

In search of the Good Deal

Like everything else in the free enterprise system, the Good Deal is subject to the laws of supply and demand.

The more people there are looking for a bargain, the fewer bargains there are to be had — the incongruous end result of which is that the Good Deal escalates in price.

Books, however, are a different case.

Perhaps it's because we're such a literate society, and have glutted the market with more books than one culture can conceivably digest. Perhaps most people have an aversion to saving books, which are heavy for their volume, and not too convenient for such a mobile people.

Whatever the cause, books have one of the fastest depreciation rates in the vast wilderness of American products. And the world has become a smorgasbord of cheap reading material.

For many people, used and inexpensive books are associated with the Smith Family Bookstore, J. Michaels, and the Book Fair. These three places offer an organized stock and wide selection, all important factors when one wants to find a copy of *Slaughterhouse Five* with a minimum amount of

fuss.

But when it comes to the Good Deal, these stores are left in the dust by a half-dozen other places in the Eugene-Springfield area.

Witness some of these bargains:

A four volume hardcover set of F. Scott Fitzgerald for \$1.

Hardcover editions of John Fowles, D. H. Lawrence, Franz Kafka, William Faulkner, Carlos Castaneda, John Steinbeck and James Agee for 10 to 30 cents.

Paperbacks by virtually every author in print for under a quarter.

Of course, one pays in other ways — the best places are in chaos, and sifting through takes time. But there is something to be said for the art of browsing.

For one thing, it's good therapy, and teaches patience. For another, titles are dropped from their narrow categories, giving one a true egalitarian perspective of literature. And finally, one never knows what one might find.

Just a few blocks from my house in Springfield is Granny's bookstore. Unique in many respects — not the least of which is the fact that it's half

of a carpet shop — Granny's provides a very different view of the literary world.

To begin with, it has one of the largest detective/mystery selections in the area. One whole wall features virtually everyone who has ever written a detective novel, including some of the greater authors not usually found in Smith or J. Michaels — Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler being two.

A reliable source tells me that Granny's has 14 of John D. McDonald's 16 Travis McGee novels.

Granny's is also the source for much of my good-but-little-known-writers collection. For example, the store always has three or four Nelson Algren titles. Algren's *A Walk on the Wild Side* is a fine novel, the seed for Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion*, yet Granny's is the only place in town where I've found either that or any of his other books.

Part of the Good Deal, of course, is the price. Granny's, like Smith, charges half the cover price. The store, however, takes in dozens of older paperbacks, going as far back as the 40s and 50s, when novels were 25 to 50 cents.

The risk, of course, is that the leaves will fall out before one is finished with the book. But then, there's something

comfortable about a well-read paperback held together by a rubber band.

The other place similar to Granny's is Western Exchange, on River Road.

Western Exchange had a nice, crammed-in feeling at their old location down the block. One always feels a sense of discovery when finding a book somewhere behind a stack or under a window sill, and Western Exchange had more nooks to search out than most.

But, to coin a cliché, times change, and bookstores change with them. The Exchange is now located in a room with about as much floor space as a gymnasium and an atmosphere to match.

Furthermore, their organization has serious deficiencies. Much of their stock is stacked up on shelf after shelf, and it takes an abnormal metabolism to get through much of it.

Western's advantage is the stock. They have over 50,000 volumes, and however inaccessible they might be, that's a lot of books.

They've also cornered the market on Steamy Southern Novels. If anyone is interested in completing their Mandingo series, this is the place to go.

The search for the Good Deal in Eugene and Springfield invariably leads to one place: the thrift shop. This area is blessed with three Goodwills, two Salvation Armys, and two St. Vincent de Pauls, and my best finds have been at these stores.

The Goodwills, though a bit more expensive, are probably the best. For one thing, they're cheap — at least one-third the cover price, and usually less. For another, their shelves are stocked randomly, leaving the element of discovery, but not so extensive as to be overwhelming. And finally, they sell their hardcovers at prices occasionally lower than the paperbacks. It's often possible to buy a hardcover for 30 cents, sell the paperback which it's replacing to Smith Family for 50 cents, and come out 20 cents ahead.

The Salvation Armys and St. Vincent de Pauls don't have the selection or class of the Goodwills. But their prices are rock-bottom — 10-25 cents.

All three offer the opportunity to buy best-sellers and occasional classics for a couple of bits. But their greatest appeal is their ability to come up with the Big Surprise. Combine the Big Surprise and the Good Deal, and Smith Family begins to look very pale.

My most recent BS-GD was *On High Steel: The Education of an Iron Worker*, by Mike Cherry. Studs Terkel calls it "a rare book," and he's right.

And last week, I unearthed a 1946 first edition paperback of Walter Lippman's *Public Opinion*, a classic that virtually laid the groundwork for everything we know today about stereotypes.

Other subjects I've explored recently, courtesy of the thrift shops, include nature and health (*Nature the Healer*, *Homestead Kitchen and Cellar*, *Trees: Yearbook of Agriculture*, 1949), ethnic poetry (*From the Belly of the Shark*), pornography (*Inch by Inch* from the traveler's companion series), and games (*Great Brilliancy Prize Games of the Chess Masters*).

A Good Deal is not necessarily synonymous with a Great Book. That's one of the nice things about the thrift shops — one can indulge, buy trashy escapist literature, and not worry too much about irreparable damage to the bank account.

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