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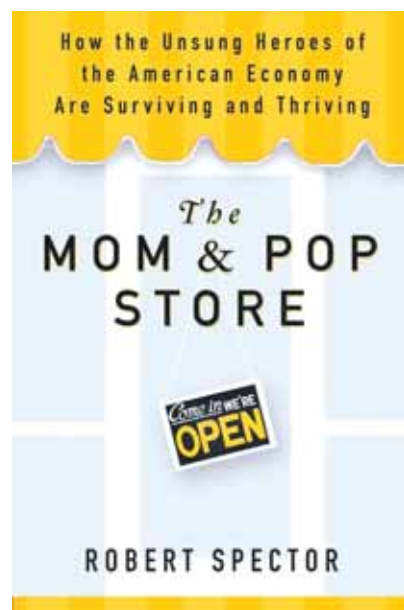
# LITERARY HILL

*A Compendium of Readers, Writers, Books, & Events*

BY KAREN LYON

## Mom & Pop

When my father came home from World War II, he was taken under the wing of a Jewish tailor in our small Western Pennsylvania town. Dad not only learned the trade, but eventually opened his own men's clothing store. The Tog Shop never made him rich, but it supported our family and sent my brother and me to college. After he sold the store, Dad downsized to a small tailor shop, where he was able at last to put his feet up, holding court by his sewing machine in a rickety old chair whose casters



were clogged with years of discarded threads. He never did retire, fixing zippers, hemming pants, and trading gibes with his customers until a few months before he died.

I thought of Dad often while I was reading “The Mom & Pop Store: How the Unsung Heroes of the American

Economy are Surviving and Thriving.” Author Robert Spector spent two years traveling the country and interviewing dozens of small business owners like my father — and like his own. He discovered that these grocers and jewelers and booksellers all share similar qualities: optimism, a desire for independence, and a can-do spirit of entrepreneurialism. They also work their butts off. Spector promises in his introduction to reveal “what life is like on the other side of the counter.” What he found was pride, satisfaction — and a whole lot of sweat.



While Spector is now a journalist living in Seattle, his bona fides arose from Perth Amboy, New Jersey, where his family ran a butcher shop. He realized early on that he was not cut out to don his father's apron. “Have you ever shopped in a family-owned store and been waited on by a pimply teenager behind the counter, who's there

because he has to be there?” he writes. “That was me.” Ironically, he went on to become a business writer; the author of “The Nordstrom Way” and other books, he writes and lectures frequently on customer service. In “The Mom & Pop Store,” he focuses his journalistic zeal on small businesses, exploring their history, social impact on the community, and economic significance. But he also has the wisdom to let the shopkeepers speak for themselves, and it's their stories that form the core of the book.

When Spector's travels brought him to Capitol Hill, he zeroed in on Frager's Hardware. He points out that customers in search of home repair materials could easily go to Home Depot, but co-owners John Weintraub and Edwin Copenhaver offer something the big-box stores don't — good old-fashioned customer service. “Sometimes, in hardware, people will ask for the wrong thing,” explains Weintraub. “When it doesn't ring true, you ask them additional questions. What's your project? What are you trying to do?” Copenhaver notes that staff are always on the floor, answering questions and guiding people to the merchandise they need. “You should be down there talking to them, asking them what they need,” he says. “That's the heart of the business. If you sit in the office and stare out the window, it doesn't work.”

Carla Cohen, co-owner of Politics & Prose (the other DC store featured in the book) also understands that “indies” need to offer something special to attract customers in the electronic age. “[People] think, ‘Why should I bother going to a store when I can get it online?’ We have to find

a way to make it cool to buy local from community-owned enterprise.” Spector clearly doesn't need convincing that local is cool, ending with a strong appeal to patronize community businesses. A delicatessen owner he interviewed sums up the reasons why: “Keep the spending in your town, otherwise you won't have choices. Some people, in order to save a dime, lose sight of that.” While it's too late to save the Trover Shop, we are fortunate to have many small businesses on the Hill that offer not only unique products but also personal, hands-on service. Let's do our best to keep them here.

