

Karen:

Hi, I'm Karen. Welcome to the Libro.fm Podcast, where we talk to authors, narrators, booksellers, and more.

Craig:

And I'm Craig. This month we had the opportunity to sit down with Jeannine Cook, the owner of Harriett's Bookstore in Philadelphia, and her mother, Celia Cook, a former librarian.

Karen:

It was so much fun to talk to both of these women at the same time. And they were also recording live in the store, which was very cool. So we had some fun guest appearances. We met some customers. I think we met the UPS driver.

Craig:

I'm sad to hear you thought that was fun because I 100% edited that part out. So you will not be hearing the UPS driver coming in or any other interruptions. I'm a very professional editor. Okay, Karen?

Karen:

Great work. Great work.

Craig:

Joking aside, this was easily one of my favorite episodes. We've talked to other bookstore owners, but they've also happened to be famous authors. I think these were the first bookstore owners we spoke to that this is their thing. They're living and breathing it every day.

Karen:

Yeah, I agree. This was one of my favorite episodes, too. Okay, so you tell me first, what did you love the most about this episode?

Craig:

There are some parts where I've actually listened back as I was editing, I was like, that's a powerful story or whatever. But honestly, I think my favorite part was the fun stuff at the end. I love the lightning round and Instagram story time, and I love when it's just the guest and us just falling over laughing. It's always fun for me. What about you? What was your favorite part of the interview?

Karen:

I agree. I laughed. I laughed a lot. I just felt like as soon as we started-

Craig:

Laughed and cried.

Karen:

Yeah. As soon as we started talking to them, I felt like we knew them. And I super want to go to their store and hang out. I also just thought their relationship was so beautiful. You can hear how much

Jeannine admires her mother and the work that her mother has done, and Celia is so proud of Jeannine and the work that she has done.

Craig:

Seriously.

Karen:

And that interaction was just really, really cool to be a part of.

Craig:

Yeah. I also am dying to get down there to their store. I haven't been to Philadelphia in probably a decade, so I'm overdue for a Philadelphia visit. Have you ever been to Philadelphia?

Karen:

No. I was born in Pennsylvania. I've been to Pittsburgh. I have not been to Philadelphia.

Craig:

Same thing. That's what I've heard.

Karen:

The Pennsylvanians on this call are not happy right now.

Craig:

There's no Pennsylvanians on this call. It's just the two of us.

Karen:

You know what I mean.

Craig:

Yes.

Karen:

Well, with that...

Craig:

All right, why don't we start this interview and we can continue talking about Pennsylvania afterwards?

Karen:

That sounds great.

Craig:

Perfect.

Karen:

Awesome. Welcome to the podcast, Jeannine and Celia. Craig and I are so excited to be talking with you today about books, your bookstores, all things book related. And for any of our listeners who might not be familiar with your work, we'd love if you could each introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about what you do in the book world. So Celia, maybe we can start with you.

Celia Cook:

Yes. Hi, my name is Celia Cook, and just happy to let you know that I love the book world, and what do I do in this book world is I love reading. And in the bookshop, I love meeting with people and expressing the love for books and the interests of learning more about books and just educating people more on the reading of books.

Karen:

Awesome. Thank you so much. We are all definitely kindred spirits. That resonated.

Jeannine Cook:

Some people [inaudible 00:03:46]. I say we're from the same tribe.

Karen:

Yes.

Jeannine Cook:

We're all from the same tribe. We know each other when we meet each other.

Karen:

Yep. Awesome. And Jeannine, could you give us an intro to yourself too?

Jeannine Cook:

Oh yeah. So I am Jeannine A. Cook, and I am the shopkeeper of Harriett's Bookshop and Ida's Bookshop, which is over in Collingswood. Harriett's is here in Fishtown, Philadelphia.

Craig:

It's so nice to meet you. And we're super excited to learn more about your bookstore. And when we were doing our research for this episode of the podcast, I just quickly did a search for how many bookstores that were in Philadelphia. And there's a ton. And as someone who's half considered opening a bookstore someday, and seeing all the bookstores in Boston where I live, and it just feels so scary to enter the market where there's so much competition. And I'm just curious, how did you get into it, and why did you guys want to open the store?

Jeannine Cook:

Well, you know how it goes. In some ways, the books, the bookshop world, the bookstore world, it ebbs and flows. And so at some points there are lots of them and it seems very plentiful. And then there's this point where it feels like a lot of them start to close. And there's almost like a crisis and this question as to whether this entity or this institution could survive another blow.

Folks thought that bookshops were a thing of the past when Amazon started, and of course they were wrong. And people think that bookstores will close because movies or bookstores will close because of some other new technology, the internet, and they're always wrong about that. I think the institution overall will survive, but it does ebb and flow business wise.

Craig:

So I saw that you guys opened Harriett, and then after that you opened Ida's in New Jersey. What kind of spurred that on? Why did you decide to open a second shop?

Jeannine Cook:

And I'll let mom talk a little bit about it too, but it's so funny. I said, I love sisterhood so much that even my bookshop needed a sister. So being a sister is such a part of my identity, as having something and someone to lean on. And I think that that's where the impetus comes from. I think in an amazing future where everything works out in amazing ways, we can have bookshops all over the world, because in many ways these bookshops are not only just bookstores, but they're also monuments to the women that they're named for.

And so Harriett's is not just a bookstore, it's not simply a bookstore. It's also a place where you come to understand a bit more about the historical context that this woman lived in and how we could adapt from her humanity. And the same thing with Ida B. Wells. But Mom, what do you think about the sister? What did you think when I was saying, hey, we're going to do another one?

Celia Cook:

Well, because I know the type of person you are, I was not surprised about this.

We traveled together, went and looked at the site and everything, and she was really excited. I was excited, and I said, "I see what it is. It's how you have different personalities coming out of you." And I saw that side of her because what she can do at Harriett's was very a different flavor of what Ida's shop is about. It was so beautiful. She just wanted flair and color everything coming out of Ida's. And that is what came out of Ida's. She wanted a flair of the lighting, the furniture, everything, while Harriett was so classy and soft and attentive. So I could understand it. I understood-

Jeannine Cook:

But I think the shops kind of adapt to the personality of the person they're named for, right?

