



# FOCAL Points ~ ~



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**Spring 2010**

**FRIENDS OF CHILDREN AND LITERATURE -- CENTRAL LIBRARY**

**For more news, go to [www.focalonline.org](http://www.focalonline.org)**

## SCIENCE DAY 2010

Saturday, May 22, 2-4 p.m.

### **AUSTRALIA GREAT WHITE SHARK EXPEDITION**

Find out the facts versus the fantasies as we study great white sharks in South Australia. See an inflatable 15-foot-long, female great white shark! Touch the gigantic jaws of a 20-foot long great white!



### **CALIFORNIA SCIENCE CENTER**

Hands-on science crafts and activities will be presented by staff at the Center. Children will create objects to take home.

### **SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS AND CRAFTS**

Students from Valley College will demonstrate science experiments and help children make science treasures under the guidance of teachers **Lauren Okayama** and **Debby Pourroy**. Learn science facts from science teacher **Lara Clardy**.

SCIENCE DAY is an annual tribute to educators Peggy and Merv Miller, who were active supporters of FOCAL. Financial support is contributed by the Miller family.

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**Editors' Notes:** Beginning April 11th, Sunday hours at Regional Branches and Central Library will be eliminated. Evening hours at all libraries will be curtailed, and opening hours will be reduced as well in all branches. Contact the Mayor and your council person by "snail mail", which gets their attention. You can help prevent further budget cuts to the Library. Make your voice heard at:

[www.savethelibrary.org](http://www.savethelibrary.org)

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A GAB READER

By Myrna Oliver

Children's books have fascinated me since my mother read them to my brother and me in our 1846 farmhouse back home in Indiana several decades ago. They still do.

I made my living writing for newspapers for nearly half a century, and I suppose in my youth I had visions of even writing a children's book. But when I ran a rough manuscript by a college artist friend I hoped would illustrate it, she observed that my idea might scare kids. Completely flummoxed, I never tried again. And I have neither children nor grandchildren. So how was I to continue to immerse myself in revels such as "Stop That Pickle"?

Read the books to children! And so I became a GAB reader.

The original name for the 21-year-old GAB, Grandparents and Books, was always a bit inaccurate because we are not all grandparents. At some point, I'm told, they began using the initials in the hope of attracting younger readers. I think it makes us sound like we talk a lot—that we are gabby. Maybe we do. Maybe we are.

At least, we like to read aloud and to share stories. Growing up, I recited narrative poems such as "Casey at the Bat" to various groups as entertainment, and loved to read to younger relatives. One of my greatest memories of my great-niece, now 16 and intent on Yale Medical, will always be of her as a four-year-old, plopping herself in my lap with an armload of Dr. Seuss books and saying in her clear, precise little voice: "Will you read these to me, please?"

I live in downtown Los Angeles, and my LAPL "branch" has always been Central. After its massive renovation, expansion and reopening in 1993, I was eager to become a part of it. I wanted very much to be a Docent, leading tours of the magnificent facility. But while I was waiting for that training program to begin, I learned I could get into GAB with only a couple days of instruction. Aha!

But I was working, and once I became a Docent, I decided I could not continue with GAB as well. That had to go on hiatus until retirement. Now I do both.

For the past two years, I have been in the Children's Literature Department of Central Library every Sunday af-

ternoon except when I'm out of town. Why Sundays? Because that's when they needed me, said children's librarian Linda Israelson, a fellow Docent and the captain of our Central GAB crew. Sunday afternoons, when the library is open 1 to 5 p.m., seem to be family time at Central.

I would be less than honest if I said there aren't some Sundays I'd really prefer to go to a concert or program or just stay home immersed in an adult mystery novel. But, thinking in some way that I can help kids love reading, I put on make-up, walk six blocks and don the GAB purple apron.

Those aprons, incidentally, were nowhere in sight during my first stint with GAB. I wasn't too happy to see them in my second. But I have discovered the pockets hold all kinds of useful things. They grow on you.

