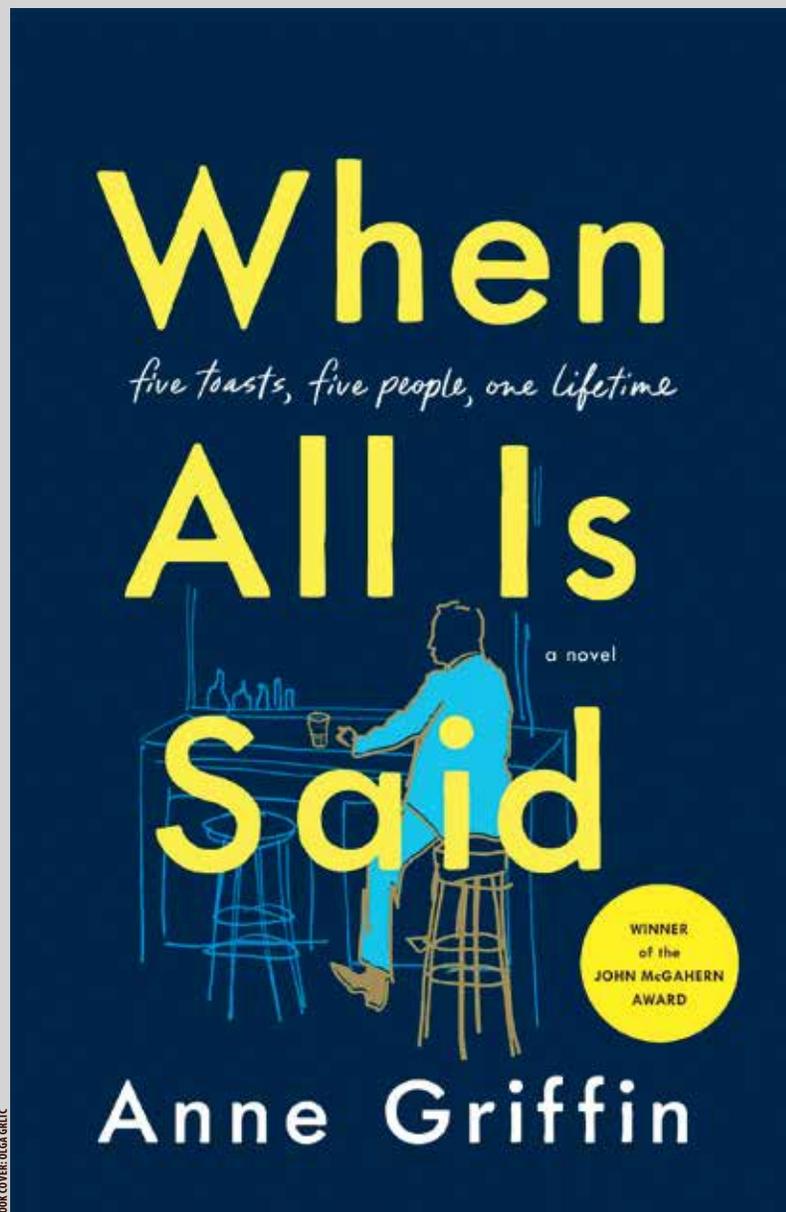


DESCHUTES PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATION presents

# 2020

## A Novel Idea

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Author

# ANNE GRIFFIN



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# An Interview with Anne Griffin

**A NOVEL IDEA** Share with us your journey to becoming a writer.

**ANNE GRIFFIN** I started late into writing. I was 44 and it was 2013. In my 20s I was a bookseller and store manager of Waterstones Booksellers, a wonderful chain over on this side of the world. As a history major I became a non-fiction buyer. But through the talent and temptations of my fiction buyer colleagues, I became hooked on Richard Russo, Mary Lawson, Anne Tyler, William Trevor, Sarah Waters, and Jonathan Coe, to name only a handful. I left bookselling at 30 and went into charity work, soon to specialize in financial management. Fourteen years later, I hit a crossroads where I decided I didn't want to manage money for the rest of my life so I rang a friend who suggested I write. And I did. In 2015 I started my MA in creative writing in University College Dublin under Anne Enright and Frank McGuinness. In 2017 my book *When All Is Said* got picked up by Sceptre in the UK and Macmillan in the US; everyone in Ireland had rejected it or simply not gotten back to me. It had taken me four years to work a miracle.

