

FOREWORD

MY KIND OF TOWN

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NEIL SIMON ONCE SAID that L.A. was “like paradise with a lobotomy.” To that, I say, with full respect to the late great writer: Screw you. If you had ever explored beyond the boundaries of the Beverly Hills Hotel, Mr. Simon, you would have found a real city full of real people, plenty of whom are smart and thoughtful and diverse and complicated. In short, people who read books.

I grew up a reader in Los Angeles in the '60s and '70s, regularly walking barefoot to the Hillhurst Library in Los Feliz to get another stack of preteen mysteries. A few years later, the Immaculate Heart nuns helped me fall in love with Steinbeck and Salinger and Hurston. My mother, also a native, found refuge from her pack of children by reading Fitzgerald and Fowles; my father, also a native, has always loved some rollicking Donald Westlake and Walter Mosley.

My family was not unusual. From the days of Helen Hunt Jackson and Charles Fletcher Lummis, my city has always been literary. L.A. hosts the nation's largest book festival. Our main library is so extraordinary that Susan Orlean wrote the bestselling *The Library Book* about it. We're home to a few dozen publishing companies, including mine, a rich array of bookstores, more literary agents than you might think, and enough readings, poetry slams, writing workshops, book clubs, and festivals to keep readers and writers happy 365 days a year. Yes, our book culture is overshadowed by the entertainment industry, but guess where many of the best productions on Netflix come from? That's right: books.

Because of all this, I'd been scheming on publishing a book about L.A.'s literary culture for years, but it simmered on a back burner. Then one day in late 2018, something snapped when I read Elina Shatkin's hilarious takedown on LAist.com of yet another clueless *New York Times* piece about Los Angeles. It was time.

I asked a few bookseller friends what they thought about the idea, and lo and behold, Katie Orphan, who at the time was managing the Last Bookstore, said she'd been working on a proposal for a very similar book and her agent (L.A.'s own Dara Hyde) was just about to submit it to me. Kismet! The bookseller and the publisher joined forces, and I built a team of Angelenos to help create our dream book about L.A. and its books: designer Amy Inouye; photographer Shahin Ansari; Prospect Park editors Katelyn Keating and Julianne Johnson; and freelance

editors Leilah Bernstein and Margery Schwartz. Six of this group of eight are natives. So much for the trope that nobody is actually from L.A., which is as big a myth as the one about nobody walking in L.A. Or nobody reading.

We chose to structure this book as loosely as the city is structured, to foster a sense of discovery and delight. You can dive in anywhere and look for something that catches your fancy. Join Katie having coffee with Michael Connelly in DTLA, or remembering Octavia E. Butler in Pasadena, or showcasing the strong YA book culture. Explore the bookstores and libraries and literary-rooted bars. Get inspired to volunteer at 826LA or WriteGirl. Put next year's LATFOB and LitFest on your calendar. Pick through our lists of must-read L.A. books, and get irritated if we neglected your favorite. Enjoy quotes galore from writers galore.

Most of all, our biggest hope is that *Read Me, Los Angeles* adds depth, richness, and just plain fun to your L.A. experience, whether you're a native like me or a first-time visitor. Read all about it, Los Angeles.

*Finally, it was the city that held us, the city they said
had no center, that all of us had come to from all over
America because this was the place to find dreams
and pleasure and love.*

— CAROLYN SEE, *Golden Days* (1986)