

The Discovery on Broadway

Tina Pathak

I remember the first time my mother handed me a novel. I was sitting on my bed under a princess comforter in the late hours of the day. I had almost fallen asleep when my mother came into the room carrying a small children's book titled *The Cat in the Hat*, by Dr. Seuss. From the minute her lips started to utter what would become my daily bedtime story, I was entranced. The way he strung his words together stuck with me. Before this I hadn't thought of words and how they come together to create meaning much. I didn't know they could be woven into a deliberate message to the world. After that moment I was changed and there was no going back. I now had the knowledge that human beings could craft such things as literature, and I was determined to explore every corner of the reading world.

For me it was not a particular story, book, or piece of writing that gave me hope during COVID-19. All the stories I read during this time gave me a certain level of comfort and distraction from issues plaguing our world. It was when I took the Long Island Railroad with my mom during the holiday season and walked fourteen blocks from Penn Station to enter the doors of a bucket list destination: the Strand Book Store. My father, who worked in the city for well over twenty years, told me of the wonders that were encased in the Strand. I imaged the ladders on wheels that would allow one to climb up to the very top of enormous bookcases. I fantasized about the little nooks set aside for when you found a new adventure in the form of ink and pages.

What I discovered stepping into that bookstore was much more than anything I conjured up in my dreams. The warmth that enveloped me as my boots grazed the aged wooden floor is something no one can understand until they experience it. Though it might pain me to admit it I wanted to cry in sheer joy. In spite of the misery plaguing the world, I believed I had found my pocket of happiness among the thousands of pages.

I was used to Barnes and Nobles and my local library but this was a different experience. There was every type of book you could imagine. Newly published works, classic leather bounds and the kind that struck deep into my heart: used books.

Used books tell a story beyond what the actual book shares. The worn pages show the novel was well loved and the potential annotations speak volumes of the impact the text had on someone's life. As a writer, used books make me feel like the words I am putting out into the world may be loved by not just one person but many. They give me the comfort that my words will be here and will be passed along long after I am gone. With so much loss surrounding us it was helpful to see that our world is bigger than its losses.

During COVID-19 hope was erased. The pandemic forced our minds to stop thinking of our future plans. It made us stop believing anything mattered because misery took over. We did not have the luxury to care about art and what it meant to us. Now with COVID-19 hopefully coming to an end, we are able to think of a future, a future where we may write words that stick with people for decades.

I went back to this book store with my best friend bundled in coats and sweaters, my face sweltering beneath my mask. My newfound love for history had increased even more since the

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last time I had entered this book lover's paradise. Due to this fact, I guess it wasn't a surprise that I bolted for the History section leaving my mom and friend calling my name as they searched through the aisles. Here was where I found *The Discoverers* by Daniel J. Boorstin. I believe that a book will light up in a way when it's meant for you to find. That was this novel for me. A note was inscribed in the cover, "To my love Henry, may you discover the world."

That is what gave me hope. Going to the Strand, finding that book, and reading that note. It gave me a special satisfaction to know that although COVID-19 spread numerous tragedies, a piece of someone may still remain trapped in a piece of literature. When our world was plagued with misery, death knocking at so many doors, this book gave me hope that one day we may again see the future as something positive. The Strand gave me a sanctuary when the world seemed so cruel, but it was also the presence of literature in and of itself that gave me a mindset that I will be here even when I am gone. That is what it means to be a writer, I suppose.