



# BETWEEN THE COVERS

## *Books + Nature = Awesome*

David Morrison

*“The smallest bookstore still contains more ideas of worth than have been presented in the entire history of television.”—Andrew Ross*

Yes, I would have to agree with Mr. Ross’ incisive bon mot. It’s a no-brainer. I was reminded of this quote upon owner Margriet Ruurs proudly showing me the Poetry Room of her book-themed Salt Spring Island B&B, *Between the Covers*. Emblazoned across the bottom of the suite’s (intentionally kaput) TV, a bumper sticker echoed the academic author Ross’ sentiment in rather more direct language: *Fight Prime Time: Read a Book*.

Pretty much since I had any concept of what they were, books have played a major role in my life. I *always* have one on the go, sometimes two, or more. My bent is for history, but I’ll pick up anything that catches my eye. I just *love* and *need* books, as does my wife—a bookseller by trade. So when our friend Sherri Israels—owner of Watermark Books in Ganges (it all dovetails)—tipped us off that a book-themed B&B run by a noted children’s author had recently opened on the Island, I was off the blocks with an introduction faster than Usain Bolt.

Margriet and her husband, Kees, holder of a Masters Degree in Park Management, immigrated to Canada from Holland in 1977. Arriving on Salt Spring Island represented the 24<sup>th</sup> move for this adventurous pair, but they assure me it’s their last. In pursuit of Kees’ work they’ve lived in Alberta, the Yukon, the Okanagan and Oregon, and spent time exploring the North American continent with their two children before landing on the largest Gulf Island. And they really like it here.

“We chose it because of the climate,” begins Margriet, “but also because of the artsy community and culture. And there are no highways, no chain stores, there’s beautiful nature... all of that combined made it ideal.”

“We discovered a job advertisement for me, here on the island as Manager of Parks & Recreation” continues Kees. “I applied and managed to get it.”

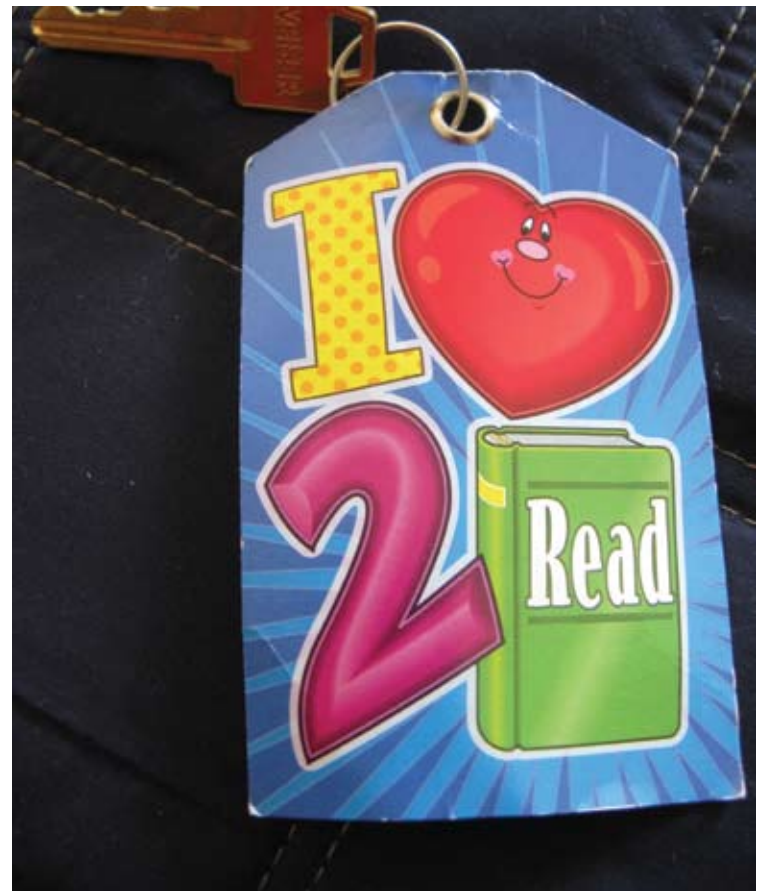
“When we came for the job interview, it was our very first time visiting the Island,” Margriet recalls. “So we thought while we were here we would look around with a realtor to see what we could afford and what was available. We looked at four houses I picked off her website, but none of those really appealed to us. Then, kind of jokingly, our son said, ‘Don’t you have a property with two houses, so we can move here too?’ She said, ‘Yes, there is one!’ So we looked at it and said: ‘This is home!’”

