

Bidding farewell to Greetings & Readings

You never want to see a business close, but seeing a local, family-owned business shut its doors after many years in the community is especially sad. So I was really sorry when I saw that Greetings & Readings is set to close later this month.

The world needs bookstores—and nothing tops a strong local bookstore with gifts for everyone and anyone, including Baltimore-related items.

I have to admit that I am especially sorry to lose Greetings & Readings because I'm a former employee. I worked there back when I was trying to earn money during summer and Christmas vacations to help pay for college. It wasn't always easy work, but it was interesting and rewarding. I learned so much from my colleagues and the customers there—lessons I still apply today.

Back then, in the late '90s, Greetings & Readings was located at Taylor Avenue and Loch Raven Boulevard. Because this is Baltimore, every day I saw customers I knew from other parts of my life, which was always fun. But even the people I didn't know were mostly delightful. It was easy to engage strangers in conversations about the people they were shopping for or the books they were selecting. You don't meet many unhappy people when you're working behind the candy counter.

Franny oversaw the cashiers, and she was a natural leader and teacher. We had plenty to learn as employees—and especially as cashiers, where the stakes seemed to be higher—and she was patient and kind and could diffuse a situation with a customer who was upset.

A cashier is often invisible, so I enjoyed the challenge of welcoming each person and making a connection during the brief check-out interaction before we said goodbye.

I remember telling one of my sisters that I didn't want to sound false when I said, "Have a good day!"

She said, "But you *do* really want them to have a good day." And I realized that of

course I did.

But I didn't just work as a cashier. At Greetings & Readings you could pitch in and learn anything—and might even need to fill in a new department tomorrow, so you had to be nimble and flexible. I learned how to sell classy ballpoint pens and how the greeting cards were organized and how to weigh truffles and where to find pretty much everything in the store.

And everything I know about blowing up—and silently popping—balloons I learned while working in the party department. I can't tell you how many times I've used my balloon skills since leaving G&R.

Everyone should have some experience working in retail, and Greetings & Readings was a perfect place for me to get mine. It gave me important perspective on the people I interact with every day who work in customer service. But it also taught me lessons I still use in my personal and professional life. It showed me the importance of learning as much as you can about an organization because you never know what question someone will ask. And it helped me see how wonderful it can be to work as a member of a team of people who look out for one another.

It also made me hungry for a good post-Christmas sale. One of my favorite days every year was Dec. 26 when people would line up outside the store to get the discounted merchandise. As I rang up their purchases, we would marvel at the prices together—and admire their selections. Is there any joy that rivals buying a beautiful Christmas item at 75 percent off? I get excited just thinking about.

We may greet a new business to that Hunt Valley location—and I certainly hope we do. But Greetings & Readings will never be replaced.

Photo by Linda McHale Poggi