

By Madeline Wendricks  
04/17/2021

Many readers have an idea of what a vintage book is. Maybe it's a rare, signed, first edition of a classic that has to be kept in a temperature-controlled room to sustain its value. Maybe it's well-worn with a cover half falling off and dog ears on almost every browning page.



THIS PIECE  
OF PAPER  
IS TO HELP  
~~MARK~~ ME  
FIND WHERE  
I LEFT OFF  
READING

However, for Chris and Jenny, owners of Los Angeles-based A Good Used Book, a valued, beautiful book can take many forms. That concept drives them to sell the used books they do.

After trying to sell used books on Amazon, Chris and Jenny saw a pattern with what was selling and what wasn't. So, in June 2017, the pair set up shop at Melrose Trading Post, selling the books they personally found interesting but that didn't particularly work for Amazon's selling platform. Unique and wacky vintage paperbacks that are usually lost among mainstream book culture is their main niche. Within two months, they were selling books there every week. Inspired by Chris's father's record store, their little book shop was meticulously organized, with carefully hand-wrapped paperbacks shelved in wine crates so patrons could flip through the titles like records. By taking pictures of their customers with the books they bought and posting them on Instagram, A Good Used Book grew a community of booklovers.

However, once COVID-19 struck California, their selling platform had to quickly pivot online. In a stroke of irony, just before California businesses shut down, Chris and Jenny were planning to post their first Story Sale on Instagram, during which they sold every book. "During that time, we were all at home and people needed a virtual event to look forward to," explains Jenny. These sales, where they post numerous books on their Instagram Story for customers to buy, are described as "a virtual stage production of books." They are now a staple of their online selling platform. When panic ensued for many storeowners, these Story Sales gave A Good Used Book an effective way to transition into selling books online.

Their only employee, Sarah, working remotely, writes great descriptions, long-form essays, and facts for the books, giving each one a personality outside of their covers. The personal touch of Sarah's writing for each book adds to the intimate level of customer service that A Good Used Book prides itself on. Sarah also runs their Twitter, which is full of witty, bookish one-liners, showcasing the personality of this small, but mighty team.



Chris and Jenny have made efforts to expand the definition of a “good used book.” In the beginning, the vintage paperbacks they often selected were indeed great classic

books, but selecting only classics had left them with large stacks of books written by white men. They have since developed their selection process to create more diverse stacks, venturing into more recently published books by a wider array of authors. Growing their collection of books by women and minorities is a primary goal.

Support from their community continued while their business moved online. Much like the pictures they would post of their customers with their purchases, their customers now post, repost, and share books they have bought. Chris and Jenny even get personal messages from customers saying how excited they are when they receive their book. These personal connections mean a lot to Chris and Jenny. “Buying a book... even selling these books is very special and intimate,” says Jenny. “[Our customers] literally supported us through this,” adds Chris. After weeks of doing Story Sales, Instagram handles started to become recognizable, and they could see who was buying books week after week. One of the things they look forward to most when they can physically sell books again is meeting everyone in person, matching the Instagram handle with the face of those who have been supporting them.

While customers have been actively supporting the store, A Good Used Book has been passing on those good graces to their community. At one point, customers began tipping the store. At first unsure about what to do with the tips, Chris and Jenny have made it a point to pay it forward to other customers that are having a hard time financially but might benefit from a book (and the escape that comes with reading). They have also given back to the community in broader ways. After the horrific murder of George Floyd, and observing the effects this had on the community right

outside of their window, Chris and Jenny shut down for a month out of respect for the Black community and everyone affected. Once back up and running, to support the Black Lives Matter movement, they did a Story Sale fundraiser and matched the funds they raised with substantial donations A Good Used Book received.



“Everything is truly driven by our community,” says Chris, “and they are kind of all over the place.” Support even comes from geographic reaches the owners did not anticipate would care about a Los Angeles bookstore. When people scour the internet for one very specific book or story, their searches often lead them to A Good Used Book

because of their highly unique stock of books, regardless of where they're searching from. People have been buying books from all over – from Los Angeles, to the East coast, the South, and the Midwest. The reach their bookstore has achieved is thrilling for Chris and Jenny.

As the world slowly opens back up, Chris and Jenny make it a point that they won't go back to physically selling at flea markets until they have complete confidence that they can provide the best safety for even their most vulnerable customers. In the future, they hope to find a steady location their store can call home. They want to create a fun place for customers browse while they pick up books they have ordered online, creating the sense of a pop-up store while still having a robust catalog of their books online. What is important to the owners, however, is to take their next steps gradually, staying aware of the scale they are growing as to make sure they aren't hurting their customers or themselves in the process.

“A lot of cool, really awesome people in LA read,” says Jenny. Breaking down the barriers and showing people that yes, books are still popular is something important to them. Having a place that makes buying books an immersive and intimate experience is what A Good Used Book does best. Even in their online format, Chris sees A Good Used Book as “a little oasis you can come to.” Selling books is what Chris and Jenny truly love. Even though it has been an uphill battle, they are both thankful that everyday they can still sell books and bring joy to those who purchase from them.

You can learn more about A Good Used Book on their website and their Instagram.