

CHARLIE ALICE RAYA

Casey's bookshop

A concluding example & story for the book stations tour

e a s y t o w n b o o k s

Blue Meadows

The coastal village of Blue Meadows, in the north-west of England, was founded some centuries ago by a handful of families, fishermen and farmers.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Blue Meadows had grown into a small town, prosperous thanks to the rising demand for fish.

The last quarter of the twentieth century saw a rapid decline of the family-run fishing businesses, many of which had to give up — at least fishing. In the following period, former fishing families transformed Blue Meadows into a place for tourists. The highlights were an old fishing boat, which had been turned into a museum, and the beautiful harbour area, which was now a place where people went for a stroll or visited the fish restaurant.

Casey knew the story of Blue Meadows well, and when she was small, she often dreamed of travelling back in time to when her great-grandfather owned seven fishing boats, which made him the second most important fisherman in the village.

In her dreams Casey would dress up as a boy and beg her great-grandfather to take her on one of his adventures.

And what adventures they had: fighting sea monsters, braving life-threatening storms, uncovering plots by devious sailors, fighting villains who had smuggled themselves on board, or landing on a secret island full of terrible beasts.

Casey's love for stories and for Blue Meadows influenced her decision to open a bookshop. But there was something else. Casey wanted to share the worlds she discovered in books.

So many people only knew a handful of authors like Shakespeare, Austen, Dickens, Doyle, Woodhouse, Priestley, Christie. But what about contemporary writers? What about writers from other countries, other cultures? Or writers with disabilities? Or queer writers? Or writers who had faced death and were starting over? Or writers who had to stay anonymous,

because in their country they couldn't speak freely or didn't have an accepted gender?

There were so many worlds to discover.

And that decided Casey to open a bookshop and to share her discoveries with the people of Blue Meadows. And she got lucky. An old house on the road to the harbour became available.

More than twenty years later, Casey still loved to discover new worlds, and her bookshop was known everywhere in the region and beyond.

It was called Worlds.

Yet another world

book stations worldwide heard of Casey's bookshop, and one fine morning, Frederick, a member of the book stations worldwide team, opened the door and stepped into Casey's world.

'You mean, do I want a book station?' Casey asked bluntly, after Frederick had introduced himself.

'Oh, I was thinking small—' Frederick stopped and looked around Casey's bookshop, remembering a description he had read: 'Imagine you enter a room full of books and warmth and little corners to sit in, and everything is composed in a way as if the room itself was the most intricate painting with thousands of details all belonging to the worlds presented in the books. This is Worlds, Casey's bookshop.'

Frederick frowned and looked at Casey again. 'I can't imagine that you would ever exchange this place for any other.'

'I would not,' Casey retorted, feeling off balance, which was not like her at all.

But here was the thing: over the last weeks, Casey had read a lot about book stations worldwide, and she liked the ideas. But it

was kind of unsettling that Frederick had turned up just when she was tentatively exploring the implications. She was curious where rethinking the book trade would lead and leave her. But what if, if she went down that road, what if she would have to give up everything she loved about her bookshop? And why couldn't Frederick have come in a month or in a year, when she would have been more certain what to think?

Frederick smiled a little. 'Look, I was in the area, and I just wanted to say hello and see whether you'd like to meet for lunch or supper. You know, you tell me about your work, I tell you about ours, and maybe we end up doing something together.'

'Who did you meet? I mean, what are you doing in the area?'

'Barnes Hall.'

'What?'

Transformations

About a year later, new worlds were taking shape. Not just in Casey's bookshop but also in Blue Meadows.

The incident with Barnes Hall had been the turning point. Everyone called it incident, though it was more a case of boredom, some said.

This is what happened.

Barnes Hall was a retired farmer, and one day he decided that he had had enough of retirement.

He had read a lot about book stations worldwide and he had a great love for books. A love he developed late in his life, and really thanks to Casey's bookshop, which had all sorts of books, some of which you would never have expected to exist.

Barnes sometimes teased Casey, saying: 'Confess, you're using magic to make up all these writers and books.'

Anyway, Barnes knew that there were six book stations in England so far. The closest was in Liverpool and that was where he went, and where he told one of the book station's people: 'I want to learn! You say age doesn't matter. Well, here I am. I want to learn how to make bespoke books, and if I like what I learn, I have a bit of land to spare which we can use for a bespoke books workshop. Not sure a whole book station would fit into our town.'

By the time Frederick met Casey, Barnes was already in the middle of his training to become a master for bespoke books.

And later that same day, Barnes told Frederick that he insisted on having a bespoke books workshop and a paper workshop on his land. All it would need was transforming the old barns. 'And doing the integrating with nature. You would think I know all about that, being a farmer, but the truth is I was a bit lazy in the head department. Not much of a thinker. And these days it's books I want to learn about. So you people do what other things need to be done — and for the nature.'

