

Letter from Keith Orr, co-owner of Common Language Bookstore

Common Language in Ann Arbor Needs Your Support

There is no easy way to say this. Common Language is not making enough sales to support itself. Its very existence is in peril.

Shaman Drum Bookshop Has Announced They Will Close June 30th

Karl Pohrt and Shaman Drum have been an important part of the book community for 30 years. They have always been supportive of the rest of the community. Their voice as an independent bookseller will be sorely missed.

Independent bookstores, and especially LGBT Bookstores, have been closing with increasing and alarming frequency. With the closing of Oscar Wilde the LGBT community has lost the world's oldest (and perhaps coolest) LGBT bookstore. A Different Light in West Hollywood recently closed. New York City and Los Angeles are without an LGBT bookstore. And these are just a few.

Common Language Could Be Next

Common Language Bookstore has been serving the LGBT Community since 1991. We have "taken the show on the road" to LGBT conferences, Michigan Womyn's Festival, Rainbow Families-Great Lakes, and more. We are the last remaining comprehensive feminist/LGBT Bookstore in the State of Michigan. We believe Common Language is too important a community resource to lose.

Without an independent LGBT bookstore such as Common Language:

- We lose a safe space to explore our sexuality and culture. While Ann Arbor may seem like a nice safe bubble for the LGBT community, folks who are coming out have a hard time checking out books from the library or buying books from Borders. I know a professor who had her psychology students play out various scenarios at Common Language and Barnes and Noble. The scenarios were as simple as buying a gift or card for an old High School Friend who had invited them to their (same-sex) commitment ceremony, to as complex as dealing with a father who was coming out as Transgender. Many of the students simply COULD NOT play out their scenarios at Barnes and Noble. And these were largely straight folks pretending to be in an LGBT situation.

- Authors and publishers lose an outlet for their work. Borders has perhaps 100 books in their LGBT section. We have 7500. Amazon.com may have lots of books available, but they don't have whole sections you can browse, and they do not have a staff who can direct you to what you are looking for, whether it is the latest gay fiction, help on coming out, or what to do after your HIV diagnosis.
- There are several publishers that would probably cease to exist without independent, and especially LGBT Bookstores to distribute their books, for example Bella Books, Bywater Books, Firebrand Books, Lethe Press, and Alyson.
- Many of your favorite authors might never have been published. Augusten Burroughs may be a huge author now, but it is because independent booksellers read *Running With Scissors*, and recommended it to their customers. 95% of the authors on our shelves might never have been published without the outlet of independent bookstores.

What Have We Done Already?

We have trimmed costs. We have subsidized the store with personal savings. The \aut\ BAR has subsidized the store. We have run promotions and sales. We bring in authors. We have worked hard to have an up-to-date website.

One of the things we can NOT do is raise prices. Books have a published price and an established markup. Publishers dictate to us what our "cost of doing business" must be.

You Can Be A Hero

All we need are customers. You can be one of them and become a Common Language Hero.

You can be a customer by buying books from our shelves, or special ordering books not on our shelves (at no additional charge), buying gifts, buying lube, buying toys and erotica, and by buying cards.

You can also become an advocate. If you are already a regular customer, encourage your friends to come in. Bring them in with you. Buy them a Gift Certificate to try and get them as hooked as you are. Send far-flung friends to the website.

Just by stopping in you help us out. The sense of community is so important to this store. When you come by, even if just to browse, you help the store become more viable.

You can also tell us what it would take for you to become a customer. Do we need to stock a different brand of lube? Do we need to do something different with our website? Should sections be moved around or reorganized?

And to give us an idea of how much community support we can count on I have set up a (non-binding) pledge form online. Click through to the pledge form at <http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=en&formkey=ckdKWjdRY3F1dIJYc1pQZGV2WEdfc0E6> MA.

An article about the closing of Oscar Wilde interviewed a fellow who lived less than two blocks away from the store. He had no idea that the store was in jeopardy and said if he had known he would have shopped there more regularly. It sounds like he wanted to be an Oscar Wilde Hero.

No one wants to be a Hero-Wannabe with regrets. That's why we are going public with the store's situation now. Your opportunity to be a hero is now.

Thanks for your support.