



Call My Bookie!

The further back I go into memory when writing these little stories, the more vague and unreliable things get, I suspect. I always try to put things down 'exactly as they happened', but after fifty years have passed, who can tell the difference between real memories and embroidered (or imagined!) ones?

Some memories though, do seem stronger than others, no doubt due to their importance to us. As I sit here in my room this evening preparing this episode, I can look around at - let me pause to count - well over 20 meters of bookshelf, and every inch of it crammed with books of all sorts. There are yet more in the next room (the kitchen!) and it saddens me to realize that these accessible volumes are perhaps only about half of my library; the rest are still in boxes waiting to be unpacked.

So when it comes to remembering episodes about books and visits to bookshops and the library, I think I can trust my memory fairly well. No need for embroidery here; nobody would believe it!

Although we had nothing at home that would qualify as a 'library', when I was growing up there were always books around; there were a couple of bookcases in the living room, and a weekly visit to the local library was rarely missed. These visits were usually made in the family car, as our weekly 'haul' was just too much to carry comfortably, and I remember sitting in the back seat on the way home trying to keep my hands off the stack, knowing that if I spent too much time reading one while we were moving, it would have dire consequences ...

Years later, when I had my own kids, pretty much the same scenarios played out. There were plenty of bookshelves around for them to dig through, and we made regular trips to the library (although in our case as it was by bicycle, I wonder if the girls ever started to read their books on the way home while perched in the carrier?)

But then came the day - as they approached middle school age - when they left my home to go and live in Canada with their mother. This also involved a major language change for them, as up to that time they had lived (and read) mostly in Japanese, but would now be using English as their main language. I hoped that they would continue reading a lot, but as they were now out of my 'control' I was at a loss as to how to help make this happen.

Inspiration struck though, and I found a way through. This was before the internet, but with the help of a friend over in Vancouver, I located a used bookshop near their home that had a good rich selection of books that would be suitable for them. I contacted the owner, and arranged to set up an account for the girls, making an advance payment to him. At my instructions he prepared two customized Gift Cards and sent these to the girls that Xmas. They were not to know how this was being financed; simply they had free run of the shop, to select a couple of books each time they visited, perhaps bringing back for resale some of the books they had previously taken home.

It worked wonderfully; they made frequent visits to the shop, and for the next few years, were never without good things to read. I kept their account topped up as necessary, although it turned out that the owner helped with this; he became so friendly with the girls that he became very loose with the accounting, and on occasion, when I was sure that their account must have run dry, he would say "Oh, don't worry about it; they're still OK ..."

So what makes me remember this now, after all that time? Well, did you read the story about my grandson a few weeks back, reading the book about the First World War? It's time to hunt up another shop!

Do such places still exist?

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