

Sisterhood stands for women



JUSTIN WARREN/Daily Bruin

Westwood resident **Liria Mersini** buys books from Sisterhood Bookstore manager **Julie Mitchell**.

BOOK: Bookstore brings the word 'feminism' into a more optimistic light

By Cheryl Klein
Daily Bruin Senior Staff

The Sisterhood Bookstore is a crosswalk away from Borders on Westwood Boulevard. Sisterhood is petite and non-pretentious next to its two-story, coffee shop-sporting neighbor, yet the small feminist bookstore is hardly in anyone's

shadow.

Since 1972, Sisterhood Bookstore has sold books ranging from lesbian humor to UCLA textbooks, hosted a women's book discussion group and has acted as a forum for many notable speakers. Co-owner and founder Simone Wallace sees it all as a way to spread a definition of feminism that is broad, optimistic and tailored to the '90s.

"One aspect of feminism has always been, since the very beginning, multicultural anti-racism,"

Wallace explains. "Also, to us, feminism is connected to progressive politics ... Feminism is not only a woman's right to choose, but it's looking at the entire environment which causes these issues to come up, which has to do with the way we treat women, the way we treat the earth, the way we treat people of all classes and all ethnic backgrounds."

Wallace is dressed conservatively and has a quiet voice, but her bright pink hair hints that she isn't shy

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about expressing herself.

"I love the way anti-abortionists call themselves 'pro-life,'" Wallace continues. "We've always been very much for pro-life on the planet and pro-life for the people ... We think that people really deserve to have the freedom to express themselves, whatever their gender or lifestyle or orientation."

Sisterhood has let many famous females voice their opinions over the years. Wallace gestures to an entire wall covered with glossy black-and-white photos of the bookstore's featured guests, including Alice Walker, Gloria Steinem, Judy Chicago and Lily Tomlin.

"This is the kind of environment that's very casual. We're non-corporate. We really want people to have the boundaries gone between the writers, the celebrities and their audience," Wallace says. She interrupts herself to enthusiastically rattle off another short list of speakers.

Wallace explains that the unique atmosphere of Sisterhood is a treat for speakers as well as audiences.

"They love coming here! And they don't always get to. They say their publishers have a lot to do with where they go. We're trying to train

them that they have a lot of power and they can say they want to come here."

Sisterhood also strives to draw people from the UCLA community, since it has shared a connection with the university from its beginning. Wallace, along with her two co-founders, is an alumna. She majored in English, but worked closely with the then new women's

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studies program after she graduated.

Wallace reminisces about her UCLA days and the Westwood of the '70s.

"When we opened the store, Westwood was really the heart of the cultural and I would say the more progressive view in Los Angeles. It was like the place to go on the weekends," she says.

Today, Sisterhood strives to keep

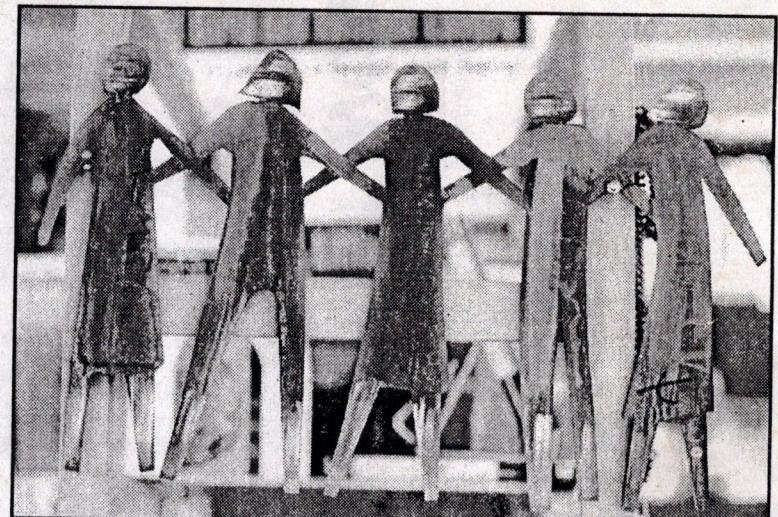
the progressive spirit alive by providing textbooks for many UCLA women's studies courses. Wallace explains that introducing young students to the store opens a new world of literature, even if they don't realize it until much later.

"I would say that especially graduate students and teachers have been interested in our store. Undergraduates are just finding out about our store and I think that many times they come in to buy their books and they're very involved in their task, which is to figure out what they need for their classes.

"They don't necessarily spend a huge amount of time getting into our store. But they have the experience of being here and they come back and, many of them will say that years later even, they start to have a relationship with our store."

If students spent more time browsing, they would discover books on current topics like women's health, providing such titles as "Menopaws - the Silent Meow" and "Growing Old is Not for Sissies II."

Sisterhood sells novelty items like candles, T-shirts and wrapping paper, most with a feminist theme. And, of course, there is a wide array of novels, from "Mary Reilly" to Toni Morrison's "Beloved."



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A sculpture evoking the spirit of sisterhood greets patrons of the Sisterhood Bookstore on Westwood.

"When I was in college in the '60s we basically only read things by men," Wallace says. "And I know there's this enormous debate going on now everywhere about what should people study. Should we study Shakespeare because Shakespeare was the greatest - even though it's really important to include women? But what if women or people of color's literature isn't up to that standard?"

"What I think happened is there has been a tremendous blossoming

and outpouring and renaissance of literature since women and people of color have found voices. It's just phenomenal how rich the literature is."

Hopefully, Sisterhood will continue to be a gathering place for many writers, speakers, feminists and students.

BOOKS: Sisterhood Bookstore is located at 1351 Westwood Blvd. For more info. call 477-7300 or visit its Web Site at www.sisterhood.com