

# Hope for a storybook ending

[**Bookstore**, from E1] holidays but was always busy and filled with all sorts of people.

Then one day in 2003, something terrible happened. The owner of Once Upon a Time, who had opened the store in 1966, said she was going to retire. She wanted to sell the little bookstore but couldn't find anyone to buy it, so she was afraid it would have to close.

The two little girls were very sad. Jessica was so sad that she wrote a letter to The Times, begging someone to buy the store. When her mother, Maureen, read the letter, she talked with her husband — and together they decided they would save the little bookstore that their daughters and so many other children loved.

It would be nice to end the story here with “and they lived happily ever after,” but “ever after” is a very long time, and running a small family business takes a lot of hard work, especially when people buy so many things, including books, online.

But Maureen and her family loved books and children and their little town and the little town loved them back. People came from all around to spend time in the pretty little bookstore in Montrose, buying books and cards and toys. Sometimes they would meet authors, who would read to the children and sign their books. Sometimes Maureen brought those authors to the schools nearby to meet more children and their teachers, and she was always happy to search around and find the books teachers wanted their students to read.

Jessica and Amelia grew up and became young women, but they still worked in the bookstore when they weren't in school — along with many other kids, because Maureen believed that loving a community meant giving lots of its high-school students their first jobs. Everyone on the staff loved to read, and no one, including Maureen, was ever too busy to talk with kids or parents about what the best books were for someone who liked magic or mystery or stories from history.

So for many years, the little bookstore was always bustling; it hosted Harry Potter parties and holiday parties and gave out candy to trick-or-treaters at Halloween. The staff took books to festivals and local events and even the Christmas parade. And they tried not to get mad whenever anyone said the word “Amazon.”

Then something even more terrible happened, this very year. A global pandemic broke out and made a lot of people all around the world very sick — so sick that many of them died. “We have to stop people from getting sick,” people cried. Governments everywhere shut down businesses and told everyone to stay home so they wouldn't spread the virus.

After months of this, some businesses closed forever. But Maureen and her family really do want a



Photographs by FRANCINE ORR Los Angeles Times

**OWNER** Maureen Palacios, left, and daughter Jessica, 26, at Once Upon a Time.



**HOLIDAY** essentials like greeting cards join books and toys at the children's bookstore in Montrose.

happily ever after.

So they are fighting to save Once Upon a Time, the oldest children's bookstore in the country, one more time.

On a recent weekday morning, Maureen Palacios tried to describe how they were going to do that, and it essentially boils down to: Try everything.

In the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Once Upon a Time was able to remain open with curbside service because Maureen's relationships with local teachers gave the store status as an essential business. Schools were closed, and teachers couldn't get to the books they were assigning, so they offered PDFs.

“But a lot of people don't like to read PDFs,” Maureen says, “so teachers told parents they could buy the books here.”

The staff set up a system by which people could order books over the phone for curbside pickup, leaving payment in a basket. Occasionally, even that process posed difficulties. “When one English class was reading ‘The Outsiders,’ we were worried about social distancing, so we gave each school period its own time slot. It took a couple of weeks.”

Some private schools reached out and asked that books be shipped to students at home. “So. Much. Shipping,” Maureen says. “But everyone, all of the teachers, were in a state of shock in the spring. Everyone was just trying to get through the semester. And we all thought it was just going to be a month or two.”

Jessica, now 26, began redesigning the store's web-

site so customers could order and pay online. As the months stretched on, many customers began calling in orders. Maureen added a cellphone line so texting was possible, and when they could, staffers would use the phone to FaceTime with customers, creating a virtual shopping experience by “walking” them though the store. They also began offering limited delivery for those who did not feel comfortable coming to the curb, a service they continued even after the store reopened in May.

This very morning, she says, after working until almost midnight to fill online and phone orders, she and Jessica delivered to eight addresses before coming to the store. “I now know more about this area than I ever have,” she says, laughing. “Some of them are easy, but you get into those hills of La Cañada and man, I'm lost.”

The store's front door is always open now and walk-ins are possible — there is a gate at the entrance to control numbers (only four customers at a time in the small space), ensure that everyone is masked and keep the very popular store cat, Pippi, from wandering off — but an appointment is advisable.

