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Strangers bond over donations to neighbourhood book exchanges

By Ian Holliday

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"It was quite a lot of books that she had," Baum said. "It was enough to fill a backseat of a car." (Ilianne Robredo)

Vancouver — Jer Baum was scrolling through Facebook's marketplace Wednesday when he saw an offer that inspired him.

Ilianne Robredo was offering a collection of books - more than two dozen of them - for \$30.

"It was quite a lot of books that she had," Baum said. "It was enough to fill a backseat of a car."

He messaged Robredo to make an offer for the books, then got in a carshare vehicle and made his way over to pick them up.



Some of the books were ones Baum had already read, but he wasn't purchasing them for himself. His plan was to distribute them to some of the neighbourhood book exchanges near his Kitsilano home.

"I got there and I told her that I was getting these books just to distribute throughout the different book exchange programs and she wanted to give me my money back, because she thought it was a nice gesture," Baum said.

He told her to keep the money, reasoning that the books would have cost quite a bit more than that for her to acquire.

"She was really touched and she said that she wouldn't forget this and that I'd restored her faith in humanity," Baum said.

"I told him that I didn't believe people like him existed," Robredo added.

Baum said restocking the little free libraries just struck him as a nice thing to do for his local community.

He said he's used the book exchanges before, but doesn't make a habit of buying used books to restock them. He just saw an opportunity to do a good deed, and decided to do it.

"If I can ever make an effort to help, I do," Baum said.

Robredo said the experience convinced her never to try to sell books when she's done with them again.

"Here's this guy who's some kind of book warrior or angel," she said. "He takes \$30 out of his wallet. He rents an Evo. He takes one hour to do this with absolutely no interest for himself, just to help the community have a better time because a lot of people are at home, a lot of people are not faring well at home."

For his part, Baum said he hopes the books themselves pass on some of the positive impact his interaction with Robredo had.

"I didn't know the impact that it would have on Ilianne, so that was really cool. I was touched by her response," Baum said. "It gave me a warm feeling as I was driving around in this Evo, going from box to box, distributing them ... It was really, really interesting to see the impact that it could have on one person, and I'm just hoping that the books can have an equal impact on people."