

Amaryllis

Winter, 2021

Amaryllis, a newsletter for the Penn South community, was conceived, and has been researched and written by Jane Hogg since 1996.



Hearing About History

In 1996, *Penn South Community News* was a handout routinely delivered to every door. It grew slowly from four pages with an Amaryllis insert in its two-page centerfold to a thickening publication as it gathered more news.

Both Maggie and I were Coop Council members then, and we'd printed out that single sheet on both sides and put one on each of the forty-five seats for the June meeting of the Council. We'd also left a copy for Brendan Keany, the General Manager.

The next morning I received a phone call. Brendan wanted to see me. My article titled *Window Wonder* had caught his eye.

"Why hadn't we done this when we started to plan the windows? Doubters would have disappeared."

His enthusiasm fueled my engine.

By 2000, printing in-house was no longer practical. From then on, Amaryllis was sent to a nearby union print shop. The finished copy, on sturdy heavy-duty paper, arrived collated and stapled.

Over the years, Penn South's priorities changed. Costs were reconsidered, and Summer 2010 was the final issue.

Ten years later, when Penn South Social Services asked Maggie and me if we'd be interested in publishing Amaryllis again, web-based only, they received an almost immediate, "Yes!"

Fall 2020 was Maggie's final issue, made memorable for me because she'd even splashed bright colors on the opening article headline. Her email said





it all. “It’s time for someone new to take Amaryllis into the future.” Maggie was right. Winter 2021 will definitely have someone new taking Amaryllis into the future.

PSSS is re-designing its website, and their designer, Kathy Bizzoco, has been in touch with me. Based in Vermont, she’s miles away while Maggie was practically next door. ☺

Crushed Candy

Mid-summer. Definitely lots of open windows. What woke Ron Caldwell, asleep in his 19th Street apartment, was the yelling, screams, and sounds of breaking glass.

Wide awake by now, he grabbed his hand-held device and zoomed in on the chaos. What was happening up on 23rd Street? Eye Candy... his own baby. Beyond belief!

Possibly, those smash the glass looters were going after big businesses, chain pharmacies, supermarkets, that sort of thing. Maybe in their own heads, they legitimatize their actions as being nothing personal.

What did this cost Ron, who is a person? Do the math. Front glass window and door; surely the landlord replaced that. No way!

Ron rented the space from him. What Ron did with the space was his business. He’s responsible for everything he does in it. Heating, cooling, and while not the plumbing lines, he must cover the cost of the water.

“Looking back,” he explains, “I wouldn’t have signed the lease.”

When he began tearing down the walls, he discovered drywall at the rear covering an original kitchen area, behind which was a closed air shaft. Once exposed it took two months of ventilation and air-conditioning to remove the odor, reminiscent of a dead body.

Finally, it was all done. March 1, 2012, the doors opened. His baby was born.

Hearing all this it’s hard to imagine his horror seeing his shop that memorable summer night.





Early evening, already dark, smashed glass was everywhere. Looters, arms filled, were running down the block dropping stuff as they raced about. Ron, still stunned, was standing out on the sidewalk taking pictures of the mayhem. Meanwhile, neighbors, many of whom live upstairs, were collecting dropped items and shaking the glass out.

Boarding up the front was urgent. Ron had some scraps, and the Super arrived carrying large panels of cardboard. A call to the nearby Lumber shop placed an order which arrived the next morning. Several sheets of substantial plywood, it cost about \$300.

Police, busy elsewhere, were nowhere in sight. Ron still hadn't been able to get to the precinct to file a complaint because that block had been sealed off; no one could enter. An official complaint was required by his insurance company.

He'd just finished his new window display; earrings were mid-center surrounded by summer hats and fans and all those vintage accessories that so intrigued him. Jewelry is the only thing he insures which is why he maintains meticulous accounts of each item, when purchased, and its cost.

Oddly enough, the only thing that kept looters from entering the interior space was a heavy cabinet bolted to the floor to guarantee stability. Its window ledge top made it perfect for his constantly changing displays. The most recent one was only days old.

Paperwork on hold, he spent hours picking up scattered pieces, creating order, plastic bagging what was now trash, and boxing all the jewelry.

Nine months and the street has seen numerous changes. Lots more street traffic with the High Line a steady draw. Street lights made night-time viewing easy. Replacing his glass cost Ron \$2,000.