Celia Cook:

Yes, they do.

Jeannine Cook:

So Harriett's, the furniture is nimble and everything's always moving, and it's just that. And Harriett was a small but mighty woman-

Celia Cook:

Mighty.

Jeannine Cook:

And I think this shop is definitely that. And then Ida's, all her furniture is like, I'm like, why is everything so heavy over here?

Celia Cook:

Yes, yes.

Jeannine Cook:

[inaudible 00:08:10]

Celia Cook:

The plants and everything.

Jeannine Cook:

Even the plants are heavy, I said. So Ida's is more grounded, and that shop is a little bit, it's just different. It adapts to the personalities.

Karen:

We did happen to see, I don't know if you can tell us about this, but we happened to see on your Instagram, I think it was a 3D rendering that said Maryland 2023 beneath it. What is that?

Jeannine Cook:

Everyone's like, "What is this?"

Karen:

Oh, definitely [inaudible 00:08:36].

Jeannine Cook:

Literally, everyone's like, "What is this? What are you talking about?"

Craig:

Once it's on Instagram, you know?

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I was like, well, I can tell you a little bit about it. So that is actually going to be a children's, dedicated to children specifically. I haven't announced what town it's in yet. Everyone's like, "What city? What city? What city?" I was like, "It's coming. It's coming."

And it's actually more of a library than it is a bookstore. And so I've been commissioned for the first time to build a library. And so yeah, it's a new venture for me and it takes me in a new direction that I hadn't seen coming. But also, it allows us to build something slightly different where I don't have to stay day in and day out and sell books because it's more of a library space. Which I can't be in every single city, I just can't do that [inaudible 00:09:35].

Craig:

I mean, you do have that, you have that horse. So I mean-

Jeannine Cook:

I do.

Celia Cook:

So she could ride through-

Craig:

Don't worry. We have questions about that.

Celia Cook:

She could ride from city to city.

Jeannine Cook:

Did you see me with the horse in the water, though? Because that was, I was like, now we're really going places.

Craig:

I didn't even know people got commissioned to make libraries. How did this come about?

Jeannine Cook:

I think we're making this up as we go. I've never heard of this either. I'd never heard of this either. But a group reached out to me and they said that they were interested in this idea. What did I think? I said, "I love it. I think it would be beautiful." And so I get to design this entire library, I get to curate the collection, and I get to design the programming. So yeah, very, very ... I think we're making it up. I think-

Craig:

Well, congratulations.

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah, thank you. But there will be a popup in France this summer for Josephine Baker.

Karen:

Awesome.

Jeannine Cook:

But that's definitely something that also has my heart palpitating, like how do you do this? How do we do this? But we must, so we can.

Karen:

Yes, you absolutely will.

Craig:

This is your second popup store, right? Because you did Marian's Bookshop.

Jeannine Cook:

Yes, exactly. Yep. What'd you think about Marian's, Mom?

Celia Cook:

I think it was beautiful. It was a good adventure, and people were really, really interested. And I want to give one story that I think it's a great idea because we never know what our children knew about our ancestors. And one little girl came into the bookshop, and her name was Marian. And she attended a school named Marian. And I was asking her, "Do you know anything about this, about Marian Anderson?" And she said, "Never heard of it."

And her mother and I took time out to teach her about, to read the book. And it had a very simple book, it was in the bookstore, in the bookshop, would explain who Marian Anderson was. And she was so amazed. And her mother said, "Do you know the name of her school is also named after Marian Anderson?"

It was such a beautiful circle, and let me know that children need to be educated about the people that has gone before us, and the things that they have done and the things that we are supposed to be doing. So I think the popup was beautiful. We needed it at the time. And you did a good job, too. You did a great job.

Jeannine Cook:

I mean, and again, that was a first, right? Because we were approached by the science center-

Celia Cook:

Commissioned.

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah, commissioned, and I was just like, "Really, what are you talking about?" And so they were like, "But Jeannine, what do you think about building out this popup in our space? Let's see what happens."

And it went really well. It was super cool. And the point was that we were, so it's not that we're just building this bookshop, right? We're also bringing attention to Marian Anderson. But the other thing was that the museum that was named for Marian Anderson here in Philadelphia was on the verge of closing because it was just not getting the recognition that it needed and deserves.

And so one way that we brought that recognition and got it into the press and got it into the zeitgeist of the community was by opening Marion's Bookshop. And then I just got word a few weeks ago that the state has decided to fund Marion's Bookshop, I mean, Marion Anderson's museum, which I think at least partially is because it was like, oh yes.

Celia Cook:

Oh, yes. That's [inaudible 00:13:18].

Craig:

I love the outcome of this story. I was afraid to ask, so what's happening with that? I'm so glad that it's a happy ending.

Jeannine Cook:

No, it's going good.

Celia Cook:

It's a happy ending, yes.

Jeannine Cook:

Going good.

Craig:

That's great.

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah. Well, we plan to collaborate more with Julian, who's the one that's over there ... Jillian, she's running it. And once it's up and running, I look forward to putting the library together because now I build libraries, apparently. Apparently I build libraries now.

Celia Cook:

She might be commissioned to do that.

Karen:

Well, this is my big question for you. It just seems like it would be so daunting. So you have all of these different spaces that you curate content and collections for, and they all have their own different personality. How do you decide what books are going to go in each store? Especially, I think about all the time too, just even the limitation of space that a shop has.

Jeannine Cook:

That is the thing that you're always up against, is the space question. I think that the bookshops are also, you know, I was a teacher for a long time before I was doing this job. And I think that in some ways they're like an extended classroom. And so they respond to the needs of the community. So folks tell us, we would like this, we would like that. We also could see where holes are that exist in our knowledge and learning within our community, because we're in the community. And then there are things that I really love personally and I'm like, I just want to share this with people.

There are things that my mom's like "Did you read this? Did you read?" I'm like, okay, okay. So I think between those different factions-

Celia Cook:

I mean, listen, we listen to the community.

Karen:

Yeah, of course.