After greeting the amazing children's librarians on duty—and all of them are amazing—I go to the workroom, grab a cart, sign in and begin to collect books from the GAB shelf. For many months initially, I was so afraid of picking the wrong thing that I relied solely on Linda's selections and read only books she had pre-screened for our set of shelves. Eventually I got bored reading the same things. Now I stock the cart with certain favorites such as a couple of "No, David" books, pop-ups like "The Long-Nosed Pig," books pertaining to the latest animated movie such as "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs" and things that are just fun to read aloud like "Pigs Galore" or "Millions of Cats." Also added are the giveaways—GAB bookmarks, which must be filled out by me, and pencils or stickers or magnets, and the books a child earns for sitting twice with a GAB reader.

Then my cart and I go to the other end of the Children's Literature section to gather books from the general circulation shelves for beginning or non-readers. If a holiday is coming, I stop first at the holiday book section and grab whatever looks like fun for Groundhog Day or Valentine's Day or Easter, etc. I look for fun things, personally steering around the serious or religious selections in favor of precocious children and animal tales. If a book looks too lengthy or has too few pictures I put it back on the shelf.

When the cart has at least a couple dozen books, I head for the main room and set up shop, propping the GAB sign in a prominent place. My reading times officially are

for two hours—2 to 4 p.m. But I start as soon as I'm ready and go until 4 or after if children are still eager. I log three hours in the volunteer ledger, usually reading up to two and a half hours and needing some time to collect and replace books and other materials.

At the end of the session, I leave the check-out books on the table for library assistants to re-shelve correctly, clean up the table, and take my cart back to the work-room to re-shelve the GAB books and giveaways, record the number of children I've served, and put away the purple apron. If the library staff has brought candy or cookies, I eat some of that, too.

Once a month, FOCAL sponsors a visit by a children's author for part of my reading time. I try to point children and parents toward the author, inviting them to visit me later. Much as I would like to listen to the author myself, I stay at my post because some children prefer the GAB reading.

Each GAB reader seems to have a particular style—some use props, some arrange a theater setting, some walk around to different groups. I have to remind myself that even if others attract 15 or more at a time, I still provide a service for my half dozen or more kids and that GAB is not a competition! I arrange a few chairs around a little square table, prop up a few enticing books, and ask little passers-by, "Would you like to read a story with me?"

Some are too busy, some too intent on their own pursuits, and some too shy—even when prodded by parents. I've learned never to interrupt a kid dangling a huge key: he is on his way to the locked rest room and often in a hurry! But others stop, hop into a chair and stay through one book or several, often for nearly the whole time I'm there.

The ages have surprised me. Originally I assumed I would be reading to children too young to read themselves. But I've read to youngsters from 11 months to 14 years, and sometimes the parents are the most rapt of all.

The beginning readers, especially those proud of their prowess, often want to read to me. I've had to learn to limit that, in order not to scare away or discourage others I should be engaging. One series of books that has proven a good compromise and lots of fun is "You Read to Me, I'll Read to You."

One boy's father brought him every week for a year to read to me as a tutor. Initially I felt I was helping, but later I worried that I was short-changing other children. I also realized I'm not really trained as a tutor and might not be doing him any good. I became so emotionally torn about the situation I seriously considered quitting GAB. But I discussed the problem with Linda, and we decided we had to end it because GAB is designed not as a tutoring program but to instill a love of reading in children. Telling the father and son that we could not continue was very, very difficult. Sadly they never returned to Central.

Every GAB reader, no matter how good a disciplinarian, undoubtedly has unruly children at times. Most of the problems are manageable and short-lived. I get kicked a lot by short children swinging their legs from tall chairs. I sometimes have to place a hand on the give-away pencils children enjoy beating on the table like drumsticks. And I may have to ask inattentive children to stop pawing through books and listen. Some parents, more than their children, demand give-away books, even when a child has not qualified for one, and complain about the selection. Most children and parents, however, love having someone read to them and are grateful that the GAB program exists for them.

One little boy continually caused disruption, talking, churning through books, not listening. Eventually he drifted away, only to reappear by my chair to give me a slip of paper on which he had drawn... a heart. I still keep it in a pocket of my purple apron.

There are golden moments when I catch one or two or six little faces mesmerized by a story, and maybe glimpse a parent or passing librarian enchanted as well. Then I know why I'm there on a Sunday afternoon.



## REMEMBERING SID

by Renny Day

When Sid Fleischman died on March 17 of this year, the world lost an icon of children's literature, FOCAL lost a stalwart supporter, and I lost a dear friend. Sid was always generous with his time and talents to foster reading, to encourage and support fellow writers, and to help cash-strapped librarians and libraries reach their goals.

