



Photographs by GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

A MELLOWER MAN: Jeffrey Segal, owner of Mystic Journey Bookstore, displays a Buddha in the store. "Jeffrey learned that the spiritual side is much more important than the material side," said his mother, Carol.

A calm that speaks volumes

After beating cancer, Jeffrey Segal took another huge step and opened a bookstore.

MARTHA GROVES

Amanda Bender, an indie-film actress, moved to Venice from Brooklyn a month ago and immediately embraced the welcoming vibe at Mystic Journey Bookstore.

"A friend of mine who's a healer brought me here," said Bender, 22, as she sat in a corner skimming a book about self-forgiveness. "When you enter, you suddenly feel a lot lighter. Your breath slows. You can sit and think, or not think. It's hard to have a negative thought while you're in here."

Such comments are like soothing Rumi poetry to the ears of proprietor Jeffrey Segal, who had to tamp down plenty of negative thoughts and fears when he opened the bookstore on Abbot Kinney Boulevard in October 2008 in the midst of the worst economic downturn since the Depression.

But after what he calls a miraculous recovery from cancer, Segal had faith that his new venture would thrive.

Four years ago, Segal, a lawyer with a high-paying, high-stress job, learned he had testicular cancer. Post-surgery tests revealed abnormalities in his lymphatic system, he said, and his oncologist recommended chemotherapy. Segal, a follower of cabala, a form of Jewish



POSITIVE VIBES: Irene Skau, a Lakota medicine woman, blesses the bookstore on Abbot Kinney Boulevard with sage burning in an abalone shell. Skau does tarot card readings for paying customers.

mysticism, decided against it.

"It crossed my mind I might die," he said. "I put it out to the universe that I needed a special healer to come to me." He worked with an acupuncturist, changed his diet and found a practitioner of "pranic healing."

Within months, the abnormalities were gone, Segal said.

The experience mellowed him, according to his mother.

"Jeffrey learned that the spiritual side is much more important than the material side," Carol Segal said. "He's calmer, and he's a nicer person than he used to be. He perhaps realizes there's something inside of him that's going to be just fine."

Given what he viewed as a second chance, Segal, 51, took a leave from the firm where he defended insur-

ance companies in high-stakes battles with corporations over pollution. He tapped \$100,000 of home equity and pursued his dream of opening a bookstore and spiritual center.

"I felt on the Westside there was an open space crying out to be filled," he said. "The situation with the economy has led people to search, to find other avenues."

The timing did not seem ideal, however. A few months earlier, Dutton's Books in Brentwood — long a stalwart of Westside bookselling — had succumbed to competition from big-box chains and *Amazon.com*. Many other independent stores were also faltering. Recently, the owners of the legendary Bodhi Tree Bookstore in West Hollywood sold the business to a local corporation. Although the metaphysical mecca is expected

to remain open for a while, the owners are seeking someone to buy the inventory and name and set up shop in a different location.

At Mystic Journey, the strong scent of incense wafts through the 1,900-square-foot shop. Customers browse the bookshelves lining the walls and the display tables featuring soaps, jewelry, greeting cards, CDs and crystals.

Segal's textured acrylic paintings of hearts, suns and yin and yang symbols line the stairway leading to an upstairs office.

After 20 months in business, Segal said, the store has just about turned the corner to profitability, thanks to sales of non-book merchandise, including crystal singing bowls, wooden Buddhas and wind chimes.

Another draw is psychics. A stable of "intuitive readers," as Segal calls them, flip tarot cards or gaze into crystal balls in small back rooms with curtained doorways. Segal also holds frequent book signings and workshops (such as the upcoming "Communicating With Your Angels" and "If You Want to Get Published").

Segal, who is working part time as an attorney, is pondering whether to open another shop in Pasadena. He thinks he can handle it, even when doubts creep in.

"I'm such a big believer now that everything is a blessing," Segal said. "It really is about the experience — the joy and the journey."

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