Robert Spector will sign copies of “The Mom & Pop Store” at Frager's Hardware, Sept. 13, 10:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

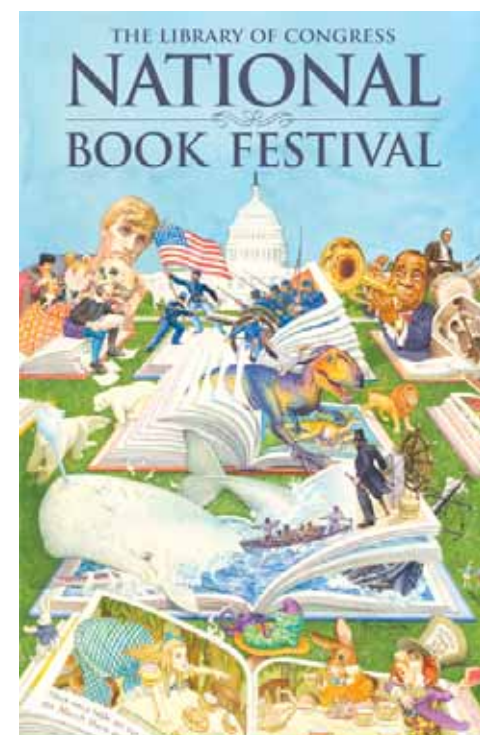
## 2009 National Book Festival

If you're a booklover, the place for you on September 26 is the National Mall. The 2009 National Book Festival, sponsored by the Library of Congress, offers a chance to hear from and get books signed by more than 70 authors. All genres will be represented — mysteries and thrillers, teens and children, history and biography, fiction and fantasy, and poetry and prose. Some big names this year include John Irving, John Grisham, Judy Blume, Julia Alvarez, David Baldacci, Colson Whitehead, and Sue Monk Kidd.

As always, Washington will provide a wealth of hometown talent. Local noir crime writer George Pelecanos, always an entertaining speaker, will be on hand to talk about his re-

cent work, "The Way Home." You'll find Hill writer James L. Swanson in the teens and children tent this year, where he'll talk about "Chasing Lincoln's Killer," a young adult adaptation of his best-selling "Manhunt." W. Ralph Eubanks will share his thoughts on a new book about his grandparents, "The House at the End of the Road: The Story of Three Generations of an Interracial Family in the American South." The author of "Reading Lolita in Tehran," Azar Nafisi, will read from and discuss her recent memoir, "Things I Have Been Silent About: Memories."

This being DC, of course, political writers abound. Washington Post reporters David Balz and Haynes Johnson will discuss their new book, "The Battle for America 2008: The Story of an Extraordinary Election." Post staff writer Kirstin Downey brings a historical perspective to the political stage with "The Woman Behind the New Deal:



"The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor and His Moral Conscience." And Gwen Ifill, a familiar face as moderator of "Washington Week," explores the role of race, racism, and identity politics in her new book, "The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama."

The Book Festival will be held on the National Mall, rain or shine, Sept. 26, 10 AM.-5:30 PM. For details, visit [www.loc.gov/bookfest/2009](http://www.loc.gov/bookfest/2009).

#### Paradise Found

Local author Ariel Sabar will read from "My Father's Paradise: A Son's Search for His Jewish Past in Kurdish Iraq," winner of the 2008 National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography, at the Southeast Neighborhood Library, Sept. 22, 6:30 PM. ★

a space inside

## Seeking Writers for 2009 readings

Email  
Monica Jacobe  
(see below)  
to apply.

*A Space Inside* is just that—a place where developing writers, lesser known voices, and the work writers create between books can be heard. It alternates monthly between poetry and prose.

For more information email Monica F. Jacobe [monica@jacobe@usa.net](mailto:monica@jacobe@usa.net).



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