

THERE WAS A TIME I USED TO LIVE IN A BOOKSHOP

When the editor of this publication suggested I should write a piece for BWD, as a Braidwood expat, I thought 'what fun'. Possibly it was the wine.

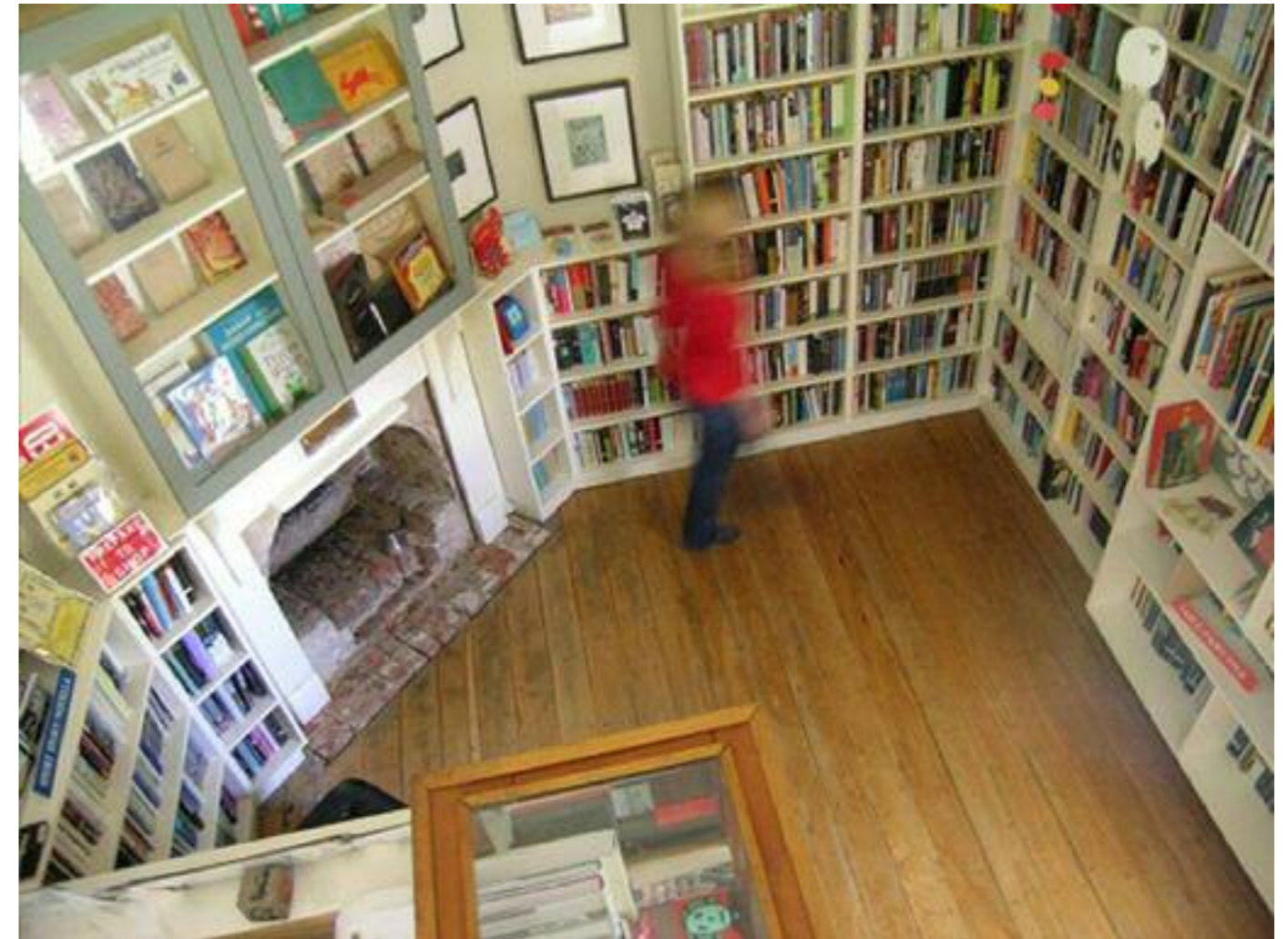
I spent 10 years of living and breathing local life: as a waitress; customer service officer; school admin assistant; festival committee member. But best of all I owned and ran a small independent bookshop for 5 years. I stayed in a relationship far too long because I didn't want to give up life in bookshelf lined rooms.