Once Upon a Time is my local bookstore (my son for a time was one of its high-school hires), and I have been a regular visitor to this haven on Honolulu Avenue in Montrose for more years than I care to contemplate. But I hadn't crossed its threshold in seven months. Once I did, the familiar sight of well-filled bookshelves, many topped with adorable animal plushies, of Shakespeare

notepads and quill pens, stacks of seasonal picture books and book club picks ... all filled me with a sense, unfamiliar these days, of comfort and security.

The silence, however, is a bit strange. “I know,” Maureen says. “We miss the sounds of kids so much, the laughter, the squeals, even the sight of all the plushies being tossed around.”

At this moment, she is overseeing a decor transition from Halloween to Christmas. Halloween, she concedes, has been a bit of a bust. Although portions of Honolulu Avenue are busy, with extended restaurant seating, the businesses on either side of Once Upon a Time, and the one across the street, are closed. Without the normal foot traffic, the store's windows could not tempt the usual numbers; even the most adorable pumpkin pillows and spooky candle holders were a difficult sell.

“We have flipped our business model,” Maureen says, “but we still need more foot traffic.”

So she's skipping the usual, though always brief, foray into Thanksgiving and going straight to the winter holidays, upon which so many retail hopes are pinned. A sign in her front window says, “Plan for Hope in 2021,” and she, like many bookstore owners, is hoping people will remember to support their local businesses during the holiday season. The fourth quarter, always important, is now do or die for many.

The pandemic-forced cancellation of the L.A. Times Festival of Books in spring took a large bite out of the store's midyear income — Once Upon a Time, which for the last few years has been the special vendor for the festival's children's stage, always sells a lot of books during the popular two-day event.

“We usually have three booths and bring in about 75 authors,” Maureen says.

But she is hopeful that the newly imagined 3½-week virtual version of the fest, which began Oct. 18, will help. Once Upon a Time is a major participant, acting as seller for Nov. 1 appearances by five authors, including Natalie

Portman (in conversation with Times film critic Justin Chang) and Viet Thanh Nguyen and Ellison Nguyen, authors of “Chicken of the Sea.”

Yet even the success of online ordering has challenges: Temporary closures and layoffs at publishing houses have made books increasingly hard to find in a timely fashion. Once Upon a Time prides itself on packaging books in an inviting way — each is kept pristine with careful wrapping — and that takes time, effort and staff. Most of the store's employees are part time, and after keeping all eight on the payroll for many months, Maureen has had to let two of them go. And though she continues to pay local children to write reviews, visible on every shelf, she has had to put her cherished tradition of hiring local teens on hold. “It's terrible, but we really can't afford to have anyone without good sales skills right now,” she says.

Hence her own extended hours.

Still, support has come from many places. “We have a lot of authors who are loyal to us, because we have always worked hard to do whatever we can to sell books so authors have a chance to be seen,” Maureen says. Stuart Gibbs recently did a virtual book launch from the store for his latest, “Spy School Revolution,” selling hundreds of copies all over the country. And Jimmy Fallon chose Once Upon a Time as one of five bookstores to host a Facebook Live launch on Tuesday of his new book, “5 More Sleeps 'til Christmas.”

Indeed, Once Upon a Time's Facebook page is as bustling as the store itself once was — with staff picks, book clubs, story times and an upcoming reading series called “Cocoa, Chair and Chat.” Pippi is the star of its Instagram.

But the surprise social media hit has been “Bunny vs. ....,” in which bunnies battle for plushie dominance. The short series, which was filmed in the store and screened on its Facebook page, is a perfect example of Once Upon a Time's “try everything” pandemic credo.

“Easter came and went, and we had all these bunny plushies left,” Maureen says. “So we started doing this very silly short competition between the bunnies and other animals, like dragons, and people loved it.”

The plushies began flying off the shelves and now, many months later, fans are clamoring for another installment.

“Maybe,” Maureen says, surveying the hefty pile of Halloween merchandise being moved aside for Christmas, “we should see how Bunny does against witches.”

Once upon a time, there was a bunny, a witch and a clever family that worked very hard during the great pandemic of 2020. And with the help of people who believe in books and family businesses, there is a good chance they will save America's oldest children's bookstore. Again.