**ANI** Maurice is a surprisingly compassionate curmudgeon who is conscience of the impacts of his decisions and actions. How did Maurice come to be?

**GRIFFIN** Maurice is 90% my imagination, 8% childhood memories/adult experiences, and 1% down to a chance meeting in a hotel in County Mayo. Actually 1% seems too little for this momentous encounter. This guy in his 70s was drinking a pint alone when we got chatting. He told me two things in the minute or two I had with him. One was that he'd worked in that very hotel when he was a boy, and the second was that he wouldn't see the morning. I never got to find out why. When I walked away minutes later I knew these two facts would allow me to build a world of a fictional character who would sit to a bar of his local hotel to drink five toasts to the five most important people in his life. Also, at the time of writing, my father was 84 and I was able to use what concerned him and my mother most to build the voice of Maurice Hannigan.

**ANI** Maurice says of the relationship between Sadie and her mother: "There was a love but of the Irish kind, reserved and embarrassed by its own humanity." Please explain how this quote describes Irish character and relationships.

**GRIFFIN** The Irish are portrayed as being great talkers, storytellers. We are, but I don't think we're always that good at letting people in. I mean really, deeply in. We are more comfortable on the surface, rarely showing what's going on inside, even, sometimes, to close family members. This reticence or privacy, or perhaps shame, seeing vulnerable emotion as a weakness, is an overriding theme of who Maurice and Sadie were and what was important to them.

**ANI** Discuss the end of your novel and the choices you made to have Maurice end his life.

**GRIFFIN** I deliberated over this ending. I wrote others, and imagined plenty, but I kept coming back to this. At the time of writing, I studied academic papers and journals on suicide in older people. And there they were, these terribly lonely people, forgotten perhaps, unloved maybe, but certainly broken-hearted who decided to end their lives. Maurice's ending wasn't all that easy to write and it was upsetting. But it felt as if Maurice himself kept talking to me, telling me this was the right thing for him. I wrote with trepidation and sent it out into the world hoping it might have something to say about loneliness in the older community. It is upsetting to some as I expected it would be, suicide is not an easy subject.

**ANI** If you were to make a toast to one person in your life, who would it be to and why?

**GRIFFIN** This changes daily. But I think today as I write this it would be my mother who at 84 minds my dad who is on the cusp of being 90. It's not easy for her and she doesn't sleep well but she forever smiles. I have two great parents in my life and I count myself exceptionally lucky.

**ANI** Who were your greatest influences and how do they manifest in your writing?

**GRIFFIN** I have two or three out-and-out favourites. Richard Russo, Mary Lawson, and William Trevor. With Russo, it is his dialogue; it is sharp and witty and makes me laugh out loud. Russo has created my favourite character in the whole world—Donald Sullivan (*Nobody's Fool* and *Everybody's Fool*). He, like Maurice, is cantankerous but Russo makes you fall in love with him anyway. With Lawson and Trevor, they discuss the saddest events in gentle lulling ways that you almost don't realise what horrors of the human condition they are showing us. All of these have influenced Maurice and the stories he has to tell.

**ANI** What is it about your little island (Ireland) that produces some of the biggest stories and finest writers in literature?

**GRIFFIN** The respect for all storytelling is in our blood. In Ireland there is a history of the *seanchaí*, a storyteller who went from town to town entertaining the population. Story tells of who we are and what we value. It not only expresses our culture but it reflects back to the reader who we are as humans. This love of writing and storytelling has, I am proud to say, led to the promotion and protection of writers, and all artists, in Ireland's governing institutions.

**ANI** We are excited to share Central Oregon with you. Is there anything you are most curious about and/or hoping to experience during your visit?

