



Joyce Fitzsimmons, in front of the neatly arranged and well-stocked children's section in her bookstore, The Book Peddler.

Books, Books Everywhere

A former school counselor helps readers of all ages find what they are looking for

By Jeanie Senior

When Joyce Fitzsimmons opened The Book Peddler on E. Jewett Boulevard in White Salmon in 2005, she planned to have a used bookstore that sold only children's books.

But as the only bookstore in town, it wasn't long before the inventory expanded to include books for all ages, and the shop became increasingly crowded.

Less than five years ago, The Book Peddler—with the slogan "Used But Not Abused Books"—relocated across E. Jewett to a sunny, larger space where Joyce can look through the window and see Mount Hood. There is room for an easy chair at the front of the store.

In the new store, the bookshelves stretch from the floor almost to the ceiling on both walls. The classics are shelved behind the checkout counter.

"You have to put books everywhere," Joyce says, noting her children's book section remains a major focus. One entire wall

and half of the center aisle are devoted to books for children and young adults. The books for younger children are in easy-to-search bins, with foam pads on the floor in front of the shelves for comfortable sitting and kneeling.

On a recent day, several children were there with their parents, perusing the books. When Lisa Neuburger, shopping with Nicolaas, 9, and Jin Bo, 6, asked about a few books, Joyce promptly started to search. She looked on the Internet and called Artifacts, a Hood River book store, to see what they had.

"We send books back and forth," Joyce says.

Artifact's owner has been a mentor to her, Joyce says, joking that he has been known to call The Book Peddler "Artifacts East."

"I am so much smaller," she says. "I have to consider myself a branch."

Joyce says one of her favorite things to do is hunt down books for people.

"I do anything I can to help people find what they need," she says.



Left, The Book Peddler's storefront in White Salmon. Above, Tiffany Chapman and her daughter Samantha find a few literary treasures.

Joyce has found books based on wisps of memory offered by people who can't recall a book's title or its author, just a few details. She found a book for someone who remembered only that it featured little mice in plaid coats and Mother's Day.

"People are very sentimental about books from their childhood," Joyce says.

She was charmed to learn that many of the tips on an online query site she uses come from librarians, one of whom told her, "I do this on my lunch hour. For some of us, it's like doing puzzles."

Joyce describes herself as an inveterate recycler.

"I have this major obsession with recycling," she says, "and I love thrift shops."

It is difficult for her to bypass a thrift shop, where she admits she has been known to whisper to the used books, "I will rescue you." She says it does feel like a rescue sometimes, to take a thrift shop book, clean and repair it, and put it on The Book Peddler's shelves.

Joyce is a Montana native. Her father raised Arabian horses. As a child, she was drawn to books with horse themes.

"I had an aunt and uncle who never had children and they

would send these lovely books as presents," Joyce says.

She particularly remembers Marguerite Henry's Newberry Award-winning "King of the Wind, The Story of the Godolphin Arabian."

Joyce's third-grade teacher introduced her to another favorite, "The Black Stallion," by Walter Farley. She read her way through Farley's horse sagas, and sat down and wrote a letter to Farley—and he answered.

Later she branched out to "The Once and Future King"—she still enjoys reading anything about King Arthur—and also Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, which she rereads about every five years.

She says she and her husband, Raymond, and their two adult daughters, both school teachers, have an ongoing debate about the ending of "Life of Pi," another book she loves.

"There are so many good authors now, it just blows my mind," she says.

Joyce started her bookshop after spending 21 years as a counselor at Cascade Locks School. She calls the bookstore business her retirement.

"I think I've always been kind of a librarian wannabe," she says.

Joyce's "retirement" keeps her busy, but there is some flexibility built in. The bookstore is open Tuesday through Saturday, and she says her hours are 10:30ish to 5:30ish.

"I know I can put the closed sign on the door and say I am gone to play with my grandchildren," she says. "People can call my cell phone if they really need something." ■