



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Hilde Reiss used to run The Pelican store in Capitola.

A happy ending for the library, its store, and woman who runs it

ONCE upon a time, there was a Capitola shopkeeper who did a very good job running her shop. Parents who knew about the shop liked it because of the sign, "No War Toys" and the interesting items she offered instead. They were sad a few years ago when Hilde Reiss closed her door for good.

Not long after, these same parents had a wonderful surprise. When they took their children to the Public Library on Church Street, they found inside a little shop just like Hilde's. And then one day, they discovered Hilde herself there, as the manager.

What a happy ending, they thought.

Hilde Reiss didn't start out as a shopkeeper. In her native Germany, she attended a school called Bauhaus, in the city of Dessau. "I was educated in architecture," she says in her typically understated manner.

That Reiss is managing one of the town's most unusual businesses is a fortunate turn of fate for the Friends of the Library and came about because Friends president, Barbara Morris, was one of the parents described above.

"Barbara knew me from the days at the Pelican (Hilde's shop) and asked me if I would be in charge of the shop," she said. "The Friends had been selling donated books, and they decided to add convenience items."

They started small, with two donated display cases and such things as bookmarks and bookplates. "Everything related to books, literature and reading."

Book sale set at library

A book sale will be held from noon to 8 p.m. Wednesday in the upstairs meeting room of the Santa Cruz Public Library.

Members of the Friends of the Library will participate in a special preview sale from 10 a.m. to noon. Discounts are also available.

In two years, the shop has outgrown its corner, with three display cases, wall displays and even a wooden entry sign.

Reiss selects the merchandise, orders, does the banking and works two afternoons a week, all as a volunteer. Marilyn Newton of the library staff coordinates 17 volunteers and 10 substitutes to work other shifts, morning and afternoon.

"It's a terribly difficult thing, scheduling all the volunteers," says the former businesswoman. Add to no-shows among the workers, the fact that every night all merchandise must be put away, and you've got nearly a miracle in the running of the Library Shop.

"The response is generally very positive," says Reiss, who for 14 years ran the House of Today in Palo Alto. Earlier, her work was much in interior design, with furniture and in industrial settings. While in Minneapolis, she did museum exhibition installations.

The word, "design" frequently dots her conversation. That's what

she watches for. Design. Is it because of her German background?

Reiss laughs. "I've been in the U.S. 50 years, so that 'German' business doesn't really mean anything anymore." Good design is good design, regardless, she believes.

As she talks, she keeps an eye on customers. A young mother pauses to inspect rubber stamps.

"These are self-inking dinosaur stamps," says Reiss, in typical low-key approach. The wonder of the item, not the sale, seem to be her pitch, and as she shows the merchandise, she's likely to get captivated, herself.

"People think the items are unusual and inexpensive, good for stocking stuffers," she says. Five dollars will buy binoculars that have eight other uses. Card games like the gem and mineral rummy transcend the ordinary. For 50 cents, there's a brass bookmark.

"We sell tons of erasers in funny shapes," Reiss remarked.

And, the Friends are starting to put out items of their own devise, such as the Book Lending Record. The lender writes a permanent record of the book loan in a booklet and tears off a bookmark-ticket for the loaner.

Prices can be kept low because the shop pays no rent, no salaries. Forty percent of each sale is clear profit.

"Every cent goes for library purposes," said Reiss. "That's especially important since the budget was cut. I don't really know how they use the money; we just keep this little place running."

— MARYBETH VARCADOS