

## **Willamette View Library - a brief history**



**Mission: Provide popular books for recreational reading for residents and staff**

Willamette View library began with books left by retired ministers in a small room on the fifth floor of the Manor. Residents also bought popular books and donated from their private libraries. The first library table was a large dining room table that a resident loaned the library. When she died, her daughter wanted the table, so another table was obtained.

The first person in charge of the library was Ellen Nelson who arranged books by general type and author. A simple card file of authors and titles was started. Signing in a notebook checked out books. When the Court was opened in 1958, a library was planned and after several moves settled in its current location. Beginning in 1974, the Council provided \$10 per month and later \$15 and still later \$20 for the purchase of books. Today the average cost for a paperback is about \$18; for hardback, about \$30, for large print even more.

When the Terrace was opened in 1985, plans included a library space near the entrance which made our third library location.

May 1987 saw the Manor libraries reorganized. The "shop crew" built and installed permanent shelving for the 6th floor library. In October 1987, a Central Library Committee consisting of eight residents was appointed to "serve all the libraries in the Manor complex." In November 1987, the former sewing room on the basement level of the Manor was converted to a library workroom where books are still processed.

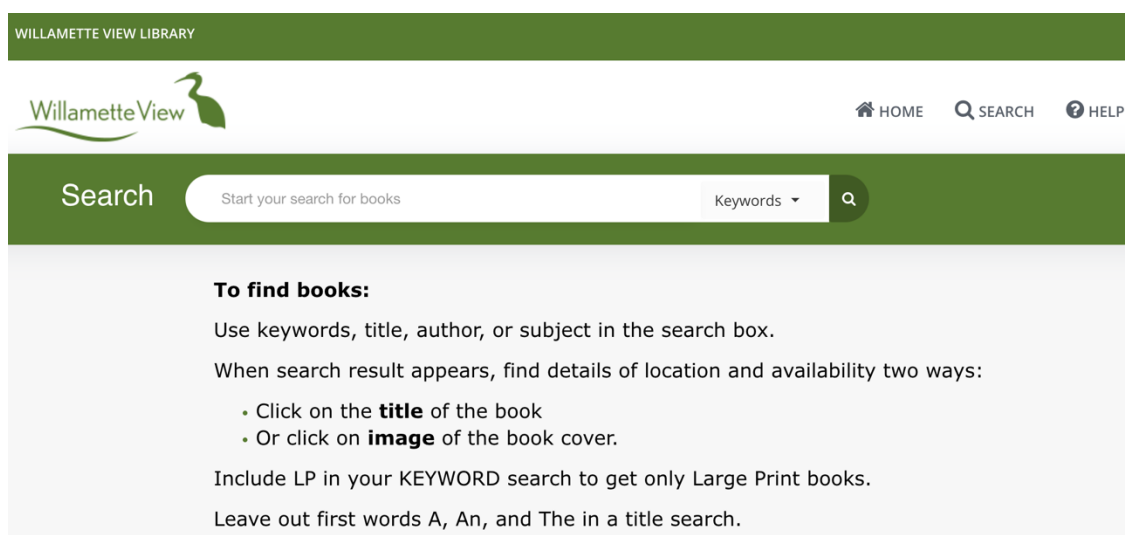
By May 1990, there were six libraries on campus: two in the Manor, one on the main floor and one on the sixth floor; two in the Court, one on the second floor of the Terrace, plus one elsewhere. The library collection had grown so much that it was difficult to locate books. Mary Nieman, a retired librarian, helped to organize the libraries with a modified Dewey Decimal System. Typewriters were purchased, 36,000 catalog cards typed, book pockets and cards prepared which took over two years. This is when all three libraries were united into one system.

Nieman also obtained a budget from the administration for library expenses. This greatly enhanced the purchase of new books, especially large print books as well as library supplies.

When the Manor was remodeled in 1991-92, the library moved from where the Blue Heron office is today to its current location in the Manor lounge. A mobile library cart was obtained in Nov 1993 to bring books to residents' rooms in the Convalescence Center (now known as The Neighborhoods).

In 2014 the Library Committee became a standing committee of the WV Resident Association “with a continuing existence, formed to do its assigned work on an ongoing basis.” [Willamette Views, May 2014] WV Administration approved funding to contract with a Canadian company to host remotely a new online library catalog,

Residents search our Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) to find titles, authors, and subjects. The Low Vision Support Group maintains a collection of audio books and DVDs in the Court Annex Suite north of the Court library.



Currently we add about 500 new books a year with a library collection ranging between 3500-4500 volumes. Residents demonstrate a strong preference for fiction and mysteries.

Residents subscribe to e-book access through our local public libraries. WV Library managers provide regular training on these services. As technology advances, we are always looking for volunteers with technical and computer expertise.

## Reading and the Aging Brain

Reading fiction is a complex cognitive task. However, in 2023 the Library Committee focused on providing books for residents with mild cognitive impairment and memory issues. We purchased books easy to hold and handle and free of dense text with adequate white space. We looked for books that feature vivid photographs and appealing content written in clear, concise, easy-to-read sentences with large print. Many such books exist! *Blue Sky, White Clouds* by Eliezer Sobel is an example of an attractive book designed for a dementia patient.

Appropriate books:

- stimulate conversation and reminiscence,
- encourage physical closeness and interaction,
- provide a calming diversion from an upsetting episode,
- inspire intergenerational exchanges with children,
- increase social interaction between staff and residents,
- promote reading skills in residents.

MCI patrons enjoy books about animals, nature, national parks, the ocean, the jungle, the solar system. They also enjoy books about earlier times, the 1940s, 1950s, etc.

