



BGI Sales Meeting Speech

written/given by

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Hi everyone. It's so good to see all of you here tonight. I have to say that I had no idea until a few short hours ago that I was supposed to be speaking... oops.

But that's okay, with three sons, well five if you count my brother and the neighbor's kid who won't ever go home, I'm used to having to improvise at the drop of a hat.

You know, I've been a writer all my life. My mother was a huge bibliophile herself and she used to tell stories about how even as a toddler, I didn't throw fits in stores like a normal kid for toys... oh no, for me it was always books.

There was just something about them that I somehow intrinsically knew they were special even before I was able to read them. And believe me, it was a struggle to learn to read. I'm horrifyingly dyslexic— so much so that I tried to be a receptionist once. It only lasted about an hour until everyone came back from lunch and realized every number I'd taken down was wrong. They weren't happy and I realized that I must have another calling in life than making them angry and frustrating them— I only do that to my family.

So I moved on to better things...

I will never forget that day when I was walking past a Waldenbooks bookstore in the mall. It was a moment of crystal clarity. I was already a published author... heck, I'd published my first story at age seven and as I was standing there about to enter it to look for another book— 'cause let's face it, before being a writer, I'm always a reader, I realized that hey, this is what I need to do. I can work in the reader and writer's Valhalla.

What better place to be than a bookstore? I mean c'mon, they'd actually pay me money to do what I love. I could read at work and not get into trouble and best of all, I'd have access to the greatest research library on the planet. If it was in print, I could order it and if it wasn't, I could book search it.

Completely enthused, I ran inside and asked for an application and was hired on the spot. I was so excited— I even have a ring that commemorates my getting that job— one that has never left my hand since the day before I started working at Waldenbooks.

It was the coolest thing... until I realized something. Borders and Waldenbooks actually make you work when you're in the store. Who knew? And you guys are still making me work— look, you made me give a speech before you'd feed me! There's no such thing as a free ride.

I don't know what I was thinking— I guess that magic elves mysteriously entered stores at night and put the books on the shelves. I had no idea just how hard a job being a bookseller was.

But the worst part about working in a bookstore was the fact that in six years, I'm not sure I ever earned a penny. In fact, I'm pretty darn sure, I paid BGI for the privilege of having first dibs on all the new releases.

But that's okay. Because I learned so much as a bookseller that I should have been paying for the privilege. I mean, I knew going into it that books were one of the most sacred treasures on this earth— that in times of sorrow they're there to make it better. That they can give the reader laughter and comfort, or even a cold chill or moment of suspense— that they are the source of virtually all knowledge.

What I didn't know was the special bond that exists between bookseller and customer. I always took for granted that Margaret who ran the local store where I grew up seemed to intuitively know whenever a new author came out that it would be someone I was going to love. She was like a magic doorway to me and through her I discovered such incredible talents as CJ Cherryh, Anne MacAffrey, John

Betancourt, Gordon R Dickson, Johanna Lindsey, Jude Deveraux, Bertrice Small, Linda Howard, and countless others.

And I remember well the regular customers who used to come into my store. And you know that look. You have basically three kinds of buyers. Those in for a specific gift or purchase for someone else—they always come up and seek you out. Those who are in all the time and know exactly what they want and can't be bothered with suggestions, and then those others. The ones who have that book look. You know what I mean. They come in ready for the journey and they're open to new things. They take their time and browse and look at everything and carefully select their latest haul.

As a bookseller, you tend to focus on them. Face it, we practically stalk them. We watch what sections they go to and when they pick up a book, we note the author and then we do the old, "ah, I see you read Laurell Hamilton. Do you like vampire novels?"

They'll nod their head and then you know you've got them. "Cool. Have you seen the new so-and-so books. Jim Butcher has a new release. Oh my God, we can't keep them in. I've read every one of them and I think they're great." And the next thing you both know, the reader has gone off with six books instead of one. And as soon as they finish that pile, they're back, asking who else you recommend.

Because somehow as a bookseller you do have a sixth sense as to what the buyer wants. And every time you get a new shipment in, you're thinking of the regulars as you shelve. You'll see a new author and go, "you know, this is right up Mary's alley. I need to make sure and point this out when she comes in."

Or if you're as bad as I was, you probably have the notecards up by the register with the numbers for the regular customers so that you can call them and tell them it's in. Or better yet, if it's something you know they've been dying to read, you can make that call, "Hey, I just got it in today... but we can't sell it until Tuesday."