Celia Cook:

We listen. We listen to what they're interested in also.

Jeannine Cook:

Absolutely. And then I think we're responding to things that are happening at some events. So there are different parts to what's here. And my mom was telling me the other day, I have this book called Principles by Ray Dalio. And everybody's like, "Why is this in here? This doesn't match." And I was like, "You don't get to put the bookshop in the box." The bookshop, it lives outside of any of those realms of boxes, because why is it in here? Because I read it and I thought it was amazing. And I thought we should be talking about economics. Don't think that just because we're a bookshop that's owned by a woman that looks like me, that conversations about economics don't get to happen.

Or someone's like, "Why do you have this book about Kissinger?" And I'm just like, "Because he was doing diplomacy. Don't we want to understand how diplomacy works?" And so it's not just that it has to be, you know, we have our foundational foremothers, which is Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston and Octavia Butler. And we have those foremothers of course, but you can't box that.

Craig:

Given that your selection is so curated and very specific, do you ever have people coming in off the street looking for whatever the newest bestseller is? Or kind of more generic, like the types of books you might grab at an airport bookstore? How do you handle that when you're like, "We don't sell that here."

Jeannine Cook:

Well, it's funny because I was like, I bought that Colleen Hoover. Because I was like, I want to see what happens.

Craig:

That was the author that was on my mind when I said buy it at an airport.

Jeannine Cook:

Right. I was just like, what? I just wanted to see if the community would be like, what is this here for, or if they would buy it. Three people were like, "This is my guilty pleasure." I said, "I'm not judging. You read what you want to read." I just was interested in seeing. And so some of the books I bring in just to see where people's minds are, or will anyone pick this up? Or will anyone ask the question as to why this is here?

One lady, she's like, "Oh, this book's on the bottom shelf. Are you trying to say something?" And I was just like, "I'm trying to say I need a bigger bookstore." So yeah, some people read into it. Some people, it just depends. It was really funny.

Karen:

One other thing that was really notable as we were reading about you all and the stores was that, if I'm right about this, Harriett's, your first store, opened weeks before the pandemic began. That seems challenging.

Jeannine Cook:

Oh, well Mommy, you have to take this story. You have to, because this is why-

Celia Cook:

She opened the store. I was in Trinidad. I came up, and in telling me she was going to France to do her work. And surely, surely right then and there, a few weeks later, she was told that it's the pandemic and we have to close. I am watching my daughter open this beautiful store and working so hard. And she's like, "What am I going to do?" She's like sleeping here.

I'm like, "Baby, you know you're supposed to eat. You know you're supposed to come home." And she's like, "What am I going to do?" And she looked at the, we have a very big glass in front of our store and she's like, "I came up with the idea, Mommy. I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to put the books out there and trust the people that they're going to buy the books from out there. We wouldn't be in contact with them." So she really used what she had, and we were taking the books, the bookshelves, putting it out there. She was decorating the sidewalk like it's the bookstore. There was carpet out there. There was furniture out there. There was plants out there. And the bookshelf..

Karen:

Well [inaudible 00:19:03].

Craig:

I was on board until you said the rug was outside.

Celia Cook:

Yes, the rug was. And she decorated out there, and we were just going back and forth with all the different furniture, the art, and everything. She decorated out there and she said, "I'm doing it by faith that the people will be honest and they will do it." And the people would pass by. They will purchase their books through the WhatsApp, through the Cash App, and then more, and give us a thumbs up that everything was okay. And we kept on going. And then we had, what's the other one, Jeannine, the one with the doctors?

Jeannine Cook:

Oh, essentials for essentials.

Celia Cook:

Right. That came up. I saw hundreds of books coming, and I'm like, "What is this"? This is something we're doing. We are going to be doing essentials for-

Jeannine Cook:

Essentials.

Celia Cook:

For essentials. And we just dive in.

Jeannine Cook:

We asked the community, "Would you purchase a wishlist book for an essential worker?" And they said, "Yeah." And then I asked the essential workers at the Pennsylvania Hospital, we started with Pennsylvania Hospital, "If you had a wish list book, what would it be to help with the stress of this moment?" And so everybody, they gave us 50 books that they would do and we built a website for it.

And next thing you know, in like an hour, we sold every book. People were mad, like, "Why didn't I get to buy a book for a doctor?"

Celia Cook:

Why didn't I get to [inaudible 00:20:28].

Jeannine Cook:

Then this was my sister's idea, which I said, "Oh my gosh, [inaudible 00:20:33]," this is way too complicated. And she was like, "No, you should do it. It's fun." Which is she had the people who bought the books for people also wrote a prescription for them. And so you had the community writing prescriptions for the doctors, instead of vice versa. So the community was saying, "You need to read for an hour and put your feet up and drink a hot cocoa." So people were saying stuff like that. It was really fun, really cute. Hard to coordinate, of course. But we figured it out.

And then we spread it and went from one hospital to two, then we were at four. And it was just a way to kind of, one, keep us going, having something to do. It gave the community something to do because COVID was what COVID was. And so we needed something, and it gave us an anchor, in a way, to reach out. And we knew that we were being helpful to the essential workers as best we could.

Celia Cook:

And the best part I like is when she started carrying books on horses, on the horse.

Jeannine Cook:

But what she didn't say to you all is that she came up here to help me with this bookstore idea that I had. And the next thing you know, her country closes and so we couldn't get her back home. And so she stayed and stayed and stayed and stayed and stayed, because we couldn't send her back. You know what I mean? I was like, "Well Mom, you're here now. You might as get to work."

Craig:

You might as well stock some shelves or something, Mom.

Jeannine Cook:

Right. I was like, so there's video of Mommy carrying shelves outside.

Craig:

I love how creative your solution was. I feel like if it was me, I'd probably have been like, well, that's the end of the shop. But you found a way to make it happen. But as amazing as that experience sounds, how did it feel when you finally got to reopen to the public and invite people back in after certain things were lifted and people were going back into stores?