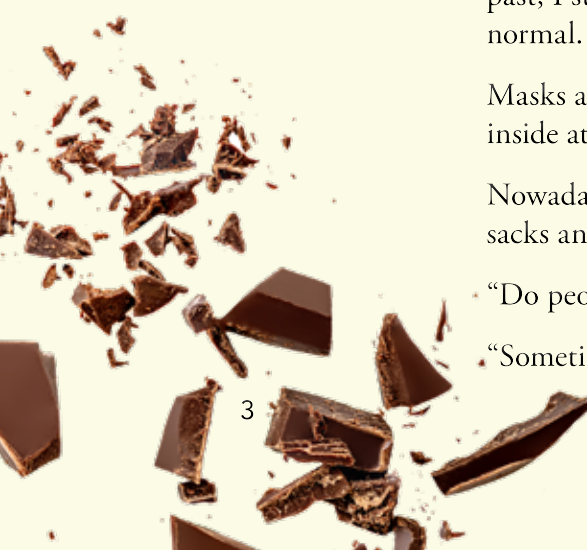
Wanting to see how a little shop survives once the night of horrors is long past, I stopped by to talk to Ron to see how he was doing in the new near normal.

Masks are required for entry and there are rarely more than five customers inside at a time.

Nowadays he steps forward to take the occasional customer's large wheeled sacks and stores them safely behind the counter.

"Do people try to steal?" I asked.

"Sometimes."





“Are they successful?”


Ron shrugged. “Listen. I spend my days doing what I like to do. I enjoy seeing people browsing about, trying things on, liking the same sort of things I like. Often they stop and talk to me about what some of the things remind them of... relatives perhaps who wore such things for special occasions... but that’s what vintage is all about.

“And if I was alone in the shop and someone wanting money came towards me in a menacing manner demanding cash, I’d say here, take whatever is in my pocket.

“Most people don’t understand. Having a small shop doesn’t make you rich. How much money do you think I have on me?”

Now it was my turn to shrug.

He pulled out everything from his skinny pants pocket—six bills... a couple of \$20s, a \$10, a \$5, and three singles.

How sweet is that! 

I to Eye

Since I always talk to people... whether I know them or not... this was a natural. He had a camera slung around his neck and while he walked every once in a while he’d stop and take a picture. Why there? Picture of what? Seems we were both heading south on the same avenue at least ten blocks.

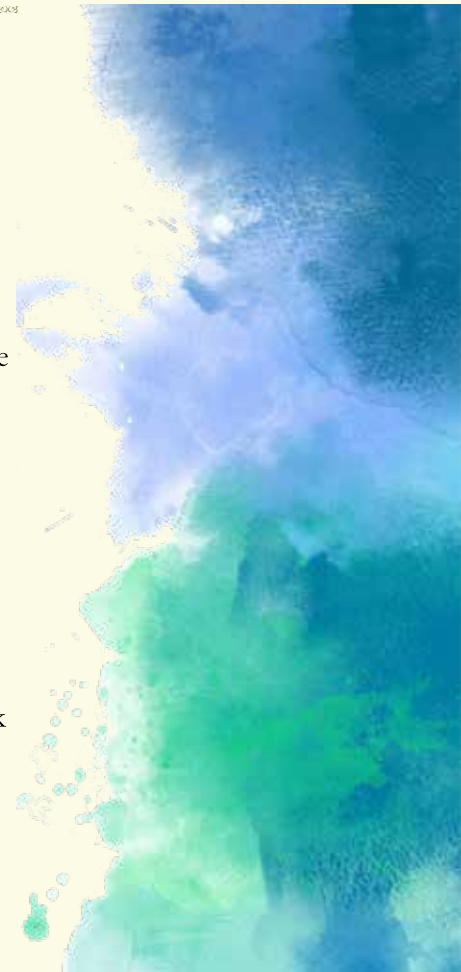
No longer just a guy with a camera. Now I knew his name, Ed Case, and he knew mine. What had he done in his working life?

So I’d asked.

“Was a teacher.”

Wondered what grade he’d taught and learned it was Kinder and 1st right here in Chinatown. Perhaps he lived in that area and even spoke Chinese.

When I asked he said, “Not really. Just bits and pieces. I understand more than I can speak. Years ago I worked at the library in that area. I was a clerk and an information assistant.”





It all seemed totally unrelated to cameras so we kept talking.

“My step-dad was in the army so I was an army brat. That meant moving around a lot, depending on where he was stationed. More than three years in Alaska, driving south to postings in Oklahoma, Indiana, Chicago. Probably took a few shots with my Brownie Box camera.

“In 1959 he was shipped to South Korea; families weren’t allowed, so we moved to Oklahoma because that’s where my mother’s mother lived. That was a year I decided not to make any friends with anyone because when we moved, I was always angry knowing that I’d be saying goodbye to all my friends once again.

“Understand, I’m not athletic. I decided to go out for track. Every day after school I went to practice. I wasn’t particularly good so I knew I’d not be put on the school’s team nor even attend any of its meets. Every day was the same. Woke up, went to school, practiced for a few hours so I was worn out, went home, grabbed some food and totally exhausted, fell asleep.

“Then, halfway through high school a big change. Posted to Japan this time so once again we moved. One of my most vivid memories is climbing Mount Fuji. I was there at sunset because it’s a long climb, most of it at night. You’re above the clouds.

“At daybreak the sun is rising from beneath the clouds. A brilliant orangey yellow and yellowish orange. Breathtaking. What a picture that would make.

“It’s quite a leap from a Brownie Box camera to the 35mm Japanese camera I’d been given. Luckily I like to tinker with things. Figure them out. Trial and error. Eventually it works. So it was with me and the camera.

“Six months after high school I enlisted in the army. Basic training at Fort Ord in California, artillery training at Fort Sill in Oklahoma, and then I was sent to South Korea.

“Think about this. I spent two years in the Army before I was twenty-one... not old enough to vote or be served liquor in a bar, but still old enough to be trained how to use a gun and kill the enemy.

“Once discharged I went to Seaside, California. Ran into Darrell, my closest high school friend whose family owned a big house nearby. He said, ‘Come stay with us for a while.’ Stay with us turned into my living rent free in their empty guest house quite apart from the main one.

“Income was sketchy. A temp job as a clerk in the circulation department



of a newspaper, then as a door-to-door salesman for the Encyclopedia Britannica where I never sold any so never got paid, just fired. That's when I went to the local unemployment office. Explained I'd just gotten out of the army and couldn't find a job. They said that meant I'd get \$30 a week, an unemployment check, to just keep looking."

Strange. It occurred to me how often the unexpected, woven together with luck and coincidence, threaded through Ed's life.

"By then I realized I wanted to learn about photography. There was school, New York Institute of Photography. The G.I. Bill would cover my tuition so I enrolled. Moved east and supported myself working as a supply clerk in a Brooklyn hospital.

"Come Christmas one of my co-workers invited me home for dinner. Her sister Roseanne was there." (Now he's smiling.) "She's the woman I married.

"Had a weekend job as a counter clerk in a small camera store which was diagonally across the street from a large camera store, Willoughby's. They had an immense display window. Once a week they even did a radio interview with someone in that window. Cameras came alive for me."

As we talked, rather like a film, Ed's life kept rolling on for me.

He and Roseanne had a baby and Ed realized how much he enjoyed her; liked being with kids. Decided he wanted to be a teacher. In 1987 he enrolled in City College's Center for Worker Education; seven years later he had a BA degree. Next came four years at Hunter College; he was an early childhood licensed teacher.

"But you don't teach now. What do you do?"


"I'm a street photographer."

"What do you do for income?"

"The stock market."

"Seriously!"

"I am serious. I study it, do research, think about things I value and invest in things I believe will help the world stay the kind of place I'd like my daughter and any who came after her to live in."

Weird... but wild and wonderful. Now I have a clear picture of who Ed Case is. 



New on 9th

Walking north from the Apple store at 14th Street stay on the west side of the avenue. Newness is everywhere. Not sure what Pandemic has done to Starbucks Roastery but if you're interested in how the bean becomes the coffee you drink you can watch the process right here. Take the elevator to the top where it all begins. Slowly follow the spiral down and you'll see it all. There are numerous niches along the way and if cost is no concern, snacks are readily available. Rarely crowded weekdays so social distancing isn't a problem. Then, just before you exit, it's your last chance for hot whatever with a comfortable spot to sit and enjoy it.



MOSCOT Optical, close to 15th Street, is an eye-opener... (pardon the pun)... but if you're browsing glasses and can't find it here I imagine it must never have been made.