When still a new children's librarian at the Brentwood Branch, I responded to a young patron's request for a "writing club." We met weekly, and members wrote poems, short stories, book reviews, even jokes. In June, the kids themselves critiqued and voted on the best items to go into a little booklet, and we decided to have a culminating event with a "real author." Sue Alexander offered to come and suggested that we invite Sid Fleischman. She gave me his phone number...I called...and he came! He offered advice and encouragement for his young audience, and quoted from the booklet.

That was the beginning of a warm collaboration. We frequently carpooled to literary events, and before the days of computers, vigorously mailed clippings on books and writing.

Sid also helped after my transfer to Central Library. He performed magic shows with his interlocking rings and red sash magic trick to help build attendance on Saturdays, and was an Author-for-a-Day in a school, a former FOCAL program. Sid also was the fourth recipient of the FOCAL Award for his popular book, *By the Great Horn Spoon* in 1983. Talented Carol Onofrio created a remarkable puppet of the character "Praiseworthy" which soon had a place of honor on Sid's mantel. On the morning of the the 1994 earthquake, Sid hurried downstairs, and his first act was to rescue "Praiseworthy" from the floor and restore him to his proper place. One of the very few authors to be honored twice, he returned to accept a puppet of "Annyrose" for *Bandit's Moon* in 2002.

After the Central Library fire in 1986, Sid went into high gear. He hosted a fundraiser for FOCAL at *HAPPILY EVER AFTER*, a children's bookstore, and signed books at many events for the **Save the Books** campaign.

Sid won the Newbery Medal in 1987 for *The Whipping Boy*, and, handsome in his tuxedo, gave a memorable speech. But his greater joy was celebrating the Newbery Medal medal winner in 1989, *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*, written by his son, Paul Fleischman. The Fleischmans happened to return to California on the same flight with several of us after the ALA conference, and Sid rambled up and down the aisles, blissfully sharing details of the whole experience and offering tidbits of the praises that Paul had received during the conference.

FOCAL honored Sid for his "Outstanding Contributions to Children's Literature" on, appropriately enough, April 1 of 1995. After the tributes and speeches, the highlight of the program was a presentation by students from Palms Middle School...four students spoke on their favorite books by Sid, and what reading those books had meant to them. Sid told me later that he was touched by their heartfelt comments.

"Break a leg, Sid," on that great new stage. May your interlocking rings always sparkle, and may your red sash trick always glow.

## ONE SINGULAR SENSATION

### A tribute to Ilene Abramson on her retirement, by Renny Day and a chorus of children's librarians

*"EVERY LITTLE STEP THAT SHE TAKES"* Ilene Abramson completes library school and goes to work at the Robertson Branch as children's librarian.

*"ONE THRILLING COMBINATION"* -- Ilene captivates children and parents alike with her story hours, book recommendations and puppet shows.

*"EVERY MOVE THAT SHE MAKES."* Ilene works part-time while her children are young, and makes an impact at each branch, as Young Adult or Reference Librarian.

*"ONE SMILE AND SUDDENLY NOBODY ELSE WILL DO."* Ilene is selected to be Senior Librarian in the Children's Literature Department.

*"YOU KNOW YOU'LL NEVER BE LONELY WITH YOU KNOW WHO."* Ilene launches innovative programs: hosts the Lewis Carroll Society for their annual convention; appears as guest celebrity for the "Fables and Fairy Tales Web Tour" ; begins a weekly column in the Sunday Metro section of the Los Angeles Times about good children's books; launches "Sundays at Central" featuring an author or illustrator speaking to parents and children about books, sponsored by FOCAL; and hosts Dinosaur Day.

*"ONE MOMENT IN HER PRESENCE...AND YOU CAN FORGET THE REST"* Ilene is named Acting Children's Services Coordinator.

*"FOR THE GIRL IS SECOND BEST TO NONE.... SON."* Ilene is named Director of Children's Services, and begins her regular column on the "Kids' Reading Room" page of the Los Angeles Times.

*"OOOOH! SIGH! GIVE HER YOUR ATTENTION."* Ilene establishes the "LAPL Reader Leader Award"; begins "CAMP LAPL" , a program for children in the depressed areas of downtown, which introduces them to art, dance and reading; networks with the Music Center to produce "Performing Books," quarterly productions in the Mark Taper auditorium that bring children's picture books to life; launches **L.A. KIDS READ** and **DiverseCity** to expand book awareness throughout LAPL.