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah, I mean it was scary. And we waited a year. So even after we started, people were allowed to start doing it and the city lifted its restriction, we still were building the bookshop outside for a year, I did, with the whole group. Because I was like, well, I feel safe with this. And if you remember it was such a yo-yo, it would be like, okay, everything's open. Oh no, it's closed. Oh yes, it's open. And I was like, instead of, let's just wait. We have the springtime. Let's go through the spring and summer. We did the

fall. And then we did some other thing to figure out how to get through winter. We were just piddling it together.

And then I got a call from the Philadelphia Orchestra and they were like, "Jeannine, we want to send the members of the orchestra to come play at the shop." And I was like, oh, I can't put them outside. I was just like, "Okay, all right. We'll reopen. And we'll reopen with the orchestra." And it was really phenomenal. It was phenomenal. And still a little scary because it was still like we just didn't know what we were working with still. But it was powerful because people came out and they kept us going.

Craig:

That's actually a perfect segue into our next question, where as I was watching some videos of your shop online and just looking at your Instagram and all of the different social media channels you have, it became very apparent to me that music plays a huge role in your bookshop. And we saw street performers out front and musicians in the store. And I was just curious if you could speak to what music's role in your business or the Fishtown area in general means?

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah, I mean, I think part of it is being unapologetic because when we got to Fishtown, we were told, "Oh, you're not supposed to be in that neighborhood." And so it was just like, no, there's a famous line from a great philosopher, not really. It's from Dirty Dancing.

Celia Cook:

That's crazy, though.

Jeannine Cook:

They said, "Nobody puts Baby in the corner." And that's what I felt like. I'm like, nobody puts us in the corner.

Celia Cook:

Jeannine in a corner.

Jeannine Cook:

Harriett's, right? Nobody tells us that we're not allowed to be somewhere, that our existence doesn't matter, or that we should be scared or cower. Nobody. Nobody gets to do that, and we won't do that to anyone as well. And so I think part of the music was that and just like, look, we're here and a part of our culture has always been a musical culture, and that's okay. And that doesn't put anybody, no one's harmed by this.

The other thing is I recognize that our artists and musicians weren't making any money. They had nowhere to play. And so I was just like, oh no, we've got to make sure that we're a space for them. And since we're doing this, we're building a bookstore outside anyway, we might as well have DJs and drummers and whatever, whoever else. We've had whole concerts out there at this point. Oh, the harpist and the cellist, and mostly all of those have been women, and women who look like myself. Because if the whole world is struggling, that group is really hugely struggling. And so that's the group that we're responsible for and that we felt like, okay, let's make sure that they have resources as much as we can. But we have musicians in right now. Every weekend for the month of December, you'll catch a live musician.

Karen:

I am so bummed that I do not live in Philadelphia right now.

Craig:

I was just thinking I might need to do a road trip soon, honestly.

Celia Cook:

Come see us before Christmas.

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah. But I mean, especially now with so many folks in town, it's good for folks to see the talent that's in Philly.

Karen:

I love all of that so much. And I love what you said about feeling responsible for a group. Another group that it's become very clear that you feel responsible for, you are very passionate about our young people, bringing them into the store, helping them become passionate about literature and learn more about their history. And I saw on your website something called the Youth Conductors program that sounded really cool. And I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about what that is.

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah. It was young people who were originally, okay, so like I said, I was a teacher for many years, and not only was I a teacher, but I worked with young people who had dropped out of high school and were coming back to get their GEDs or diplomas. And my work was always, and I think it's a part of why I had to learn how to be creative and resourceful, is because it was like, how do you engage folks that have in many ways been disengaged or been pushed out of the system? How do you make them know that they are important and valuable and that you care about their presence and that their voice really matters?

And it's like one of the things that you do is you give them opportunity, you provide them with space and see what they do with it. So young people have always been a central, literally always been a central part of what we do. The Youth Conductors, they could be doing any number of jobs, whether they're working behind the register or they're helping order books or they're running events. They have a lot of jobs within the work that we do.

Celia Cook:

We train them, and we do [inaudible 00:27:51].

Jeannine Cook:

And my mom is big on the training.

Craig:

Our next question is about ownership. I've seen you speak about what ownership means to business owners. And although they own their business, they may not actually own the space that they're in. So a landlord owns a big building and rents it out to a bunch of business owners. And I really enjoyed hearing you speak about that, and I would love if you could just tell us more about that.

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah, so I was talking to a group and I was just wanting them to understand that it's a part of the reason that so many [inaudible 00:28:24] 40 to 50% of Black women owned businesses closed during the height of the pandemic. And that number has increased since. Even though things have reopened, that number of closings has actually increased within that community.

And so I was saying in some ways, folks haven't asked us why that is happening. They haven't asked us exactly what could we do to support you. They'll tell you like, "Oh, here's how we'll support you." They'll say, "We're going to put you on the top 10 list of Black businesses in Philadelphia." And that's a really nice gesture, but you didn't really ask me what would be helpful. And because of that, you're not actually meeting the need.

And the need is that we need to own our own spaces because in many ways we're still acting as sharecroppers when we are in someone else's space and we're working that person's land, and you're bringing all the energy and you're taking care of their location and you're paying them, and I'm even paying your taxes or their taxes, and then you're like at the slightest anything, they could say, "Okay, you've got to go. We found somebody else," especially in Fishtown where now it's, when I got here, it wasn't as popping as it is now. And so it's like, oh, Fishtown's popping. You can literally just switch somebody else in and you can double the rent. And if greed has you do something like that, there's no moral police that say, "Oh, you can't do that." So that business owner is just out on the street.

And I'm watching, we ran a tour last year where you could take a trolley tour from, it started at Harriett, you could go to five to six other Black women owned businesses of Philly. And I want to say two of those businesses don't exist anymore from last year to now. And that's just, it's only getting worse. It's only getting worse because yes, there was a huge surge right after George Floyd's murder and Breonna Taylor's murder in this country, but that surge wasn't, because it was a part of rage marketing, it wasn't sustainable. It hasn't sustained itself for many within our ecosystem.

