



Bottom Shelf Bookstore News

QUARANTINE ISSUE #5

The Nostalgia Issue

Bottom Shelf Day Managers

1st, 3rd Monday: Connie Knutson

2nd, 4th, 5th Monday: Linda Lovett

Tuesday: Sue Billing

Wed: Debbie Schubarth

Thursday: Violet Hult

Friday: Lynne Barker

Saturday: Debbie Schubarth

Volunteer Coordinators

Marilyn Bradley

Open position: Contact Sue or Marilyn if you are interested.

To all my Bottom Shelf family,

I am hoping this finds you in good health and taking care of yourself.

I miss my Tuesdays at the Bottom Shelf and all my BS friends. Lynne, Debbie S. and I continue to accept donations and take care of Amazon sales. We have been told we can no longer work on Fridays at the Bottom Shelf. We are allowed to enter for a short period of time on a week day to take care of miscellaneous business.

The library has gone back to no in-person browsing. Hopefully sometime in 2021 we will be allowed to reopen.

Sad Sue

Book Shops are a precious shelter from the storms of life...

From The Guardian. Books blog on Booksellers by Martin Latham

It was blowing a gale when I took Lemn Sissay on to my bookshop roof to talk about open-air poetry readings. Gulls on the wing struggled stationary in the wind and even the cathedral peregrines were nowhere to be seen. When we came back down to the warm, bright bookshop it was like coming below decks on a sailing ship. Lemn said he would return to Canterbury one day for a rooftop reading and wrote a poem, which is still on the wall by our poetry section. I found myself with a line from Bob Dylan's Shelter from the Storm in my head: "Try imagining a place where it's always safe and warm."

Bookshops have been in a perfect storm of online competition, business rates and parking charges for a while, but they will always survive. Even the tornado of the pandemic won't defeat them. It has, however, made me appreciate my job all the more – I've been bookselling on the shop floor for 36 years – and the customers, from the tearful first few on the day we reopened after lockdown to the joyful children getting back on the rocking horses or gazing at the fish, seem to feel the same way.

"We all become stories", as Margaret Atwood once said, and the same is true of bookshops. When we refer to our favourite bookshops, we'll mention the cat or the nice coffee, or the spiral staircase, or the really knowledgeable children's buyer. *Book-ish*, which I recently stumbled upon after getting lost in a Welsh storm, has old typewriters lined up above the bookcases, all donated by locals, a reminder of how a community can take a bookshop to its heart.

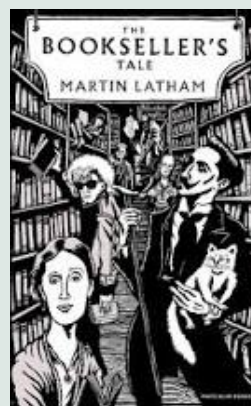
Customers have told me how bookshops inhabit their subconscious as well. Graham Greene dreamed in such detail of a London bookshop that he went to look for it twice before realising it was completely dream-forged, and the novelist David Mitchell – who used to be my fiction buyer – said my shop was "the Piccadilly of [his] psychogeography". In bookshops, as Virginia Woolf noted, we can lose the carapace of self, we can flit around our levels of consciousness and inhabit any of our potential selves. After reading that Greta Garbo spent hours in Rizzoli Bookstore because she needed "a break from being Garbo", I look back differently on the day in 1988 when Faye Dunaway somehow left her passport – her identity – among the books of my independent shop in Chelsea. (Obviously I still boast about her kissing me

after I phoned her hotel to say I found it in philosophy.)

Perhaps the most important self you can rediscover in a bookshop is from your childhood. Recently, a woman in her mid-60s was buying a contemporary literary novel when a dreamy look came over her and she asked: "I don't suppose *The Silver Sword* is still in print?" I'm the same age, and we both identified deeply with the refugee in Warsaw during the second world war who kept his parents' paper knife – the "silver sword" – in a shoebox. She was surprised when I told her it is still consoling children facing the storm of adolescence. Like *The Magic Faraway Tree* and *I Capture the Castle*, it is part of the secret canon, unknown to academia, of shot-in-the-arm books.

They exist for adults, too, and sell as steadily as chai in Delhi. They are written in a sort of trance-state burst of creativity, like *Brideshead Revisited* and *1984*, the result surprising their authors but forever feeding the reader-soul. These are the books which are sniffed before purchase and hugged or kissed afterwards.

Serendipitous browsing throws up discoveries and rediscoveries in a way that algorithms never can. Every day there's a customer who thumps a great pile on the till and exclaims "I've got to get out of here before I find any more – I only came in for a card."



