Notes From the NEIBA Advisory Council

Interview with a Bookseller: Two Booksellers and a Bagel

This morning’s Notes from the AC is brought to you by Bank Square Books, and Savoy Bookshop & Café, for another installment of Interview with a Bookseller. The bookseller in question, Thomas, just moved back to Mystic, CT after living in Portland, OR for three years. In addition to being an awesome bookseller, Thomas is a dear friend of mine, so when Thomas and I sat down in the café at Savoy cover cups of coffee, erotica...
anthologies, and a solitary bagel, our conversation was full of laughter, nostalgia, and catching up. This interview really captures Thomas' humor and sarcasm, and I can't wait for him to meet you all in upcoming NEIBA events!

**Name:** Thomas Sainsbury MacMahon (AKA Momas, like a mom)

**Store:** Bank Square Books in Mystic, CT, and Savoy Bookshop & Café in Westerly, Rhode Island. I'm a two-fer.

**Number of years identified as bookseller:** 9 years...it's almost 9 years since I worked that very first sidewalk sale!

**Favorite genre:** I read mostly fiction, with a focus on dark, young characters. I like sad stories.

**KELSY:** Start off by telling us your bookseller story...where did you get your start? How did you get where you are now?

**Thomas:** Growing up I had two friends who worked at BSB, Kelsy and Kat. I’d come in and hangout while they were working, and eventually was asked to volunteer during the sidewalk sale. I did that for two summers before I left for college. I got a summer job at BSB, basically because Kat told Annie to hire me, and I worked there every summer and holiday season until I graduated. I moved out to Portland, OR, a few years ago. I interviewed at Powell's and didn't get the job. So, I went into a brief retirement from bookselling at the ripe age of 23, but bookselling was always a part of me. Emailing Ginnie about getting my job back was the first thing I did when I decided to come out of retirement to move back to Connecticut and be bookseller again. I had really missed it.

**K:** Best part about being a bookseller?

**T:** Right now, the best is getting free audio books of Libro.fm. Shameless plug. But really, it's the connections you make with people. I love getting the chance to meet people and talk about books and what they like to read. I used to work in food service in Portland and talking about food wasn't as interesting as talking to people about books because everyone likes food. Not everyone likes to read and having the chance to help develop someone as a reader is wonderful.

**K:** What the best book you've read in the last year?

**T:** *Sick City* by NYT Bestselling Author Tony O'Neil. It's about two heroin addicts who meet in rehab and form a plan to set out and retrieve a lost sex tape starring Sharon Tate...and (maybe) Mama Cass...from the Mamas and the Papas. It was such a ridiculous book.
New England Book Awards!

All books must be either written by a New England based author or be set in New England.

Eligible books must be published between September 1, 2017 and August 31, 2018 in either hardcover or paperback.

DETAILS

Ci6 New England Scholarship Winners!

The awards cover the conference fee, a three-night stay at the host hotel, and up to $400 in travel expenses to the June 19-21 event at Sheraton New Orleans.

- **Abrams**: Casey Gerken, Innisfree Bookshop (Meredith, NH)
- **American Booksellers Association**: Isabelle Opper, That Book Store (Wethersfield, CT)
- **Baker & Taylor**: Margie Leonard, The Blue Bunny Books & Toys (Dedham, MA)
- **Book Industry Charitable Foundation**: Kinsey Foreman, Odyssey Bookshop (South Hadley, MA)
- **Disney Book Group**: Clarissa Murphy, Wellesley Books (Wellesley, MA)
- **Holiday House**: Betsy Covert, The Toadstool Bookshop (Keene, NH)
- **Seven Stories/Triangle Square**: Liz Whitelam, Whitelam Books (Reading, MA)
- **Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing**: Clarissa Hadge, Trident Booksellers & Café (Boston, MA)

K: What's your most memorable moment with a customer?

T: "Gasp" Alexandra Stoddard. A customer lost her gold bracelet. I got $50 bucks out of it. I didn't even find the bracelet.

K: Wait...you need to explain this one more...this is the first time I'm hearing about this? What happened?

T: Okay so someone found the bracelet and put it in the lost and found. I happened to be working when Alexandra came in asking if anyone had turned in a gold bracelet. I said "Yes! Here it is!", and she looked like she was going to cry when I gave it to her. Turns out her late husband had given it to her back in the 80's and she's been wearing it ever since. I almost said she's been wearing it for centuries...

K: [laughter] I wouldn't doubt it...that woman is eternal. I always assumed she ran on eternal positivity and grace. So where did the $50 come from?

T: She put it in a handwritten envelope. Okay, this is where the story gets weird. I'm in my home with my friend Eden, and I open this envelope that Alexandra had given me at the bookstore a couple of days after The Bracelet. Eden whips her head around and goes "WHERE DID YOU GET THAT ENVELOPE?" so I told her the story of The Bracelet, and it turns Eden knows Alexandra from the restaurant where she is a waitress, and WATCHED Alexandra write that note earlier in the day, having no idea that it was intended for me.

K: Last but not least, if money were no obstacle and you could design your very own bookstore, what unique flourish would you put on your store? And what would it be called?

T: I would want a bookstore that only opens from dusk til dawn...and I want it to be called From Dustjacket til Dawn. Just kidding, I don't want it to be called that. But I really do like the idea of a late-night bookstore with a bar, with lots of velvet chairs and leather booths, and black slate floors. Dark stone, cold atmosphere. I want it to be terrifying, 500 square feet, tiny. I want it to be a place for the freaks to go shopping. I'd do open mics and readings every night of the week. I want a place where I can go to work in my platform Doc Martens...even though I already do that. I'm thinking of the store that Giles from Buffy the Vampire Slayer buys.

K: Would you play Depeche Mode?

T: Noooo.....maybe.

K: Then what would you play for music?
Publisher Promotions

Every Monday morning we send out an email with a link and an attached Word document of active Publisher Special Offers. If you aren't signed up for this benefit email Nan@neba.org.

—Kelsy April, Savoy Bookshop & Cafe, Westerly, RI

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