

Ray's Books

On a crisp fall morning, Aaron Kessler was relaxing with a cup of coffee when his phone rang. "Hello?" "Good morning Mr. Kessler. I'm Charlotte Hamburg, the attorney in charge of handling your late uncle's affairs. Are you able to meet me at my office in an hour?" Startled, Aaron replied yes. He looked at his watch and jotted down the address Charlotte gave him.

Soon after, Aaron was in his car, plugging the address to the lawyer's office, into his GPS. Why would Uncle Raymond's lawyer want to meet, he wondered. Aaron missed Uncle Raymond, his father's only brother. It had been one month since he passed away after a bout with pneumonia. After Aaron's father, Michael, died of a massive heart attack five years ago, Aaron had grown even closer to his uncle.

Aaron was greeted warmly by Charlotte Hamburg when he arrived at her office. "Thanks for meeting me on such short notice," she said as she shook his hand and smiled. After he sat down, she continued "As you know, your uncle owned one of the best independent bookstores here in Arlington, Seattle. And he left instruction that Ray's Books be left to you upon his death."

Later that evening, back at home with his wife Carrie, son Adan, and daughter Terri, Aaron had time to digest what happened. His initial reaction was shock. He knew how much the bookstore meant to Uncle Raymond. It was his life. He never married or had children, and put everything into the bookstore. Aaron adored it too. Now that he was a busy husband and father, he never seemed to spend as much time as he wanted at the bookstore. Growing up, he loved to stop by the bookstore after school and on Saturday afternoons. But he never expected Uncle Raymond to leave the bookstore to him. He thought he would leave it to one of his employees. He had a small group of staff at the bookstore. Mostly college business majors looking for experience in helping run a small business. Occasionally, the librarian at Adan's school would volunteer her services at the bookstore.

"I'm a sports columnist. What do I know about running a business," Aaron said to his wife when he briefed her that evening on the visit to the law office. "If it's what you want to do, you can learn how to run a business. Hire some experts. Your uncle clearly thought you were the best choice to take on that responsibility," Carrie told her husband. Something then clicked in Aaron. And he became determined to honor his uncle, by taking the reigns of the bookstore.

Once Aaron made his decision, he began to throw himself into the project. Excited, he formed a group of people to help. He arranged a meeting with some of those already on staff at the bookstore.

That Tuesday, Aaron met at the bookstore with the two business majors working at Ray's Books: Tim Porter and Kayla Bush. Carrie made baked spaghetti and Caesar salad for the group to feast on as they talked.

"What are some of the biggest challenges you think the bookstore has faced over the past two years," Aaron asked. He and his accountant, Robert, had already looked over the bookstore's records, and saw that business had steadily declined.

"We need to inject new life into the bookstore," Kayla said boldly. "It's dead in here most days. A lot of the loyal customers we once had, just don't stop by anymore."

Ray's Books

Tim began to speak up too. “We should bring local writers in for book signings and meet-the-author events. And I’ve heard suggestions from many parents that they want to bring their children on Saturdays for book readings, arts and crafts, etc.”

Over the next few hours, the group began to write a plan in earnest to revitalize the bookstore. Kayla compiled a list of local authors they wanted to invite for book signings. They would ask Majorie Pennington, the librarian at Adan’s school, to come to the bookstore on Saturday afternoons and read to children. Tim also suggested that the bookstore finally have a presence on social media. “I offered to set up Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts for the bookstore, and run those accounts. But Raymond wasn’t enthusiastic about it,” he said. Aaron loved the idea, and asked Tim to set up the social media accounts by the end of the week. The group wrapped up their discussion, and decided to call it a day. They were all feeling pleased to be on the same page about the future direction of the bookstore. As she began walking to the bus stop, Kayla appreciated the beautiful sunset. She quickly pulled her iPad out her purse, and took a picture of the bookstore with the sun setting behind it. She would text it to Tim. Perhaps he’d want to use the picture on the social media pages he would be setting up for the bookstore. That evening, Aaron wrote a short biography of his uncle, and the birth of the bookstore. He would email it to Tim to post on the bookstore’s Facebook page.

Aaron also had a decision to make about his future as a sports columnist. He loved his writing career. But knew that in order for the bookstore to be a success going forward, it would need his full attention. He began researching online business classes. He was grateful to have Tim and Kayla on the team, but as college business majors, they may have aspirations other than the bookstore. Aaron needed to continue to soak up their knowledge, but also take some business courses himself. Between their children and nursing school, Carrie had her hands full. But she’d support her husband in any way she could. She was taking shifts in the pediatric ward at the local hospital. And knew she could spread the word about the bookstore to her patient’s parents. One of Aaron’s colleagues at the newspaper promised to write about the revitalization of the bookstore, for the Arts and Entertainment section. Aaron had a friend at a t.v. station, who would do a segment on the bookstore for the 11:00 PM news.

Now that they had a game plan to win back customers, it was time for the group to turn their attention to the aesthetics. The bookstore was in need of a paint job. It needed more pops of color to make it look vibrant. Floors needed scrubbing. The group planned to do a walkthrough in the morning to make a list of everything that needed to be done to beautify the bookstore.

But the future looked bright indeed for Ray’s Books.