



Bookmark

By MARNI FREEDMAN | Photo by RANDY TUNNELL

# THE Last Bookstore in Carmel

*Pilgrim's Way bookstore owners Cynthia Fernandes and Paul Fridlund*

PILGRIM'S WAY BOOKSTORE is a Carmel character. Like all interesting characters, it is bubbling with life, filled with contradictions, and tremendously entertaining to observe. That is, if you can find it.

The last book store in Carmel is tucked away like a hidden gem on Dolores Street between Fifth and Sixth. A fixture at this location for well over 30 years, the bookstore is run by a husband and wife team, Cynthia Fernandes and Paul Fridlund.

While the store is best known for carrying an extensive line of New Age and metaphysical books, it also offers titles on business management, local interest and social commentary — not to mention a broad selection of popu-

lar novels. "Because it is the last book store in Carmel, to respond to the needs of the community we have widened our selection of New York Times bestsellers, novels and books for a more general audience," says Fernandes.

Touting itself as an "oasis in the middle of downtown Carmel," the shop, which has been in the Fridlund family for over 27 years, also carries one-of-a-kind jewelry, handmade gifts and a unique selection of music. And if you want a real treat, stroll down the bamboo-lined walkway and you will wind up in the Secret Garden. This section is filled with the art of local sculptors, poets and painters. Fridlund calls this a "feel-good sanctuary" because he says when you walk in, "you just feel

good." It was recently revamped to create a space for special events and demonstrations, particularly related to health, says Fernandes.

A highlight of the secret garden is the colorful abstract art painted by Fridlund's mother and the previous owner, Zoe Landria. A talented artist with a pioneering spirit, Landria purchased the bookstore in 1980. "The first few years being a bookstore owner were rough," she says. "I was a graphic artist with no experience running a business." And at the time a metaphysical bookstore was not exactly a sure thing.

Then, two things happened — Shirley MacLaine came out with the movie, "Out on a Limb," which sparked great interest in metaphysical thought — and Clint Eastwood became mayor, which greatly increased foot traffic in Carmel. From then on the bookstore flourished.

Sitting with Fridlund and Fernandes you are in the presence of two sweet, gentle souls who from time to time gaze at one another affectionately. Theirs, it seems, is a true love story. Fridlund remembers the exact day and time that Cynthia walked through the doors. "It was July 3, 1999, 3 p.m.," he says, tearing up. She took nearly a half an hour to make her way over to the counter where he was standing, wandering leisurely through the aisles and kneeling down to linger before a case, he relates. Finally, "She stood up to meet my eyes. At that moment I just knew. My knees went weak," says Fridlund. Fernandes adds that it took a few years and a couple of moves around the state to agree, but last April they were married in the Secret Garden.

While they are both soft-spoken and calm, make no mistake; they are clear and passionate about this enterprise.

Their work is more than it may seem at first glance. Yes, they will special order any book a customer is seeking. Yes, they pay attention to trends in the marketplace. But both feel they are providing far more than titles on shelves or an attractive environment. The store, they note, is a true community hub, a place where people come to chat, to seek and give advice, to feel warm and welcomed.

Fernandes says that she often hears customers say, "I didn't know where I was going when I left the house today, and I ended up here." One customer notes that she comes to the store because it has a "family feel to it, like being in a warm living room." And this living room has become part of the local tapestry for thinkers, artists and philosophers from all walks of life. In fact, the store hosts monthly talks by doctors, physicists and popular authors.

When asked why Pilgrim's Way has lasted when so many others have fallen by the wayside, Paul responds, "I think ours is more than a bookstore, our store is an experience." ▲