## TV Highlights

During the coronavirus crisis, the Los Angeles Times is making some temporary changes to our print sections. The prime-time TV grid is on hiatus in print but an expanded version is available in your daily Times eNewspaper. You can find a printable PDF online at: [latimes.com/whats-on-tv](https://latimes.com/whats-on-tv).

### SERIES

**The Price Is Right at Night** (N) 8 p.m. CBS

**The Voice** (N) 8 p.m. NBC

**Swamp Thing** Swamp Thing (Derek Mears) senses a growing darkness in the swamp. 8 p.m. CW

**The Bachelorette** Former bachelorette DeAnna Pappas pays a surprise visit. 8 p.m. ABC

**Homestead Rescue** (season finale) 8 p.m. Discovery

**Let's Make a Deal Prime-time** 9 p.m. CBS

**This Is Us** In the two-hour season premiere, the family gathers to celebrate the 40th birthday of Randall, Kate and Kevin (Sterling K. Brown, Chrissy Metz and Justin Hartley). 9 p.m. NBC

**Tell Me a Story** An anonymous delivery sends Ashley (Natalie Alyn Lind) into a dark tailspin. 9 p.m. CW

**Kal Penn Approves This Message** The season finale draws on lessons from previous episodes to encourage voting. 10:30 p.m. Freeform

### SPECIALS

**Nick News: Kids Pick the President** (N) 7 p.m. Nickelodeon

**Not Done: Women Remaking America** This new special explores justice for women. 8 p.m. KOCE

**2020 Hip Hop Awards** (N) 9 p.m. BET and VH1

**The Soul of America** Jon Meacham offers his insights into the United States' current political and historical moment. 9 p.m. HBO

**The Campaigns That Made History** Surprising and shocking political contests that have highlighted presidential politics over the last half-century. 9 p.m. History

### SPORTS

**World Series** Game 6: The Tampa Bay Rays versus the Dodgers. 5 p.m. Fox

### TALK SHOWS

**CBS This Morning** Christina Tosi. (N) 7 a.m. KCBS

**Today** COVID-19; Jimmy Fallon. (N) 7 a.m. KNBC

**Good Morning America** Pedro Pascal. (N) 7 a.m. KABC

**Live With Kelly and Ryan** Jimmy Fallon; Jessica Capshaw (“Holidate”). (N) 9 a.m. KABC

**The View** Bari Weiss guest cohosts; Jon Meacham. (N) 10 a.m. KABC

**Home & Family** Yeardley Smith (“The Simpsons”). (N) 10 a.m. Hallmark

**The Talk** Wayne Brady. (N) 1 p.m. KCBS

**The Drew Barrymore Show** Stanley Tucci. (N) 2 p.m. KCBS

**The Kelly Clarkson Show** Meghan Trainor; Glenn Howerton. (N) 2 p.m. KNBC

**The Doctors** Yoga for the elderly. (N) 2 p.m. KCOP

**The Ellen DeGeneres Show** Justin Hartley (“This Is Us”). (N) 3 p.m. KNBC

**The Real** Sterling K. Brown. (N) 3 p.m. KCOP

**Amanpour and Company** (N) 11 p.m. KCET; midnight KVCB; 1 a.m. KLCS

**The Daily Show** (N) 11 p.m. Comedy Central

**The Tonight Show** Mendes performs; Tig Notaro. (N) 11:34 p.m. KNBC

**The Late Show** Dr. Sanjay Gupta; author Sarah Cooper. (N) 11:35 p.m. KCBS

**Jimmy Kimmel Live!** Anne Hathaway; David Muir; H.E.R. performs. (N) 11:35 p.m. KABC

**Late Night** Natalie Portman; Cindy McCain. (N) 12:36 a.m. KNBC

**Nightline** (N) 12:37 a.m. KABC



Freeform

**THE SEASON FINALE** of “Kal Penn Approves This Message.”

# Auctioning their residuals and royalties

[**Royalty**, from E1] and put out my own record,” says Broido, who has since worked with Rihanna, Justin Timberlake and Kendrick Lamar, among others. “All these things have come from me taking the independent investment to run my own career.”

