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## NORTHWEST news

# BEYOND WORDS

Bookstore founder passes the torch by Sarah Leimert

For the past nine years, In Other Words Women's Books and Resources has been an invaluable resource to the Portland community.

Founded in 1993 by Catherine Sameh, Catherine Tetric and Johanna Brenner, it is the only comprehensive women's bookstore in the area. The shop, located at 3734 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd., offers an extensive collection of women's writing on all subjects, gifts, a video rental library and free resources.

Working off grants, donations and a stellar staff of volunteers, In Other Words also offers a gathering space for community events including a monthly open mike, a program highlighting grassroots organizations in the store windows and a weekly children's nonsexist reading hour. In addition to these activities are regular author readings, lectures, discussion series and movie nights.

The inspiration to open In Other Words grew from the closing of another Portland women's bookstore in 1990, Sameh explains. "We felt like a feminist project was still viable, and we wanted to create a feminist community space. We felt [that] a women's bookstore was the perfect place to do that."

Also known as the Women's Community Education Project, In Other Words is one of only 70 women's bookstores remaining in the country. Sameh explains it was founded "as an outlet for education, for activism, for women's culture...a central place to do that kind of work."

Each founding member has a strong background in activism and social change work. Like many women's bookstores, In Other

Words was a byproduct of movement building and a need to bring women together as a group.

"A big part of feminism is personal discovery," Sameh says, "and bookstores are a really good, safe place to explore your identity and your life through the writings of other women." She strives to create that sense of safety in her store, where women can come to research the issues that affect them freely and comfortably.

Topics for the discussion series have included feminist parenting, women and globalization. Sameh is concerned that women who have left the academic setting (or who never had access to one) might not have an outlet for these important issues.

During a time of corporate domination, bookstores are among the smaller businesses that are being bought out or completely overshadowed. Sameh points

out that seven major companies own most of the publishing houses and that a less diverse range of books are being printed.

Staying afloat in this kind of environment is "a labor of love," she says. "Some of the owners [of the bookstores around the nation] opened the stores in the '70s and just can't do it after 30 years."

But even with competition from corporations such as Barnes & Noble and Borders, In Other Words has managed to make itself indispensable—and therefore successful—in Portland. Sameh credits her staff of tireless volunteers and the broad range of resources they promote.

"It's been a difficult venture," she says. "Finally, after nine years, we have become an institution that people depend on...and even though feminism has changed and it looks dif-



PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS

Catherine Sameh plans to pursue a graduate degree in Middle Eastern women's studies