

tors kept by EFN, another non-profit whose staff unionized, but “the list was made up entirely of men,” says Malito. Currently, the staff is seeking a woman with experience in labor issues to mediate.

“Kali Ma, I offer you my petti-ness, I offer you my sorrow.”

Back to the older staff, and older board. It's déjà vu for Mother Kali's.

Mother Kali's was founded in 1975 by Marilyn Picariello (“Muff”), Kathryn Hunt (“Devi”) and Ellen Greenlaw (“E”). The store opened with a shoestring \$500 loan from Muff's brother. The three worked the store until 1978 and then left, turning it over to a handful of women who formed a collective to run it. Elizabeth Anne (Izzie) Harbaugh joined in 1979, as did Lorraine Ironplow.

All the women were volunteers. Turnover was rapid as people moved on to take jobs that paid. But Harbaugh and Ironplow stayed on, Harbaugh working more, Ironplow putting in only one or two days per week. By 1982 or '83, says Ironplow, “it didn't make sense” to run the store as a collective, as Harbaugh was working there most of the time, knew everything there was to know, and usually had one younger person working with her whom she could train. “Because it



Co-founder
Marilyn
“Muff”
Picariello,
1975

was a collective, the board and staff were the same,” says Ironplow, and all agreed Harbaugh could be the manager.

Harbaugh managed the store until she died in 1999.

“She worked for free, lived on her Social Security, PERS and savings,” says Ironplow. Harbaugh also put some of her savings into the store, which was also supported by loyal customers' purchases and donations.

“She became the warm, engaging face of Mother Kali's. She was a force of nature; there was no replacement for her.” It was Izzie who met new women who came into the store, looking for resources, connections, community. “She's why our customers stayed with us,” says Ironplow, who was also Izzie's partner.

In summer of 1999, Tova Stabin entered Mother Kali's as co-manager, along with Jeannie Davis. Nikki Williams, who had worked with Harbaugh, continued through the transition.

Stabin had wandered in and out of Mother Kali's 20 some odd years ago, back when she was doing the national women's bookstore circuit for readings of her own writings. She remembers it as a sweet, small space, filled with a supportive community and friendly

people. Stores like it were all over the country: small, collectively run, volunteer supported. There were lots of small women's presses and bookstores in the '70s and early '80s.

In '99, the store was doing well, supported by a loyal customer base and UO professors who ordered their class textbooks there.

In summer of 2002, sales were booming and events, such as Mother Kali's 25th anniversary celebration, brought in thousands of dollars in profits. This, despite the fact that Barnes and Noble, Borders and Amazon.com were pushing small, independent bookstores, especially specialty ones like feminist bookstores, out of business all over the country.

“Great Mother, consume them, cut through them, burn them up.”

But despite its success, conflicts in different business styles began to develop between the manager and the board. It just so happened that when things began to erupt in 2002, the conflict was between an already overworked staff and board. “It's a big Catch 22,” says Stabin. “It's easy to categorize it as a personality conflict when there was just one person on the board.”

That one person was Ironplow, who wanted the staff to have more training in salesmanship and more experienced workers staffing the store; staff took these concerns as criticisms of their performance. With feelings tense, labor issues arose, including Stabin wanting more autonomy as manager, less experienced staffers feeling disrespected and powerless, charges of sexual harassment by senior staff, lack of job descriptions and clear lines of who was doing what and who was in charge of hiring new staff.

Ironplow, already working full time as a network engineer, was putting in 25 volunteer hours per week, helping with books and in the store, pitching in with whatever needed doing.

At this point, Stabin was working 30 hours per week, and she and co-manager Jeannie Davis were splitting managerial duties.

But the power dynamic of having a board member also working in the store was too much for the staff, who had not been there for the collective days of the '70s and early '80s when that's how it was done. Yet because there was a power dichotomy, Ironplow also felt entitled to have the final word.

The staff began to file grievances with the board. Trouble was, some of those grievances were about Ironplow, who, as the board, responded to them and dismissed them as not having merit.

Under pressure, Stabin gave notice of resignation, but offered to stay through October to make it through the textbook rush. She later rescinded that notice, if the board would meet certain staff demands.

“Meanwhile, the board was considering hiring a full-time manager who could assume the entire job, not just part of it, and who understood the importance of sales presence,” says Ironplow.

The staff felt Stabin was being forced out and treated unfairly.

The board, which by now included Barb Ryan, agreed to enter mediation with Stabin and the other Kalis' staff.

“Release me from the illusions of separation and ego, free me from the bonds of attachment.”

Lezlie Frye was one of those staff members. She began working in Oct. 2000, and by summer '02, had considerable experience



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