

Farewell Letter to Dragon's Nest Customers

Dear Customers and Friends,

It is with a great deal of sadness but also with tremendous gratitude that I write today to let you know that, after 37 ½ years, The Dragon's Nest will be closing its doors on Market Square forever at the end of August. This has been a heart-wrenching decision, one that I have not made without months'-long consideration and conversations with colleagues, friends, and family.

Our closure date will be at the end of August. In the meantime, we will be open every day from 11-5 and will continue to sell online through our eCommerce site, which can be accessed via our website: www.dragonsnesttoys.com. Items purchased on the site may be picked up at the store until our final closing.

Because of the significant and life-altering effects of Covid-19, we simply cannot continue to offer the hands-on shopping experience that is the hallmark of The Dragon's Nest. The distinctive characteristics of the store that make it a picturesque throw-back to another time, an Exploratorium in a way, also create serious obstacles to keeping visitors and staff safe and healthy. The challenges related to the Covid disruption are not the only factors contributing to my difficult decision to close. As with many brick-and-mortar stores, we are not able to compete with the breadth, range, and specificity of options the Internet provides potential shoppers, and the loss of business to online sales has made it increasingly difficult to stay economically viable.

I am very fortunate to have had the support of many people during my 5 1/2-year tenure and would like to try to do justice here in thanking those who helped-in many disparate and vital ways-to keep The Dragon's Nest going.

First, I would like to thank Donna and Martin Seim, our landlords and the visionary founders of The Dragon's Nest, who created the unique and beloved "land of magic and wonder" that has been the Nest for nearly 38 years. Without their generous, unwavering support and wise counsel, I would not have been able to take over the reins, let alone continue their cherished legacy, along with that of their daughter, Kristin, who owned the store for 8 years and who happily offered much-appreciated advice and assistance. All they offered was indispensable, and I am eternally grateful to the Seim family.

A gigantic thank-you is due my staff over the past 5 years: Ann, Sue, Shelly, Maeve, Leighann, Morgan, Lindsey, Ellie, Emma, Rachel, Michaela, Alison, and Jack, who, with kindness, humor, patience, and grace, helped keep the spirit of the Nest alive and vibrant and who daily worked to maintain it as a happy, welcoming place for all. No challenge was too great, whether physical or technological, and they always kept calm and carried on even in the most chaotic and mentally trying of times. The collective efforts and goodwill of all these dear friends and comrades not only sustained and enhanced the store, but me as well, and the friendships that have evolved over the years are gifts beyond any I could have imagined.

The Nest has always offered its customers a wide range of toys, books, arts and crafts, and curiosities. We have been able to balance the unusual, the timeless, and the classic with the new, must-have, in-the-moment toys, thanks in large part to the terrific toy reps who helped me build our inventory from scratch and whose advice and recommendations were invaluable and really crucial to keeping us fresh and new. We benefited from their knowledge, experience, and wisdom and owe them a big debt of gratitude for their part making the Nest a place worth visiting again and again.

Of course, we are enormously grateful for the loyal support of our wonderful customers from Newburyport and well beyond who have appreciated the importance of shopping local and live by that principle and who recognize that Newburyport is a rare city whose historic character and vibrancy have been maintained primarily through the hard work of its merchants, restaurant owners, and other businesses that operate downtown. We have been very fortunate to have been boosted by our weekly visitors and by those who travel to this beautiful city to visit historic sites, to dine and to shop, and to enjoy the majesty of this extraordinary place where the Merrimack meets the Atlantic.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all our customers, many of whom “grew up” in the Nest and have returned with young children of their own. We are especially sad about not being able to offer this next generation the memorable experiences their parents have told us they hold dear. We wish it weren’t the case, but we cannot continue to operate successfully and in a way that reflects the mission of the Nest that has always been at its core.

We have been very fortunate to have our toys and wonders delivered by long-time UPS philosopher and raconteur, Tim, and by Billy, our amiable, unflappable FedEx fellow. Many thanks, guys, you literally have brought happiness to hundreds of kids, year-round, in every kind of weather, and we are very grateful for your sometimes herculean-always cheerful-efforts.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Hugo, our maintenance guy, bookkeeper, supplies manager, accountant, website designer, and my absolute rock and counsellor in all things, who kept me grounded (well, sort of) and whose support and encouragement never wavered.

We hope to see many of you in the coming weeks before our closing at the end of August.

Many, many thanks, best wishes and stay well,

Sally Owen