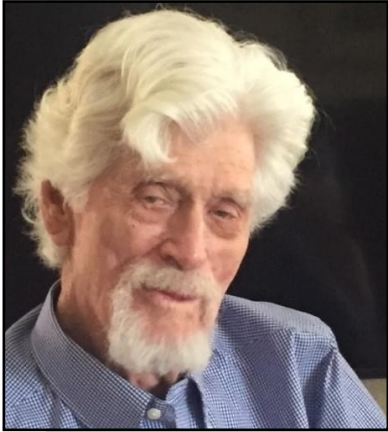
With new restrictions currently making it impossible to browse, it may be a long wait until those of us in England can find our many selves among the bookshelves again. But whatever the storm may throw at us in the meantime, bookshops will forever be a shelter where it's always safe and warm.

The Bookseller's Tale by Martin Latham is published by Particular Books (£16.99).

What I miss about the Bottom Shelf...

Remembering the Bottom Shelf

By Wayne Yonce, Author



I remember when our used book store was named because of being at the bottom of our old library. I bought, read, and then returned, a lot of Clancy and Gresham novels to that little lower level library.

Sometime after the construction of our new library I'd bought a computer and thought maybe some of my memories might be put to printed pages. But it had been a long time, a very

long time, since I'd diagramed a sentence in ninth-grade English. In the new Bottom Shelf I found a shelf with books about writing. Wow! So much knowledge packed into those books by the best authors, editors, and professors in the country. I was buying and reading, but returning only a few of those books.

There were all the classic college level teaching books, but my two, less formal, favorites are: *A Writer's Coach*, by Jack Hart and *On Writing Well*, by William Zinsser.

I've had a storybook life. Many of my stories, when put to print, seem unbelievable—how could so many good things happen to one guy? I have one such a story from the Bottom Shelf.

I was sharing the narrow aisle between rows of books with a woman. She wasn't young, she wasn't old—maybe forty-five—about half my age. We bumped. We both apologized and she said, "We'll just go around each other."

I said, "But we'll not be going around with each other."

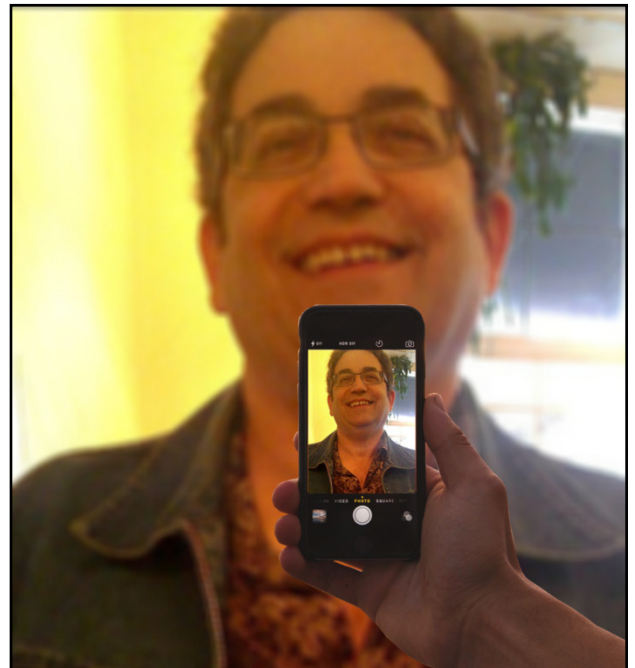
She and said, "Could happen—could be a fun thing."

I was guilty of turning the conversation to what was sounding like pick-up banter, but now I didn't know what to say. I reasoned that this was a playful lady who had turned an old man's words back at him. I mumbled something, grabbed a book and retreated to an end-cap chair. A few minutes later the lady tapped my shoulder as she exited with her purchases. With a wide grin and slight wave she said, "Bye boyfriend."

We'd both enjoyed a fun moment at the Bottom Shelf.

Why do I love the Bottom Shelf? It is a good question. The simple answer is that I love books and the rare breed of people who still read and enjoy them. The Bottom Shelf has both of them. I usually head for the classics, where I can reacquaint myself with old friends but I also like to scour the paperback science fiction and detective stuff. You see, the regular library has been largely denuded of the titles that tickle my literary cockles. Try to find a book by Rex Stout, Mary Roberts Rhinehart or Arthur Upfield at a library these days. Good luck. You at least stand a chance at the Bottom Shelf. I like good writers that can stand the test of time. I bought a compendium of O. Henry last year, written before 1910. Still great. In our throwaway culture such authors were relegated to the dustbin in some library putsch of the recent past and are nigh impossible to find. It is horrible to say but I find a lot of contemporary writing unreadable. The little shop on the left gives me a chance to jump into something fabulous, some times for as cheap as a dime. It has been worth it every time.

by Robert Sommers, proprietor of the Blue Heron Gallery and author of the famous blog, *Blue Heron Blast*.



