

Candy Coonerty succumbs to stroke

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SANTA CRUZ — Candy Coonerty made a town full of readers feel at home.

Co-owner of Bookshop Santa Cruz for the past 25 years, she made the business a local favorite by offering an eclectic selection, featuring books by area authors, and providing comfortable wing chairs for customers.

A single candle burned inside the Pacific Avenue store Thursday for Coonerty, who died that morning at Dominican Hospital, where she had been in a coma for seven weeks following a stroke. She was 49.

Flowers began arriving at the store soon after news of Coonerty's death spread. Friends and customers stopped to pay respects.

"A second earthquake shakes Bookshop," one wrote in a remembrance book.

Coonerty had suffered a stroke six years earlier.

'She saw the bookshop as more than a business. It was a meeting place for the community.'

— Neal Coonerty

Many people never knew because she had fully recovered and returned to the busy store.

"She saw the bookshop as more than a business," said her husband Neal Coonerty, who owned the store with his wife. "It was a meeting place for the community. She loved to talk to people. She saw the bookshop as a place where people bumped into each other and renewed acquaintances."

It has been like a living room for downtown Santa Cruz.

A former mayor of the city, Neal Coonerty is largely the public face of the business, but his wife was an unheralded driving force, making it one of the most respected bookstores in the nation.

Richard Howorth, president of the American Booksellers Association, said Bookshop Santa Cruz is special.

"After the earthquake happened, what they did with the store and the community in the face of that disaster speaks volumes," Howorth said.

After the 1989 earthquake destroyed the store, the Coonertys operated from a temporary pavilion for three years before reopening as

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an anchor of the rebuilt downtown.

"It is so different from the chain stores that are run by formula," said Andy Ross, owner of the landmark Cody's bookstore in Berkeley. "They have always been part of the town."

Ross was sleeping on the Coonertys' couch 22 years ago when he decided to buy his own bookshop.

"Candy was very meticulous," Ross said. "She cared a lot about the details. Candy would notice if something was out of place."

The Coonertys met because of literature, specifically the work of Irish poet William Butler Yeats. They were college students attending the W.B. Yeats International Summer School in Sligo, Ireland, in August of 1968. She was 18. He was 21.

Although they both loved Yeats, their first discussion was about her cousin, Montreal poet Leonard Cohen. Neal Coonerty, a student at UC Berkeley, had written a paper about Cohen's novels and admired his song writing.

But she objected to a scene in his first novel, "The Favorite Game," in which the protagonist throws a chicken at his mother.

"A Jewish boy should never ever throw a chicken at his mother," she said.

Coonerty said he was charmed.

They married in Montreal in 1971 and moved to Santa Cruz two years later. Their son, Ryan, was born in 1974 and daughter, Casey, in 1976. The children gave her endless joy and absolute happiness, said her husband.

Candy Coonerty was born and raised in Montreal, Canada. She graduated from Emerson College in

Boston in 1972. She worked at G.K. Hall Publishers in Boston before moving to Santa Cruz to take over Bookshop Santa Cruz in 1973.

In 1975, the Coonertys opened Bookworks in the Rancho del Mar Shopping Center in Aptos. Candy Coonerty managed Bookworks until it was sold six years later.

She also worked as a greeting card sales representative for David McPhail & Associates.

At Bookshop Santa Cruz, she acted as a buyer for the card section, audio books, journals, calendars and other sections in the bookstore.

Coonerty was active in a number of community organizations and had served as president of Temple Beth El Congregation. She also helped found the Jewish Cultural Fair, the Jewish Film Festival and the Jewish Comedy Night.

She was serving on the board of directors of Friends of the UC Santa Cruz Library and the advisory council of the Santa Cruz Hillel Foundation.

She was an avid gardener, walker and cook. She traveled extensively.

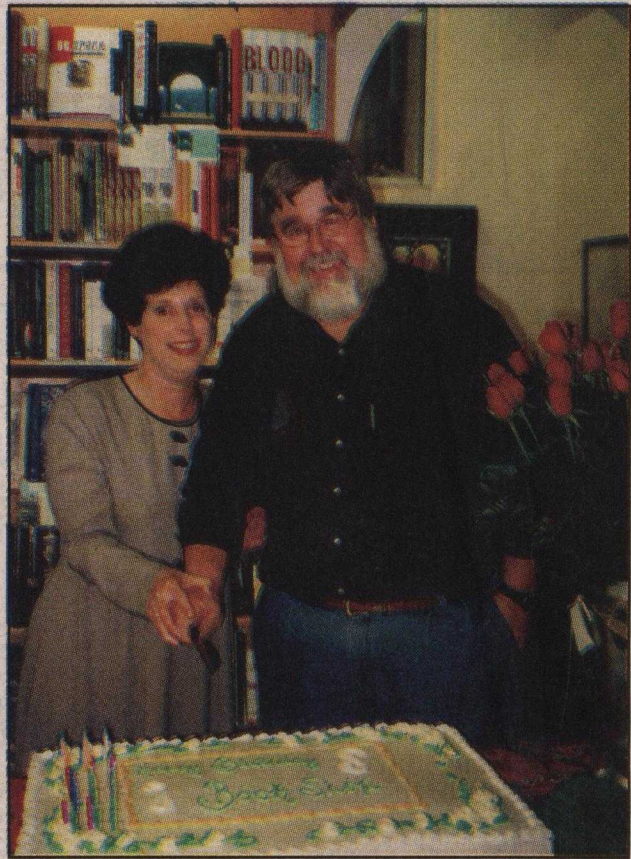
Coonerty and her husband recently went to England and Italy, traveling the backroads.

They returned home May 30, and Coonerty had the stroke four days later.

In addition to her husband and children, all of Santa Cruz, she is survived by parents Bernard and Ruth Issenman of Santa Cruz; sister Tina Issenman of Santa Cruz; and brothers Philip Issenman of Montreal and Robert Issenman of Burlington, Ontario, Canada.

Services will be 1 p.m. Sunday at Temple Beth El, 3055 Porter Gulch Road, Aptos. A private burial service will follow.

Contributions are preferred to Temple Beth El, 3055 Porter Gulch Road, Aptos, CA, 95003, or the Children's Defense Fund, 25 E. St., NW, Washington, DC 20001.



Candy and Neal Coonerty celebrate the 25th anniversary of Bookshop Santa Cruz in November 1998.