

Sunday Cover

Catch and release for booklovers

Online bookswapping club leaves free books for pickup in random dropoff spots across Halifax

By Heather Sawers – The Daily News

Books should gather friends, not dust. At least, that's the motto of BookCrossing.com, a site devoted to sharing books with strangers by sending them on treasure hunts.

BookCrossing.com was started in 2001 by Ron Hornbaker, a partner at U.S. software company Humankind Systems, Inc. Inspired by WheresGeorge.com, which tracks American money, and PhotoTag.org, which tracks disposable cameras.

The process is similar to geocaching, where you use a GPS (Global Positioning Systems) to hunt hidden containers. You choose a book you're ready to part with, register it on the site, write its tracking number — and a note explaining the game — inside the cover, and simply leave it in a public

place. If someone picks up the book, they can register it as "found" on the site and keep it for as long as they want — or just ignore the note and keep the book, but that ruins the fun.

In Nova Scotia, there are currently books released in Halifax, Bridgewater, Mahone Bay, New Glasgow and New Minas. Popular "hiding spots" in Halifax include Halifax Shopping Centre, the patient lounge in the QEII Health Sciences Centre, and Cabin Coffee on Hollis Street.

Sarah Austin, the owner of Cabin Coffee, said she sometimes sees customers purposely leave their books behind, but didn't know why they were doing it.

"I've seen books that say 'Take this book and pass it on,'" Austin said. "We just leave them around for people to help themselves

to, or we'll put them on our bookshelf."

The site now has more than half a million members, and around 300 people join every day. There are more than 15,000 books released in the U.S., and more than 1,500 in Canada.

"It's hard to say how many books I've released, but it's dozens," said Halifax BookCrossing member Maureen Woodhouse told *The Daily News* via e-mail while traveling through Asia. "Some of them are books that I picked up at meet-ups and then re-release. Others are books that I've had for years and figure they should get a new home."

Woodhouse heard about BookCrossing from a friend in London, England, and then discovered there were fellow "book-crossers" in Halifax. Local members meet

each month to "release" books directly to each other and talk about what they're reading.

As a project manager of International Activities at Saint Mary's University, her travels take her all over the globe. Woodhouse uses her trips as opportunities to expand the voyages of her books.

"I bring BookCrossing books with me on my trips and release them in exotic places such as Mongolia, Vietnam, and Lithuania," Woodhouse said.

"I like the thought of having someone I've never met and will never meet reading my books."

"It's really a kick to find out that one of your books has made it all the way across the country or over to Europe." hsawers@hfxnews.ca

Oprah a mighty wind for book clubs, bestsellers

By Heather Sawers – The Daily News

If she stickers it, it will sell. As soon as those shiny 'Oprah' stickers are placed on a book — no matter what the subject or the author — it will wind up on the best-sellers list.

The one-woman empire that is Oprah Winfrey has a powerful grasp on North Americans, and her book club has collected countless fans over its 11-year run.

"People find her very accessible and personable," said Mount Allison University English professor Jennifer Harris, who co-edited *The Oprah Phenomenon*.

"The fact that she's also willing to share her insecurities is tremendously powerful. We always like people who are willing to tell us when they mess up, or make fun of themselves."

Harris attributes the success of Oprah's Book Club to the fact that Winfrey stresses reading for pleasure.

"From the very beginning, each book was presented as something she read and loved, and wanted you to love," Harris said. "Often, they are stories of triumph over adversity, which I think is a trajectory which mirror's Winfrey's own."

Harris says Winfrey understands the importance of book clubs for women over time, and how they have traditionally been a source of "emotional support and intellectual stimulation" for members.

"They were a place where women's opinions are valued, and emotional intelligence isn't dismissed or trivialized," Harris said. "She privileges the emotional intelligence — what women know and how they know it — and encourages women to talk about that."

Winfrey also presents books on an approachable level, by taking away the "it's-too-hard" stigma a difficult book carries.

"She also doesn't use heavy-handed interpretive strategies. She used language people know — symbols, metaphors, plotlines," Harris said.

"It's familiar to most people from high school English, and not intimidating."

Harris thinks the most important thing Oprah has done for book clubs is make them accessible for women who thought they



Oprah's book club has given women a sense of themselves as readers, Mount Allison professor Jennifer Harris says. Harris is co-author of *The Oprah Phenomenon*.

weren't smart enough to be serious readers.

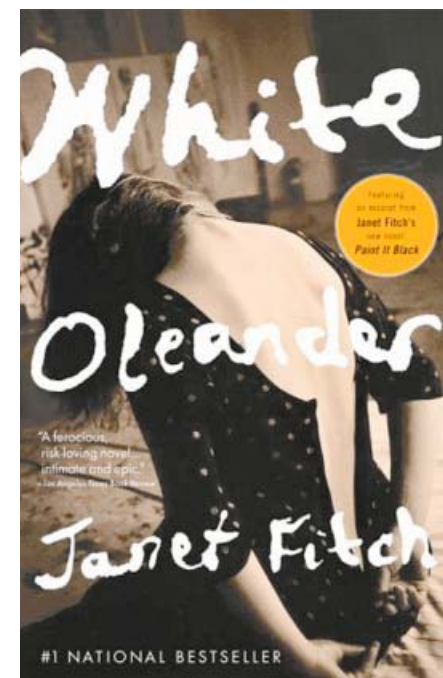
"Before, book clubs were seen as very bourgeois — what middle-class women had as their entertainment," Harris said.

"By promoting book clubs through the very democratic medium of television,

Oprah has brought in a whole different kind of woman — in terms of class — who might not have participated in one before."

"She's made women get a sense of themselves as readers." hsawers@hfxnews.ca

OPRAH RECOMMENDED
Here are a few books from Oprah's Book Club reading list:



White Oleander.
By Janet Fitch

Anna Karenina.
By Leo Tolstoy

I Know This Much Is True.
By Wally Lamb

Fine Balance. By Rohinton Mistry

A Virtuous Woman. By Kaye Gibbons.



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