*"DO.....I.....REALLY HAVE TO MENTION?"* Ilene inaugurates the annual presentations by authors and performers at order meetings; serves on the Caldecott committee; and is the inspiration for attention-getting Summer Reading Programs that invite children and their parents to read...read...read.

***"SHE'S THE ONE !!!!!"***

So, it's no wonder that a chorus line of children's librarians strutted onstage to the rousing music of *Chorus Line* at Ilene's retirement send-off at a recent order meeting, doffing their glittery top hats to a remarkable leader. Congratulations, Ilene!!!!

## NON-FICTION

*The world is a wild and wacky place... and so is the universe! Here are some great reads to help make sense of it all!*

### **Bishop, Nic. *Frogs.* (x 597 B622) 2008**

(Grade 3 and up) Feeling squeamish about the idea of dissecting a frog for science class? Check out the glass frog with his see-through skin! You'll see heart, stomach, and intestines, all doing their jobs. This photo-rich book is packed with amazing facts. Did you know that frogs are found on every continent except Antarctica and that there are over 5,000 types of frogs and that each of them has their own special call? Besides being a biologist and an expert photographer, Nic Bishop (he provided the pictures for Joy Cowley's *Red-Eyed Tree Frog*) spent days wading along the edges of ponds and wetlands looking for frogs and he traveled to the rain forest to photograph colorful dart poison frogs and red-eyed tree frogs. Bishop covers general facts their habitat, mating, eggs; how they turn from tadpoles to frog; and much more! Did you know a frog can breathe more than half of the oxygen it needs through its skin, but only if the skin is damp? A frog must never dry out or it will suffocate! And the skin of some dart frogs contains enough poison to kill ten people! Another totally cool frog is the gliding frog of Southeast Asian. A gliding frog can leap from the top of a rain forest tree and glide for fifty feet using large webbed feet. The double page up-close photos are amazing. Take a hop over to Bishop's other books: *Spiders* (x 595 B622 – Sibert Honor Book 2008), and *Butterflies* (x 595 B622-1); you won't want to put them down. – Ms. Diane

### **Hilliard, Richard. *Ham the Astrochimp.* (x 629.4 H654-1 folio) 2007**

(Grade 2 and up) Before human beings traveled in space, animals were sent to pave the way and ensure that it would be safe. Because chimpanzees are similar in many ways to humans, they were considered the best candidates. They also were good choices because their mental capacities could be monitored, as well as their physical reaction. Ham was one of many chimps who were trained by the United States space program to follow specific commands. Scientists wanted to find out if he would be able to think clearly and make choices while under the physical constraints caused by space travel. He succeeded, thus opening the door of opportunity for humans to travel in space. This book follows Ham on his adventurous journey and beyond. Bold, lifelike illustrations accompany his story, and sidebars with additional scientific information enrich the narrative. This appealing true story is a must-read for kids interested in animals or space travel. – Miss Linda

### **Hillman, Ben. *How Weird Is It? A Freaky Book All About Strangeness.* (x 500 H654) 2009**

(Grade 4 and up) Did you know that when you swim in the ocean, you are swimming in Strange Liquid From Outer Space (well, the remains of comets made of ice that slammed into the planet Earth for millions of years)? Did you know that mushrooms are more closely related to animals (like us humans) than they are to plants? Do you think chameleons are cool?

Consider the octopus, who can not only match the color and pattern of whatever is nearby, but can also match the texture? And it can do it in a split second! These and other interesting, amazing, disgusting, and sometimes just plain unbelievable science oddities are presented, along with fabulously weird illustrations. This book will boggle your mind and entice you to the library to do further research to see if any of it is true! (*I'm not saying we librarians made a deal with the author or anything... but you WILL want to know more about the charming water bear [tardigrade], a microscopic critter that can survive being baked, frozen, AND dried out. You'll come into the library, and then we'll have you in our clutches... Bwah ha ha!*). – Miss Mara