From Literary Hub, “The Secret to Shopping in Used Bookstores,” by Kelsey Rexroat

....There’s another type of customer encounter that happens at least once a shift at the used bookstore where I work, sometimes a dozen times. A customer walks in, beelines to where I’m helming the front desk, and asks a variation of the same question: “Do you have this specific book?”

I’ve worked at the register for two used bookstores—the nonprofit Housing Works Bookstore in New York City’s Soho and the cooperatively run Adobe Bookstore in San Francisco’s Mission District—so I’ve fielded this question hundreds of times. It’s usually easy to answer. Often I know immediately that we don’t have the book in question, simply because it’s a new release. Used books have to be circulated to the public, digested, and then passed through households and among friends like persistent rumors before they make their way to us. For older titles, our inventory isn’t catalogued and changes daily, but I’m more than happy to search our stock in the relevant section, with occasional success.

So the question itself is a welcome one. What comes as a letdown is when I have to reply “No, sorry”—more often than not, the customer spins around and leaves without even a glance around the store. To me, that’s like walking into an art gallery, asking “Do you have any de Koonings?” and then immediately leaving if the answer is (as should usually be expected) a no.

For another type of customer, though, my “no” is just the first part of their experience in the store. The difference between those who leave disappointed and those who leave delighted is simple: the latter group doesn’t come in looking for a specific title. Or when they do, that predetermined search is just what brings them in the door—it doesn’t give them blinders to everything else the store has to offer.

My favorite used bookstores don’t pad their shelves with outdated computer manuals collected from garage sale free bins. Each one offers a considered selection of literature that has outlived passing trends. They’re also a good place to start when I get anxiety over the impossibility of making a dent in the world’s literary offerings. Many secondhand-seekers lean on Thoreau’s advice to “read the best books first, or you may not have a chance to read them at all.” A used book’s very endurance is a reassuring vote of confidence that’s harder to find in a new bookstore, where untested titles offer little to go on besides literary world hype and a polished publisher’s blurb.

Of course, that very immutability might deserve some scrutiny. One discussion that regularly pops up among the staff is whether our selection is current enough or if our shelves are in danger of becoming a museum to unevolving taste, the way my husband’s music playlist loops only songs from the 70s (sorry, honey). We know the canonization of primarily white male authors wasn’t an accident of history, and it often came at the expense of silencing other voices. Our challenge is to curate shelves that showcase history’s best minds without propagating its worst attitudes. It’s a challenge we engage with by highlighting women authors and authors of color, and in some cases supplementing donations and estate-sale purchases with our own secondary-market purchases. (Cleveland’s Loganberry Books once brilliantly shelved all its books by male authors spine-in during Women’s History Month.)

Those efforts aside, I don’t think a book should be dismissed just because it’s not still warm from the presses. Taste isn’t linear—with only a bit of effort, I’ve discovered diverse voices and engaging

perspectives across the decades. Often that comes by paying special attention to the staff picks, which I know weren’t only meant to fill an afternoon or a slot on a school reading list; they fleshed out a part of that person’s mental framework that they hadn’t realized was barren and became something to fall back on again and again.

I’ve learned to treat a visit to a used bookstore less like a treasure hunt and more like a nature walk, with plenty of chances to enjoy myself along the way. Although searching for specific titles or authors has led to disappointment, curating a mental list of topics I can’t get enough of—New York in the 40s, the Beat generation, memoirs by female rock stars—gives me a place to start and regularly leads to happy surprises, especially when I look across genres.

When my own bookshelves start overflowing, I shop for my friends. Used books make the perfect low-stakes, just-because gift that won’t leave anyone feeling awkwardly indebted. Last year my friend was going through the tough process of having her eggs frozen. To lighten the mood, we would jokingly refer to the upcoming procedure as “the harvest” in our creepiest Halloween-witch voices. As a good-luck gift, I found a copy of Erica Jong’s aptly titled poetry book *Fruits and Vegetables*. (I starred the line “Ambition bites. Bite back.”) For other friends, I’ve found just-because gifts that spoke to their passions—Hitchcock, standard poodles—without even having those friends in mind when I walked in.