I don't know, I guess I'm sadistic 'cause I always loved the excruciating sounds they'd make and then I'd laugh and tell them not to worry because I have the book on the special order shelf with their name already on it so that they can get it as soon as we open on Tuesday.

And I also learned the signs of when you've been a bookseller too long. I no longer have shelves in my home. No, no. I have four sets of wall bays. And in my new house, I even have an endcap which I

rearrange at the end of every month. Yes, I admit, I even have a planagram for all my books and woe to my children or husband should they defile the master planagram.

And I really knew the day I was in trouble and had been a bookseller too long, when I called my mom up to tell her that I was living for the moment when I'd see one of MY books in a dump. My poor mother was baffled. Why would anyone want to see their book in a dump? Laughing, I had to explain that those were the books in the big displays in a store. She still didn't really get it, but she let me ramble.

One of the things I think I loved best as a bookseller was creating displays. Every season we'd come up with something really cool for the store. My favorite was the year Charles Wilson had come out with a summer book about a shark— I can never remember that title, but Tim and I did a display for summer reading with a huge shark and we'd just gotten in some Sesame Street dolls and Scooter had on tennis shoes. So being the sick people we were, we put Scooter in the shark's mouth so that all you could see were the sneakers. We got a lot of milage off that. Whenever kids would come in, we'd point at it and say, "that's what happened to the last kid who messed up the children's section."

Okay, we really weren't that mean, but it was tempting. God, how I miss being a bookseller. Some of the best years of my life were spent working in stores. And last year while I was at a Borders meeting, my old boss came up to me and I burst into tears. I hadn't seen her in years and she was so amazed that I remembered her and yet how could I forget? I'd worked with her for four years and I loved every minute of it. Best of all, I did my very first booksigning in our store.

And I still hear from those customers all these years later who write all the time to tell me how strange it is that they once read the books I recommended to them, and now they read me... and by the way, who else can I recommend to them.

I love them so.

You can take a bookseller out of the store, but you can't take the habits out. I still religiously straighten shelves any time I'm in a store and I admit I face out books, strangely though, never my own and I still recommend other writers to those readers I see in those sections where I'm browsing for a new book. It's a running gag between me and Robby who works at my local chain store.

He knows that anytime I have a new release, I'm in the store to sign stock and every now and again whenever there's a new hire, they'll tattle on me and send him over. He'll stand over me, shaking his

head. "I was told there was someone straightening shelves and I knew it had to be you."

I just can't help myself.

I love booksellers and I love bookstores. You guys are magicians. Whenever I want to try something new or whenever I need something for my children, I know I can go to Robby or Sarah and ask them what they recommend for us and they're always right. They magically know just what we need and where to find it.

I always thought that if I ever got a chance to come up here for a sales meeting, it'd be as a bookseller or manager. I never really dared to dream that it would be as a published writer.

I'll be honest, my writing career hasn't been an easy one. It's been a lot of hard work and many years of setbacks and heartbreaks. But as my mom always said, the merry go round gets boring— it's why people prefer the roller coaster. Sure sometimes it makes you sick and dizzy, but man what a rush.

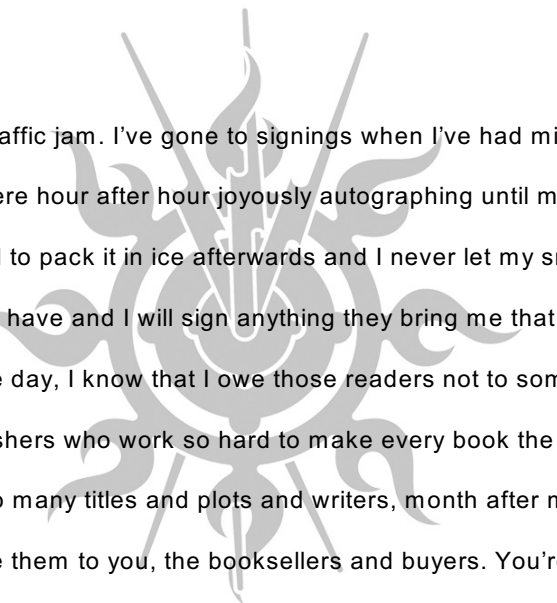
I've come a long way from that little girl who lived her life wanting to see something she wrote in print. I honestly don't know how many books I've written at this point— I'm extremely superstitious on that point and I figure they'll count them up when I'm gone. In the meantime, I'm looking ahead at the books yet to be written. The journeys yet to be taken.

