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Opening Extract from...

More Weird Things Customers Say in Bookshops

Written by Jen Campbell

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INTRODUCTION

The world of bookselling is anything but boring. In the past year a drunk man has thrown up on my shoes, a woman convinced herself I was hiding Hugh Grant in our storeroom, and a little girl tried to get to Narnia through one of our cupboards. And that's just the beginning.

Sometimes bookselling is the best job in the world. For example: a few months ago a customer gave us a call and said she was looking for a book she'd had as a child. She wanted to buy it to read to her grandchildren. As luck would have it, we had a copy, so we posted the book out to her. The following day, the customer called us back to say the book had arrived, and she couldn't believe it: it was her copy. Her copy of the book from when she was a child. It had the inscription on the frontispiece from her great aunt, and a bump to the spine where she'd accidentally dropped it when she was seven. Her mother had sold the book in a car boot sale forty years ago, two hundred miles away from our bookshop. Somehow, we'd come across it and, somehow, she'd happened to call us. Moments like that are just wonderful.

On a day to day basis, customers of all kinds make the bookselling world interesting. This book will show you the weird and wonderful side of that. The strange requests. The odd comments. The rude remarks. Not to mention the, quite frankly, amazingly awesome things children say – such as the boy who told me that, when he's older, he's going to

become a book ninja. I have no idea what a book ninja is, but I want to hire that kid. Children are excellent.

Chatting to people about about *Weird Things Customers Say in Bookshops*, and travelling to other bookshops to talk about the book, has been a wonderful experience. I'm thrilled to be introducing the sequel. Like last time, this book also has quotes sent in from booksellers across the world, and there are some quotes from librarians, too. It's comforting (I think) to know that people are saying strange things everywhere.

Finally, this book has a little section at the back with some weird things said to me at *Weird Things...* book signings. Now there's a mouthful. Don't ask. Just read.

The other day, a customer asked me what my favourite 'weird thing' was. I told him that changed all the time, but I have a particular fondness for the person who asked if Anne Frank had written a sequel to her diary. The man laughed and said: 'You should have told her that she ghostwrote it!' I think I might love that customer.

Many thanks to the Twitter followers and bloggers who have come to visit Ripping Yarns after reading *Weird Things...* Special thanks to the two French guys who acted out scenes from the book in the middle of the shop – in French. Excellent stuff. And, seriously, to everyone who goes into bookshops – whether you happen to say weird things or not – thank you for supporting those bookshops.

Long live bookshops, their booksellers, and every single one of their customers. (Well, maybe not the guy who threw up on my shoes. Everyone else still counts.)

Jen Campbell

Ripping Yarns Bookshop

where I work, is an antiquarian bookshop in north London. Owned by Celia Mitchell, it's been a bookshop since the 1930s. We specialise in old children's books, but sell everything from biography and poetry to esoteric and ephemera.

BOOKSELLER: Hi. Can I help you find anything?
CUSTOMER: Yes. This is your history section, right?
BOOKSELLER: Yep.
CUSTOMER: I can see you've got books on World War I and World War II.
BOOKSELLER: Yes, we do.
CUSTOMER: But I can't find any books on World War III. Where are those?

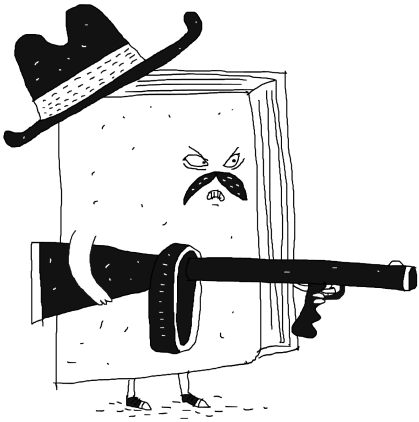
CHILD: Mummy, who was Hitler?
MOTHER: Hitler?
CHILD: Yeah. Who was he?
MOTHER: Erm, he was a very bad man from a long time ago.
CHILD: Oh. How bad?
MOTHER: He was like … he was like Voldemort.
CHILD: Oh! That's really, really bad.
Mother: Yes.
CHILD: *(Pause)* So, did Harry Potter kill Hitler, too?

