

The Outlook

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By Saul Rubin
STAFF WRITER

When Simone Wallace and Adele Wallace became active in the women's movement in the early '70s, they began collecting journals and manuscripts and selling them to other feminists on an informal basis.

But as more literature on the women's movement surfaced, and demand for it increased, they decided that a full-fledged shop might be the answer.

They opened Sisterhood bookstore in 1972, on Westwood Boulevard south of the village and the UCLA campus, an area they knew from their student days and one which they knew exhibited strong support for feminist causes.

"Our only concern was whether there were enough books on the subject of the women's movement to fill a bookstore," says Adele. "At first, everything had to be face-out on the shelf. But it was amazing how there was a proliferation of titles about women's fiction and history and all kinds of journals."

Twenty-five years later, the Sisterhood bookstore has come a long way, baby. The store now carries 10,000 titles, or five times the amount of books as when it first opened.

There are subject sections you might expect in a women's bookstore, including contemporary feminist theory, lesbian mysteries, and politically-correct children's books. There are also dozens of magazines catering to specialty women's issues and interests.

But there is more mainstream fare as well, including works of contemporary fiction, anthropology, health, and other items including jewelry, T-shirts, CDs and even umbrellas — coveted items on a recent rainy day.

Simone Wallace says that the store's longevity is due in part to the fact that it has continually expanded its focus.

"We've always seen the store as a place for all women, and men, too," says Simone, who shares the same last name with her business partner because they are related as sisters-in-law.

It's a store, she says, with books by and about women. Its endurance, and that of the women's movement in Los Angeles, will be celebrated this Sunday at a 25th anniversary event.

On hand for the afternoon gathering at the Skirball Cultural Center will be *Ms.* magazine founder Gloria Steinem, U.S. Congresswoman Maxine Waters, California Assembly leader



A wall in the bookstore is covered with photographs of some of the hundreds of women authors who have been there for book-signings over the past 25 years.

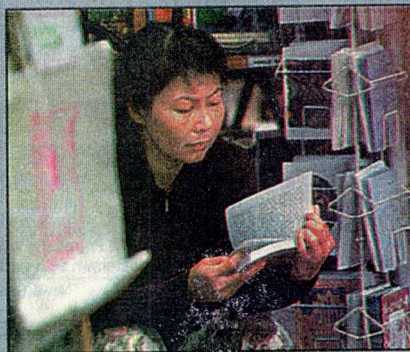
Sister Act

Westwood's Sisterhood bookstore celebrates 25 years of business



BRYAN McLELLAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Above: Simone Wallace is founder and co-owner of the Sisterhood bookstore which is devoted to literature for women and progressive feminist topics. The shop is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Below: Li Hu of Santa Monica gets lost in a book while she waits as her teen-age daughter browses.



UPCOMING

"Still Here," an event celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Sisterhood bookstore, will be held from 1-4:30 p.m. Sunday at the Skirball Cultural Center, 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd. in Bel-Air. Tickets cost \$100. For reservations, call the store at 477-7300. The Sisterhood bookstore is at 1351 Westwood Blvd. in Westwood.

Sheila Kuehl, D-Santa Monica, as well as several prominent women writers.

While the bookstore's founders say that the women's movement has made much progress since the store first opened, there's much to be done.

"Unfortunately, I think the issues are pretty much the same," Adele says. "Women still make less than men do, women do all the housework, and there's still domestic violence. I think the difference is that people are more aware and take these problems more seriously."

She points to other issues, such as the use of more inclusive language, as long-sought changes by early feminists that are now accepted by the general public. For example, firemen are now referred to as firefighters, she says. When these language changes were first suggested by feminists, Adele points out, they were often scorned or mocked by the public.

Both women feel that stepping into the store is just as strong of a political statement as when it first opened. Now, not all loyal customers may consider themselves feminists. But they are making a statement in support of independent, specialty bookstores. Sisterhood competes with a Borders across the street.

Browsing the store on a recent rainy day was Kate Monteiro, a visitor from Rhode Island, who makes it a point when traveling to seek out independent women's bookstores.

"Thanks to stores like this, there are a lot of books that you can get in Borders now that you could never have gotten before," Monteiro says. "These chain bookstores realize now that they ought to have a women's section that isn't just makeup or fashion books, but women's history, sociology, and psychology."

Mercedes Taha is a West Los Angeles resident who has been shopping at Sisterhood for the past 10 years. She recently bought a calendar there after not finding anything of interest at the Borders across the street.

"Borders has all the regular, routine calendars," she says. The one she found at Sisterhood focused each month on a different social issue, such as women's rights or recycling. Taha also carted out a book on how to have an easier childbirth, a resource she used to great benefit two months ago when she had a baby. She was buying another copy for her sister-in-law, who is expecting.

When Howard Stern was due to appear at Bor-

Sisterhood

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ders during a tour for his *Private Parts* book, his fans lined up outside the store for hours ahead of his appearance. Some wandered over to Sisterhood to see if they had a copy of the book. Adele said that is a good example of something they wouldn't carry.

While there are titles at Sisterhood that can be found at chain stores, the founders make a point of stocking in hundreds of books that aren't as widely circulated. When it comes to fiction, they only

carry women's titles because they feel that male authors have ample opportunities to have their works sold at other bookstores.

"As long as the books are generally about women and are not anti-women's equality, we will stock them," Adele says.

As for how much longer the store will continue, both women

couldn't say. Already, the store has surpassed expectations they had for it when they started and, indeed, exceeded the longevity of most small businesses.

"It was just sort of something

that we believed in politically at the time," says Adele. "I don't know if we ever thought it would be an enterprise that would support us and keep going for such a long time."