**GRIFFIN** I still can't quite believe I've been invited to what is a beautiful part of the world. You have lakes and mountains and amazing wildlife and skiing and brewing companies, Maurice would be so jealous. But above all else I cannot wait to meet the readers. I'm curious and a little nervous to hear how people have taken to Maurice. I also want to hear what other books and authors people are reading. I'm always in the market for learning about new writers I really should be experiencing.



# The Final Five

# Discussion Questions

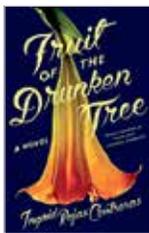
**What a year for reading!** Starting in January 2019, the Community Nominators and Advisory Committee members began compiling a list of potential “A Novel Idea” books. The final list included 46 titles, and as usual the genres, topics, and settings were varied. It was obvious from the start that getting to a final decision was going to be tough. (See the complete list at <https://bit.ly/3btVmnJ>.) Always up for a challenge, the Advisory Committee dove in. After a herculean amount of reading and some spirited discussion, they winnowed the list down to a phenomenal five. What’s interesting to note is that all finalists are debut novels and written by women, something that has never happened in the history of “A Novel Idea.” Here is the list of the four books that rounded out the final five:



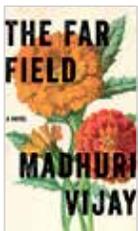
**American Spy** by Lauren Wilkinson  
“Rest assured that *American Spy* will not only keep you turning the pages, it will do much more than that. Wilkinson steeps her thriller in a complicated awareness of huge, thorny themes: race, Cold War amorality, the politics of our intelligence services, and the ease with which we can become complicit with deeds we actually abhor.”  
*National Public Radio*



**Miracle Creek** by Angie Kim  
“Intricate plotting and courtroom theatrics, combined with moving insight into parenting special needs children and the psychology of immigrants, make this book both a learning experience and a page-turner.”  
*Kirkus Review*



**Fruit of the Drunken Tree** by Ingrid Rojas Contreras  
“Set in Bogota, Colombia, during the ‘drug wars’ of the 1990s, the story line features an exquisitely intimate double portrait of two young women—girls, really—whose lives are disrupted as well as disfigured by the intertwined effects of terrorism, poverty, violence, and exile.”  
*San Francisco Chronicle*



**The Far Field** by Madhuri Vijay  
“The chain of events connecting a privileged young Indian woman, her volatile mother, and a tale-spinning Kashmiri merchant leads to tragedy in a story of religious conflict and domestic damage set in contemporary India.”  
*Kirkus Review*

## ONE

What was your initial reaction to the book? Did it hook you immediately, or take some time to get into?

## TWO

How did the ending resonate with you? What feelings did it evoke?

## THREE

How did the characters, in particular Maurice, change throughout the story? How did your opinion of anyone change?

## FOUR

How did you interpret the sense of justice in this story?

## FIVE

What were your expectations of the story based on the cover—did the book live up to the cover, and to the title?

## SIX

If you could hear this same story from another person’s point of view, who would you choose?

## SEVEN

Which character in the book would you most like to meet?

## EIGHT

If you were to toast five people in your life, who would they be?



**Suicide is a leading public health concern** locally and across the globe that affects people of all identities and backgrounds. According to the World Health Organization, over 800,000 people die by suicide globally each year. In the United States alone, suicide is rated as the 10th leading cause of death and Oregon State has the 15th highest suicide rate in the country according to the Center for Disease Control. Fifty-seven people died by suicide in Deschutes County in 2017. There is no single cause to suicide. Some risks to be aware of include, but are not limited to: social isolation, experiencing a mental health challenge, experiencing homelessness or job stress, and lack of access to effective mental health care. We can all help prevent suicide in our community by taking some of the following actions:

- Educate yourself on effective suicide prevention efforts—a great place to start is Suicide Prevention Resource Center: [www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org)
- Know the warning signs by visiting the Suicide Prevention LifeLine website: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- Know the local resources for the entire Central Oregon region by visiting the Central Oregon Suicide Prevention Alliance’s website: [www.preventsuicideco.org](http://www.preventsuicideco.org)
- Get involved in local efforts, such the Central Oregon Suicide Prevention Alliance: [www.preventsuicideco.org](http://www.preventsuicideco.org)

Lastly, it is important to remember that the book, *When All Is Said*, is a fictional depiction of one person’s experience with suicide—it is not fact. It is important for us to know the facts about suicide in order to not contribute to harmful myths and stigma. Learn more about the facts about suicide at <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/>.