And so yeah, if you own your building, that's one less thing for you to have to be trying to come up with rent. If I tell you this, the horror story, my friends who've been like, "Yeah, it was March 15th. And the lady is like, yo, you better pay me this rent." And she was like, "I don't know what to do because it's March 15th, 2020, and they're telling us to close the doors. And I'm like, what am I going to ... How?" And she was like, yeah. She said, "And then April 15th, they were like, you better pay this rent." And I was just like, wow, the lack of compassion some people had, and I get it because they must have had their own whatever responsibilities.

If you own your space, you have a little bit more flexibility. You have something you can pass down. You have a true asset. And we get to see more of that. So yes, it's nice to be on a list, but I would say remove as much red tape as possible and make it possible for us to own our space.

Celia Cook:

Jeannine, I think it would be nice if you tell them what you learned in France about having a bookshop and owning your own bookshop.

Jeannine Cook:

Oh, yeah, so in France it's something the country actually really protects the bookkeepers, the bookshop keepers. And so once you have a bookshop, it's yours forever into perpetuity. You can pass it down to your children. And you're just treated as a special heritage builder within the country.

Karen:

Wow.

Jeannine Cook:

You're not treated as just another business, which I think is so important. So that's why you'll see lots of really, really old businesses or really, really old bookstores over there, because they've been able to pass them down. And even if the economy goes wild or inflation is crazy, you can still keep this business around because it's an institution that the country values.

Craig:

That's amazing. I feel like I have goosebumps. I've never heard of this. That's amazing.

Celia Cook:

With me, I was like, this should be established everywhere.

Jeannine Cook:

I mean, they've also done other things where they're like, because there was one point where we were trying to get books and you couldn't because the big boxes were buying everything up, and it was just over there, they were like, they wouldn't allow that. They had to have stuff set aside so that we were still considered.

And you're talking about businesses, corporations that do not need books to survive. Books are not their lifeblood. And I've said this many times, if Amazon decided to just go a year without selling books so that the independent bookstores could actually reap the benefit of that, it would have a tenfold, tenfold benefit to us as independent bookstores. And it would do very little to their bottom line, for one year, just one.

Karen:

One of the things that kind of dovetails into this, so when all of us initially started talking about doing the podcast, I think it was a couple of months ago, time got away from us, but it was in conjunction with World Sight Day. And we were specifically thinking, how do we talk about how audiobooks are important for the vision impaired? How does this play in with accessibility? And I know this is something that's also important to both of you when it comes to your stores. Can you talk a little bit more about why that's such an important part of your mission as well?

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah, I'm going to let Mommy talk about it.

Celia Cook:

Yes. Audiobooks is very, very important to me because I'm visually impaired and I have been blind, actually four times I've been in the darkness. And the first thing that my daughter asked me is, "What do you miss most," when I first lost the sight, and I say reading because I love reading. And she was like, "Ma, you don't have to be sad about it. You could always get into reading through the audio."

And the first thing the Blind Association did was introduce me to getting books through the library. So I was registered to do that, and it was so exciting for me to be able to be still in the world where you can enjoy books and enjoy the genre that you like. You know what I'm saying? It was just great. And I truly

believe, even for the people who are sighted, on the run, want to read books, it is such a great thing to have.

I have enjoyed reading books through, my vision is not, it has improved, but it's not where I can read a whole book. So therefore, [inaudible 00:35:13] any audiobooks is great for me. I keep up with my reading, and Jeannine say I'm a speed reader. I listen to books, because it's so many years, I could enjoy books like never before. Sometimes in a day I can read two books, listen to the books, enjoy them so much. And I thank God for whoever it is decided that this is what they were going to do.

I am even trying to get my granddaughter to start reading, volunteer herself to read because she have such a beautiful diction, to read to other young people. I met a lady yesterday, she came into the bookshop and she was telling me how her daughter has given up. She's only 20 something years old, and she's just hiding herself in the house. I'm like, "Have you introduced her to audiobooks?" She says, "She's just shutting herself out." I want to tell the world that there is a world to live in. We can enjoy our books through audiobooks. It is the best thing that could ever happen to somebody who cannot read the pages anymore. It is the best thing in the world.

Karen:

Thank you so much for sharing that. That is really powerful for us. And a good reminder for us too, because we spend our days working on audiobooks, and to hear how impactful they are means a lot. And I know we talk a lot about how attached we get to certain narrators and the sounds of their voices and how all these people have become important to us on a day-to-day basis.

Craig:

Yeah, thank you so much for sharing that story. Our last semi-serious question before we end the podcast with a couple silly questions, as we tend to do, is just asking you what's the best way for people that live in Philadelphia or listeners, or even people that don't live in the area, to support local bookstores. I mean, I obviously know they should go in and buy books, but is there any other ideas you have of how we can all support our independent bookstores?

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah, I think that we get to start thinking about policy. And like I said about France, we get to start thinking about how to make sure this institution is sustained so it's not always an ebb and flow. And now we have lots of bookshops, and now they're all closing, and now we have lots. And I think another thing to think about is the ecosystem. One, for us it's like, yes, individuals are super supportive of the bookshop, but other institutions, other corporations, other organizations get to also think about where they get their books from.

Because where's your school district getting their books from? Where's your local universities getting their books from? Where are the hospitals getting their books from? That's a question that we could ask and also answer, and say, "Hey, well maybe we should be getting them more locally. Maybe we should think about how to do this in such a way that sustains our actual community's ecosystem."

Because like I said, when you work with, you see Jeannine, you get to meet Miss Celia. You come in here. I'm watching children grow up, I'm watching little puppies turn into big dogs. I'm just like, this is amazing. Everybody comes here with their dogs, because I always have the treats and whatnot. And so it's like we're a part of this community. I'm your neighbor. This is a real relationship. It's not some random corporation that really just cares about the bottom line and making sure that their stakeholders, their financial investors get their money back.

And so there's ways for us to do well and do good. And so I would say start thinking about questioning the institutions that you're a part of, whether that's your religious organization, whether that's your school or whatever, the business you work for or whatever. You say, "Hey, well where are you getting it from?" Especially bulk, right? Because bulk would do wonders for independent bookstores.

Craig:

That's great. Thank you so much for sharing that. Our next thing is new, so we've never done this before, but we want to try a new segment on the podcast.

