sr. Joan Chittister, Barbara Brown Taylor, Sr. Irene Nowell, Judith Valente (Atchison Blue). I'm pretty much a non-fiction guy: Doris Kearns Goodwin, Jon Meacham, Robert Caro, Tom Brokaw, etc. Also love historical fiction as written by James Michener. Wonderful song by BJ Thomas; he made some beautiful music.....Prayers and Blessings for your upcoming retreat! Thank



you, Sister. You always brighten, and enlighten, our Mondays.  
Ed J.

REPLY

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**Judy Vassel** January 28, 2019 at 7:31 am



I always have loved reading all types of books, anything I can get my hands on. I read to my children when they were infants and as they grew up. They are also adamant readers. I am looking forward to our cruise next week. I hope you bring that song. See you soon.

The email address is a new address.

REPLY

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**Mary M Nausadis** January 28, 2019 at 8:49 am



Books, books and more books is my belief! My mother read to the 5 of us children every night before bed....it was a special time for us and great memories. She also was a great proponent of the public library. I grew up in a small towm, so the library was easily accessible to us....every summer I was part of a reading challenge and simply loved going to the library. There is acertain smell in a library that I just love and would often stop in at the library on the way home from school.

As a mother, I was keen on introducing my children to books at an early age and encouraged them to read by putting a book in their crib when I put them down for a nap.....no surprise that they both love to read in bed!

I actually get a little panicky if I don't have a book at hand. My morning time is my time for spiritual reading....Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgault, Joan Chittister, Henri Nowen, Ronald Rolheiser, to name a few. The afternoon and evening are for inspirational fiction, including historical novels and I love Amish novels.

I am not eager to get a Kindle or any such electronic devise because I love holding the book, seeing the dog-eared pages, perhaps a stain or two because I know the book has been read and loved.

In my opinion, an unread book has as much personality as an unlit candle....

As you can see this is a subject close to my heart, Sr. Melannie, so thank you and blessings on your upcoming retreat/cruise.

REPLY

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**Shirley** January 28, 2019 at 9:01 am 

Thank you Sister Melannie. I too enjoy reading. This song is so amazing, thanks for sharing.  
Many blessings on your upcoming retreat.

REPLY

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**Cheryl Zellhoefer** January 28, 2019 at 9:30 am 

As I prepare for the retreat onboard, I pray for new insights into God's plan, wisdom to follow that plan, the blessing of new friendships, and safe travels for all participants!

REPLY

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**Chris Keil** January 28, 2019 at 9:37 am 

According to my Good Reads account I read 34 books last year! I enjoy reading more and more as I grow older! I am a far cry from that junior in HS who would sit up late in the bathroom trying to finish "Pride and Prejudice"! I belong to a book club and it does provide for some interesting and "spirited" discussion about the book, life, etc. I love book club because I get exposed to new authors, genres, etc.

I am an e-reader reader. I love my e-reader!!!! I love to take a book or 2 everywhere and my e-reader is so much lighter and more portable. When I go on a long vacation sometimes I'll take 4,5 or 6 books and that is just too much space/weight in a suitcase!

I'm sorry to miss the retreat/cruise. I was ready to sign up but that is the same time that we are taking an entire family vacation to Disney World! All 3 grown children, their spouses and 4 grandchildren! Can't wait. Enjoy and good luck on your cruise/retreat. I'll do the next one for sure! God Bless You.

REPLY

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**joan metzger** January 28, 2019 at 10:29 am 

Good Morning Sister Melanie,  
We are having another snow day here, a good day to sit and read. I have loved books since I was a little girl. There are probably 300 or 400 books in the house



right now, but I do recycle them to various charity book sales. I worked in two historical research libraries during my career. Now I volunteer as the parish librarian. I enjoy being the first to see the new donations. I usually have two or three books going at once. I'd give you the titles of the current ones, but I have a cat sleeping on my lap. I hope your retreat/trip goes well.

REPLY

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**Kathy P** January 28, 2019 at 10:51 am



Thank you for your reflection. I am an avid reader. My husband and I joke about buying a second home for our books. Mornings are for spiritual reading. The evenings are for a good mystery and a hot cup of tea. Thoughts and prayers for your retreat.

REPLY

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**marilyn woidat** January 28, 2019 at 10:56 am



Dearest Sister Melanie,  
Aside from your books, our treasured copies of Charles Péguy, GOD SPEAKS...."I don't love the man who doesn't sleep" says God; as well as Kahil Gibran's THE PROPHET, are among our collection favorites. Reading is the joy of our retirement. Vaya con Dios! Marilyn and Frank Woidat

REPLY

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**carol elsholz** January 28, 2019 at 11:14 am



Good morning S. Melannie,  
Here's another thought about being an avid reader that others might relate to. As a young child I was too busy (?) to read, but my sister Peggy was a "book worm." One rainy day she suggested I might like a book she had just gotten from the library-"Strawberry Girl" by Lois Lenski. I picked it up, read it, and was never again too busy (?) to read. I'd like to recommend a great new book that I just finished-"Our Towns" by James and Deborah Fallows. It gave me lots of hope for grassroots America. Blessings and love...