CUSTOMER *(picking up a copy of* Little Women*)*: Is this a book about really short people?

CUSTOMER *(pondering)*: How much would a signed copy of the Bible be worth?
BOOKSELLER: Signed by whom?
CUSTOMER: Well … I don't know. Not God, obviously. *(Nervous laugh.)* That would be silly … wouldn't it?

CUSTOMER: I'd like to return this *Where's Wally?* book, please.
BOOKSELLER: Why?
CUSTOMER: Because I've found him.

CUSTOMER: Can you recommend a book of spells to raise pets from the dead?
BOOKSELLER: …
CUSTOMER: Just animals, you understand – not people. I don't want my husband coming back.



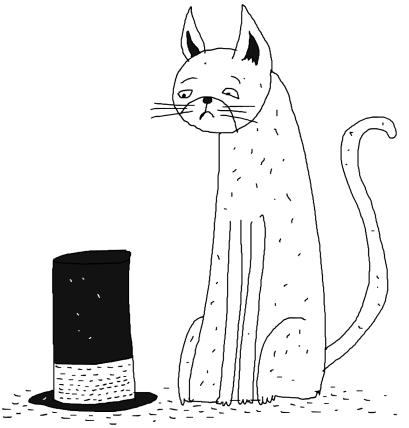
CUSTOMER: Do you make wanted posters for books?
BOOKSELLER: … How do you mean?
CUSTOMER: I mean, can I bring you a list of books that I'm looking for, and then you could make them into wanted posters and put them up around the bookshop, in case other customers know where I could find them?
BOOKSELLER: Erm, I have a 'Wants' book that I can put your list of books in, and then I can let you know if we get those books in stock? Or I can try and track the books down for you myself, by calling other antiquarian booksellers?
CUSTOMER: No, that's OK. I like to pretend that the books are criminals, and that I'm tracking them down, like I'm the police. It's more fun that way.
BOOKSELLER: … OK.

(Customer tries to walk out of the bookshop with a book that he hasn't paid for)
BOOKSELLER: Excuse me, you haven't paid for that book.
CUSTOMER: Yeah, I know. Don't worry; I'll bring it back tomorrow!

CUSTOMER *(buying* Thirteen Ways to Dispose of a Dead Body*, whispers seriously)*: There are actually fourteen, you know.

CUSTOMER: You've got a lot of books in here.
BOOKSELLER: Yep.
CUSTOMER: Do you ever just, like, sit here and count them?
BOOKSELLER: No, not really.
CUSTOMER: How long do you think it would take to count them all?
BOOKSELLER: A long time; we've got thousands and thousands of books.
CUSTOMER: How many exactly?
BOOKSELLER: … I don't know. I haven't counted.

CUSTOMER: The Very Hungry Caterpillar was bulimic, right?



LITTLE GIRL *(pointing at* Dr. Seuss *books)*: I made a hat for my cat, but he won't wear it. That book is full of lies.

♦

CUSTOMER: Where would I find a book about William Shakespeare?
BOOKSELLER: We've probably got one in our biography section. I'll have a look for you.
CUSTOMER: Wouldn't it be in fiction? I mean, he wasn't a real person or anything, right?

CUSTOMER: I'm looking for this picture book for my daughter. I read about it in a review somewhere. I think it's by someone called E. L. James.
BOOKSELLER: Erm, I don't think it was by that person; that's who wrote *Fifty Shades of Grey*.
CUSTOMER *(going bright red and clutching her handbag, as though hiding something inside it)*: Oh! I don't know how that name cropped into my head, then. I've certainly never read any of those books! Never!