If you or a loved one are experiencing thoughts of suicide, there is help available. Please call the Deschutes County Crises Line, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at **541-322-7500 Option 9**. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention LifeLine at **1-800-273-8255**.

# Irish Struggles

by Jason Knirck Ph.D.

**M**uch of Irish history revolves around a struggle over the ownership of land, a condition echoed in *When All Is Said*. Beginning in the 12th century, English adventurers conquered parts of Ireland from the native Gaels. In the 16th century, most of England became Protestant but the majority of Ireland remained Catholic, adding an aspect of religious difference to the existing colonial situation. After two major failed Catholic rebellions in the 17th century, the British government passed a series of laws that made it very difficult for Catholics to own land. By the end of the 18th century, Catholics owned only 5% of Irish land, despite comprising over two-thirds of the population. In the 18th and 19th centuries, many of the Protestant landed families built mansions—called “big houses” by the Irish—on their rural property and ran their estates from them. Rural Catholics were usually renters or hired laborers, and a variety of economic and religious grievances often led to poor relations between landlords and tenants, especially in the wake of the Great Famine (1845–51). By the early 20th century, Catholic farmers began buying back land from struggling Protestant landlords and the Irish revolution (1916–23) saw a spate of attacks against Protestant big houses and seizures of landlords’ land. Maurice Hannigan’s transformation from hired laborer to wealthy farmer, and the corresponding decline of the Dollard family and their “big house,” evokes many of these colonial themes.

Emigration also figures prominently in *When All Is Said*. Several key members of Maurice’s family left Ireland to seek better opportunities elsewhere, a state of affairs over which Maurice and his wife Sadie spent much time brooding. Irish emigration had its roots in the 17th century, but the Famine changed Irish emigration patterns significantly. The Famine caused

roughly a million deaths and a million emigrants to leave Ireland, the vast majority of whom ended up in the United States. Post-Famine Irish emigration was much more Catholic, rural, and poor, and for most of the 19th and 20th centuries nearly every rural family would have expected some members to end up living abroad. Emigrant numbers remained so high that the population of the island still is less than it was prior to the Famine.

In addition to emigration and the struggle over land, another important theme in the book is that of modernization. Through the 1960s, Irish political and social leaders tended to imagine Ireland as a rural country governed by the ethos and lifestyle of the farmer. There was a significant cultural and political divide between Ireland’s urban areas and its rural population. Many common features of 20th-century urban life—cinemas, mechanization, telephone service—were slow to come to rural Ireland. Despite the construction of a massive hydroelectric power project in the 1920s, much of rural Ireland did not have electricity until the late 1940s and early 1950s. Maurice’s simultaneous embrace and condemnation of many aspects of “modern” life is emblematic of cultural shifts that took place in rural Ireland after the Second World War. Anne Griffin’s novel, *When All Is Said*, explores themes that are rooted in Irish history and culture. She artfully manages to bring forward issues that the Irish have long struggled with into the present where they still have an impact.