REPLY

**Jean** January 28, 2019 at 11:08 am



Good Morning Sister Melannie,

When my very best and closest friend passed away she had thousands of books in her home and they all went to a good home, just as she planned. I always told her she needed no insulation in her ND home as the walls were lined with her treasures. She was a reference librarian and loved, loved books. She loved the smell of books, the feel of books and could give you a synopsis of any book. Her recommendations for books were always spot on. I drew my love for books from her. Your post today was in honor of my Nancy, I just know it.

Thank you for sharing and providing a memory of two of my oldest and dearest friend.

The best to you and your participants as you sail in the warmth of the seas.

REPLY

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**marilyn sabatino, snd** January 28, 2019 at 11:28 am



Dear Melannie,.....two of my favorite books are, The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tullay which is about a little and her toy rabbit. The stories message is being lost, adapting to what life brings you. The second is the The little Prince which is also about adapting to what life brings you.

ah I forgot about the Velvatin Rabbit...is about transformation....these are all marvelous books.

REPLY

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**Rose** January 28, 2019 at 11:29 am



My father taught me the alphabet and rudimentary reading before I started kindergarten. I think that's where my love of reading began. So many books, so hard to choose. Three to mention: I have read The Jesus I Never Knew by Philip Yancey numerous times; one book that has impacted me deeply is Dead Man Walking by Helen Prejean; and the most beautifully written book I have ever read is Cry, The Beloved Country by Alan Paton.

I was shocked that the writer earns the least on his/her book! I guess, mainly I was shocked by my own ignorance of the whole financial breakdown!

Many prayers for a successful retreat/cruise.

REPLY

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**Lin Pobjecky** January 28, 2019 at 5:09 pm



Sr. Melannie,

We are very interested in having you come to our church for a talk next year. I tried filling out the info on your contact page but have had no luck. I keep getting an error message. Please contact me at your convenience.

Thank you!

Lin

REPLY

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**Debra Tomaselli** January 28, 2019 at 5:34 pm



What an interesting, thought-provoking post! Thank you!

My love of books began early. Even as a child, I loved the crinkle of the casing on library books, and the thrill of choosing whatever books I wanted! Later, Mother Teresa taught me through books. I was impacted by *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale, *Intimate Moments with the Savior* by Ken Gire, and *The Courage to Grieve* by Judy Tatelbaum.

Finally, I know firsthand that writers earn about what you say, as I recently published my first book - *My Emmaus Walk, True Stories of Faith, Hope and Inspiration*. My column has run in Catholic newspapers since 2003, and this is a collection of selected works.

You're right. It's not about the money. It's about so much more. It's about bringing the faith home, into the laundry room, the dinner table, the kid's science lesson, and showing people the presence of God in their everyday lives. The rewards can't be calculated...they are out of this world!

So your post resonated at many levels...thank you for that! May God bless you as you continue your good work!

REPLY

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**Annie** January 28, 2019 at 11:45 pm



I had no idea a writer earned so little on a book. Makes me appreciate the writers even more. I have always loved books and learned to read before first grade. I read every supplemental book that my first grade teacher put on the bookcase shelves in our classroom. When I was young I was an expert at figuring

out if a wrapped present for Christmas or my birthday was a book before opening it. Books have a wonderful way of teaching spelling, vocabulary, inspiring creativity, and broadening the imagination. I went so many places with my books. We're wired for stories. I'm sure your retreatants will enjoy yours! Thanks for the song too. It's been a long time since I've heard B.J. Thomas, but I do remember that song! May God bless you with a wonderful voyage!

REPLY

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**Jean Canatsey** January 29, 2019 at 2:16 pm



I have always loved to read and remember curling up in a big lounge chair as a child and enjoying "Heidi", "The Black Stallion" and "Trixie Beldon" and "Nancy Drew" books. When I was a young mother, I kept an open book in the laundry room. Today I keep a book on my nightstand and one by my rocking chair. Currently they are, "The Lies My Teachers Told Me" by James W. Loewen and "Love Poems From God" by Daniel Ladinsky.

(Thank you, Sr. Melanie.) I love the tactile feel of a "real" book.

I have read and reread the "Narnia" series by C. S. Lewis. One of our daughters was cast as Susan in the musical production of "Narnia" which was based on "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" in the 1980's and I remember being very disappointed when I read the last book and discovered that Susan didn't turn out to be a very nice person. (My daughter did, however!)

My favorite adult reads are historical novels. I immensely enjoy John Jakes and a recently discovered author, Kristin Hannah. I learned a lot more about the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars by reading Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables" than I ever did in history class.

Can you have too many books? Only if they are no longer read. Then it's time to pass them on to someone who will hopefully enjoy them as much as you did.

REPLY

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**Lori** January 31, 2019 at 11:37 am



Sorry i am answering late. I love books. All my books are on Catholic religion or other denominations or spiritual books. Last year i read 4 books. Recently, the book by Phillip Keller, "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23"-i read twice. The video song was great. I need to be still and let God love me!!!! (when thinkgs get too rough). I'll pray for your February Retreats.

REPLY

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GOD'S GOODNESS AND PROVIDENT CARE.

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