

# Nothing Beats a Neighbourhood Bookstore

Written by Monique Polak

It's important to know the places that make us happy. My personal list includes the Jean-Talon Market, especially in fall, and pretty much every bookstore I've ever been to.

When I was a little girl growing up in the 1960s, my dad, a lawyer, worked in the Dominion Square Building, at the corner of Ste. Catherine and Peel Streets. Some Saturday mornings, he'd take me to the office. Our outings always ended downstairs, at the WH Smith bookstore, where my dad would let me choose any book I wanted. Those bookstore visits helped make me a reader – and a writer.

Shopping on-line for books may be convenient and easy, but it brings none of the satisfactions of a visit to a brick-and-mortar bookstore. Web browsers give us access to the Internet, but they do not compare to browsing in a bookstore, looking for a book – the book! – we need to read.

On my morning runs, I sometimes jog past Bibliophile on Queen Mary Road. If it's closed, I stop to check out the window display. The small store has been around for forty years, and owner Sandra Climan is a kind of book curator. If a book is in her window, I know I should read it – and that I'll enjoy it. This morning, I spotted Bill Gates's *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster* and Anna Malaika Tubbs's *The Three Mothers*, which tells the stories of the three women who raised Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and James Baldwin.

If I jog in the opposite direction, I can visit my friends at Librairie Saga Bookstore on Upper Lachine Road. In the local bookstore biz, Saga is the newest-kid-on-the-block. A bilingual bookstore, it is owned by Mathieu Lauzon-Dicso and his husband Ilya Razykov. Le Devoir newspaper described the little shop, which opened in December 2020 -- mid-pandemic -- as a "librairie de poche" or pocket library. The store motto is: "To read with pride and without prejudice." The specialty here is speculative fiction. But the shop also carries graphic novels, children's books, and resources for writers.

When I last visited Saga, Lauzon-Dicso was chortling with excitement as he opened a box of fresh books, and discovered Nnedi Okorafor's YA sci-fi novel *Remote Control*. During the January lockdown,

Saga offered free home delivery to NDG residents. When public gatherings are allowed again, Lauzon-Dicso and Razykov plan to host some in-person literary events inside their store and in the neighbourhood. Here's hoping they'll partner up with Momesso Caffé Sportivo, an NDG institution that serves up the best Italian subs in town, and which is located in the same building as Saga.

From my home in NDG, there's no jogging to Livres Babar. But for me, a visit there is well worth the fifteen-minute car ride to the heart of Pointe Claire Village. As the store's name suggests – it's named after Jean de Brunhoff's fictional elephant -- the specialty here is kids' book and has been since the shop opened in 1986. It's owned by Maya Munro and her husband David Byers; their daughter Megan helps run it. The shop features two floors of children's books. Though Livres Babar is a staunch supporter of Canadian kid-lit, the shop carries kids' books by writers and illustrators from around the world. "It's important to have good books from other countries and cultures if we're going to understand each other," said Munro.

Munro came up with the idea of opening a kids' bookstore. "I was at play group and it was hard to find kids' books," she recalled. Between 2005 and 2015, Livres Babar had a second location on Greene Avenue in Westmount. That Greene Avenue location had a story of its own – before Babar moved in, it was the long-time home of the Double Hook Book Shop, a Canadian-only bookstore owned by Judith Mappin, an important figure in our city's literary landscape.

The first book launch I ever attended was at the Double Hook Book Shop. At the time, I didn't dare dream that one day I'd be launching books of my own, and that some of those launches would take place in the same space.

Before the pandemic struck, Saturday was the best day to go to Livres Babar. That was because, sometime between 11 AM and 4 PM, you could be there for story time and a craft activity. From my observations, I think it's safe to say no one is ever too old for story time.

I go to Babar to browse, attend my friends' launches and talk books. When I'm thinking about starting a new project, I often drop in at Babar. If Munro thinks it's a good idea, I know I'm onto something.

Once you're in Pointe Claire Village, consider making a morning – or an afternoon – of it. Don't miss Le Panier, an old-fashioned gift shop, where you're sure to find a gift for someone, or better still, for yourself.

You should probably also try the made-on-the-premises fudge. If you need a coffee, make a beeline to Victor Rose Espresso Bar. The lattes here are first-class, and Munro recommends the scones. Try to get one of the stools by the café's sunny front window. If you bought a book at Livres Babar, now is the perfect time to crack it open.

**Bibliophile**

5519 Queen Mary Road  
Montreal, QC, H3X 1V4

<https://bibliophilemontreal.com/>

**Livres Babar**

46 Avenue Sainte-Anne  
Pointe-Claire, QC, H9S 4P8

<https://livresbabarbooks.com/>

**Librairie Saga Bookstore**

5574 Upper Lachine Road  
Montreal, QC, H4A 2A7

<https://librairiesaga.ca/en>

**Le Panier**

274 Lakeshore Drive  
Pointe-Claire, QC, H9S 4K9

<https://www.thepanier.com/>

**Momesso Caffé Sportivo**

5562 Upper Lachine Road  
Montreal, QC, H4A 2A7

<http://momesso.ca/>

**Victor Rose Espresso Bar**

15C Cartier Avenue  
Pointe-Claire, QC, H9S 4R5