

DISCOVERING BOOKPEOPLE

On my days off, I walked the streets of Austin. The city seemed made for wandering: old buildings with unexpected details, inviting shops, shaded parks, and strangers who nodded or smiled as I passed. Those nods and smiles meant a lot to me. I struggled to remain positive under the weight of my stressful job.

One afternoon, my walk led me to *BookPeople*. My heart quickened at the idea of finding an independent bookstore. Soft jazz met me at the door, and the high ceilings of the first floor made the space feel grand. Tables overflowed with new releases, staff recommendations, and handwritten notes that seemed to speak directly to me. I wanted to buy everything I saw.

Notices for author events and book signings covered the walls. I saw that BookPeople had hosted book signings for former presidents such as Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter. I was impressed, but more than that, I felt welcomed by a world I had almost forgotten about.

The café inside *BookPeople* became my home away from home. I visited often. I would order a latte, claim a comfortable chair, open my laptop, and update my journal. The ritual was simple, but it felt private and slightly daring because I was exploring my complex feelings about my job which was taking care of an elite Scientologist who had had a mental breakdown.

Those afternoons were precious to me. I began to loosen the grip of my carefully constructed Scientology self that I had carried for so long. Beneath it, another woman was still waiting: the one who had once dreamed of becoming a writer, living in Paris, and walking the streets and visiting the haunts of Ernest Hemingway, D.H. Lawrence, and Gertrude Stein.

BookPeople became more than a refuge from work and worry. It became a place where I could hear my own thoughts again—and, in time, where I would become open to the kind of friendship I had not realized I needed.