“We're unlocking the power of markets to financially empower creatives,” says Royalty Exchange partner Anthony Martini. “In the creative industry, it's hard to get loans. This is a way to empower them to do the things they need to do using the assets they created.”

When an artist approaches Royalty Exchange, the company analyzes and evaluates the asset being offered, then determines a potential value. After getting a guarantor to set a minimum price, it clears everything with the rights holder — and the auction can begin.

Broido has the kind of happy-ending story the company hopes everyone will achieve. Right now, Royalty Exchange has 25,000 registered investors (though anyone can sign up to become a potential investor) and has done \$85 million worth of deals in the last four years, according to Martini.

Recently, the company



BLAKE CHARLES

**JAKE BROIDO** performing as indie artist the Truth Experiment.

branched out from music royalties into residuals from film and television, with sales including 1983's “Trading Places” (producer residuals sold for \$140,300 in 2019); 2008's “Repo! The Genetic Opera,” which sold director residuals for \$563,000 in June; and a package of 21 films (including four “Star Trek” movies and “Beverly Hills Cop III”), which sold director residuals for \$61,200 in September. Buyers then get paid every time the film, TV show or song is used on a platform.

Not all sellers auction off full rights; Broido, for example, still holds his international royalties. Other auctions might be selling roy-

alties and residuals only for a set period of time. As an auction house of sorts, Royalty Exchange never owns the rights itself. Instead, the seller writes up a letter of direction, which redirects payments he otherwise would be receiving from a guild or publishing house, to the new owner of the rights.

“They're a safer asset than a stock market investment,” asserts Martini, who says rights and residuals became exponentially more valuable in the age of streaming. As he notes, consumers no longer purchase a song or DVD once, so every time a film or song is streamed, there's a new payment. “It's accelerated the desire for people to get into this,” he adds.

Investor Charles D'Atri, a former music catalog head at the Walt Disney Co., is pleased with the result. He's made over a dozen investments in royalties and residuals over the five years he's been investing, and he says the returns have been “excellent.”

“If you buy sensibly, it's a fantastic area to participate in with a stable and growing return,” he notes. “It's entirely legitimate, straight-up investing. I mean, if you love Warren Buffett, it's legitimate to buy a share of Berkshire

Hathaway. It's no different in music and film. If I'm a huge ‘Star Trek’ fan, any return is enjoyable if I can say I'm a participant in the success of ‘Star Trek.’”

If there's any shadow over all of this buying and selling of residuals and royalties, it might be within the unions that negotiated them in the first place for their members, says Richard W. Kopenhefer, a partner in the Labor and Employment Practice Group at Sheppard Mullin. “Residuals are collectively bargained participation,” he says. “The idea that those residuals could be alienated or sold through a third party would be a mandatory subject of collective bargaining.”

SAG-AFTRA Chief Operating Officer and general counsel Duncan Crabtree-Ireland had the same concern. He notes in a statement to The Times that as collectively bargained wages paid on ongoing or supplemental use of an artist's work, residuals are subject to legal wage protections. Those protections can include limitations on garnishment or assignment of those wages and, in jurisdictions like California, on the individual's right to void any assignment of those wages.

He also notes that federal

labor law preempts attempts to divert those kinds of payments that are contrary to a collective bargaining agreement. Anyone who wants to sell or assign residuals should have a lawyer, he adds, saying, “As to those who might purchase residuals rights, the best guidance is *caveat emptor* — let the buyer beware.”

The DGA, Writers Guild and Producers Guild declined to comment for this article.

But despite any potential misgivings, Kopenhefer does say the arrangement Royalty Exchange has set up is “good for talent,” likening it to a “reverse mortgage.”

And overall, it's hard to spot where anyone is losing out. Broido, for one, couldn't be happier. “I was sleeping on couches in L.A. figuring out how I was going to get my artist project off the ground before this,” he says. “Having funds from an auction means you can stay independent and keep your publishing and your masters.”

For his part, D'Atri is planning to keep adding to his investments, and Broido is planning to launch more auctions. “They really are, in my opinion, doing something that is helping musicians and artists — 100%,” he says.