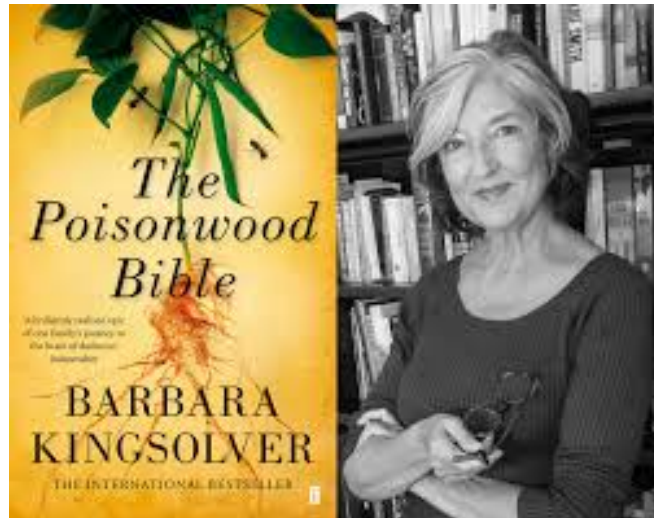
There are exceptions to every rule. Sometimes people come in asking for a specific book and I’m happily able to pull it off the shelf for them. Once a teenage boy came in looking for a copy of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. It turned out we had two copies, each by a different translator—an unlikely occurrence in a new bookstore. I watched in awe as another volunteer, a tech consultant by day, gamely explained the nuances of the different translations to help the boy decide.

Last weekend I was window-shopping in Santa Rosa and drawn into Treehorn Books. The wall-to-wall wooden shelves there are wonderfully over-crowded—any space above the rows of upright books is crammed with more books shelved horizontally, in defiance of neat alphabetization (every bookstore must take its own stance on whether that space is off limits or fair shelving game). I searched in the R’s for a specific Marilynne Robinson book but didn’t see anything by her. Instead, I wandered past shelves labeled for Pirates, Sabotage, and Disasters, got briefly absorbed in the Rodeos & Boardwalks section, and somehow ended up back in fiction where I snagged a pristine copy of Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing*.

That’s the kind of unexpected and satisfying journey I want everyone to have when they walk into a used bookstore to round out their summer reading list. I’ll continue to help people look for specific titles when they pop their heads in, but I’ll also encourage them to stick around and browse a bit. If you don’t know what you’re looking for, then you never know what you’ll find.



Nancy's Book Review



The Poisonwood Bible

by Barbara Kingsolver

I know you've probably read this book. I read it years ago, too. But for some reason I've been enjoying re-reading my old favorites. Maybe because I can't seem to find current books that I like as well as my old friends.

Barbara Kingsolver has written many really good books, but *Poisonwood Bible* is her real masterpiece. It's so beautifully written. It's a book about a lot of things: family relationships, religion, culture, politics, love, death, and socio-economic issues. All of these subjects are discussed in five different voices—the mother of the story and her 4 daughters. The beauty of Kingsolver's writing is that each voice is distinct to its owner.

The family, headed by their preacher father, took off for Africa and ended up in a small village in the Congo in the late 1950s. Their father, Nathan's goal was to baptize everyone in the

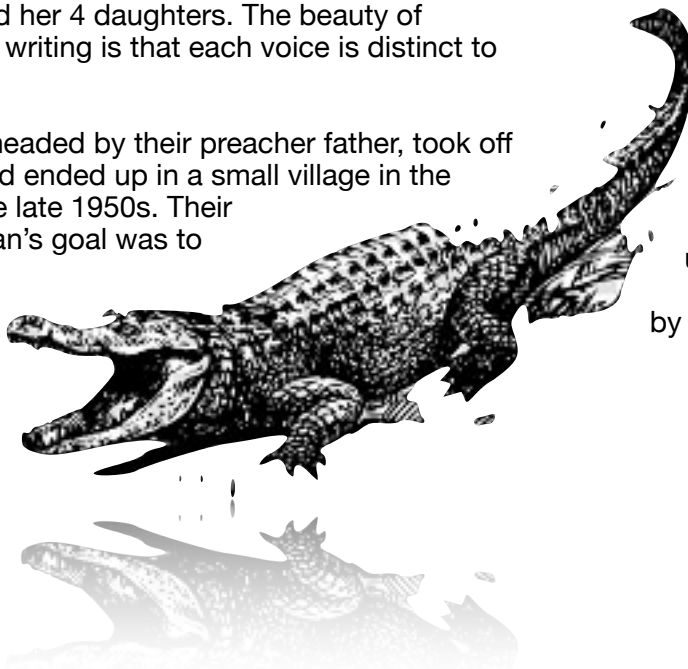
village by dunking them in the river. But the villagers were terrified of the river filled with crocodiles. This fact didn't dissuade Nathan. He was obsessed with his baptism challenge.