But one thing that has never gotten old in my life is that thrill I get whenever I go into a bookstore. That thrill of finding a new writer to take me into their world and hold me there for a few hours.

The thrill of seeing my book on a shelf and hoping that some reader is going to discover me and love my worlds as much as I do. And I've been really lucky that so many have discovered my worlds. I don't get ten or twenty people at a booksigning. I get hundreds and sometimes over a thousand.

Writers are always asking me why my readers are willing to drive eight to thirteen hours, or even fly in from other countries to meet me. And what I always tell them that I think it's for one basic reason— I never take my readers for granted. I spent most of my life working jobs that had me on my feet all day. I grew up in poverty and I well understand the value of a dollar. And I know, because I live in a bookstore even now, that those readers don't have to buy MY books. They could buy anyone's with their hard-earned cash. I am so grateful that they are willing to spend it on me that I always go out of my way to let them know it.

I've waited three hours past a signing for a fan to get to the store because they were driving in out



of state and got caught in a traffic jam. I've gone to signings when I've had migraines so bad I could barely open my eyes and I've sat there hour after hour joyously autographing until my hand was swollen and my arm hurt so badly that we had to pack it in ice afterwards and I never let my smile falter. Because I love and appreciate every reader I have and I will sign anything they bring me that isn't a check.

And at the end of the day, I know that I owe those readers not to some intangible talent I might have. I owe them to my publishers who work so hard to make every book the best it can be. To the sales people who can remember so many titles and plots and writers, month after month.

And most of all, I owe them to you, the booksellers and buyers. You're the ones who put my books in the store. You're the ones who make the displays and most of all you're the ones who when that reader comes in, browsing. You walk over and say, "you like vampire novels? Have you tried Sherrilyn Kenyon's Dark-Hunters? You're looking for science fiction? Have you heard of the League series? You like Arthurian fantasy? Have you tried Kinley MacGregor's Lords of Avalon?"

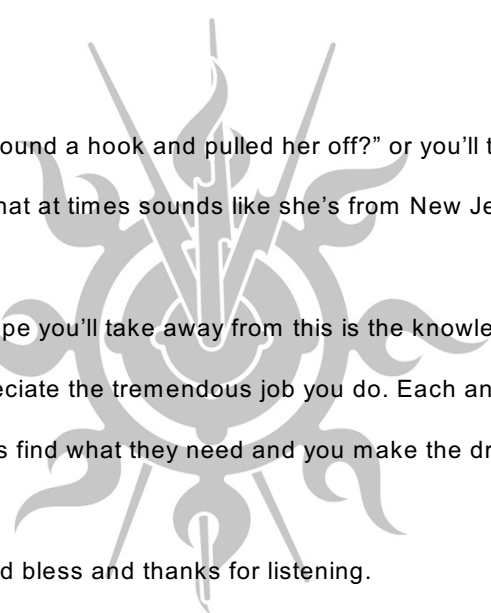
I get more letters from fans who tell me the names of the booksellers who have turned them on to my books. And I am grateful from the bottom of my heart that you guys are in the store unseen and unheard, doing such an important job. For me and for them and for all the other writers out there.

I've been very lucky that I've been number one at both Borders and Waldenbooks and I owe it to you. Last year, I was even fortunate enough to have the bestselling paranormal for BGI and Sue can tell you that I was so stunned and thrilled that I had to take my shoes off to make it up on stage without falling. That award sits right by my monitor and I stare at it every single day and I say a prayer of thanks for every bookseller and reader who made it possible. Because you have given me my dream.

And it is a hard job you do. Stocking shelves, rotating stock and section, going through the sections every night, pulling magazines, counting down the drawers, waiting on customers, trying to decide what to order and how many copies and don't get me started on what should be a four letter word...INVENTORY.

You guys amaze me.

You know, I could stand up here and give you my bio. I could tell you how many times I've been on the New York Times, but I don't expect any of you to remember that. I mean let's face it, you'll probably only remember one of two things. Either you'll think, "Wow that was the most boring speech I've ever



heard– couldn't someone have found a hook and pulled her off?" or you'll think, "that was the strangest woman with a southern accent that at times sounds like she's from New Jersey. Huh, how did she ever get a job with us?"

But in the end, what I hope you'll take away from this is the knowledge that though we may not say it often enough, we do appreciate the tremendous job you do. Each and every one of you. You're dream makers. You help readers find what they need and you make the dreams of writers the world over come true.

Thank you so much. God bless and thanks for listening.