

Laurie Wheeler



Literary Necklaces: a Novel Idea

Laurie Wheeler, Arms Library director, has developed a new method of book preservation. On a shelf in her house stands a row of jars, their labels bearing some popular titles such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Silas Marner*, 1984, *The Phantom Tollbooth*. How does she fit a book in a jar?

Well, this is just a little tease. The books stored in jars are in transition from printed pages to "Miss Reads Beads," as Laurie calls her necklaces made from discarded books and magazines. In true librarian fashion, each necklace is made with paper beads formed from specific, popular publications. A label attached to each informs



the customer what book has left the shelf on their behalf.

The literary twist to her artistry is quite literal: each bead is made by rolling up a strip cut from the page. Laurie will read through the books to find important words or names that (hopefully) fall at the very bottom of the page. Then she cuts the page so that the callout word will roll up to be legible on the outside of the bead.

Testifying to the title with familiar words is a sure way to endear these readers' rosaries to book lovers everywhere. Laurie finds it redemptive, as well. "I look at the struggle right now with the written word because of what's happening in the publishing industry. The internet and electronic publishing have changed how people view books. At one time they were just so precious and people really treasured them...I look at this as a new way to treasure them. They can have another life again."

Book people will bring her a family book that they can't split up among kids and they can have it split by refashioning it into jewelry. Sometimes someone just loves a story and brings it to her to immortalize in her twisted way.

Other beads are rolled up for the sake of their color and design. "People go through purchasing phases, sometimes they really want words and phrases and sometimes they just go for color. Sometimes you find great

magazine color photos to use, or maps. And christmas wrapping paper too. It's neat to be able to wrap people's



special paper into jewelry."

Laurie has amassed a large collection of glass and other beads over the past two years that she has been "Miss Reads Beads". These are combined with the paper beads to add color, texture, and variety of form. She has been pleasantly surprised by the popularity of her items which have been selling steadily at the Coop, her only outlet at present.

Being fully employed in her library position and presently in the middle of a campaign for a new roof for the library building has not left much time for artistic exploration or further marketing, but she has ideas saved up for future free time. "I'd love to do sculpture. Something provocative. I want to spend more time being a creative person because that's how my brain is wired. I am not wired as an administrator or anything. It would be fun to do mini sculptures with words, not really dolls but figures out of strips of books, people sculptures with words-- arms akimbo, or dancing with words on them."

Laurie is a Franklin County native, a GCC Human Ecology student and Mount Holyoke Critical Social Thought graduate, and a former herbalist, park ranger, World Eye book store employee, gardener, museum curator, and for many years the librarian for the small hill town of Heath. She was first juried into the Coop as a photographer, then took a break for a several years and came back in as a jewelry



maker.

Miss Reads Beads is happy with her meanders. "It's been a mish-mash of things, things that all attract a lot of interesting people. I talk about the coop being like family, and it's true. My library is a lot like family as well. They both have a lot of interested and interesting people and a lot of supporters. And I think that everything I have done has been so much fun."