

My Honorary Degree

by [Peter Glassman](#) (November 2023)



In the Library, Édouard Vuillard

It's August 28 and school started on Monday, August 24. I looked back at the day I volunteered to be a librarian assistant for the Las Lomas Elementary School. It was grandparents' day and I had two grandchildren enrolled here. That was three years ago. I've been at the library almost every school day Friday morning since then. While my Fridays

begin at 10 am the children's classes begin at eight, so I always walk in on a class of children just getting settled for their new lesson in Library Science.

I continue to marvel at this beginner's library. The rows of books are easily accessed. Computers line the entire left wall and the octagonal tables with their low chairs occupy a center space creating a classroom between the book stacks. On the tables are iPads, tablets, or interactive electronics to engage the projected screen teaching session. As I walk in with my library volunteer picture ID stuck to my shirt, Ms. Langford, the head librarian, smiles and calls the class to order.

"All right class, I want you all to say good morning to Dr. Glassman. He helps out with our work in the library. Everyone say, 'Good morning Dr. Glassman'."

"Good morning Dr. Glassman." Most of the second graders wave their hands with the greeting.

"Good morning students," I reply with a smile and a wave.

Ms. Langford then addresses the class, "This morning we're going to learn how to use the dictionary." Twenty pairs of little eyes are fixed on her PowerPoint projection as Mrs. McKay, the assistant librarian, motions me to the main desk.

"Dr. Glassman, you can begin by pulling all the Thanksgiving books from the shelves onto this cart. Next Friday you can set them up on one bookshelf for our Thanksgiving display and easy access for the students to find them for their class assignment."

I started at the far left stack and began to extract all the children's books with the Thanksgiving DayTurkey sticker on the book spine. One of the books got my attention and I started to read it. I'm writing a children's book with my fifth-grade granddaughter and I'm interested in the format,

word choices, and writing styles for ten-year-olds and above.

Mrs. McKay arrived at my post, glared at me, and grunted, "You're supposed to pull the books onto your cart—not read them."

I meekly put *Little Red Riding Hood and the Evil Turkey* onto my shelved cart and moved on. I can't help but reflect on how my entire earthly existence has been dominated by women. Most of my teachers in elementary, middle, and high school were women. My mother ruled our house and my grandmothers were the bosses of theirs. College, graduate school, and medical school weren't much different. When I got married my wife suddenly became a domestic dictator. As a physician, I learned that the main job of nurses was to keep the doctors out of trouble, and I absorbed their sage advice. The operating room where I worked as an anesthesiologist was always run by a no-nonsense middle-aged female who rarely smiled. And today, Mrs. McKay, assistant head librarian at the Las Lomas Elementary School, won't let me peruse a fourth-grade reader, and I comply.

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My reverie is broken by a second grader who is staring at me with large round eyes. Her black hair is in one giant pigtail and she and her other classmates are now released from the formal class to select no more than two books to take home until next Friday. Neither of us speaks. I kept my eye contact as I pulled another Thanksgiving book from the stack in front of us. She finally opened her mouth. "Are you a real doctor, Dr. Glassman?"

"Yes, indeed I am." I wonder if a medical question is coming next.

"So how come you're working on the bookshelves?"

Good question, it's one I sometimes ask myself. "Well, when I got older, I retired from working as a doctor." I stopped

there but her querulous stare and silence implied this wasn't enough. I decided to give some sage advice and have her move on. "If you do well in school like I did and go on to college and medical school, you will someday be able to come back to Las Lomas Elementary School, and work on the stacks of library books."

She left. At her age, I hoped I gave her some sound words to ponder although my overall message did carry a negative connotation. But that was how I felt at the time. Really, Why am I doing this? Seventy-four years old and I'm pulling kids Thanksgiving books from the shelves. I had to get off the pity pot. What have I done on a positive note lately? Of course, I published my twelfth novel last week on Amazon and I'm already well into my next novel. Books are what life is about. Books are what dreams are made of. Books are important. Reading is paramount. My presence here bespeaks such noble pronouncements.

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There are five minutes to go for this class of juvenile readers and Ms. Langford reassembles the students. "I have one more announcement before your teacher takes you back to your home classroom."

I hear Mrs. McKay clearing her throat next to me. She caught me reading another Thanksgiving mini-tome. Before she could speak, Ms. Langford continued, "Dr. Glassman, could you please come up to the head of the class next to me."

What! My first thought is I've been fired—fired from a volunteer job as a librarian assistant for sneaking a read in a second-grade Turkey Day mystery. What if this ever finds its way into my lifetime work résumé? Will I be denied access to heaven when my time arrives?

Ms. Langford is in her early thirties; she's cute with curly light hair; and she's smiling and clutching a scroll-like

sheet of paper. Mrs. McKay sidled up to my other side. I'm doomed. I can't even escape. I look down at the assembled children. Am I to be made an example of?

Ms. Langford took a deep breath.

Here it comes.

"Class, some of you remember Dr. Glassman from when you were in first grade. Some of you heard him read his story about Thanksgiving last year that he wrote for the San Antonio Writer's Meetup. Dr. Glassman has written over ten books himself and is still writing more."

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My mouth was dry. It was difficult to swallow. So far this still feels like a prelude to my last day allowed as a volunteer library person. Ms. Langford unfolds the paper. My God! She put my walking papers in writing. The shame of it all!

"Y'all know that Dr. Glassman has helped set up the book fairs and the war of the books contests. He's been an inspiration to other volunteers and is one of the few grandpas volunteering at our school library."

The second-grade class teacher had her cell phone out and was poised to take a photo.

"So it gives us all great pleasure to present this honorary certificate with an esteemed, un-validated, and unique academic degree—probably the only one of its kind—to Dr. Glassman. He can now proclaim the LWB degree after his MD and PhD."

Everyone applauds. I'm speechless. LWB! What in God's name is an LWB degree?

Ms. Langford points to the certificate. "LWB—Librarian Wanna

Be.”

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At this point in my dream, I woke up. Dana, my sixteen-pound orange tabby cat was licking my nose. I sat up in bed and then opened the door for Dana to leave. I lay awake for a while and decided to accept and keep the award.

I am now Peter Glassman MD, PhD, LWB. Wow!

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Peter Glassman is a retired physician living in Texas, who devotes his time to writing novels and memoir-based fiction. He is the author of 14 novels including the medical thrillers *Cotter*; *The Helios Rain* and *Who Will Weep for Me*. Some of his short stories were written for presentation at the San Antonio Writers Group Meetup. You can read more about him and his books [here](#).

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