

# Wondrous Things at the ATA59 Dictionary Exchange

Here's a story that at first glance might not make sense in a technical column, but then maybe that's exactly where it should be.

Something happened ATA59 in New Orleans that still makes my heart go pitter-patter when I think about it. About six months ago, someone asked me whether I could think of a way for him to donate a bunch of Russian dictionaries that he no longer needed after retiring from his translating life. After talking with him and the ATA conference organizers, we decided to host a Dictionary Exchange—or, more accurately, a dictionary giveaway, since there was no need to bring something in order to take something. I don't think I'm sharing any confidential information by revealing that there were great doubts, and maybe even concerns, that this would completely flop. Truth be told, I wasn't quite sure whether it would work either. Those old paper-based things? Who still uses those?

Well, for me, and I think for some others as well, it was really one of the highlights of the conference this year. Over the three-and-a-half days of the conference, people brought between 300 and 350 dictionaries, including stunning specimens such as a Bulgarian-Albanian dictionary, formerly highly confidential Russian military dictionaries, and other beauties that had been languishing on the



bookshelves of their former owners. All but eight of the dictionaries were taken, and it was so much fun to see the joy on the faces of those who just couldn't believe their good fortune at being able to take as many treasures as they wanted.

The Bulgarian-Albanian dictionary may not see much use (but then, who knows!), but I know that many other handsome tomes will be used again—much to the joy of their new owners, their generous previous owners, and probably the dictionaries themselves.

You might—rightly—wonder what happened to those eight remaining dictionaries. Since I was unsure of this dictionary extravaganza's potential success in New Orleans, I contacted a used bookstore not far from the conference hotel and asked them to commit to taking whatever wasn't picked up. Much to my delight, they embraced the task, even adding a welcome note and the conference logo to their bookmark (see image). How do I know? Can you really imagine going into a bookstore and not buying a few books (complete with free bookmark)? I can't—and after seeing the frenzy around the dictionary table, I know many of you can't either.

I was also the lucky recipient of a book of poems by Geoff Munsterman, the bookstore manager, which was presented to me on behalf of my generous colleagues who had donated their books. His poems are beautiful and dark and full of Louisiana life. Here is an excerpt from one of my

favorites that I assume will resonate with some of you as well:

### *And Suddenly*

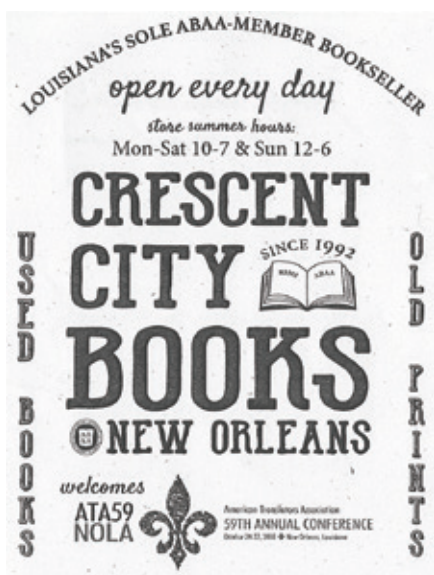
*your toes are tracing ampersands in dirt.  
Summer brings a melody that  
dashes thoughts  
of lasting past the heat, like Maris guesses  
if he'll last  
to sixty-one. There is no asterisk—  
you pack mascaras  
and board a bus for somewhere colder.  
Better to your luck.  
Before the tide this night erases all  
your punctuations,  
an alligator drags his icy belly through  
the sand  
deleting almost every curvature your lazy  
toes discerned.*

You can find the rest of this poem at [xl8.link/AndSuddenly](http://xl8.link/AndSuddenly). Munsterman's latest published volume, *Because the Stars Shine Through It*, can be found at [xl8.link/Munsterman](http://xl8.link/Munsterman).

Oh, and the Dictionary Exchange? Yes, I'm pretty certain it will be back on the program at ATA60 in Palm Springs. Get ready to empty those bookshelves to generously share (and receive). ◉



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This column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals.