

# Mr. Snavely's Bookstore Won't Make Him A Millionaire

By Susan Hughes

"You don't get rich in the bookstore business . . ." That's the answer that Mr. Snavely gives to all the curious souls who ask him "Aren't you rich?"

Our Mr. Snavely has been in the bookstore business ever since he was fourteen years old. His family moved all around the country and during his teen-age years they lived in Lynchburg, Virginia, where his father was a linotype operator for the J. B. Bell Company. The company had a large printing plant and a bookstore. One night Mr. Snavely's father came home and told him that they needed a boy to deliver packages, and so Mr. Snavely took the job. By the time he was eighteen years old he was buyer for the bookstore.

In 1928 he came to Winston-Salem to work at Watkins Bookstore, and in 1932 when he heard that the bookstore at Salem was being closed and the girls would be left to buy things wherever they could, he bought the bookstore. For about twenty-four years he operated our bookstore and remained the buyer for the bookstore uptown. Now he has this bookstore and does not buy for anyone else.

Mr. Snavely says if you read the *Publisher's Weekly*, you can see that there isn't much money in the book and stationery business. Hardly any college graduates go out and plan to open a bookstore, and when the causes are traced they invariably turn out to be a lack of return on the investment. Another reason is the fact that few towns need more than one or two bookstores. So many times the department stores have book corners, and this seems to show that it is hard to make a bookstore stand on its own feet.

"One of the tragedies of the reading public," Mr. Snavely says, "is the fact that America has the fewest number of bookstores per capita of any nation in the world."

"A person has to almost be a little crazy to get into the business, but it's like teaching in college—you don't get much money, but it's in your blood and you love it . . ." He says it was the best thing that ever happened to him.

Mr. Snavely says that President Rondthaler used to try to get him



Mr. Snavely shows a fish caught on one of his rare fishing trip vacations from the Book Store.

to talk to the girls in chapel about his business and his life, but Mr. Snavely says that that was out of his element—he'd rather talk to us in his store than face us en masse. When he became a buyer at the bookstore in Lynchburg, he was only eighteen. He did the same work for Randolph-Macon College that he does for Salem College, and

he recalls this incident as one of his favorites:

One day a little college girl ran in and said "I believe your forte in life is helping college girls in distress . . ." Mr. Snavely said he felt it was supposed to be a compliment, but he had to go look up the word "forte" to see what it meant.

After he left Lynchburg, he dealt mostly with men, and was a little older by the time he got to Salem Bookstore. "When I came down here, I just about died. There were too many girls and I didn't know how to act or talk. A girl would come in and ask for a pair of stockings and I would just about drop dead."

Now, he says, salesmen come in and see him laughing and talking when about half the school descends on him at once and always they ask, "How do you stand it?" And Mr. Snavely just laughs and tells them he's been with us twenty-nine years. He says one thing that keeps him here is the fact that so many girls come in to see him for years after they've graduated, and they bring the children. He loves to see them come in and wave and smile—and I'm sure one reason they want to come back is to see his smile. Girls can rush in forty to fifty strong and he never loses that smile. He sees us at our worst and he never loses that smile. He has to stick to his policies, but he never loses that smile.

Mr. Snavely says the reason for his good life is his faith. "That is the unquestionable secret of my happiness. It's not a plaything." He feels that although he has not made a lot of money he is rich in experience and friendship. And he believes that to go down to his store and do the best he can every day is the best service he can give. Counted among his blessings are

his wife, two sons, a daughter and five grandchildren who live within driving distance of his home. His favorite pastime during his time off—which isn't much—is fishing and his "office" behind the rows of books, flashbulbs, records and so on, has several pictures of him with the fish he's caught—big ones too.

As for Salem girls, he says he can brag about them because they have been here for twenty-nine years." He says that one of the used book buyers who come to the store told him that he traveled all over the United States buying books from girls who just couldn't seem to understand why the depreciation of a book lowered the value so much. He sees girls at their worst, arguing and griping but he said to Mr. Snavely that Salem girls have a quality of character that he's never seen anywhere else in the United States. "Now he didn't have to say that . . ." said our Mr. Snavely, "but he saw what I've seen all this time."

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