

OBITUARIES

C. Coonerty, loved by book-lovers

Driving force behind Bookshop Santa Cruz

*When you are old and gray and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep*

— William Butler Yeats

BY ELISE BANDUCCI
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Yeats brought Candy and Neal Coonerty together, beginning a 31-year love affair that built the locally cherished Bookshop Santa Cruz.

With Mrs. Coonerty's death last Thursday from a stroke, her husband turned to her favorite poem for solace.

At her memorial service, he listened to a reading of "When You Are Old" with a mixture of longing and hope. His wife was only 49 when she died.

Poetic meeting

The couple — he a Catholic from California, she a Jew from Montreal — met in 1968 in Neal Coonerty's ancestral Ireland, when they were attending a Yeats summer program.

They married in 1971 and bought Bookshop Santa Cruz in 1973. Throughout the 1980s, at a time when many independent bookstores were being driven out of business by big chains, Bookshop Santa Cruz not only prospered but also grew into what many described as the com-

Candy Coonerty

- **Born:** Dec. 5, 1949, in Montreal, Canada
- **Died:** July 22, 1999, in Santa Cruz, Calif.
- **Survived by:** Husband, Neal, son, Ryan, and daughter, Casey, all of Santa Cruz; parents, Bernard and Ruth Issenman of Santa Cruz; sister, Tina Issenman of Santa Cruz; and brothers, Phillip Issenman of Montreal and Dr. Robert Issenman of Burlington, Ontario, Canada.
- **Services:** Have been held.
- **Memorial:** Donations may be made to the Children's Defense Fund, 25 E St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20001.



munity's "living room."

Though her husband, a onetime Santa Cruz mayor, was the couple's public face, Mrs. Coonerty was the force behind the store's evolution.

"I like to say that what you get from an independent bookseller is good advice from people you trust," said Avin Mark Domnitz, chief executive officer of the American Booksellers Association, which represents about 3,300 independent stores. "Candy knew the people who came into that store, and they trusted her."

Longtime customer Eleanor Hilberman said that literally no obstacle would stop Mrs. Coonerty from getting the right book into her customers' hands.

"She would climb over packing crates" to get what the customer needed, said Hilberman, whose reading group often turned to Mrs. Coonerty for suggestions. "We loved her."

Mrs. Coonerty's devotion to her customers did not end at the entrance to the bookshop. She was a tireless community volunteer. In addition to her work with various children's advocacy groups, she was president of Temple Beth El Congregation. She also helped found the Jewish Cultural Fair, the Jewish Film Festival and the Jewish Comedy Night in Santa Cruz. In addition, she was on the board of directors of Friends of University of California-Santa Cruz library and the advisory council of the Santa Cruz Hillel Foundation.

She shared her passions with her children. In her son, Ryan, 25, she instilled a love of author Wallace Stegner. In her daughter, Casey, 23, a devotion to children. Casey recently completed a fellowship working in child advocacy.

Rescued from rubble

In 1989, after the Loma Prieta earthquake destroyed the building that housed the bookstore, Mrs. Coonerty's customers repaid her devotion: More than 400 turned out to rescue the books from the rubble.

For three years after the devastating quake, the Coonertys sold books from a tent.

"It wasn't a pleasant place to shop," Neal Coonerty said. "It was almost like they (the customers) were giving us the gift of their pa-

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tronage."

At a time when their two children would soon be starting college, the Coonertys risked everything to rebuild during a recession.

Their new shop on Pacific Avenue, which was financed by offering their home as collateral for a loan, served as an anchor for the rebuilt downtown.

"My sister described Candy as an incurable romantic with no desire to be cured," Neal Coonerty said. "We had this dream . . . to come to Santa Cruz. We had lived our lives to pursue these dreams in a realistic way, and there wasn't any doubt between us that we should do this."

Today, when Neal Coonerty recites "When You Are Old," it takes on a very different meaning than it had when he and his wife were young lovers.

"... love fled

And paced upon the mountains overhead," reads the final stanza.

Surrounded by the majesty of the Santa Cruz Mountains, Neal Coonerty says he is reminded that "you do return to earth and you become part of nature again. . . . In nature you can see the beauty that you saw in your love."