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### What Do You Mean, “Bookseller is Not an Occupation?”

Staring at the unemployment form online, I searched for any word on the list that correctly described my line of work. “Bookseller” wasn’t there; neither was “author event manager,” “knowledge professional,” or even “Retail Sales–Books.”

I tried typing in “Bookseller,” but the template insisted I pick one of the pre-ordained choices. So I chose “Retail Sales,” pausing to wail to my husband about the utter injustice of the system. “Now they’ll think I can get a job selling just anything! Like shoes! I don’t know anything about shoes!”

I always think of shoe sales when I try to imagine working in some other type of store. Maybe it’s because of Joan Bauer’s great book *Best Foot Forward*, although I sure wouldn’t be a good shoe salesperson like the teenage girl in that.

I felt terrified when I was told I’d be laid off from my job as a bookseller, after a decade at Paulina Springs Books. A need for less staff following the sale of one of the store’s two locations had made this necessary. For my whole adult life, I’d worked almost exclusively in the world of books, at various bookstores and libraries. Now I was about to be unemployed in an area where book-related jobs aren’t plentiful, and worse, the Oregon Employment Department apparently thought I could just as happily get a job selling, well, bobble-head dolls or something. Or shoes.

After some more wailing, I completed my unemployment registration, still wishing I could tell them something like, “I’m a bookseller, dammit, not a retail salesperson.”

But...I’m not a bookseller. At least, not right now. And as frightening as it is to lose that title, there’s also some freedom in peeling off a label.

So what am I doing now that I’m not selling books?

Of course (ironically) I have more time to read. I finally read the first of Phillip Gulley’s *Harmony* series, *Home to Harmony*, and started on the second. Though, for me, it wasn’t as absorbing as Jan Karon’s *Mitford* books, to which it regularly gets compared, I’m finding the series

enjoyable. I'm getting attached to Sam, the Quaker minister who's having a crisis of faith, and to Asa and Jessie Peacock, who are trying to figure out what on earth to do with their money after winning the lottery. Gulley presents truths about humans with a wonderfully light touch.

I'm also loving Rosanne Parry's new children's book, *The Turn of the Tide*, a modern seafaring tale. After a tsunami in his Japanese hometown, Kai is sent to Astoria, OR to live with his cousin Jet's family. Jet and Kai take on a sailing race in a story chock full of adventure. As well as enjoying Parry's other books immensely, I've had the privilege of meeting her, and she is one of the kindest, most genuine people I know. I'll have to figure out creative ways to champion my favorite authors' books now—I sure miss hand-selling. *Turn of the Tide*

I'm also working more on coping with my health. For the past few years, as my migraines worsened and became chronic, I pushed coping with them to a back burner. Although (thanks to Oregon's public health insurance) I see a knowledgeable neurologist, so far we have been unable to find a good way to prevent me from having daily migraines. When I was working, I dealt with them by taking a daily stream of medication and pretending as hard as I could that everything was fine.

While at the library recently, I stumbled on the book *How to Live Well With Chronic Pain and Illness*, by Toni Bernhard. I'd seen it briefly at the bookstore and fleetingly thought of buying it, but I didn't know how helpful it would be. I'm now almost halfway through Bernhard's book and am very impressed by her wisdom, compassion, knowledge, and practicality. I want to buy a copy of this book for everyone I know who has a chronic illness of any kind, but since I'm unemployed, this isn't possible. So I'll just tell you here that if you struggle with any kind of chronic condition, I urge you to get to your local library and check out this book. Yes, I'm shamelessly promoting reading it for free over buying it, even at your local indie store. So sue me; I'm not a bookseller anymore! This book will help you accept your life as it is, even appreciate it, and be gentle and wise with yourself.

I don't feel as lost not being a bookseller as I'd thought I would. I went through most of my mourning for losing my job before I left it, as I was given a good amount of notice. Sometimes I miss being there, especially the talking about books part. A lot of days, though, I don't think about it

that much. This almost stuns me.

Someday I hope to be a bookseller again, somewhere. But maybe life will take me in a whole different direction. For now, I'm just, well, me. And that feels sort of good.

I do wish I could set the Employment Department straight, though