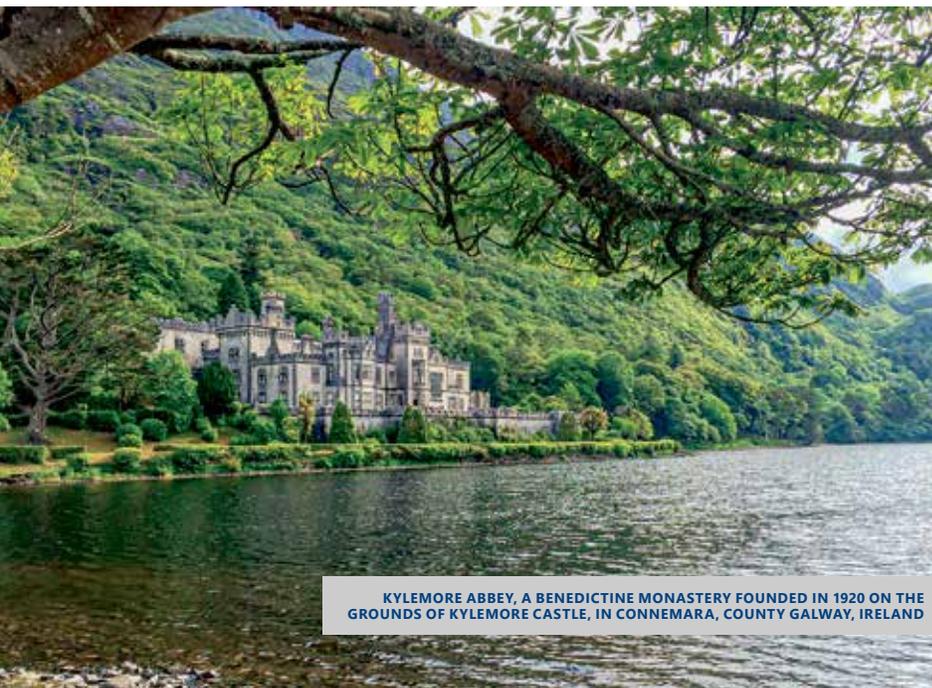


<https://spoti.fi/2SUJxP8>  
Check out the *When All Is Said* playlist on Spotify



PHOTO: PETER JULIAN

**Jason Knirck** is a professor of history at Central Washington University. He is a modern Irish historian who also teaches British and Western European history. His research concerns the Irish revolution and the foundation of the Irish Free State, focusing particularly on the political rhetoric of the period. His monograph *Afterimage of the Revolution: Cumann na nGaedheal and Irish Politics 1922-32* deals with the relationship between the Free State political party Cumann na nGaedheal and the legacy of the Irish revolution. His current work focuses on the Irish Farmers’ Party in the 1920s, and the roles played by opposition parties in the Free State parliament.



KYLEMORE ABBEY, A BENEDICTINE MONASTERY FOUNDED IN 1920 ON THE GROUNDS OF KYLEMORE CASTLE, IN CONNEMARA, COUNTY GALWAY, IRELAND

PHOTO: TIM WALKER DAVIS

# A Graceful and Gracious Journey

by Jennifer Sasser

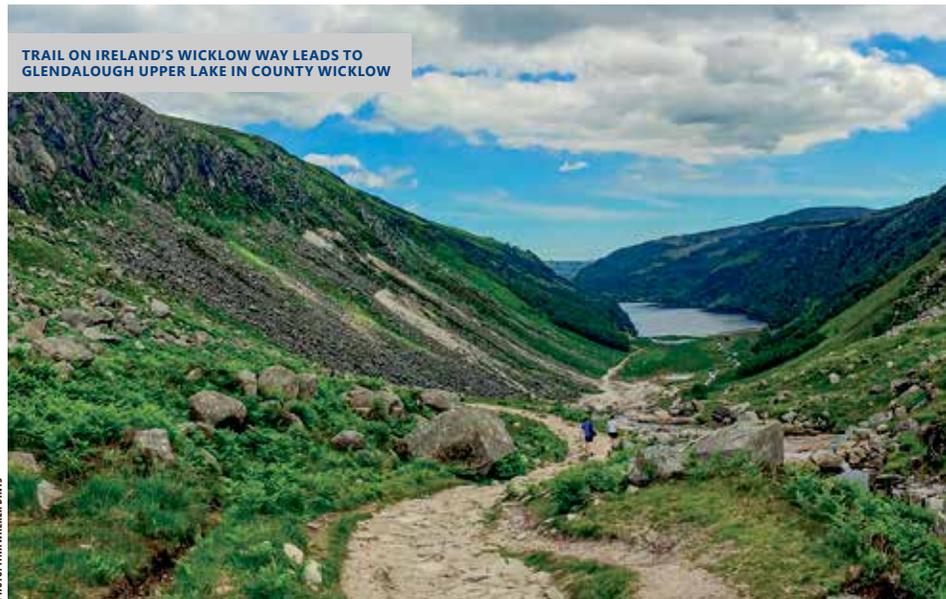
Call me a late bloomer, but much of what I've learned about nurturing connections I learned from the elders in my neighborhood. My older friends were not gregarious. They came from diverse backgrounds; none of us had much in common except proximity. But they all possessed what I will call a "spirit of friendship." Even in the face of great personal losses—divorce and remarriage, decades of widowhood, financial challenges, uneasy relationships with adult children, chronic and terminal illness—they found a way to connect outside themselves.

