

Not All Bookstores Are Closing!

Some are opening and thriving.

by Happie Testa

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It's a sad sight. Store windows that were once thriving, covered over by large "Closing Sale" signs. In Toronto we have been mourning the loss of some important community literary champions. The closing of bookstores is especially sad because books are culture. A bookstore often becomes a destination in the community it serves, and, like all stores, it depends on the support of its community to thrive.

But while it is important to mourn and reflect on the steady decline of our appetite for printed books, we should also not wholly despair because not all bookstores are closing!

I know that because with my friend Hanoosh Abbasi, over a year ago we went and did the unthinkable: we opened up a children's bookshop! Granted, our store is small... very small, but it has survived for 15 months, and in that time it has been embraced by our community so much that is thriving and growing.

Our teeny tiny bookshop, Rainbow Caterpillar Multilingual Bookshop, is colourful and packed with children's books in over a dozen languages from around the world. On week-ends it is abuzz with activities, children singing in French or Spanish, moms or dads bouncing their babies while looking for birthday gifts, regulars dropping in to check out what's new or even just curious passersby coming in to see what we're all about. I know we're only a small example, but taking our cue from other great children's bookshops of our city like Ella Minnow in the Beaches and Mabel's Fables on Mount Pleasant, we're going out there and doing our best to nourish kids' love of books so that they may continue loving books when they are adults.

Our growth is mostly thanks to parents in looking for books in languages that are hard to come by, from French all the way to Hindi including Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese and many more.

To support this love of languages we do a few things, from offering classes and activities in our own bookshop, to participating in community events. But we also give material support to writers. Every year we give an Award to the best children's short story written in a language other than French or English, that's \$750 we give out of our own pocket. This year we are even adding a junior version of the competition for young writers. And that's not all! Last year we organized a very successful multicultural street festival for children where hundreds of kids and their parents enjoyed workshops, storytelling, performances, music and author readings all in different languages!!

So I say, while we mourn the passing of some of our dear bookstores, let's also not miss the opportunity to celebrate the birth of new ones that are doing more than surviving!

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