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Good Reads

ALIBI BOOKSHOP OWNER KAREN FINLAY BRINGS GREAT BOOKS, COMMUNITY SPIRIT, AND GOOD OLD-FASHIONED FUN TO DOWNTOWN VALLEJO.

BY MEGAN MCCREA // PHOTOS BY CALI GODLEY



HIT THE BOOKS

From classics to modern releases, Alibi Bookshop has the perfect read for you. **Page 10**

CALI GODLEY



Find titles for the kids, and the kids at heart, at Alibi Bookshop.

Bookshop at 624 Marin Street. "It was thrilling, exhilarating, exhausting, celebratory, and full of love," she recalls. "One of the best days of my life."

Since then, she's kept plenty busy: ordering and shelving books, finessing window displays, running Alibi's social media accounts, and most importantly, transforming the beloved bookstore into a true community space. There's the book club on Thursday nights and the writers' group on Wednesdays, a silent reading club on Tuesdays, and story time on Saturdays—plus regular readings and speaking events with renowned local authors such as Trevor Allen, Mary Brown,

and Wayne Goodman.

Finlay complements these traditional word-nerd activities with a healthy dose of riotous fun. For her birthday—coincidentally the same day as Bloomsday, which commemorates the life and works of famed Irish novelist James Joyce—she invited customers to join her for rainbow sprinkle cake; another time, a '60s-themed read-aloud included a rollicking performance by the fringe-wearing Devil-Ettes. "I think we might be the only bookstore that's hosted go-go dancers," Finlay says.

Naturally, the past few months have looked much different for Alibi. Closed to the public since March 15, most of the shop's operations—including the monthly book clubs—have since transitioned online. Customers can purchase books through Bookshop, a digital marketplace for independent bookstores, then swing by Finlay's house for a socially distanced pickup. "When people order," Finlay says, "they'll slip us notes that say, 'We love you,' and 'We can't wait for you to come back.'"

She can't wait to come back either. "I'm honestly going to be so happy," she says. "I'm looking forward to seeing everyone and hearing about their day, what they're reading. We're excited to see our people again." •



SUMMER READING

TAKE YOURSELF ON A VIRTUAL VACATION WITH ONE OF THESE SUPERB BOOKS PICKED BY KAREN FINLAY.

***The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, Suzanne Collins**

"The eagerly anticipated prequel to *The Hunger Games*. Set 64 years before the first novel, it's the story of Coriolanus Snow and the 10th Annual Hunger Games."

***The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Ernest J. Gaines**

"This 1971 novel by former Vallejo resident Ernest J. Gaines—whom we sadly lost last year—is the fictional autobiography of Jane Pittman. From the Civil War to the civil rights era, Jane tells the story of African American history and struggles."

***Nothing to See Here*, Kevin Wilson**

"Lillian's life is on a dead-end track when her former roommate asks her to be caretaker to her stepchildren on her beautiful Tennessee estate. It sounds too good to be true, and it is: The children have a tendency to spontaneously combust. This book is quirky, charming, and heartwarming—literally."

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nyone who's seen her—grabbing coffee at Moschetti, browsing treasures at Eco Thrift, or talking books on Facebook Live—knows Karen Finlay has a deep closet. She can go full Francophile in a striped top, silk scarf, and black beret; celebrate Aloha Friday with a flowery dress and shell earrings; or veer culinary with a *Joy of Cooking* apron and a blouse festooned with silverware. But perhaps no outfit fits her better than her recent Halloween costume: a circus ringmaster, complete with red skirt suit, black bowtie, and top hat. In fact, the pink-haired 51-year-old has played the part nonstop since April 30, 2019—the day she and her husband, Jon Burchard, got the keys to Vallejo Bookstore.

Back in late 2018, Finlay was working as a national accounts manager for Chronicle Books when the bookstore's previous owner, Shannon Hartlep, approached Finlay and her husband about buying the shop.

"We thought about it for a month," Finlay says. "I feel like everything in my life directed me here. My first job in high school was at Upstart Crow & Company. I got a degree in creative writing. I worked in publishing. All along, I dreamed of opening my own bookstore."

That dream came true on June 1, 2019, when Finlay opened the doors to the newly minted Alibi