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Notes from a retired librarian on a mission

Imagine A Very Special Place



Storybook Village

560 S. Hancock Street

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www.storybookvillageofpentwater.com

Attention, all elementary school teachers! Okay, I should also include parents of elementary and preschool children as well as grandparents, aunts, uncles, people with fond memories of childhood, adults who are still children at heart, not to mention all individuals with creativity and imagination or the appreciation of said qualities. And since I believe everyone has some amount of creativity and imagination, I guess I mean attention, everyone! Do I have a bookstore for you. In the small Michigan lakeside town of Pentwater, I recently had the joy of discovering Storybook Village, not just a bookstore, but an imagination store.



I have visited interesting bookstores housed in uniquely repurposed structures: a train car, an old bank building, a former factory, a log cabin, and a variety of former department stores. But husband and wife owners, Tom and Barbara Sims took a different tack with their bookstore. They designed and built Storybook Village from the ground up, and "village" aptly describes the store.



The lakeside-tourist-town atmosphere of Pentwater is born out in a collection of cottage-like building fronts with bright, colorful rooftops and real glass windows that beckon children to browse collections of books, toys, and imaginative play things. A doorway is not just a doorway, but a lighthouse, and there is even a sailboat complete with portholes for peering through and pretending.



One particular publishing company's mission statement really nailed what Tom and Barb had in mind for their business, so the couple made a conscious decision to sell a specific line of books. [Barefoot Books](#) with their focus on enthusiasm for learning, encouraging young imaginations through art and story, and respect for the earth and its diversity was a perfect fit for Storybook Village where children of all kinds are encouraged to "sail away in their imaginations." To this collection of award-winning books, the store has added books by local authors, Michigan books, and other titles based on specific recommendations.



Open for just three seasons, Storybook Village expanded the operation beyond books this past July when they opened the Starlight Theater, a portion of the store focused on art, drama, and

all things creative. Here patrons will find toys, games, costumes, puzzles, stuffed animals, and most notably, a pair of French doors that open to an enchanted room that is sure to inspire creativity and spark young imaginations.



Here a castle is not just a castle, but a puppet theater in front of which rests a colorful round rug and several chairs ready for an audience to view the next puppet performance. There is a large video screen, several tables for crafts, and the aforementioned sail boat. Of course plain painted walls would simply not do for this captivating space. So Tom and Barb commissioned artists

who spent two and a half months creating a fabulous wall



mural.

Based on the children's book, *Starlight Sailor*, the mural runs completely around the room filling it with visions of sailing ships, treasure, dragons, and castles. Behind the puppet theater and over the video screen, the painting continues leading ultimately to a cave opening painted on the door to--yes, the children's restroom where the mural story continues.

I can easily imagine all of the creative fun that happens in this magical room. It is here that Barb's 40 years in elementary education are most apparent. She was, unfortunately, not present at the time of my visit, but Tom explained that four times a day during the summer, Barb sets up activity centers for children, encouraging them, for example, to select puppets and write stories about them. Kids of all ages are able to be involved in creating and performing at Storybook Village, as Barb weaves their stories into puppet plays and helps kids make their own artistic creations.



Since I was visiting in mid September, there were no children at the store, but there were plenty of adult customers. I struck up a conversation with one of them who told me that her granddaughter loves the place and would come every day if she could. It seems that Storybook Village is becoming something of a tourist attraction in Pentwater.



Of course, I did some shopping of my own in the store. For my son and his fiance', who both love astronomy, I found a pack of night sky playing cards with constellations printed on the cards. I simply love loons, so for myself I purchased *Loons in the Mist* by Carl R. Sams and Jean Stoick, best known for their best-seller, *Stranger in the Woods*, and other brilliant wildlife

photography books. And for a cousin who recently had her first baby (Congrats again, Hannah and Brian!), I found a beautiful baby book, *Baby's First Journal* by Clare Beaton.



If you plan to be in the Pentwater area and want to visit Storybook Village (and I think you should), be advised that they are open for only eight months, closing from January through April when Tom and Barb head to Florida where they have a similar, smaller venture. The store website says, "Imagine a very special place . . ." I would say that Storybook Village is indeed a special place.