There are many discussions about religion—Nathan vs. the village chief, Nathan vs. the previous preacher, and Nathan vs. Anatole (his sidekick and interpreter). I found these arguments to be some of the most interesting in the book.

The lives of the four daughters are just as interesting. They couldn't be more different from one another. And we are fortunate to follow them from children to adulthood and read how their lives evolve.

Even though you've probably read this book, I'd encourage you to read it again. So much has happened in the world since the book was first published. Africa has gone through many changes over the years. This book will give you some history and references that will help you understand that part of the world.

by Nancy Javier



What is that perfume you're wearing?

The global pandemic has closed millions of bookstores all over the world and many people who used to browse their favorite shop, are unable to do so. Most people are now shopping online, but you miss the smell of a used bookstore and musty old paperbacks. One of the big new trends is a series of perfumes and colognes that smell like books.

[Powell's Books](#), the beloved independent shop in Portland, recently announced a limited-edition perfume that smells just like its seemingly endless rows of new and used titles. "This scent contains the lives of countless heroes and heroines. Apply to the pulse points when seeking sensory succor or a brush with immortality," Powell's says about the forthcoming release. Termed an "Eau de bookstore," the unisex fragrance was spurred by customers saying they missed the aroma of the shop during the ongoing pandemic. The packaging of Powell's by Powell's even resembles a bright red hardback that can sit inconspicuously on a shelf with other titles. You can [pre-order](#) a bottle now.



Commodity has released a new fragrance called [Commodity Book](#). This crisp, woody fragrance tips its hat to the Hemingway's and Fitzgerald's of the world, conjuring the warmth of a quiet moment curled up with a good book. Its complex blend of sparkling bergamot, spicy cypress and creamy sandalwood results in an unexpectedly fresh scent.

[Maison Margiela Replica Whispers in the Library](#) has a scent of wood wax and old books, endless bookshelves, and secret passageways are evoked in this eau de toilette. A mysterious Oriental composition, this fragrance for women and men is a bewitching blend of spicy and woody perfumes like pepper, vanilla, and cedar. It costs \$38 for the mini size and \$158 for the full size.

Demeter Paperback evokes a trip to your favorite library or used bookstore. Sweet and lovely with just a touch of the musty smell of aged paper, Demeter's Paperback harnesses that scent with a sprinkling of violets and a dash of tasteful potpourri. Ranges in price from \$3 to \$40.



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Nostalgia

Is time going slowly for you? Or speeding by? For me, it alternates. A day drags, and then a month is gone in a flash. Experts say it's because our routines are all upset. Like missing our shifts at the Bottom Shelf.

Well, if you weren't missing the store for the first part of the Coronavirus closure, I can bet you're beginning to long for a shift about now...just one shift where you can go to the back room and stuff your purse and jacket up on the shelf and see what everyone else has forgotten, including you.

It's not just us. Our town really misses the store too. **The Web Master for the library has noted that more enquiries are made about the Bottom Shelf than anything else about the library.**

I can assure you I've probably lost my badge by now. I saved it from a purse on it's way to the Angel Shop, but I'm afraid it got tossed in the last cleaning frenzy in April. Since then, we've barely cleaned at all, so the badge, if it's still at home, is probably buried under stuff.

I miss lots about the store. For one thing, my husband and I work together—so, it's a shared interest on Wednesdays. We make an afternoon



out of it. After work, we go to a local restaurant for an early dinner. I miss our "date" particularly now as we head into another lock-down phase. No working, and no dinner out.

I miss manning the cash register and getting to chat with the customers and Debbie, our manager. We all miss Jean's

cookies and a piece of red licorice. Gotta have one of those special treats. Nobody works for nothing.

Donations? Who doesn't miss the treasure-hunt aspect of a mountain of cardboard boxes piled on the floor. Even if it's one of those moldy, basement-stored, never-seen-the-light-of-day donations, full of outdated computer manuals, travel guides and old National Geographics. You never know when there's pearl hidden in the heap.

But maybe it's a really good donation and you get to see what jewels might have arrived, looking all plain Jane and ordinary in their cardboard box or plastic tote. Perhaps the donation will be full of new best sellers, or great coffee-table books, or cookbooks. I'm sure you, like me, never leave the store without purchasing an armload or more.

Let's look ahead to opening back up and making 2021 our best year ever.

by Helen McHargue

