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Exercising my Gratitude Muscles

“Happiness in this world depends on internals, not externals.” — Benjamin Franklin



I read recently about how our muscles remember strengthening exercises. The memory changes our gene expression so the muscles respond quickly to those exercises later on. This led me to ponder whether something similar may be true about how we think.

I'm an optimist by nature, but that doesn't mean I'm always thinking nice or positive things. In fact, I have a bad habit of ruminating on irritations or errors. Rather than cataloging my daily activities or

grievances in a diary, I'm following an exercise recommended by Albert C. Brooks: keeping a gratitude (and wonder) journal and adding two things to the list every evening.

(A wonder entry from today mentions a sharp-shinned hawk flying over my head carrying a junco in its talons. Sucks to be the junco; awesome to be the raptor, in this situation.)

As the list grows, coming up with new ideas for thankfulness requires more thought. I have to be present to what is going on or existing in and around me. In a way, I'm training my "gratitude muscles." If I'm in need of a mood booster, I can pull out the gratitude journal and read a few pages.

Shunting aside negative thoughts in favor of open-minded curiosity and wonder is a major goal for me this year. We are what we think? Maybe so. No doubt this type of exercising my brain will make me happier, or at least more contented and at peace.

Brooks has a list you might be interested in perusing: "[10 Practical Ways to Improve Happiness](#)." Let me know if any of these ideas resonate with you. "Act Nicely" and "Be Generous" are good ones for me.

Will you be happier in 2026?

Eilene

On Bookselling

Some Things Never Change



"It is, however, to the bookseller rather than to the publisher that my heart goes out...The difficulties from which he is chiefly suffering are two: first, the unfair competition of certain department stores [think Amazon, Costco, etc.]; and second, that we, the readers, have deserted him."

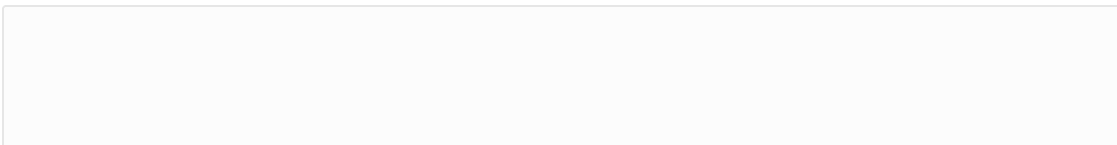
— A. Edward Newton, "What is the Matter with the Bookshop?"

Newton wrote those words over 100 years ago, in 1921! He goes on to lament the disappearance of the lyceum and debate societies, because "the mental stimulation that comes from personal contact has been lost, and seemingly there is nothing that will take its place." (Facebook? Instagram? X? Nope.)

He felt an obligation to support the authors who provide him with the many hours of pleasure he derives from the written word. He noted how we'll spend an equal amount on a show that lasts but a couple hours and then lament the quality.

Booksellers must "compete with the many forms of amusement unknown fifty years ago." And the "department stores" cut their margins to nothing, creating loss leaders. Against this, independent bookstores and authors struggle to compete.

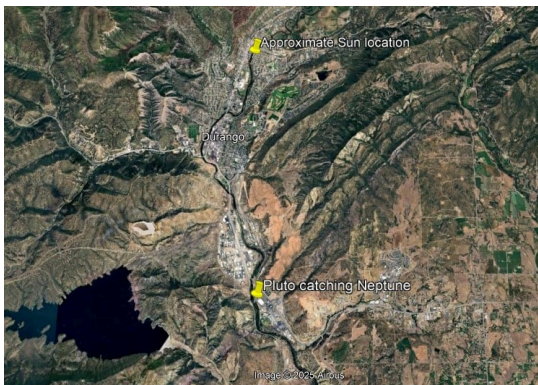
It seems that authors and booksellers have been fighting an uphill battle for a very, very long time.



"It is a man's duty to have books. A library is not a luxury, but one of the necessities of life."

— Henry Ward Beecher

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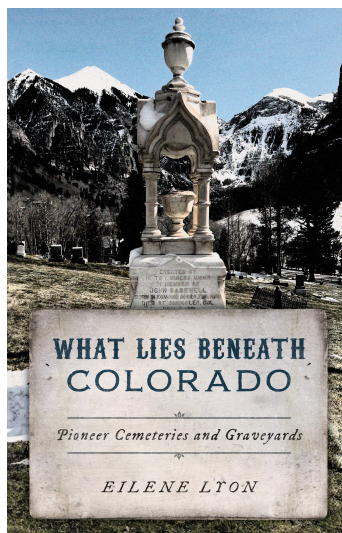
The Death of Christmas Cards?



A Bates Family Mystery

Note: Two recent events impacted my view stats this month (not counting the "attack of the bots" that sent my Home Page views soaring above a thousand a day). First, WordPress promoted my post "The Skywatchers" which featured in last month's newsletter (378 views this month). Second, my artist friend, Suzie Grimm, shared my post about the Solar System installation on the Durango River Trail, Number One this month.

Reviews and Event News



Events

Wintering with Women Writing the West. I will give a presentation on March 18, 2026. **"What Lies Beneath Colorado: Researching and Writing a Nonfiction Book in 13 Months."** Free on Zoom. Details to come in February.

In May and June 2026, I'll be presenting a genealogy talk: **"Overlooked records: What you can learn from lawsuits"**

If you have an organization needing a speaker, you can learn more at my [Presentations](#) page on my website.

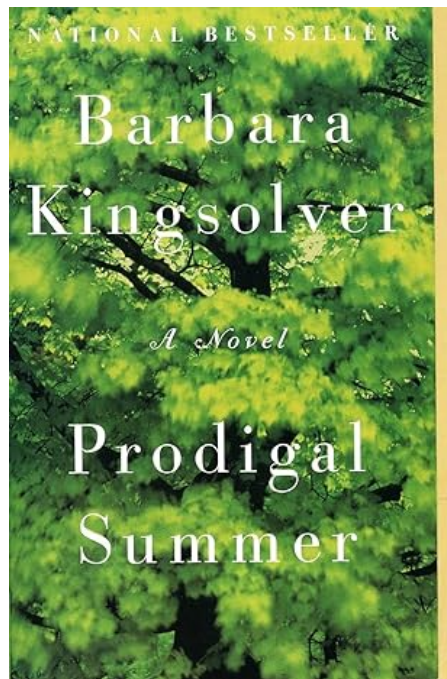




Black-and-White

I decided to play around with some of my old photos, converting them to black-and-white. I believed I could tell which color images would work well, but found out otherwise.

Going through some old Ansel Adams calendars helped me see that even something that looks "busy" can still make a good monochrome image. These are a couple that I particularly like so far.



ICYMI: One of my favorite writers is Barbara Kingsolver. I updated my review of her book, [*Prodigal Summer*](#), with a little quiz question. See how you do!

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