It’s not remotely difficult to understand why the property made an instant impact. The setting alone would

surely have sold it, to me at least, even had the dwellings been a couple of dilapidated old sheds. Which they certainly are not.

The side of the main house boasts a wraparound wooden deck looking out across a large, gently downward-sloping field that at its furthest boundary merges into another. Majestic trees dot the acreage and run along two edges of the distant field. Firs blanket the imposing hills rising up on two sides to dramatically cradle the stunning vista. Close to the house is a sizeable lavender patch that Margriet has taken to harvest. It’s a truly beautiful scene promoting contemplative reverie or, as *Between the Covers*’ genial hosts suggest, lazing quietly on the deck with a good book.

Sharing a hot tub on the lovely deck there are two adjacent and very cozy suites: the Poetry Room and, our den for the night, the Fiction Room. As one would expect, it is *all* about books. Besides full bookcases (from which, with permission, you may take home a book) and book stacks on tables, there are lamps made from books and book-themed wall hangings and prints (notably Charles Wysocki’s cat



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series). Cushion covers have been stitched from literary fiction or book fare tote bags; the nightstand drawers are inventively adorned with bookshelf wallpaper borders. And, would you believe, the Fiction Room's fridge used to belong to best-selling author, Arthur Black!

Yet when Margriet and Kees purchased the property, it was not initially with the intention of turning it into a B&B.

"We *had* thought about running a B&B in the past, but not very seriously," Kees explains. "I had a full-time job and Margriet was very much into writing and doing a lot of traveling. But when we saw this property, because of the second house for the kids, and the five bedrooms—way too much for the two of us—we decided to look at the possibility."

Having made the decision to go for it and then carried out the required renovations, the idea of a book lover's theme presented itself as somewhat obvious. Margriet is totally immersed in the literary world as the award-winning author of 29 acclaimed children's titles, and as a columnist, teacher and international lecturer. If there was to be a theme, it was a given, and from the get-go it has struck a welcome chord with like minded people seeking a home-from-home when visiting Salt Spring Island.

"We thought coming to a B&B full of books would be very attractive, and I would say about 60% of the guests so far have come here because of the theme," says a clearly delighted Margriet. Writers, poets and librarians have discovered *Between the Covers*, with fellow children's authors Andrea Spalding, Frieda Wishinsky and Linda Bailey amongst the impressed guests since the accommodation opened on May 16 last year.

The mouth-watering breakfasts will also have met their approval, for sure. The various dishes are prepared using as many local foods as possible, including eggs from the Ruurs' own hens. And needless to say the book theme remains consistent with the menu boasting such as (Beatrix) Potter's Parfaits, (Harry) Potter's Rock Cakes (lavender scones) with Agatha Christie's Clotted Cream, Hansel & Gretel's Bread Basket and, you'd better believe it, Ham-ingway & Eggs.

Still feeling their way through a first year in a new business that has far exceeded their expectations, the Ruurs' continue to hone their excellent value superlative service by adding little touches to each suite as the fancy takes them. I asked in parting if their experiences so far had highlighted the need to improve or add anything in particular, features that future guests might look forward to.

"Oh, just more books, lots more books!" they chirp in unison. Of course. How silly of me. I should have seen that coming, really. ●

*Between the Covers* is located at 160 Sharp Road, on Salt Spring Island. More information is available at [www.betweenthecoversbandb.com](http://www.betweenthecoversbandb.com) or by calling Margriet and Kees Ruurs on (250) 537-2440. For information about Margriet's children's books and other projects, please visit [www.margrietruurs.com](http://www.margrietruurs.com).