Jeannine Cook:

We're always ready.

Craig:

For now, we're calling it Instagram Story Time. So with this, what we do, again, bear with us, first time. We went through your Instagram and we're going to pick one photo and ask for you to tell us the story of it. And for Harriett's, this could not have been easier. We decided to choose the photo of you riding a horse and delivering books with the caption, "Amazon ain't got nothing on us." Please, please, tell us the story of how this happened.

Jeannine Cook:

Oh my goodness. Okay, so there's so many layers to that funny, that beautiful photo. So the Fletcher Street Riding Club in Philadelphia, another institution ... Because I'm intentional. So this institution was struggling, and I reached out to them and said, "What could we possibly do with you all that might be able to shine light on the fact that we have urban cowboys in Philadelphia and they don't fit neatly into the arts so they're not getting funding from there? They don't fit neatly into education, so they're not getting funding from there." But I said, "This is an institution that has been in Philly for so long, and many people don't even know that it exists. What can we do?" Because they were losing their land.

And they were like, "Well Jeannine, we could teach you how to ride." And I was like, yeah, of course they'll teach me how to ride. And so they brought the horse to Harriett's just so that I could, I got on for the first time and we did a photo shoot. I wanted to bring the horse inside of the bookstore and they were like, "We don't know, if she takes a poop, you're going to be so mad." And so we did that, and that was the first thing.

And then I was like, "Ooh, I love this so much." And Chloe is the horse that I ride over and over and over again. And so they were like, "Look at Chloe in the photo. She's posing, and her and you are symbiotic," and all of this stuff. Me and Chloe got so close. And then I was like, well what if we started to give the books, go out and take the books to people by horseback? What would happen? And they were just like, "Huh, no one's ever asked us that." And I was like, "Let's try it."

Craig:

Wow, I can't believe no one had ever asked them that before.

Jeannine Cook:

No, that's that line. And I have a poem and it says, "The path with no beginning is worth beginning." And so that was the path with no beginning, which is going out on horseback because it was socially distant because people were on the ground and I was up on top of the horse. And it was the shock and awe in

people's eyes when they see you coming down the street on a big horse and all of this hair and all these books.

And I said, like I said many times, we posted it, that day that we posted that was Indy Bookstore Day. And I was saying, Amazon ain't got nothing on us. They've been told, everyone's always like, "Oh, how are you going to make it against Amazon?" They think they're this big behemoth of a monster and this Goliath. And I'm just like, listen, there are so many things that they could never do, they could just never do, and they could never think this way and never connect this way. And that was also to support the Fletcher Street Riding Club. And so we were able to do multiple things at once.

Craig:

And am I correct in this is now this story and this image has been made into a children's book?

Jeannine Cook:

Yes.

Craig:

Amazing.

Jeannine Cook:

Yes, you're correct. You're correct.

Karen:

I love it.

Jeannine Cook:

Because people are like, "Are you kidding me?" And I'm just like, "Yeah, we really do. Yeah, that's what we do. It's part of it."

Craig:

Oh, I love it.

Karen:

I also love that Chloe is the horse and we know her name now.

Jeannine Cook:

Right, right. Which is also Toni Morrison's real name. And so it was even more like, whoa for me. I'm like, are you kidding me? Yeah.

Karen:

That's amazing. Okay, Craig, I think we've got to keep Instagram story time in. This is awesome.

Jeannine Cook:

Oh, I love Instagram story time. It's really good.

Craig:

We're off to a good start.

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah.

Karen:

Well last but not least, so our last few questions for you, we called this our lightning round. We've done this the last few episodes. I think we started with Anne Patchett in Nashville when we interviewed her, and basically we have I think five-

Jeannine Cook:

Tell Anne Patchett I said hi.

Karen:

Absolutely.

Jeannine Cook:

I like her. I like her writing. Okay, sorry.

Karen:

No, that's awesome. So we tested out lightning round on her and she was like, "This is great. Keep it in." So here we are.

Jeannine Cook:

Here we are.

Karen:

So my first question for both of you, what is your favorite restaurant in Philadelphia?

Jeannine Cook:

Oh, you know what I'm going to say.

Celia Cook:

Lloyd's.

Jeannine Cook:

Lloyd's. No, no, no. Okay, so I'll say there's a few. Okay. So I have to say, I know, but I've got to go like ... Okay, Lloyd's, because it's right across the street and it's my grandfather's name. And it was to me, it always felt like a symbol. Like, wow, we get a bookshop that's across the street from a restaurant called Lloyd's. And so I thought that was always great. But also I've got to shout out my Black owned restaurants, which are, I really like Amina's, it's the newest Black woman owned soul food restaurant that's down in Old City. And so I've been taking all my dates there.

Craig:

On horseback?

Jeannine Cook:

Dates are my books.

Karen:

That would be a good t-shirt, I like that.

Craig:

Yes.

Jeannine Cook:

Right. I'm taking all my dates and a book to Amina's. [inaudible 00:45:03] Yeah, that's my code word. Oh sorry, lightning. Lightning.

Craig:

Oh yeah, sorry. Our second question, Magic Gardens, tourist trap or awesome?

Jeannine Cook:

I think you should see it at least once. It's like it's not-

Craig:

So somewhere in the middle is what I'm hearing.

Jeannine Cook:

Yes. I mean, you should see it because it's cool, but it's a little touristy.

Karen:

All right, next question. If you weren't doing what you're doing right now, what would your dream job be?

Jeannine Cook:

Oh, I want to get commissioned to build libraries.

Craig:

Nailed it.

Jeannine Cook:

No, I think at this moment I would love to be a playwright.

Karen:

Awesome. Very cool. Celia, any lifelong dreams?

Celia Cook:

What else would I like to be doing?

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah, if you weren't working at the bookshop.

Celia Cook:

Preaching.

Karen:

Awesome.

Celia Cook:

I do talk to people when they come into the bookshop, which I love. If I feel something coming from them when we start talking, I always feel as though, what's the word we use, ministry, when we meet with other people and talk to them and encourage them. I love that. I love the ministry.

Karen:

Awesome.