To staff the workshops, Barnes insisted on getting old birds back into play. 'We can do better than sit in front of the telly all day.'

But in the end, Barnes agreed that some youngsters, and maybe one or two of the middle-aged towners, would be allowed on to the team, too. Just to balance the team a bit.

Now, a year on, book-related ideas were seeping into every corner of Blue Meadows.

It wasn't just Barnes and his growing team any more, or Casey and her Worlds.

It was also Gina, the mayor, who had become a driving force behind the town's transformation and worked relentlessly to get everyone on board for all the new ideas for the future of books — in Blue Meadows.

And Lizzy who was great with embroideries and who designed beautiful pouches as protection for books.

And Martin, an up and coming chef, who travelled to Oxford to speak with a professor in English Literature to find out which

dishes he could offer in his book-themed restaurant. Meanwhile other towners were already building the new books restaurant in a nice spot between Barnes' farm and the entry to the town. From there the guests would have a fantastic view across Blue Meadows and all the way to the ocean.

And Joyce and Marlon who quit their jobs as teachers to build a Books Garden, which stretched from Barnes' farm to the town, with Martin's restaurant in the middle, Marlon's Tea Hut on the other side, and Joyce's Breakfast Café at the entrance to the garden.

Once completed, the Books Garden would offer reading spots, designed by three artists from neighbouring villages, book tours, garden competitions, and reading events. They even thought of adding Alice's rabbit hole.

And the former teachers were developing ideas for the town's children, hoping that the Books Garden would give children a place where they could learn about books and nature alike, and about the children's place in the natural world as much as in the world of stories.

And then there was Marsha who asked, during one of the many books-related town meetings, whether part of the book trade's profits could be used to rebuild a small fishing branch.

'And I want a fishing museum,' Larry chipped in. 'And we should get into teaching about sustainable fishing and build our own aquaculture farm.'

Bertha stood up: 'And I want a museum documenting the farming history of our families, and we need support to diversify and improve our farming practices. Get our biodiversity back.'

Martin shook his head. 'We already have a fishing museum on the boat—'

'—that's just a small bit of our history!' Larry cut in.

Gina, the mayor, cleared her throat. 'I'm sorry to ask, but what does fishing and farming have to do with books?'

Immediately the towners erupted into protest. An outsider would have been surprised how quickly the hubbub subsided, and how

easily the crowd decided who should speak first. But here was the thing about this time of the books: all considered, people didn't want to fight. They wanted to build. So they decided that Larry should make his argument first.

'But don't you see?' Larry said to Gina. 'Books contain stories. And the story of this town is all about fishing, that's where we come from—'

'—and farming,' Bertha chipped in with a challenging smile.

'And farming,' Larry repeated with a wink. 'And therefore, telling our stories in museums, but also using this opportunity to improve our work practices, to rebuild, to look after our land better, after nature, that's all part of everything. I mean ... You know what I mean. And we can have books with all our new knowledge and with our history. It's all connected.'

Marsha, who had brought up fishing in the first place, nodded and added: 'We can make both work, fishing and books, and combine it. We could, for example, invest in some newer boats. And we can use them to fish what we need in town. And at the same time we can use them to offer fishing trips for tourists. And,' Marsha paused for effect, 'and we can offer boat readings. Like, people can rent a boat and read a book while sitting in the boat.'

'But fishing boats smell, to put it politely,' Gina remarked.

'So what?' Marsha returned with a grin. 'It always says, people are keen on authentic experiences. That's what they get, smells and fish scales included.'

People chuckled and nodded, and Bertha added: 'If we learn more, we can also use parts of our farmland to produce the raw materials for paper. I mean, if we work together like in the old days, we can make it work, and we become independent of— of all the weird stuff that's going on in politics and on the stock markets.'

This time the towners erupted into a big applause.

And more people got involved, like Jake and Ada who were looking into opening a Braille kids holiday camp, a school for guide dogs, and a workshop for Braille books and comics.

And Mick who was about to publish his first book with short stories about how Blue Meadows got into books.

And Jenna who specialised in calligraphy and was presently working on redesigning all the signs in town, and she developed new signs for all new book locations. Plus she created little plaques for every house where someone lived who had added a book idea. For example, the plaque for Lizzy read: Lizzy, our book pouch creator and embroiderer, and the plaque for Mick read: Mick, our first local author. And the plaque for Barnes read: Barnes, the source of the incident.

And then there were Sandy and Clara who extended their bicycle shop to include a cargo bicycle service.

And Ralph and Nash who decided to revive their great-great-grandparent's coach service. And for that they built an old-style coach house.