### **Stevens, Chris. *Thirty Days Has September: Cool Ways to Remember Stuff.* (x 154 T447) 2008**

(Grade 4 and up) Do you ever find yourself forgetting important facts or how to spell a word? Clearly you need an effective method of remembering information. Or rather, **Mom Needs Effective Methods Or Nothing Is Certain**. Notice that the first letter of each word spells out "mnemonic", which is a fancy name for a memory device, and memory devices are what this book is all about. Here are tricks that will help you keep track of the simplest thing, like telling your right hand from your left, to harder math problems like long division or multiplying by 11. Is it true that **Kind People Can Occasionally Feel Grumpy Suddenly**? It is if you are trying to memorize the biological classification of the animal and plant world (Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species). Not only that, you'll gain a better understanding of punctuation, parts of speech, grammar, music, and much more. Get ready to astound everyone around you with the stuff that you'll know after reading this book. – Miss Joanna

### **Yaccarino, Dan. *Go, Go America.* (x 973 Y12) 2008**

(Grades 2-5) With a sparkly cover and a colorful Retro 1950's look, this book harkens back to free-wheeling family vacations in the station wagon. A good book to bring along in the car, readers follow the Farley family and their friendly pooch Fido, as they travel the states from Maine to Hawaii learning wacky facts and weird laws along the way. In Little Rock, Arkansas it is against the law for a dog to bark after 6pm. Every year Santa Claus, Indiana receives thousands of letters for Santa. Boulder, Colorado is the only city in the U.S. with a glacier. The longest Main Street in America (35 miles) is in Island Park, Idaho. And for *more* fun, kids can track down Bigfoot, who lurks among the pages. A more traditional chart with essential facts (bird, flower, motto) about all 50 states is included in the back, along with the Farley family photo album. Fasten your seat belts and enjoy the ride! I mean, *READ!* – Miss Madeline

Want even more? Go to [www.laplib.org](http://www.laplib.org) or visit your local library!

# Fun for Kids

Children's Literature Department  
Central Library

April, 2010

## April

*Programs are subject to change without notice.  
All programs are free.*

### Preschool Storytimes

Tuesdays, April 6, 13, 20, and 27

Stories and more for ages 3 - 5. Reservations required for groups of five or more. Call (213) 228-7250. (*Children's Literature Department, 11 a.m.*)

### 3 Sat Family Storytime

**"Bunnies Bunnies Bunnies!"** We'll have a bonanza of bunnies in stories, songs, poems, and a puppet show. (*KLOS Theater, 2 p.m.*)

### 10 Sat Family Program

**"Carrie Higgins – Creatures and Critters"** From bugs and frogs to dinosaurs and dogs, join Carrie and her puppet friends for singing, dancing, and general silliness! (*Children's Literature Department, 2 p.m.*)

### 17 Sat Used Book Sale

Find bargain children's books for sale. Sponsored by FOCAL, Friends of Children and Literature. (*Rotunda, 10 a.m. to 12 noon*)

### 17 Sat Family Storytime

**"Poetry Party"** Celebrate National Poetry Month: reams of rhymes, oodles of odes, and heaps of haiku! And some stories and a puppet show, too! (*KLOS Theater, 2 p.m.*)

### 24 Sat Family Program

**"The Rhine's Gold performed by We Tell Stories"** Meet gods, dwarves, giants and mermaids in the Wagnerian romp *The Rhine's Gold*. Based on Wagner's opera, *Das Rheingold*, this production by We Tell Stories features a puppet dwarf, charming

costumes transformed from ordinary objects, musical experts from opera, and audience participation. For children ages 5 – 12 and their families. (*Mark Taper Auditorium, 2 p.m.*)

### SUNDAYS AT CENTRAL

On Dec. 13, 2009, Michelle Markel presented her new book *Tyrannosaurus Math*. Michelle used the Department's new digital projector, the generous donation of Denise and Michael Doyen. Photos by Alex Muller show how much the program was enjoyed by those present.



\*\*\*\*\* MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION \*\*\*\*\*

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Membership is for calendar year, January through December.

New \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_ Basic \$10 \_\_\_\_\_ Associate \$25 \_\_\_\_\_

Contributing \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ Sustaining \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ Lifetime \$1,000 \_\_\_\_\_

(Free autographed book)

(Seat at Head Table)

(Book and Head Table)

Judy Sanchez Moorhead, Central Library Management  
Madeline Bryant, Senior Librarian, Children's Literature  
Helene Mochedlover, FOCAL Points Editor

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