

Partners give up more than 5,000 hours to help others

A team at Waitrose & Partners has dedicated thousands of hours volunteering for charities and local causes as part of a pioneering new initiative. Around 1,000 volunteers across the John Lewis Partnership have donated more than 5,000 hours of their time for the first Partners In The Community scheme, which runs until 8 June.

The three-week campaign has seen people help with dozens of activities so far, ranging from marshalling marathons to providing meals for the homeless.

'We encourage all our Partners to give their time and skills to good causes throughout the year,' says Lindsey Crompton, the supermarket's social impact manager. 'The aim of this event was to highlight the good work being done by all our volunteers, as well as to encourage even more people to get involved.'

'We've been absolutely blown away by how much support we've received from Partners nationwide, including everyone from the shop floor to board members.'

At Lepe beach in Hampshire, Partners joined the Marine Conservation Society to collect litter, and in Glasgow, support was given to FareShare, an organisation that turns surplus food into meals for vulnerable people.

In Bracknell, 40 volunteers from the grocer's head office assisted forest rangers across three sites, helping to refurbish benches, plant new trees as well as construct a wildlife refuge.

'Our Partners also stand to benefit from the scheme,' says Lindsey. 'Volunteers often report feeling a massive sense of achievement, plus they get to broaden their skill set while engaging with people in their local area.'



BEACH CLEAN Partners joined the Marine Conservation Society at Lepe



SEABIRD NUMBERS SOAR

The population of seabirds on Lundy has tripled after the rat population was culled. The RSPB, one of the organisations that launched the cull in 2003, says there are now 21,000 seabirds on the island in the Bristol Channel.



Illustration: Dale Edwin Murray

MY WEEK

Alvin Hall



The sheer joy of gifting books knows no bounds

Bookstores, the brick-and-mortar kind, have been a primary destination for me this week. Every year, I choose one book that will be my house guest gift for everyone I visit during the summer. Also, from June to September, I read only one author's works. I find being immersed in a single writer's words – seeing them on the page, hearing them in my head, imagining the scenes or worlds he or she creates – to be deeply satisfying, informative and rewarding.

This summer practice probably grew out of an experience that was commonplace when I was in college. Professors often assigned reading lists of books and articles to digest over the summer before the new academic year. Back then, getting through the list was sometimes a chore. Today, I enjoy the focus.

Choosing the book and the writer is always a last-minute effort. I delight in the process of wandering around a bookstore, scanning the signs and shelves, perusing book covers, randomly reading a few pages. James Baldwin was the first author I read for an entire summer. His novels and essays remain an ever-giving source of insight, inspiration and truth for me. Other authors who have taken me on rich journeys of imagination and education include Truman Capote, Alice Munro, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Taylor Branch and playwright Eugene O'Neill. Invariably I discover some jewel in their work I did not know as well as some wisdom or insight that becomes a life lesson.

Not all of my ideas come from bookstores. A few years ago, I met Alan Bennett on a train and decided to read his works for the summer. Sometimes a friend who knows about my summer reading ritual will suggest a

writer, as happened recently with Jodi Picoult. Often, I'll also add a biography and autobiography of the person and the sources of his or her inspiration.

For this summer, *Around The World In 80 Trees* by Jonathan Drori will be my house guest gift book. (Luckily, I found a few signed copies.) It's a book that my hosts can open randomly to any two-page spread and discover at least one fascinating fact. As for my own summer reading, I'm torn between Robert Caro's multi-volume biography of Lyndon Baines Johnson, the novels of Thomas Hardy (which I don't remember well any more), Arthur Miller's plays or the short stories of Deborah Eisenberg.

Once I make my choice, my commitment to support brick-and-mortar bookstores confronts my unyielding habit of travelling on planes with only carry-on luggage. My compromise: from the store, I buy books that can fit in my compact case; the remainder, I buy as ebooks, with a tinge of guilt. Audiobooks are still, for me, too removed, denying me the pleasure I get from seeing an author's words on a page in the summer sunlight.

AN UNEXPECTED FAREWELL

A friend recently agreed to join me at social events on three consecutive days. The first time he failed to show I figured something had happened. The second no-show, however, made me think his actions were about something other than me. After his third no-show, I simply did not answer his texts. The next morning, he called and blurted out that he didn't want to hurt my feelings but he didn't want to see me. 'Why?' I uttered, softly. He said he didn't know, but 'maybe it has to do with my own finances'. I said: 'That's okay. When you're no longer afraid to get together, give me a call.' Later that day, he sent a text saying: 'Thank you.'

Some people have a hard time saying no, so they act out in sometimes annoying, passive-aggressive ways that are the equivalent of 'no'. I now wonder if my friend's 'thank you' really means 'goodbye'.