We are learning ever more about the protective importance of positive social connections throughout the life-course. Loneliness and social isolation can be harmful experiences for humans of all ages, but especially for older persons for whom supportive and beneficial social and physical environments are crucial. Emerging national and international research suggests that loneliness is a common experience. One 2019 study of over 10,000 adults found that as many as three in five Americans are lonely. Loneliness is correlated with many factors including, interestingly, heavy use of social media. Surprisingly, Gen Z (18–22 year-olds) had the highest rate of loneliness; Boomers had the lowest. Men, across all ages, tended to be somewhat lonelier (63%) than women (58%). Other studies suggest that social isolation may increase with age, though this could have more to do with an intensification of the underlying factors associated with social isolation—accumulated losses, health challenges, living alone, and lack of resources—than with aging itself.

How might we contribute to our own disconnections from others, even our own loneliness? And, conversely, how might we help others feel seen, heard, and more connected? Perhaps the antidote to this existential discomfort is two-fold. First, by embodying the spirit of friendship, being present to what's going on outside of ourselves, and beholding others with kindness and respect. Human experiences—aging, living—are complex; relationships are complex. Second, the companion practice of cultivating curiosity about our own experiences. Reflecting on our past, the ways in which we fell short of our own or others' expectations, is beneficial primarily to the extent that doing so moves us toward a place of acceptance and resolution and making amends. It is simply impossible to undo what's

been done, but living weighed down by regret only serves to diminish one's capacity to live in the present. And the present is all we have.

Perhaps the aspiration isn't to make it to old age without regrets, but rather to live gracefully and graciously. One of my favorite ways to think about



TRAIL ON IRELAND'S WICKLOW WAY LEADS TO GLENDALOUGH UPPER LAKE IN COUNTY WICKLOW

PHOTO: TINA WALKER DAVIS

aging is as the accumulation of experiences. Aging is an ongoing, unfolding process; the aging journey is life-long, not a process marked only by decline. The aging journey is the human journey: intricate and dynamic, a dance between continuing to grow and letting go.

In later life our time horizon diminishes, which makes it important to try—not once, but over and over—to reach out to others, with openness and curiosity. We can decide to engage in aging, because aging and living are really the same thing.



**Jennifer Sasser** is an educational gerontologist, transdisciplinary scholar, and community activist. She began as a nursing assistant and senior citizen advocate before focusing on scholarly inquiry and education. For the past 20 years Sasser has focused inquiry into: areas of creativity in later life; aging and embodiment; transdisciplinary curriculum design; Critical Gerontological theory; and transformational adult learning practices. She served on the Portland Community College Gerontology faculty from 2016–18 and spearheaded the Ending Ageism campaign.

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# A Novel Idea...Read Together Celebrates 17 Years!