Craig:

Both your dream jobs are so noble. Mine would be something ridiculous. If you could instantly become an expert in something, what would it be?

Jeannine Cook:

Ooh, go. You go.

Celia Cook:

If I could instantly become an expert, I would love to be a doctor who can fix eyes so that everyone would see perfect.

Karen:

Oh, I love it.

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah. I think I want to work on conflict resolution. I want to do some serious Nobel Peace Prize, like let's do some stuff, like can we deal with this thing that's at the middle? Can we move this along a bit so that I don't live in a city where hundreds of people are getting murdered every year. I think that there's work that could be done here. And I think a lot of it has to do with conflict resolution. Just folks just don't know how to deal with the conflict.

Karen:

Awesome. And then our last one-

Jeannine Cook:

And that's the same for Ukraine and Russia, right? What's happening in Philly is a reflection of some other larger world issues that deal with conflict.

Karen:

The need is there, that is for sure.

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So I'd love to be an expert.

Karen:

Our last question for you is a very silly one. Craig and I were joking about this, and so we thought we'd ask you if you could bring back any fashion trend that has gone out of style, what would you choose?

Jeannine Cook:

You know I've always got my old fashioned. What would you choose, Mom?

Celia Cook:

Platforms.

Jeannine Cook:

Platforms. I thought you were going to say culottes.

Celia Cook:

I do like culottes.

Jeannine Cook:

I want folks to go back to wearing really fancy hats on a regular basis.

Karen:

Oh my gosh, yes.

Jeannine Cook:

On a regular day. I like that.

Celia Cook:

And gloves.

Karen:

I'm down. I'm totally in. I will wear my hat and gloves any day.

Jeannine Cook:

You can wear it when you come here.

Karen:

Perfect.

Jeannine Cook:

I would love it. I would love a hat. But yeah, so that's it.

Craig:

So that is the end of our lightning round. So before we let you go and say our goodbyes, we want to know from both of you, what are you reading right now and do you have any recommendations for our listeners?

Jeannine Cook:

Her hands are up in the air. She's just like, yes. Go ahead, Ma, what are you reading right now?

Celia Cook:

Our Missing Hearts.

Jeannine Cook:

Yeah, so Celeste.

Celia Cook:

Celeste. Celeste Ng.

Jeannine Cook:

You know that one?

Karen:

I don't know much about it. I've seen it. That came out pretty recently, right?

Jeannine Cook:

Yes, it just came out.

Celia Cook:

It's awesome. Oh my God, I love it. I love it. It's so beautiful.

Jeannine Cook:

Everyone laughs at me when I tell them what I'm reading right now because they're like, what are you talking about, Jeannine? So I'm reading *Vanishing Fleece*, not *The Vanishing Half*, but *Vanishing Fleece*. And so I'm reading all about wool. And they're like, "Why are you reading about wool?" I'm just like, "I don't know." But it has me gripped up. It has me gripped.

I'm thinking about manufacturing and I'm thinking about what do we do as an organization, as an institution? How do we make sure that we're not just a middleman? And at some point, I would love to be a manufacturer in this space. And so *Vanishing Fleece* is what I'm reading, all about wool.

Craig:

I'm looking at the cover right now, and there's a person riding the sheep with a lasso.

Jeannine Cook:

Right, [inaudible 00:50:03] right now.

Craig:

Exactly.

Jeannine Cook:

That's so funny.

Craig:

Well, we'll have to read both of those. They both seem awesome. Thank you so much for your time today. I'm so glad we were able to connect and learn all about your bookstore.

Jeannine Cook:

It's really nice to be interviewed with my mom. That's a special day. So this is really special for us. I think this is the one of the first, and so may it not be the last.

Karen:

Oh, thank you. We are so delighted that you both wanted to join us, and it has been such a pleasure. So thank you so much. And we will all be cheering you on and can't wait to see what happens with the new bookstore in 2023, with the library.

Celia Cook:

[inaudible 00:50:34] Hat and gloves.

Jeannine Cook:

And she said, come by with your hat and gloves.

Karen:

I will be there.

Jeannine Cook:

All right. We'll see you, and I'll bring the horse for you and everything.

Karen:

Yes.

Jeannine Cook:

All right, take care you all.

Craig:

You too. Bye.

Karen:

Bye. Thank you.

Jeannine Cook:

Bye.

Craig:

Well, thank you for listening to that episode. We were speaking with Jeannine and Celia Cook of Harriett's Bookstore, so if you find yourself in Philadelphia, you should go visit them. This was easily one of my favorite episodes that we've done so far, Karen. What about you?

Karen:

Oh, I love that. I feel the same way. And I would love to know specifically why you feel that way.

Craig:

It was so fun just getting to talk to a bookstore owner in this way. We've spoken to a few others, but they're also authors, so they have a ton going on. And I think Anne even said, "I don't run a bookstore, I own a bookstore." So it was fun to get to speak to somebody that owns a bookstore and it's their livelihood, they live it and breathe it every day. And just listening to their stories, whether it was launching as COVID was kicking off. Kicking off-

Karen:

That sounds way too celebratory.

Craig:

Yeah, that sounds very fun. I just got a calendar invite for the COVID kickoff. It was awesome. And also just the interaction between her and her mom was so fun. And I don't know, what about you? What was your take on the episode?

Karen:

Yeah, I think the last thing that you said was just absolutely so beautiful to be a part of, to see and to hear their relationship live blew my mind. It's just so cool how Celia has been so supportive of and influenced Jeannine's career and is a big of why she does what she does. And also, you can just hear their pride in each other for the work that they have done and the women that they are. And that felt really special. I also love that we were in the bookstore with them. They were recording live in the store.

Craig:

I was so confused when you just said that. I was like, no we weren't. It was on Zoom. What are you talking about?

Karen:

We were virtually in the bookstore with them, but I felt like we were there because I think a customer came in while we were talking to them and the UPS driver with a bunch of books came in. And so it was cool to hear the hustle and bustle and the flow of their day from the perspective of the store.

Craig:

You know who won't get to hear all that? Anyone that listened to this episode, because as much as you enjoyed it, I absolutely edited it out. I'm sorry.

