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**Community Rallies  
so Rent Spike Won't  
Write Drama Book  
Shop's Final Act**

BY WINNIE McCROY

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BY SAM RIFKIND | 16

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## Community Rallies so Rent Spike Won't Write Drama Book Shop's Final Act

Added by **Scott Stiffler** on October 31, 2018.

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The Drama Book Shop, at 250 W. 40th St., will close shop at the end of January. | Photo by Winnie McCroy

**BY WINNIE McCROY** | After learning that rent hikes are likely to shutter their beloved Drama Book Shop in early 2019, longtime customers are rallying to support the 100-year-old independent store, which stocks thousands of plays, serves as a go-to gathering place for passionate patrons of the arts, and even plays host to a black box theater in its basement — and has been doing so from its 5,000-square-foot location since 2001 (250 W. 40th St., btw. Seventh & Eighth Aves; visit [dramabookshop.com](http://dramabookshop.com)).

"Space is very expensive in New York right now. There are a lot of expensive vacant shops. Just on this stretch of 40th Street, three major businesses closed in the past few weeks: the wonderful falafel shop, Maoz; Elegant Fabrics, which has been there my whole life; and Guy & Gallard, a lunch place that had lines out the door all day long. Their leases came up, and they're gone," said vice-president Allen Hubby, who first began working at Drama Book Shop as a clerk/cashier in 1977. His aunt Rozanne Seelen has owned it since his uncle died; the

uncle got a third ownership in 1957, when the previous owner retired.

Since they've been on W. 40th St., said Hubby, the monthly rent on the Drama Book Shop rose from \$4,000 to \$18,500. And when their lease runs out on Jan. 31, 2019, the landlord's proposed 50 percent rent hike will prohibit them from staying. But local elected officials have vowed to help.

"Another drama is unfolding with our small business industry in the city. The script repeats itself. A thriving small shop forced to close its curtains or to relocate because of skyrocketing rent," said NYC Council Speaker Corey Johnson. "My office has spoken with Allen Hubby with

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the Drama Book Shop, an institution in the Theater District and for all theater and Broadway aficionados, and we have committed our help to keep their doors open in this community. When a small business shuts down, we lose a part of New York City, and this is why the City Council is currently working on the Small Business Jobs Survival Act in an effort to protect mom-and-pop shops across the five boroughs.”

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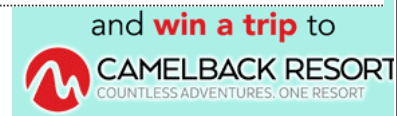
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L to R: Book buyer Eleanore Speert, author David Finkle, and Drama Book Shop vice president Allen

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 When this publication visited during their Save the Shop Event on Mon., Oct. 29, author David Finkle was at the counter, signing copies of his book, “Humpty Trumpy Hit a Brick Wall: Donald J. Trump’s First White House Year in Verse.” Finkle said it’s a collection of poems: one per day from Jan. 20, 2017 to Jan. 20, 2018, written as a way to deal with his despair. Finkle was there to help.

“We are hoping to do panels or symposia with some prominent theatre people about how much this shop means to them,” Finkle noted. When asked when these panels would happen, he said, “The sooner the better.”

In the back, Hubby was welcoming playwrights — including Dan Goggin, Alex Dinelaris, Eric Ulloa and Eric Bogosian — to sign copies of their plays. Two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Lynn Nottage was rumored to be planning a visit later that evening. Said Bogosian, “When you first moved to New York, this was the hangout where everyone went to find out what was up, who had dibs on what, and to look in the booklets to see what was coming up and what was cancelled. This was the only place that existed to buy some of these plays. That’s why we came then, and why we’re all out here today trying to save Drama Book Shop.”



L to R: Playwrights Dan Goggin, Alex Dinolaris, Eric Ulloa, and Eric Bogosian signed their work and spoke with customers, at the Oct. 29 event. | Photo by Winnie McCroy

As the conversation moved to money, Goggin reminisced about his early days as a singer in the Broadway production of “Luther,” starring Albert Finney, saying, “Back in 1963, the tickets for that show were \$10. And I remember when we had to move the show to the Lunt-Fontaine because ‘Hello, Dolly!’ was promised our space, the director told us they’d be raising the price to \$11, and we all said the show would close immediately. Then years later, when the tickets for ‘Nunsense’ were raised from \$35 to \$37, they all said the same thing. But people kept coming. I guess that’s just how things go.”

In the wings, aspiring playwright Hayley St. James, a student at Marymount Manhattan College, waited patiently to speak to Bogosian and other idols. She told us, “I’ve been coming to Drama Book Shop since I started seeing shows here because there are no other stores like it. A world without Drama Book Shop just doesn’t seem right.”

The event was planned to help loyal customers donate to the bookstore’s relocation fund — hopefully, to another location nearby that likely won’t offer nearly as much space.

“We have some possibilities that are looking interesting, but it’s all about finding out if the finances will work and getting a deal,” Hubby said. “We’re looking at some interesting things, and we’ll probably know more by next week. There’s one possibility we’re looking at, but we might need to get an extension on our lease” to make it work.

In addition, on Oct. 24, patron Nina Kauffman created a [GoFundMe campaign](#), which has already reached more than \$6,899 of its \$20,000 goal. The store, which celebrated its 100th birthday last October, has moved a half-dozen times before, but the 40th St. location has been its longest home.

Said Hubby, “It’s amazing! The outpouring of support we’ve gotten from the theatre community is overwhelming. But we don’t like to have to ask for help, because we’re here to help others — it’s our reason for existing. So it feels awkward for things to be in the reverse.”

In 2016, when a pipe burst and wiped out 30 percent of the store’s inventory, Lin-Manuel Miranda — who reportedly wrote part of “In the Heights” in the bookstore’s downstairs offices — launched a fundraising effort to help.

“And this is even more outpouring than for the flood,” added former general manager Nancy Reardon.

“Back when the water main broke a few years ago, the store was closed for a few months. It was like hell froze over! I love this store, and my dream is to have my plays published and sold here,” said student St. James, who said she would spend her hours until curtain rose at “The Prom” hanging out at the shop.

But patrons will not let the Drama Book Shop go gentle into that good night. As arts writer David Noh said, “It was a haven for both book and theater lovers, where I never left without purchasing something... I got everything from an essential bio of Eva Le Gallienne there to a rare copy of the joint memoir by Cyd Charisse and Tony Martin, to Kohle Yohannan’s magnificent coffee table tome about that greatest of designers, Valentina. All for a song.”



“On top of which there was usually a box of freebies at the front, which contained the real kinds of goodies no one was supposed to want enough to buy,” he continued. “Hello?! ZaSu Pitts’ cookbook? Yes! And then there was that lovely dog to pet. New York is once more all the poorer for the passing of someplace special.”





Customers came out in droves to support the Drama Book Shop. | Photo by Winnie McCroy

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