At the next corner is urgent and primary care for pets. Super cautious in these times of pandemic there is even curbside consultation. White coated, pockets filled with instruments and a stethoscope around her neck, I watched a staff member examine a cat, retrieved from its carrying case, treat its eye condition, explain how to use the prescribed medication and then present a business card if the owner wanted to call and make an appointment. Huge windows make it easy to have some sense of what the location provides, the variety of animals they treat.

Chelsea Market, hardly new, but constantly adding new vendors, varied grab-and-go edibles, pleasant places to perch while you eat and additional restrooms for the growing numbers of visitors.


Between 19th and 20th is F. Rozzo & Son's Fish Market. Monday through Friday they're open from 8:00 in the morning until 5:00 PM and Saturday from 10:00 AM until 2:00 PM. Everything is fresh caught so daily options may vary. Payment is cash or credit only.

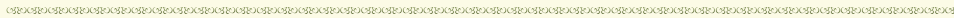
Not new but still amazing is Garber Hardware below 23rd Street. Looking for a tiny battery that no one uses or a bulb for the refrigerator pre-LCD? If they don't have it when you come in no problem: *Call in four days. It should be here by then.*

Martial Arts: More than merely a canopy it's fully operational now. When summer ended their sidewalk sign announced, *Classes are about to begin.* Not just for teenagers and adults they're having a special... call it a special special. This one invites you to enjoy a two-week trial with uniform.



Taekwondo! Ages? Little Tigers are four to five; Beginners six to eleven, and the rest of the young group are older than twelve. Price to register? \$49.99 and that includes the uniform.

Curbside entertainment available because viewers can watch what's happening when shade is pulled up on wall-to-wall floor-to-ceiling windows. 



Winter Seen from My Window and What a Scene!

Usually roaming the streets of Chelsea, for me not done since shelter-in-place became the new norm, I count myself lucky. My living room picture window overlooks the immense park area between 25th and 26th Streets. Vast green grass areas are set back from the seating area where eight benches are placed around the wide concrete walkway that surrounds a meticulously landscaped planted area.

MLK Day. Chilly... mid-morning. No one else in park. It's a Monday. Woman with large black and white long-haired mixed breed...might be chow or something. Sitting on middle bench nearest entrance. She has dog brush and that's just what she is doing. Each energetic swipe produces handful of hair. And with each handful she walks over to garbage bin and drops it in there. Process continues for at least fifteen minutes. Occasionally part of handful blows away behind bench. When this happens she goes behind bench to collect it. Few times it's blown in several directions but she collects all of them and takes them to bin. Wonder why she didn't carry plastic bag with her. Would have simplified process.

Curious, I rush downstairs just to talk to her. Doesn't live in Penn South. In the neighborhood? Yes... for nineteen years. Lives in London Terrace. Just found the park a few months ago. Really hostile guard told her she couldn't come here with dog. He'd call the police if she came again. Seemed so angry she avoided him. Doesn't think he's here anymore.

Dog is well trained. He was three-months-old when she got him from one of the dog drop off places. Didn't realize how big he'd grow. Amazingly good dog owner attitude. Always curbs her dog and picks up leavings and bags them. For her curbing means taking dog to curb; after all the city trucks




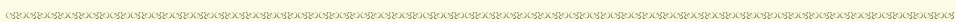
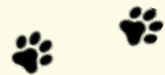


sweep and wash that area. Also doesn't allow dog to pee on grass, plants or sidewalks. She uses curbs for that too. As she left the park I realized dog likes to sniff everywhere but that's all she is doing.


Tells me her name and as she leaves park I tell her about our Paws on the Path rule. She waves, smiles and shouts, "We'll be back."

December 2, near noon. Gray, cold dreary day. Parent enters park with double decker stroller... children seem to be close in age... maybe two and three. Mom tosses bright orange soccer-size ball on grass area. Babes, bundled in snowsuits and boots seem to be more interested in chasing squirrels. Mom, using hand-held device, spends more than twenty minutes taking video pics. Christmas coming... maybe to send to far-off grands?

Sudden surprise. Not long after 7:00 on a weekend morning woman and her unleashed dog are casually wandering the grass area, most often in different directions. At 7:58 a tall Security guard, walking west from morning clock-in looks across 25th Street and sees the pair, races over and calls her over to the hedge. Don't speak too long but woman grabs dog, picks up her benched possessions and scurries away. I've never seen her since. 



