



# Book of the Month

## ***The Library Book* by Susan Orlean**

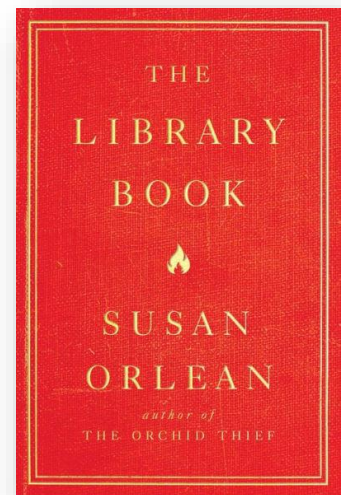
### **Book Review by Peggy Bates, Friends of the Starkville Library Board Member**

When journalist Susan Orlean moved Los Angeles with her family about ten years ago, her son came home with a school assignment to interview and write about a city employee. He chose a librarian. Susan remembered how much libraries had meant to her as a child and together she and her son went to their branch of the Los Angeles library to talk to a librarian. That visit inspired her New York Times best-seller, *The Library Book*, a fascinating account of the flagship Los Angeles Central Library, its history, its importance to the community, its unforgettable characters, and its mysteries.

Now before you think this book must be a real snoozer, just wait until you read about the great fire! On the morning of April 29, 1986, the fire alarm sounded in the L.A. Central Library, one of the largest libraries and the repository of many thousands of valuable artifacts, films, books, and one-of-a-kind documents in the country, if not the world. By the time the first person got a whiff of smoke, the damage had already been done.

If there is one thing dreaded by all librarians, it is fire with floods running a close second. Therefore, traditionally at that time, sprinkler systems in library buildings combined the two most devastating forces within a library's walls so the Central Library was not equipped with a sprinkler system and had no defense against fire. And it was arson. A fire set high in the isolated stacks, fueled by books and a dry environment, rampaged for more than seven hours, reaching an astonishing 2000 degrees, and destroying 400,000 books and damaging nearly twice that many more. But the most curious thing to me was that a fire of that magnitude in a building as historic and world renowned as Los Angeles Central Library went unnoticed by the press and, therefore, unknown to the public at large. On April 28, 1986, Sweden reported unusually high radiation levels drifting west from the Soviet Union. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, only the Russian news agency TASS covered the fire extensively on its front page. The rest of the world covered the Chernobyl.

After visiting the library with her son, Susan Orlean spent three years researching the Central Library and two years writing her book. It is a masterful work. She delves into the mystery of the arson and the unknown young, blond-haired man who disappeared from the scene, introduces us to unforgettable



cast of characters who each influenced the development of one of the most important libraries in the world, describes the heroic efforts of her citizens to restore it, and reveals how these beloved institutions provide more than just books and are a vital part of the people they serve. I loved *The Library Book* by Susan Orlean.

For more information about supporting the Friends of the Starkville Library, click [here](#).