

back as 1987 with the establishment of National Life Stories, with its mandate to record interviews with a broad cross-section of contemporary society, Bradley recognizes that this effort is one more contribution to a burgeoning field of scholarship.

Fortunately, it is a contribution that is accessible—making available the original sound recordings in such a way as to pique interest in the larger audio collection as well as generating further works that continue to illuminate the colourful world of U.K. book publishing.

The volume also points to the greater appreciation and interest Canadians should take in our own country's book trade professionals. An equally ambitious project seems almost unimaginable here, however, given the constraints on funding. While we are fortunate to have the three-volume *History of the Book in Canada*, Bradley's work? volume? sets an example for enthusiasts who want to capture the flavour, first-person, of Canada's book trade.

REVIEWED BY PETER MITHAM

~ *A Memoir* By Larry McMurtry
(Simon & Schuster, 2008, \$28)

It is not at all surprising that Larry McMurtry's memoir of his 40-plus years in the book trade would be eagerly awaited by bibliophiles everywhere. After all, he was the author of some 28 novels, one of which, *Lonesome Dove*, won the coveted Pulitzer Prize in 1986. He was also well-known for the successful film adaptation of his third novel, *The Last Picture Show*.

McMurtry had a wealth of personal experience to back up his considerable narrative skill. While studying at Stanford University he became a rare book scout, and during his years living in Houston he managed a bookstore called the Bookman. In 1969 he moved to Washington, D.C., and in 1970 with two partners opened a bookshop in Georgetown which he named Booked Up. In 1988 he opened another Booked Up in Archer City, which is one of the largest single used bookstores in the U.S., carrying somewhere between 400,000 and 450,000 titles.

McMurtry, therefore, is an experienced book man with considerable skill in telling a good story. One might well ask, then, what happened to that

great fund of knowledge and that ability to tell an interesting tale? Readers will certainly not find a well-crafted and satisfying read in Books.

The problem is that this book of 259 pages is chopped up into 109 chapters. I conducted a laborious manual count of the book's chapters and came up with the following numbers:

- chapters of one page or just slightly longer: 53
- chapters of 2 pages or slightly longer: 45
- chapters of 3 pages: 7
- chapters of 4 pages: 1
- chapters of 5 pages: 3

That's more than 183 pages right there. In addition, as one reviewer has already noted, the chronology is not always straightforward but tends to jump back and forth in time.

The result is a very sketchy and fragmented read. McMurtry begins an interesting anecdote, for example, about some part of the book trade, but invariably it fizzles out in an anticlimactic way in a mere page or two. The reader is often left wanting to know more details about a particular story and perhaps even some discussion about the possible significance of an event or events. It is sort of like reading a book of one-liners as opposed to reading a well-crafted humorous short story. One might even go so far as to call reading *Books: A Memoir* an experience—given the bookish theme—of “codex interruptus.”

I did eventually read right through the book for the occasional insight it might offer about the book trade. It certainly didn't take me long given the large number of one- and two-page chapters. My final recommendation is to borrow *Books: A Memoir* from the public library and then try to sample the book in some way. I wouldn't recommend buying a copy, since at least two of my friends after purchasing and dipping into the book decided they did not want to keep it in their personal libraries. They passed both copies along to me to do with as I saw fit.

Anyone want to buy a good used book?

REVIEWED BY RICHARD HOPKINS