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TALEWIND BOOKS

Life of bookseller Bev Shaw spoke volumes

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Bev Shaw, the charismatic and conscientious founder of Sechelt's Talewind Books, is being hailed for her outsized influence in shaping literary culture on the Sunshine Coast, across Canada, and beyond.

Shaw died on Nov. 27 after a two-week struggle with an aggressive cancer. She was 64 years old.

"It's rare that a person achieves her level of penetration into people's lives across such a wide community," said Howard White, owner of Madeira Park-based publishing houses Douglas & McIntyre and Harbour Publishing.

When White shared news of Shaw's sudden passing on social media, the message travelled rapidly, eliciting heartfelt reactions from broadcasters, authors, and Talewind aficionados around the world.

"Some of the people talk about the bookstore and the amazing cultural role it played," White said. "Most of them wrote about how they felt about Bev and how deeply her loss is felt. With her witty, sardonic commentary, she was such a part of all our lives, and I'm lucky I got to engage with such an original, wonderful person."

Shaw established Talewind Books on Sechelt's Trail Avenue in 1987.

She and her husband, former district councillor Tom Lamb, were living in Sechelt as Shaw commuted to St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver for her work as an ultrasound technician. One day, while waiting at the Langdale ferry terminal, her car wouldn't start. The vessel sailed without her.

"They finally jump-started the car," recalled Lamb. "She came and found me and said, 'I'm done. I don't want to do this anymore.'" Shortly after, during a Whistler ski trip with friends, Shaw met the daughter of the owner of a former bookstore in Sechelt. The shop had just been listed for sale.

"Bev came home and talked to [the owner] and they made a deal," said Lamb. Shaw promptly renamed the shop Talewind Books. She soon established a reputation for cultivating expert knowledge of her patrons' interests. "She found joy in her work," added Lamb. "It really was her life.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FAMILY OF BEV SHAW

Bev Shaw, owner of the Talewind Books, built relationships with authors, publishers and book lovers around the world.

She had that bookstore and she had her family, and she gave 100% to everybody."

Talewind's status as an independent shop became rare as online retailers upended the bookselling industry. Shaw's first order was a handwritten request dropped in the mailbox. She later introduced computerized cataloging and other efficiencies, but always prioritized the personal touch.

"Most bookstores in Canada today, they're just hanging on," said author Betty Keller. "But Bev just made that place. I would phone up and say, 'I've just seen this book. I've got to have it. She'd say yes, give me the full title. A few days later I'd get a call and she had the book. She was such an enormously vibrant woman, and she knew everybody who came into that store."

Under Shaw's direction, Talewind Books became a fixture of the annual Sunshine Coast Festival of the Written Arts. Months before the summer event, Shaw contacted authors and publicists to inquire which of their books should be exhibited. She and

her staff arranged shipments from publishers, both mainstream giants and boutique presses. Volumes were arrayed in the festival's book tent, arguably the social hub of the 41-year-old festival. As authors finished their readings in the main pavilion, Shaw would wait beside the stage to escort them personally to the tent for signings.

"She was beloved by writers," said Jane Davidson, who retired as the festival's executive director in 2022. "She just had this beautiful way of putting everybody at ease and knowing that they were in good hands. She was funny and thoughtful and such a professional."

Davidson's successor at the Writer's Festival, Marisa Alps, said Shaw's leadership helped cement the Sunshine Coast's renown as a hotspot for readers and writers. Under Shaw's direction, Talewind Books hosted and supported book launches, author readings and initiatives like the Book Giving Tree, a partnership with the Sunshine Coast Community Services

Society that gifts books to children in need.

"Having that sort of ongoing, strong support," explained Alps, "and the ability to put books into people's hands, to promote books very well through knowledge and skills, and the books she brings in and how she supported local writers, really, she's one of the key factors of why our community has thrived as a literary community."

Shaw had three children and four grandchildren. She and her husband regularly vacationed in Puerto Vallarta, where in 2021 Shaw endowed a park bench. The family collaborated to create a unique design. "It's one of the nicest benches in the park," observed Lamb.

As news of Shaw's death reached friends in Mexico, floral tributes engulfed the bench. Seeing photos of the impromptu shrine, Lamb recalled a lunch meeting he and Shaw recently shared with author Darrel J. McLeod, who also holidays in Puerto Vallarta.

"He's a big dog in the literary world," said Lamb. "And he took his time out to say 'Hey Bev, I want to go for lunch with you.'" Every Christmas, Shaw received calls from customers in England and the United States. Lamb recalled the most consistent request: "I want to buy a book for somebody on the Sunshine Coast, because I want to spend money in your store and for your community."

In the days following her death, Shaw's daughter Courtney found a small book that her mother carried in her purse. Inside was a quotation from American songwriter Macklemore: "Don't try to change the world, find something that you love. And do it every day. Do that for the rest of your life, and eventually, the world will change."

A celebration of Bev Shaw's life will take place at Chatelech Secondary School on Dec. 16 at 1 p.m. Shaw's family is also working with the Sunshine Coast Foundation to establish a fund to support literacy. The fund will welcome donations from the public in Shaw's memory.

Lamb and his children plan to maintain the ongoing operation of Talewind Books.

Shaw's celebration of life will be accessible via online video by browsing to sunshinestreaming.ca/watch/bev-shaw-celebration-of-life.

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