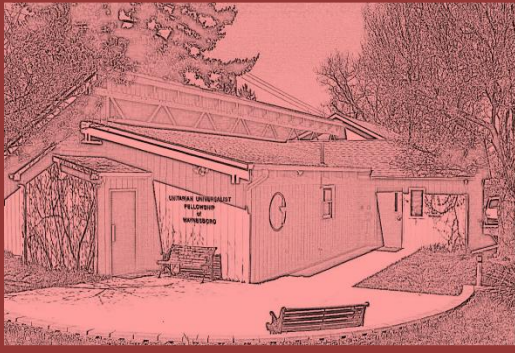




The CommUUnicator

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Freedom to Read: A Fragile Right

By Susan Clark

Every year in October, the American Library Association sponsors “Banned Books Week” (Oct. 5-11) to highlight the value of free and open access to information and to stand against censorship. In my previous newsletter article, “[Libraries: Hallmarks of Freedom and Democracy](#),” I discussed the value of libraries and the dangers of censorship of books and other materials because a few can limit what all should be able to read. Many of these attempts are successful in having books removed from library shelves. But in cases where library boards have refused to remove books based on first amendment rights, lawsuits have been deemed necessary by these library representatives. They know that such measures are antithetical to our right to free expression.

Data gathered by the American Library Association for 2024 shows that “the majority of book censorship attempts are now originating from organized movements, pressure groups and government entities that include elected officials, board members, and administrators.” According to the ALA, these demands comprised 72% of all demands to censor books in school and public libraries.

In the first half of the 20th Century, we can cite hundreds of attempts at censorship by totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Burning books that

threatened their beliefs and destroying libraries crushed the rights of citizens to read, write and view whatever material they chose. Such repression resulted in control of all media in order to impose conformity of thought and opinion. We wonder how people could stand by and allow the government to eliminate their right to read and write freely. Fear. Fear of being ostracized, losing their job, losing their home or worse. And we know it got much worse.

At the present time, there are organized groups whose intentions and efforts are to remove books and materials from libraries and school reading lists—books that they deem inappropriate, dangerous or threatening to their ideas of family rights. One such group, “Moms for Liberty,” lists on its website specific books that have been rated by parents as objectionable for young people to read because of any of a dozen attributes outlined in the “[Universal Book Content Rating System](#),” which was devised by members of the organization.

Based on this rating system, librarians and teachers are being fired for their book selections or book displays in many states. Books with racial, LGBTQ, cultural and sexual issues are among their targets. There is now a concerted effort being used by parents to challenge books in school libraries and/or on teachers’ reading lists. Parents often attend

school board meetings and teacher meetings to make their objections and get media attention.

In the 2025 documentary, [Banned Together: The Fight Against Censorship](#), Moms for Liberty, with chapters in Virginia and many other states, is highlighted as being funded by huge amounts of "dark money." It aims to inform and train parents to challenge and censor books, to lobby Congressional representatives about their concerns and to support selected people to run for school board, state and federal seats. It is responsible for having hundreds of books removed from libraries, first in Florida and now in other conservative leaning states. And it has successfully manufactured growing distrust towards public education and educators, while attempting to suppress histories that conflict with their funders' ideological aims. We can't let our librarians and teachers fight alone for our freedom to read what we prefer. For information about how you can help in this challenge go to [Unite Against Book Bans](#), an initiative of the American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom.

Susan Clark was a librarian for children and adults for many years in Staunton.

Paper Clip Protest

During WWII as a sign of resistance against the Nazis, Norwegian teachers and students wore paper clips to signal their opposition to Nazi occupation. They attached them to their lapels and wore them as jewelry, a symbol of solidarity binding them together as paper clips did with papers. It was a quiet act of defiance, expressing that Norwegians remained united against Nazi rule.

Our defiance against encroaching authoritarianism can and must be loud and public. But the quiet symbol of solidarity on someone's collar when you walk into a crowded room? Genius. Even a person who is unable to stand and hold a sign can protest in an inoffensive way. You can be a subtle sign of support for people who need that. You can be a conversation starter.

Someone said that it's more effective for a million people to do small things than for a few people to try to do a million things. Small efforts can bear fruit when we all participate.

From "Civil Discourse with Joyce Vance" on Substack, September 20, 2025



Last Saturday, the fun of traditional Oktoberfest was enjoyed by about 45 members and friends. This fundraiser

featured the usual Bavarian fare and the ubiquitous "Chicken Dance." Did you know that the original name of the song was "Der Ententanz" (The Duck Dance), composed by the Swiss accordionist Werner Thomas in 1957?