Dogs Have Their Own View of Park

 **One pet sees it as a personal playground.** Several mornings, just after 6:00, man enters with large, white Spitz. Once unleashed he runs to grass area and spends his time racing about. When owner gives soft call or just claps hands dog races back, is leashed and they leave park.

Another sees it as an outdoor gym. Mid-morning, on a regular schedule, woman arrives with small neatly groomed gray dog, and they move towards middle of grass area. She removes his leash, reaches into her pocket for a small orange ball and throws it far away. Dog races, retrieves it, returns and drops it. Nothing happens. Aha. Must be a training session. When dog retrieves it and drops it close to woman's feet she picks it up and pitches again. Pure exercise. If the park is empty they usually stay about half an hour; less if sitters arrive. Depending on the weather they often have a re-run of the performance late afternoon.





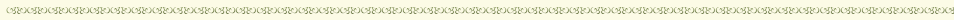
Some Dogs See the Park as a Public Toilet



Early February when first snows have melted woman arrives with unleashed white-pawed brown dog. Attaches lead when inside the park. She walks on path and pet, close by, pauses to poop... walks again and poops... and once again. Three clumps clearly obvious on snow piled at walk edges. Time to go. Oh well; this walker is not a picker-upper.



Soon after another dog walker arrives. She sits on bench and leashed dog rests near her feet while she finishes coffee. That done they walk around the path. Dog poops, walker bags it, as they continue on path she passes a bench with abandoned container lid, picks that up too and deposits it all in bin as they leave park. Super neat. Makes my day. ☺



Notice the New

The new year has heralded a slew of newness for a single block of West 23rd Street. The entire northern corner with its window walls remains vacant. Look inside and you'll see high ceilings, bare white walls and entirely empty spaces.

Turn the corner and the newest departure is Boston Market. Customers are invited to visit their other locations in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.

Bonchon is "taking a temporary holiday but will be back soon." Meanwhile, for home deliveries they suggest you call either of their other two Manhattan locations.

Rin, the Thai place is gone. Painted on the metal shuttered front is "Cheap Rent Util Kitchen" and a phone number.

A note on Trailer Parks shuttered front reads, "Temporarily closed due to circumstances beyond our control." Sidewalk dwellers to the east have curtained off their area with a large sheet held in place with a wood chair and broken cart. Close by was a nice-looking collapsible stroller, no occupant, just a For Sale sign.

uBreakiFix, recently re-located, had slid a few doors west; we've moved with a huge arrow fills their former window.



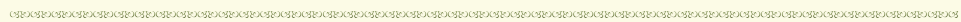
Chelsea Vision is much bigger now. They took over the space vacated by Pet Central. The dentist is gone; merged with someone at Park and 61st Street.

Blick Art Materials boasts more than art supplies and its wide canopy makes for convenient window shopping regardless of the weather. Right now the west window is a one man show of creations by Gregorio Pinto who makes handmade greeting cards.

Urgent Care is still there, then Metro by Mobile. Nice Laundry is out of business but they have a nice neighbor. A sign in their window says “Customers coming to retrieve their goods—please pick them up at Eye Candy, the Vintage Shop.” AT&T and Cobbler Shoe Spa fills the narrow space, then a hair salon, and finally the freshly scrubbed Crunch Health Club with brand new pavement to its eastern edge.



Muhlenberg Library, now grab-and-go, has changed its hours to 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM, six days a week. A machine takes your temperature as you enter. *NOW Chelsea* is back on their counter, and continued technical assistance is planned. Only the city owned sidewalk, cracked and pitted, remains a shocker. ☹️



Mostly Meandering

A number of new neighbors are now sharing West 19th Street with the Pearl Cutler Mineroff Synagogue pre-K and early grades beyond school programs. Then there’s Asian Barn, Tokyo Sushi at 121, tiny but also certified as Kosher and Cowlicks at 137. They’re a Japanese hair, body, and energy works providing styles and cuts for men, women, and children.

Out with the old and in with the new was the 17th Street Housing Works way of finishing 2020. Soon after they shouted a major shipment of accessories; hats, scarves, gloves which welcomed in March. A week later they boasted a Pajama Party with Ralph Lauren night-wear.

Remember what used to be across the street from them? It’s now six floors of something called Skinworks.