Presently the brothers and their team were building fun book coaches for tourists who were asked to leave their cars outside the town in a new underground parking space with a sprawling mixed forest on top and a coach waiting at the exit of the parking space to take the visitors into Blue Meadows. The coach trip could be booked with a reading.

Nash, the younger brother, tinkered on a particularly large book carriage for tours into the region to give more people access to books. The carriage had a private section at the back where two travellers could sleep during their tour. Nash told himself — and others — that he was building the carriage for Casey who could use it to replace her book bus. But the truth was that he was hoping to impress Zoe, and whenever he worked on the carriage, he dreamed of them travelling up and down the region, having a laugh, doing puppet shows and readings, and in the evenings getting a campfire going, cooking together and ...

There was a small chance that that might happen. Zoe was a puppeteer and performer, and she loved adventures and the unconventional. But so far, Nash hadn't dared to tell her about his dreams.

And then there were the kindergarten kids who helped create a book-themed playground.

And the schoolkids gave a hand wherever they could, did short story competitions, and added ideas of their own, such as the Comics Garden and the Philosophers Garden.

And there was Luis who sold his house to Casey so that she could extend her bookshop.

And Alex, the baker, who experimented with letter-shaped buns, and who was working with Jenna, the calligrapher, on ideas for poems and quotes on rice paper which could then be added to cookies or cakes. And they were discussing ideas for a rice paper printer with Hayley.

And three farmer families, the Forks, the Millers and the Stouts built a new farmers' market for the harbour area. It could be stowed away in the wall at the back of the promenade. And to the delight of all children, and those adults who still loved fairy tales, the market had many references to fairy tales, using carvings and sculptures to create something to tickle the imagination.

And Josie bought three houses, not far from Casey's bookshop, for her book workshop. Then she went headhunting to find the best printer in the country and to learn from them.

There was a rumour that Josie had an old flame, who was an excellent printer, and that her push to open a printing workshop was an excuse to find her love again. When challenged on this rumour, Josie smiled. 'You have no idea. But lucky for me, I also want to become the best printer there is for my book workshop.'

And then there were the two families who invented the storyscapes, the Bakers and the Greens, grandparents, parents and five children between sixteen and twenty-one, all of them tech-savvy.

These families bought, restored and extended the old lighthouse while working on website-like portals for novels.

There was a simple portal version where an author could upload background information on characters and storylines, and create maps of the story's locations and add illustrations of scenes.

The complex portals had a lot more content and features, including videos. The highlights were the 3D spaces where readers could explore the locations of a story with an avatar, and in some cases, they could sneak into the scene of a story.

The lighthouse had several spaces for visitors. Some for single visitors, others for groups. For example, a group could explore a story's background and locations on large screens together, or a single visitor could book a viewing spot, and explore a story on their own.

Many more ideas were in the making, both for online options and for the lighthouse experiences.

The families worked closely with the local illustrators, of which Blue Meadows had twelve now. And more illustrators were coming since there was a lot of work on offer, not just at the lighthouse but also at Barnes' bespoke books workshop and at Josie's book workshop.

The lighthouse had three studios for authors who could stay there for days or weeks, and who could work with the two families and with the local illustrators on their storyscapes.

And the families brought the collections idea into play. If, for example, a story touched on several subjects, then a reader could ask for a special print or an e-book which only included scenes or dialogues on the subject the reader wanted to re-read or further explore.

That everything worked so well in Blue Meadows was also thanks to Miro and Marla, who had declared that so long as a job was about books, and they weren't asked to work before noon, they would be the town's odd jobs people, which included quite a few deliveries between the different branches of the town's book businesses.

Meanwhile Barnes realised that his paper workshop could easily be extended and produce all the paper needed in town, on top of producing the paper for the book workshops. And Casey's bookshop got an outpost at the lighthouse.

There were more stories of how the towners, newcomers and people from the region found something to get involved in and become part of the book frenzy.

It was like people suddenly discovered that new worlds could create new worlds — and they could be part of it.

About nine months ago, book stations worldwide calculated the size of the region Barnes (bespoke books) and Josie (pre-order books) would supply. The size of the region ensured that sufficient orders would come in to make the book workshops profitable.

For Casey that meant more customers and from further away, because Barnes and Josie sent all customers to her bookshop.

In Casey's bookshop things were also still in a process of changing.

The greatest change for Casey was that by now three people were working full time in her bookshop, plus her two part-time staff, and her two occasional helpers. And Casey teamed up with Bobbie to open the Worlds Café, next door to her bookshop.

Seven months ago, Casey selected books she wanted to display in the bookshop. Single copies, some of them durable books, others bespoke editions. This way, a reader could still come into the bookshop and browse all the books on the shelves. And then a reader could decide whether to buy a pre-book, whether to pre-order, or whether to go for a bespoke edition of a book.