We are eager to share with you Anne Griffin's debut novel *When All Is Said* as the library's 17th annual "A Novel Idea" community read. The novel's strong sense of place draws us into a small town in Ireland where we are introduced to the charming curmudgeon Maurice Hannigan. In this poignant novel, Maurice shares a lifetime of stories as he toasts the five most important people in his life. *When All Is Said* provides an opportunity for us to come together to discuss the impacts of heartbreaking loss, unconditional love, past regrets, unbearable loneliness, and suicide. The library has created more than 25 free cultural programs that explore the themes of the book to deepen understanding and engage readers in discussions with other members of the community.

Author Anne Griffin presents at Bend High on Sunday, May 3, at 4:00 p.m. All programs, including the author presentation, are free thanks to the generosity of our sponsors. Tickets are required for the author presentation on May 3 and are available beginning April 18 online at [www.dplfoundation.org](http://www.dplfoundation.org) and at all Deschutes Public Library locations.

Thank you for continuing to make the "A Novel Idea" community reading program the largest of its kind in Oregon. We send much gratitude to our sponsors and donors who make a difference for the library and our community by supporting this program and keeping it free for all. And tremendous thanks to all of you readers whose participation makes this community read the best in Oregon! Happy reading!



This program is supported by the Oregon Cultural Trust



This program is supported by funds from the Oregon Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts.



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O'Brien Memorial Fund at Seattle Foundation<br>Laura Seaver<br>Robert & Alice Selder<br>Laurence & Patricia Serrurier<br>Aimee Serrurier<br>Stan & Sue Shepardson<br>Carl Shoemaker<br>Susan Shuck & Stephen Knapp<br>Andrea Sigetich<br>Brenda & Mike Simpson<br>Janet Sirhall<br>Lisa Sjoblom<br>Jamie Smith<br>Jay & Yvonne Smith<br>Todd & Julie Smith<br>Karen Smund<br>Sheryl Snapp<br>Brian & Gay Sommer<br>Anonymous<br>Nancy Spreier<br>Nikki & Dell Squire<br>Roy & Mary Stafford<br>Brian & Valle Stewart<br>Chantal Strobel<br>Lorraine & David Stuart<br>BJ Sullivan<br>Summit Bank<br>James Swarn<br>Liedie Szaraniec<br>Carolyn Tate<br>Grechen Taylor<br>Raymond & Valerie Teller<br>Kay Terzian<br>Michael & Anne Thomas<br>Judith Thornburg<br>Joan Thyne<br>Tince & Cindy Timm<br>Bonnie Tomsheck<br>Rick & Susan Torassa<br>John & Barbara Trachtenberg<br>Marge Trayser | Richard Truitt<br>The Trust For Public Land<br>Frances & Bill Tweed<br>Malcolm Ulrich<br>Arleen Vallejo & Warren Regan<br>Helen Vandervort<br>Chandra vanEijnsbergen<br>Kaari Vaughn<br>Cheryl & Randall Wagner<br>Patricia Wallin<br>Mary Wallis<br>Peter & Becky Wanless<br>Jo Ann Watson Lay<br>Martha Weaver<br>Barbara Wehrle<br>Elizabeth Wehrli & Joy Graham<br>Western Rivers Conservancy<br>Paul & Linda Whitsell<br>Thomas & Elizabeth Wightman<br>Margaret Wilson<br>Worthy Brewing<br>R. Thomas & Karen Wykes<br>Julianne Yonge<br>Kelly Young<br>Zuri Group LLC<br>IN HONOR OF<br>Richard B. Baxter<br>George Beardsley<br>Donna Brandon<br>Todd Dunkelberg<br>Gertrude Ehrhorn<br>Rya Fennewald<br>Ann Hettinger<br>Fisher Olin<br>Ann D. Thompson<br>IN MEMORY OF<br>Richard B. Baxter<br>Sally Bradshaw<br>Paul Edgerton<br>Herb Ekstrom<br>Kent Franklin<br>Micki Knoernschild<br>Joanne & Wayne MacAskill<br>Sam McCurdy<br>Marilyn Monahan<br>Mike Perris<br>Jessica Ruby<br>Betty Shadoan<br>Virginia E. Sands<br>Arden A. Squire<br>Michael Van Meter |
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