Karen:

Well, everyone know that that happened and it was delightful.

Craig:

I'm sorry that I edited. I can never say edited it out.

Karen:

Yeah, same.

Craig:

Try it.

Karen:

Nope. No thank you.

Craig:

All right. What are you reading, Karen?

Karen:

Okay, so I am reading two things. Well, I just finished listening to an audiobook that if your StoryGraph does not lead me astray, I think you also just finished. I listened to the House in The Pines on Libro.fm and it is kind of like a mystery thriller set in the present day. And so that was my recent listen. So I'm on the hunt for my next audiobook. I haven't decided yet.

And then I'm also reading a book that I'm a little behind the curve on. I know everyone else read this last year, but I'm reading Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow. I'm not very far in it. I think I'm 20% of the way through. But I really like it so far. It's just very friendship oriented. It's about a man and a woman who have known each other since childhood and they're embarking on this project to build a video game together. And I love it so far.

Craig:

I've seen that book cover a million times, and I think it was in our top 10 best sellers of the year. I had no clue that that's what it was about.

Karen:

Yeah, I honestly didn't either. And so I was surprised when I started reading it. I'm like, oh great. Interestingly enough too, so the cover has The Great Wave, that famous painting, on it. And that is a very

prominent piece of the book when it comes to their game design and the art that influences them and things like that. So lots to unpack.

Craig:

I will pick it up. And yes, I did read that other book, you StoryGraph sleuth.

Karen:

I am such a StoryGraph stalker. I love to know what my friends are reading and listening to.

Craig:

I do, as well. I also add everything to my want to read list if someone that I trust their taste on has read something.

Karen:

Yeah. What are you reading right now?

Craig:

I am listening to two things. One is a reread of a book I love that I'm going to try to make you guess in a minute because I'm curious. And the second one is *Weyward* by Emilia Hart. And I'm loving it so far. Again, like you, I'm not that far in, probably about a fifth of the way through, like you are, but it's three women through three different parts of history. Like old timey, like Salem Witch trial days, sometime in the fifties or something, and then present day, not the same woman because it's not Addie LaRue. I don't know why I had to specify that.

Karen:

I'm with you.

Craig:

But it's good. And I think they're all in the same family. It's like someone's great, great aunt and the great, great, great grandmother type of thing throughout history, and it's really, I'm loving it so far and I'm thinking there's going to be magic soon.

Karen:

Ooh.

Craig:

Fingers crossed.

Karen:

I've seen the cover, and it lends itself to a book that would have magic in it. Very fairytale looking. Yeah.

Craig:

Yes, yes. For sure. If you had to guess what book I am rereading, based on nothing more than telling you that I love it, what would you guess?

Karen:

I have two guesses. You are either rereading something by V.E. Schwab.

Craig:

Nope.

Karen:

Or you are rereading The Magicians.

Craig:

That is accurate. I am.

Karen:

I knew it. Yes.

Craig:

Yes, yes. I will reread that book forever. Love it so much. As soon as we're done recording this outro, I am going to email Lev Grossman and say, "Please come on our podcast."

Karen:

How many times do you think you've read The Magicians?

Craig:

An embarrassing amount of times. That's how many, that many books.

Karen:

You don't even have a guess?

Craig:

Oh no, I mean, five probably. Typically just the first one, though. Because there are three. I don't sit and reread all three. I typically reread the first one because it's my favorite.

Karen:

Got you. And you don't count those towards your annual reading goal.

Craig:

I typically do not count rereads, but based on a conversation I had with you recently, I think I might start doing that.

Karen:

I encourage you to do so.

Craig:

You just care about me hitting those reading goals.

Karen:

I do. You don't want to miss that goal.

Craig:

[inaudible 00:57:21] reading at the end of the year.

Karen:

Exactly, exactly.

Craig:

Lastly, another book that Karen and I both read recently is *How to Sell A Haunted House* by Grady Hendrix. We were both lucky enough to get an advanced copy of it for a very specific reason. What is that reason, Karen?

Karen:

Well, Craig, wait a minute. Way to bury the lead. Grady will be joining us on the podcast very soon. I think in real time as we're recording this, we'll be meeting him on Tuesday of next week. So cannot wait. We both really enjoyed the book. I specifically, there is one element of this book that kills me. I cannot stop laughing every time I think about it. And it's not a funny book. It's a horror book.

Craig:

You also cannot stop saying it. You say it so much.

Karen:

So I'm very excited for our listeners to read this book. You'll know exactly what I'm talking about when you get to this element.

Craig:

Yes.

Karen:

And you too will laugh.

Craig:

When we record on Tuesday, when I edit it, I will put a clip from the audiobook that includes-

Karen:

This thing.

Craig:

This super secretive thing that you're talking about so that listeners can hear it and then go, I have to hear the rest of this book.

Karen:

I remember you said something when we were chatting about this that I really liked about what this book reminded you of, and I think it was like early Stephen King. Is that right? I know you really enjoyed this one.

Craig:

Yeah, yeah. It reminds me of early Stephen King, where it's just so kind of over the top, and silly isn't the right word because it is a serious book, but it's just so ridiculous. I mean, for people that haven't read the description, it's about puppets. This woman's mother dies, and she was a prolific puppet collector, so when they go back to the house to sell the haunted house, it's full of terrifying dolls and puppets.

Karen:

Sentient puppets.

Craig:

Yes. Spoiler. Gee.

Karen:

Oh, should I not say that?

Craig:

I guess that's implied with the whole haunted aspect of the title, so it's okay, I think. Yeah, it's great. I really liked it. I've read all of Grady Hendrix's books, but this is honestly, I think this is my favorite one, so I'm really excited to have him on the podcast and get to ask questions about it.

Karen:

Well, everyone, this book is now out in the world. It exists. You can get it on Libro.fm, if you would like to do your homework before the Grady Hendrix episode. And if you haven't signed up for a membership or tried Libro.fm before, don't forget that you can use promo code Libro Podcast when you sign up. You will get two audiobook credits for your first month instead of just one.

Craig:

And as always, thank you for listening.