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Feature Writing

Bent Pages Bookstore

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Molly Bolden pulls a book off the shelf, rubs it and just says thank you. “I want a real book. I want to be able to touch it. I want to be able to go back to Page 36 which was my favorite part and reread that…And maybe reread the entire book again depending on how happy it made me when I read it.”

When Bolden reads a book, she forms a relationship with the book and its characters. She explains some people don’t develop relationships with books like she does.

 Bolden says technology and digital book systems such as the e-reader are objects today that create a place where people do not do real things anymore. “Women replace men with things that run on batteries too. I have a real husband; sometimes he’s a pain in the butt, but he’s real… We are replacing things that are real with things that aren’t. I don’t think it’s good for us as a country, as a nation, and as human beings… I think you need real things.”

Bolden says she thinks an e-reader is wonderful to some places. She explains if someone works in New Jersey and travels to New York daily on a train, it would be convenient to have an e-reader, or if someone traveled to Europe, the individual would not want to carry along 12 books. She says that most of her customers can easily read 12 books in one week.

 Bolden, the co-owner of a used bookstore, *Bent Pages Bookstore and Coffee Shop* in Houma, Louisiana, thinks that technology has affected the number of customers coming into her store. Some of her customers use e-readers now. She says some customers who bought the e-readers were disappointed with them because the customers could not get the personal interaction they got at her store when deciding which book to read. Bolden explains some have come back to talk about their experience with the systems and said that the systems were expensive to get fixed. She says that most books people are commonly reading these days are much cheaper to buy at her used bookstore than they are to purchase on the kindle or any other e-reader. “You’re saving money if you get a used book. Most mass market used books are about $4 at the most. With an e-reader, it’s often more expensive and you are also not able to trade it back.” Bolden explains *Bent Pages* has a trade-in policy that gives customers credit for their next set of books they purchase at her store. She says that the discount they give on new books makes them extremely competitive with bookstores in town such as Books-A-Million because they give 30 percent off on new books and one half the price of used paperback books.

 Bolden and her business partner, Kay Levine, opened *Bent Pages* 16 years ago. When Bolden met her business partner Levine, she was working at a used bookstore previous to *Bent Pages. “*Levine was a nurse in critical care and was ready for a career change. She told me ‘I couldn’t see myself pulling lines at the age of 70 but I could see myself selling books at the age of 70.’” She says that between the two of them they could learn to tear up a steel ball. They both started reading at a young age, are college educated and have read most of the books in the literature area. Levine says what makes them different from other bookstores is they have more personal interaction with the customers, have the knowledge of the books, and are able to help the customer make the right selection. “We don’t just go look at this shelf and pull a book out. We ask who have you read and recommend a book.”

Bolden reads every book genre so she knows a little about each different type of book, because she wants to have the knowledge to help almost anyone who comes in the store. “I’m passionate about reading and the industry. I know what books can do for people.”

She has a collection of over 10,000 books at her house that she has read and could never part with. “If you come here and you buy a book and isn’t a good book, even if I had nothing to do with it and you picked it out yourself. You will still associate that bad feeling about that book that you read with me or with the store.” If she knows a book is not good she will let them know if there is something in the book the person is not going to like. “People appreciate that. There is nothing worse than getting your book and you finally have the time to sit down and read it and you hate it. Some books are just badly written. How they get published I’m not sure.”

Bolden says *Bent Pages* is unique because they sell books that are often out of print that box stores such as Books-A-Million do not sell. She explained they also promote local writers and have two conferences yearly. One of the writer’s conferences is in conjunction with the *Nicholls Jubilee Festival*. The conference is at the Terrebonne Parish Main Library in April. “It’s important that we do something for the community.” Bolden says the committee she is on brings in experts from New York, agents and editors from New York, and *New York Times* best-selling authors come to speak. She explains that the conferences are time consuming but she enjoys helping people in the community get published by regular publishing companies.

Bolden and Levine has the ability to listen and take the time to listen to what people say to figure out what the customer really wants. Bolden says sometimes the customer does not even know the type of book they want but by talking to them she is able to know what direction to go in to recommend a book to the customer.

 Bolden says her store has a relaxed atmosphere and it is a place people enjoy coming to. “We try to make people happy. We want people to have a place to come to that they like and a place they want to come back to. That’s more important than getting $2.35 out of you for a book.”

From the outside Bent Pages is a large tall green building that might strike ones curiosity passing by. When the customer walks into the store they are greeted by the aroma of used books and coffee. The bookshelves are wall to wall and stacked high with books and boxes of books are sporadically placed on the old wooden floor throughout the store. To the back of the building there is a café with homey tables, chairs, and aromas. The two owners always greet their customers with a smile and are willing to help them find any book they are looking for or to suggest a book they think the customer might like. Bolden said, “The two businesses that failed in the United States the most are used bookstores and restaurants and we have both.” She explained the atmosphere and personal interaction with customers has made *Bent Pages* a place people enjoy coming to.