I've always been known as the person most likely to be found tucked away somewhere with a book. Having the bookshop allowed for this indulgence - it was research after all. Colder months were spent inside curled up with heaters and a cat. Warmer months outside with my legs in the sun with the fronts only getting a tan. Although outside time was brought to a halt when it was reported to the person

I used to live with that I was asking for it, sitting out on display like that. But the old miner's cottage where the bookshop was situated was lovely and cool through summer months, so no matter about small minded people. I moved back inside.

Meanwhile, between reading and trying to ignore the crazies, I worked on building a bookshop like none I had ever been to. It was a selfish bookshop - I found this to be the best description. The idea was to have books that other bookshops didn't stock.

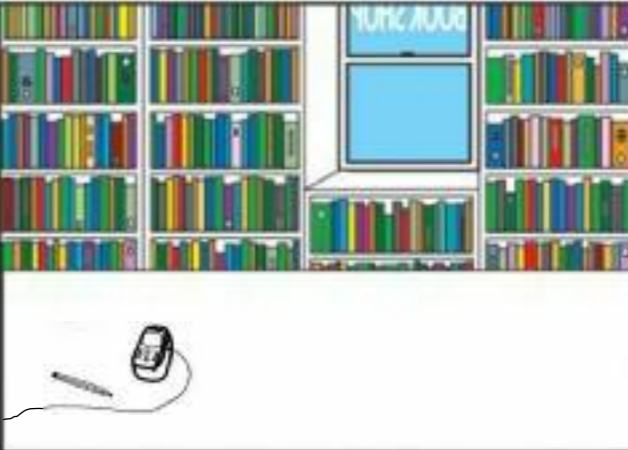
This meant becoming unpopular with some locals who couldn't understand why I didn't have a particular certain H.P. series on the shelves. I would try to patiently explain that I couldn't stock books that you could buy cheaper at large outlets than I could get wholesale. Instead I would source and make friends with people at small publishing houses, have great online conversations with like minded people around the world, and build on stock that was not available in bookshops anywhere in Australia.



BIBLIOFILES

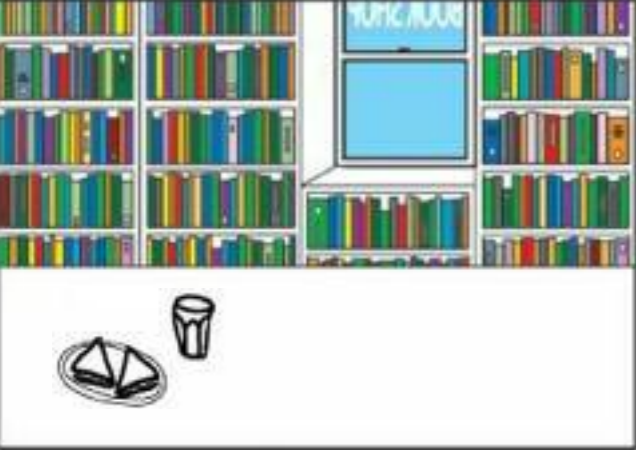
I had this very annoying dream last night, Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote me an abusive letter that made me feel bad. He said my bookshop was rubbish and he thought, from the start, that it was a really bad idea. It would never work, it was too small and specialised.

Why would anyone go into a bookshop where you can't get a best seller?



And what's more I had only ordered books from him when I had first opened the shop and he hadn't heard from me since, so he was discontinuing the relationship and hoped he would never hear from me again.

What an arse. I really hate Gabriel Garcia Marquez and his stupid books.



I. Hansen

I learnt a lot from running a business - ordering, paperwork, tax - but the biggest learning curve was people. Between admin work, waitressing and the shop I'm pretty sure I have met every character possible. Hilarious to awful and everything in between.

Sitting behind the counter and observing I dealt with some quite odd (annoying) customers and from these experiences grew a series of comics (see opposite). After all, one needs an outlet from the annoyances, the amusements and the atrociousness that are people.

It's nearly 3 years since I left Braidwood behind. I have driven through several times and stopped only a couple. Not completely sure why that is, but it doesn't feel like a bad thing.

So what am I doing now? I work at a place called Megalo which is a community access print studio and gallery. I have the best set of workmates that

anyone could ask for and a brand new set of characters to deal with in our members. I have also been teaching book design at the Canberra School of Art. (Teaching being something I never considered happening to me.)

My new life - because that is how I see it - is quite social. It's fun being back in the Canberra art community, catching up on years of lapsed relationships and creating new ones.

And at the end of long work days, or after late exhibition openings, I get to come home to the small, bookshelf lined flat I share with my partner and his 4 year old daughter.

Ingeborg Hansen
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Bibliofiles first appeared on www.chevie.org - an online fortnightly magazine, put together by Hartmann Wallis (if I remember correctly).