The old books, Casey hadn't sold yet, were transferred to the new spaces in the attic which got something of a farewell

atmosphere, but like everywhere else in the bookshop, this space also included reading corners.

For bespoke books Casey added a special counter where customers could look at samples, and where they could meet with a typesetter or with an illustrator if they didn't want to use the Worlds Café.

Pre-books were still a bit tricky to sell, though Beth and her team produced the most amazing binders, which actually sold better than the pre-books, at the moment.

Over the last year, Casey had become both an expert and a fan of bespoke books, not least thanks to Salome who was a great graphic designer, and who had a good intuition with regard to what kind of bespoke book a customer would enjoy.

In fact, one of the big lessons Casey learned this year was: a bespoke book is not about what an artist considers best, it's about what the customer likes and enjoys. Give that an artist's touch, and you get something extraordinary.

Books with a history were a great hit with tourists. Some liked to start a book's journey in Blue Meadows, while others liked to let a book pass through here.

Someone in Amsterdam invented a travelling passport for owners of books with a history, and those owners could get their passports stamped at Casey's.

By now Casey even bought back books with a history, because there was a steady demand by people who loved to buy books that already had a history.

The pre-order books had a wobbly start, but eventually people accepted that reducing waste, and printing fewer books, was good for the environment and therefore good for them. When this thought finally sank in, about six months ago, Casey's bookshop was overrun by people who brought their books for recycling.

It took a while to find someone who wanted to build a recycling facility, but eventually a man from a neighbouring town, Gus, decided to move to Blue Meadows, and he built the facility with a local team and with a team of experts sent by book stations worldwide.

Casey had been hesitant about the digital station, which offered everything from e-books, audiobooks and digital comics to movie-adaptations. But then Gina, the mayor, suggested to transform an old bus stop into a digi-p, and the lighthouse got a digi-p, too.

And that was that.

Two weeks ago, Casey had a long talk with her former book suppliers, and eventually Casey agreed to sell some of the old books for a few more years.

Not a book station

Some books inspire.

In Blue Meadows it was the idea of books which inspired, and at some point nearly everyone in town was hooked.

As for tourists, Blue Meadows took a leaf out of Venice's book and started to sell day tickets, and holiday tickets, to make sure that the towners had their town to themselves at times. After all, this was their home, their community. And while visitors were welcome, the towners didn't want to dedicate their community and their way of life to tourism.

With and without tourists the boat readings became a great hit, and the book stations worldwide research team provided Josie and Barnes with the know-how to produce saltwater-resistant books.

Boat readings could be all sorts of things, private or public.

A couple of friends could, for example, go to the new boat rental, choose a resilient book, pick one of the comfy rowing or pedal boats, where they could lounge on straw, get a bit out on to the sea, and either read for themselves or read to each other.

Often you would see six to twelve or more boats gently rocking in the sea.

On tourist days, Peter and his team would row past the boats and offer drinks and snacks. Peeing was a bit of a concern at first, but then Marsha and her brothers came up with an in-boat solution plus a docking release that worked very well, though no one was keen to talk about it.

There were also reading events on the water, like the audiobook rocking, just like a movie night, only everyone was sitting in a boat while listening to a story. Or the storyteller nights, and the meet the author nights, when the boats anchored around a raft which served as the stage for the storyteller or the author.

Sometimes there were real movie nights, and occasionally bands played on the raft, too. But in the early days, most towners were a bit puristic about their focus on books.

One day, Casey overheard a conversation between a visitor to Blue Meadows and Gina, the mayor.

The visitor asked: 'But who orchestrates all of this?'

Gina laughed. 'I'm not sure. I think we all do. Ask me again in a few years, and maybe then I can tell you how we did it. All I know right now is that we are having a great time.'

Some two years later, Casey walked from her new home, next to the new Worlds Garden, into Blue Meadows. At the crossroads, Casey looked up to the only house on the hill where Toni lived.

Casey smiled.

Toni was one of their new local writers. And she was full of ideas and loved the town. And so far everyone was still in the mood to test more ideas. And it looked like they would get a Challenge

Casey's bookshop

Garden and a library soon, in cooperation with eight villages in the region.

Casey smiled some more, and after another ten minutes of passing transformed and new houses and gardens, Casey reached her bookshop.

And then, a thought pushed its way into her consciousness, and Casey chuckled.

No, Blue Meadows didn't get a book station.

It turned into one.

The End

— for now

easy town books

Casey's bookshops
A concluding example & story for the book stations tour

Published in Berlin, 2022 by Charlie Alice Raya
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last updated: 17 February 2023

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