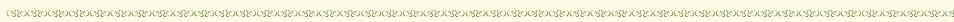


Cream of the crop. Angel Thrift on West 22nd closed, but on Second Street a Japanese retail shop is opening at 142 West 26th Street. Buying and selling gently used clothing their *Hand2Hand* project ensures all their garments are re-used in some way. Asked why that matters? "... it helps reduce global landfill waste."

Bamboo comes bursting out in a different way. Babo, unbleached bathroom tissue, eight rolls in a pack, 200 sheets in a roll, it's triple-ply and costs \$10.99. Find it at CVS.

Comparison pricing seems sensible. Good Seasons Italian Dressing... at nearby Gristedes it's \$7.59, at Ideal \$5.99. While I was at CVS in the Pet Needs section I noticed a plastic shovel, typically used for cat litter boxes, priced at \$3.98. A few doors away at Pet Smart it's only \$1.49. Your money. Spend it where it pleases you.

Plastic poisons. All the leaves are gone now. It's just bare branches out there. Well, bare except for those occasional plastic bags flapping in the winds. They'll last for years. Green leaves will bury them but next Fall you'll see them again. Next Fall and more Falls to come... there's one outside my window that's been there for three years. Ugh! ☹️



Public Library Offering Virtual Tech Support

For this non-techie signing up for it is the initial challenge. Saturday afternoon when I first saw the fact sheet on the Muhlenberg counter I asked the librarian how to do it and she gave me a 917 number to call. Went home and called but recorded voice said they were closed. Their regular hours were 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM six days a week.

Next morning I called at 10:00 knowing that librarians are often there, already answering phones, even before doors are open to the public. Lucked out; a man answered. When I asked where in cyberspace he was sitting, he said in City Island. Also, knew nothing about program but said he'd try to figure it out. Eventually gave up, saying he was far too old to deal with technology; suggested I call in forty minutes when those people arrived.



Called 917 number at 10:02. Busy signal. Kept trying. Mostly busy but occasionally got mechanical voice saying I'd get transferred to next available operator. Even offered me an option; keep my place in line, they'd call me back. Since I have a land-line, not a mobile phone, I just continued holding.

Musical background let me know I was still waiting. Twice, after ten minutes, heard a loud click followed by a busy signal and then it disconnected. Finally, at 10:42, success. (No. I don't wear a watch but my eyes never left my microwave clock.)



Mechanical voice asks for my card number. Clearly memorized, I gave fourteen numbers plus the four digit pass code. Voice asked for my zip code, gave that, and whoopee... finally a live person was talking to me. She checked to verify my email address and said she'd just sent the link to me.

Laptop in front of me I kept checking the inbox. Nothing. Checked spam boxes. 11:29: Aha. It's in the suspect mail. I printed it out for visual proof lest it get lost. Gave human voice condensed rundown of my recent near two hour adventure and she laughed.

"You just got the final spot for the Visual Tech Support."

Zoom event appointment, scheduled for Tuesday, January 25 at 1:00 PM. Told to be on time or I'd lose my place and someone wait-listed moved in. No way I'd risk that.

My problem was specific. My really old mini iPad was something I used only to read ebooks from the library. I could download them and read them wherever I was, be it in the Berkshire mountains, a small gulf coast island in Florida or right here in Penn South.

But when I turned device on the face was filled with icons, all unfamiliar to me, and I didn't know how to begin. Tech support would show me what to do. Fantastic.

I could hear but not see her. Odd. She said she could see me. We proceeded slowly, pressed each icon and finally both our faces were there.

Several books on pad but I'd finished reading them. She showed me how to delete and return them. One unread still there so I kept it.



Now I wanted to download the latest I heard about on NPR which was to be discussed the following week. Odd. It wasn't there. Was I sure? Held up iPad so she could see it.

Bitter cold but she asked, "Could you come into the library now?" Seems Muhlenberg was the branch hosting event. Bundled up, device in pocket, arrived soon after. Even recognized face behind heavy plastic shield.

Seems book only available in audio. Showed me how, downloaded it and I headed home to hear it.



Listened. Yech. Hated experience. Besides, if I fell asleep it kept reading and I'd never know how to go back.

Three days later when I dropped by to grab-and- go saw same librarian.

"Ever doing Virtual Tech

Help again?"

She smiled. "Sometime in February."

Definitely a different kind of winter. 