

The following is a compilation of numerous tributes to Joyce in Colorado and National Publications.

Joyce Ann Meskis, the longtime owner of Tattered Cover Book Store in Denver, died at home Thursday, December 22, 2022 surrounded by her family. She was 80 years old.

After graduating from TF South in 1959, she went to Purdue University expecting to be a math teacher or an English literature professor, she told **5280** magazine in 2015. She continued on to graduate school at the University of Denver, still working in libraries and bookstores.

"Until I woke up one morning and said to myself, 'Wake up, you idiot. Don't you realize you've been doing what you love all these years?' I dropped out of graduate school, and the rest is history," Meskis told the magazine.

In 1974, the single mom with two young daughters opened the book pages of the Sunday Denver Post and saw Tattered Cover had come up for sale, Meskis said in the 2015 interview. *"I did a back-of-the-envelope calculation, thought I could make it work, and made an offer,"* she said.

Using a small loan from her uncle, she purchased the Tattered Cover, a 950-square-foot bookstore in Cherry Creek - smaller than some Denver condos. Within 12 years, she had taken over the 40,000-square-foot former Neusteter's department store building on the corner of Second Avenue and Fillmore Place with half a million books in stock. At its height, Tattered Cover had four locations in the Denver metro area, and three more at Denver airports in partnership with Hudson Booksellers.

She popularized the concept of a bookstore not just as a place to purchase novels but as a place to spend the afternoon with a cup of coffee curled up in a cozy chair, reading until you realized the sun had long since set. She had a keen eye for antiques, employees said, and made sure each chair had its own reading lamp.

"Her legacy is changing the way people think about bookstores and their role in society," said Cathy Langer, a longtime employee who worked closely with Meskis for decades.

Before Amazon crippled the independent book industry, Tattered Cover was the place in Colorado to find books that might not exist anywhere else. The stores carried books in Braille, the Oxford English Dictionary and obscure foreign volumes that a chain such as Barnes and Noble wouldn't shelve.

Meskis sold the store in 2017 to Len Vlahos and Kristen Gilligan. The store remains in operation today under the leadership of Kwame Spearman, who purchased it in late 2020.

"When future historians look back at the later 20th century and early 21st century, one of the most important people in this city's history will be Joyce Meskis," said Mark Barnhouse, who wrote a biography about the iconic book chain in 2021. *"There are mayors, governors and other prominent people, but Joyce is right there among them."*

Meskis became a legendary figure in indie bookselling circles, both as an advocate for the industry and as a supporter of the First Amendment. A past American Booksellers Association president and the recipient of the ABA's inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award, she became more broadly known after filing two lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of Colorado laws that sought to restrict displaying books that may be harmful to minors. Later, Meskis won a two-year fight to quash a police search warrant for the book-purchase records of a customer who was a suspected drug dealer, resulting in a unanimous decision from the Colorado Supreme Court. "

"We booksellers are gatekeepers of the expression of ideas," Meskis told members of the American Booksellers Association in 1991 when she was president of ABA. She added: *"It is my view that as booksellers we have our own version of the Hippocratic oath to maintain the health and well being of the First Amendment.... That, in fact, it is our most honorable charge to provide books of all kinds, even those with which we may personally disagree, find distasteful, even abhor."*

The store's website was even more emphatic, stating: *"We maintain that it is our responsibility to actively resist censorship that limits your right as our customers to make those choices for yourselves."*

In 1995, Meskis received the PEN/Newman's Own First Amendment Award, which included a check for \$25,000, money she used to establish the Colorado Freedom of Expression Foundation.

Her legacy lives on in both the store and at the University of Denver's Publishing Institute, where she lectured for decades and served as director.