Books can be an extremely useful aid for us as we age. Books provide a natural and unlimited opportunity to rebuild connections for the person with dementia, stroke, multiple sclerosis, and related disorders. Books can help facilitate important conversations.



Picture books help us reminisce, as images are a very powerful way to access memories. They can help increase communication, whether it's with relatives, caregivers, or friends. If used in a group setting, they can bring individuals with cognitive impairment together and can be used as an entertaining activity that helps combat boredom, or even depression.

Books with sound can be used to encourage stimulating activities. Pop-up, lenticular, scanimation, photicular, or integrated photography type books require no planning or preparation. Techniques in integrated photography books involve an animation process that creates the illusion of movement in each picture. The visible image moves and changes with the perspective of the viewer. These books can open to a favorite illustration or be read from start to finish or you can select just a page or two to spark an exchange.

Many older adults find it difficult to follow the plot and keep track of numerous characters, especially when the story jumps forward and backwards in time and place.

However, Richard Restak in *The Complete Guide to Memory: The Science of Strengthening Your Mind*, says in this excerpt from Chapter 3:

"Reading novels, incidentally, provides an especially helpful exercise in working memory. Why is fiction preferred over non-fiction? Because non-fiction works are often organized in ways that allow the reader to skip around a bit according to personal interests and previous familiarity with the subject . . . Fiction, on the other hand, requires the reader to proceed from beginning to end while retaining in working memory the various characters and plot developments. The fiction reader must remember when a character was first encountered along with

all of the backstory from the character's past. Each time that character reappears, the reader, by means of working memory, has to recall the character's past actions along with whatever insight into the character's motivations the author may provide. Incidentally, I have noticed over my years as a neurologist and neuropsychiatrist that people with early dementia, as *one of the first signs of the encroaching illness, often stop reading fiction*. [Italics added.] They can no longer keep the characters or plot development "in mind" (in their working memory). A second early sign of incipient dementia (while we are on the subject) relates to cooking. Unable to retain and employ working memory, the sufferer can no longer follow a recipe. Especially hard are measuring the ingredients and timing their entry into the meal being prepared. **Bottom line: keep reading and cooking as spurs to maintaining your working memory.**" [Emphasis added.]

In 2025 the Library Committee developed the "Simple Pleasures" collection of straightforward, simple, fun reading to provide reading materials for residents who may be having difficulty with plot development but still enjoy fiction. The Simple Pleasures collection is growing and includes "cozy mysteries," some young adult and children's books (think *Wind in the Willows*, *The Secret Garden*, etc. Although it's challenging to determine if a book is suitable or not, residents are thrilled to find good, enjoyable, easy to read books.

## What You Can Do

Reading aloud for as little as 10 minutes a day may improve memory, focus and vocabulary.<sup>1</sup> It can lead to greater reading

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<sup>1</sup> Nouchi R, Taki Y, Takeuchi H, Nozawa T, Sekiguchi A, Kawashima R. Reading Aloud and Solving Simple Arithmetic Calculation Intervention (Learning Therapy) Improves Inhibition, Verbal Episodic Memory, Focus

comprehension. Reading aloud is active with little or no pressure and exercises body and facial muscles. It can provide hours of brain exercise.<sup>2</sup>

“Shared reading is one of the most significant developments to have taken place in mental health practice in the last ten years.” says Dr. David Fearnley, Medical Director, Mersey Care Centre, United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Among its other benefits, reading aloud challenges intonation, strengthens emotional bonds, can bring joy, comfort, and a sense of belonging. Reading aloud is the easiest way to boost your memory.<sup>4</sup>

It also helps develop better listening skills, builds confidence, can expose one to different levels of text and to correct grammar and language structures. Listening to others reading aloud provides the opportunity to hear excellent reading models. Kate DiCamillo, the author of “Because of Winn-Dixie,” which won the Newbery Medal for children’s books, says “It is an act of love to read to somebody.”<sup>5</sup>

Repeating words out loud to another person has been linked to better recall. This is because production of one or more sensory aspects allows for more efficient recall of the verbal element.<sup>6</sup> The brain refers to multisensory information associated with the

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Attention and Processing Speed in Healthy Elderly People: Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial. *Front Hum Neurosci.* 2016 May 17;10:217. doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2016.00217. PMID: 27242481; PMCID: PMC4868921.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.voices.com/blog/7-ways-reading-out-loud-improves-your-life/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://eldercarehomehealth.com/read-to-someone-its-amazing-how-enjoyable-and-beneficial-it-can-be/#:~:text=Dr.,in%20the%20last%20ten%20years.%E2%80%9D>

<sup>4</sup> Forrin, Noah D. & MacLeod, Colin M. (2018) This time it’s personal: the memory benefit of hearing oneself, *Memory*, 26:4, 574-579.

<sup>5</sup> Dunn J. “A Simple Way to Build Intimacy: Reading Aloud” *The New York Times Well Newsletter*, February 23, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Forrin, Noah D. & MacLeod, Colin M. (2018) This time it’s personal: the memory benefit of hearing oneself, *Memory*, 26:4, 574-579

communication episode. Varying feedback creates differential effects on memory for spoken words.

## **Thank you!**

Thanks to astute administration support, our library is a welcoming sight across campus, a strong draw for visitors, and a major marketing tool. We are fortunate to have a well-funded system and many able and generous resident volunteers. *The libraries are supported by grants from the Blue Heron Foundation At Willamette View.*

LaJean Humphries, Library Chair, 05/2025

Information on early history from archived *Willamette Views* issues



The Manor branch library (2025)