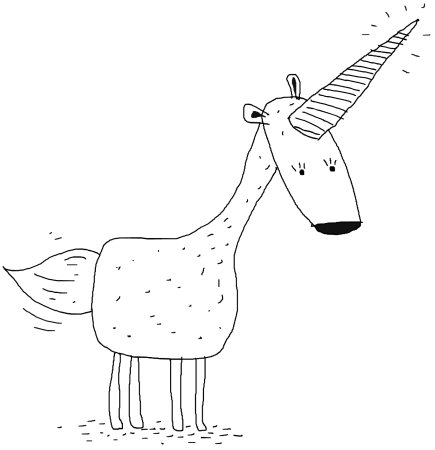
CUSTOMER: Did they make a film edition of the Bible when *The Passion of the Christ* came out? You know, the text of the Bible, but with Mel Gibson on the front cover?

CUSTOMER: My Kindle's broken. Do you know how to fix it?
BOOKSELLER: I'm afraid Kindles aren't really my speciality.
CUSTOMER *(pulls her Kindle out of her bag)*: Look at it! I dropped it in the bath!
BOOKSELLER: If you did that with a book, you could just put it on the radiator and then flatten it out between two heavier books.
CUSTOMER *(seriously)*: Do you think that would work for this, too?

CUSTOMER: Do you have a copy of this book but with the title in red, instead of green? And maybe with a different background image, too?
BOOKSELLER: … No.

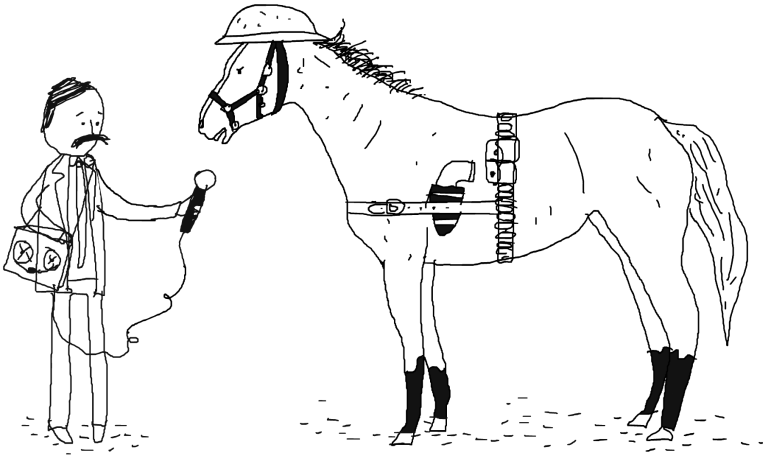
CUSTOMER *(holding up a book)*: What's this? *The Secret Garden*? Well, it's not so secret now, is it, since they bloody well wrote a book about it!

CUSTOMER: Do you have a book on how to found countries? I want to know if it's possible to claim my back garden as a separate nation.



CUSTOMER: Do you have books on how to look after horses?
BOOKSELLER: Yep, they'll be in our nature section.
CUSTOMER: Great. I need to do research on how to look after unicorns, and they're basically the same thing.
BOOKSELLER: …

♦

(A customer is reading a book about the nativity)
CUSTOMER *(to her friend)*: Don't you ever get the feeling that Baby Jesus is somehow related to Herod? I always freak out, thinking that he's going to go: 'JESUS. I AM YOUR FATHER!'

CUSTOMER *(to her friend)*: You know the book *War Horse*?
CUSTOMER'S FRIEND: Yeah.
CUSTOMER: It's about horses during a war, right?
CUSTOMER'S FRIEND: Yeah, I think so.
CUSTOMER: But, like, how did they interview the horses to find out what it was like during the war?
CUSTOMER'S FRIEND: Dunno.
CUSTOMER *(clicks her fingers)*: Got it. Did they use a horse whisperer or something?
CUSTOMER'S FRIEND: I guess they must have done.
CUSTOMER: That's, like, so cool.