



FOCAL Points



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FRIENDS OF CHILDREN AND LITERATURE — CENTRAL LIBRARY

The FOCAL 42nd Award Event

By Kristin Peers

On Saturday, June 19th, 2021, we celebrated Juneteenth, the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the end of slavery in the United States. Just by happenstance, this year's award-winning book tied in perfectly with the Juneteenth celebration - *Biddy Mason Speaks Up* by Laura Atkins and Arisa White with illustrator Laura Freeman.

This is a story of a prominent African American woman who defied the oppression of enslavement. Bridget "Biddy" Mason was a nurse and a Californian real estate entrepreneur and philanthropist. She is the founder of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, California, the oldest African American Church in the city dating to 1872. Enslaved upon birth, she gained a variety of skills and developed knowledge of medicine, child and livestock care. In California, she successfully petitioned a court for her freedom.



The authors were inspired by the theme—Fighting for Justice—as shown in the children's book series. With in-depth historical research, the authors present a well-constructed story of her childhood, piecing together a multi-layered, multi-history of the many occurrences surrounding her circumstances. With a unique format, the book itself also includes a timeline detailing important events, interspersed with medicinal herbal remedies.

A story of strength, tenacity, and resilience, *Biddy Mason Speaks Up* exemplifies what it means to stand up and break free when faced with adversity and extreme hardships. The book met the highest standards of excellence in literature for children. We listened to the authors' and illustrator's thought process—feeling uplifted and inspired. A special thanks to Dewi Ochoa-Reyes, FOCAL Points Editor and Social Media Chair, for doing a wonderful job moderating. There were a lot of thoughtful questions posed to the authors and illustrator that brought forth some reflective answers. And thank you to everyone on the board and committee including our host Brooke Sheets, Senior Librarian of the Children's Literature Department at L.A. Public Library, who made being part of FOCAL (Friends of Children and Literature) a rewarding and enjoyable experience.

In traditional fashion, a handmade puppet was presented as the award to the authors and illustrator. This year, the artisan, Jesse Kingsley, used a new technique involving the puppets being hand-stitched, which made it an exquisite work of art. Jesse wanted the puppet to represent Biddy's dignity, wisdom, love, and sorrow. At the Children's Department, a copy of the puppet is displayed in a collection for the public. This gives our community the opportunity to share the book throughout time, providing a legacy of 42 years of the history of California.

Serving with a Purpose 2021 Conference

By Kathryn Wilcox and Michele Marot

Serving with a Purpose is a conference for the volunteers of public library Friends Groups in Southern California, which usually meets annually at the Ontario Conference Center. Usually, that is, until COVID clamped down upon it. Last year's conference was canceled. This year's meeting started with all the gathered attendees attaching a 2021 sticker to last year's "Serving with a Purpose" folders to cover up the "2020." And the conference began.

The conference started with food: hot drinks, juices, pastries and assorted fruits (later we enjoyed a tasty sit-down lunch complete with good service and white linens). Thank you to the many sponsors of this wonderful conference and great food. As always, the decorations on the tables and the large door-sized paintings that were placed around the halls and rooms were beautiful and well-done (see picture).

The 2021 Conference Theme was, "The Only Story That Matters." The webpage offered this explanation:

"Storytelling is one of the most powerful ways to breathe life into your brand and often called one of the main components of a content marketing approach. By giving our services an identity by capturing and sharing the stories they really are, we can take our target audience on a journey they yearn to experience. In order for our customers and patrons to form a personal connection with our brand, our stories must be authentic, creative and inspirational."

Shawn Thrasher, Library Director of the Ontario City Library, was the MC for this event.

Greg Lucas, California State Librarian, began with a quote by Tony Atkins, "May the light of a library card shine a light in your life!" Greg told us that the state budget had designated 439 million dollars for our libraries with the hopes of helping with maintenance and other needs of libraries across the state.

Jayanti Addleman, President of the California Library Association, briefly talked about some of the CLA's history, mentioned the establishment of National Library Week, and spoke about what they are doing today.

John Chrastka, from EveryLibrary (which is 501(c)4 Political Action Committee for Libraries), was the keynote speaker. His speech and slides stated it so clearly:

Mission: "Building Voter Support for Libraries"

Vision: "Any library funding issue anywhere should matter to every library everywhere"

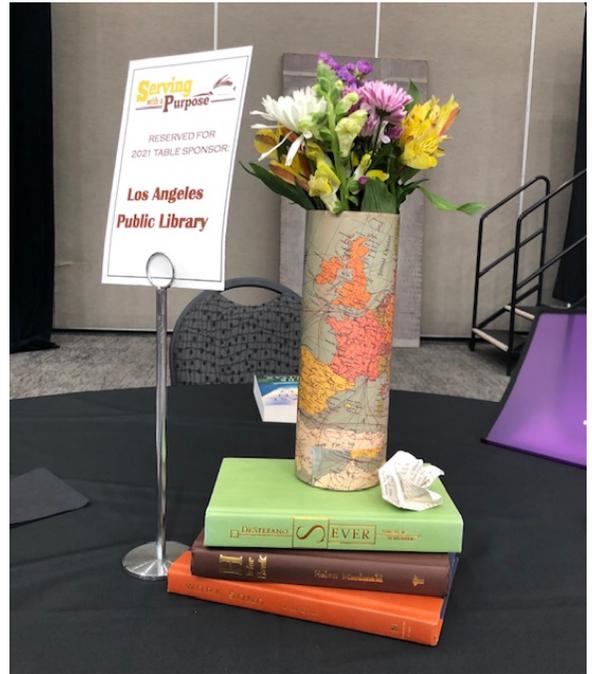
Values: "Political" and "Action" and "Committee"



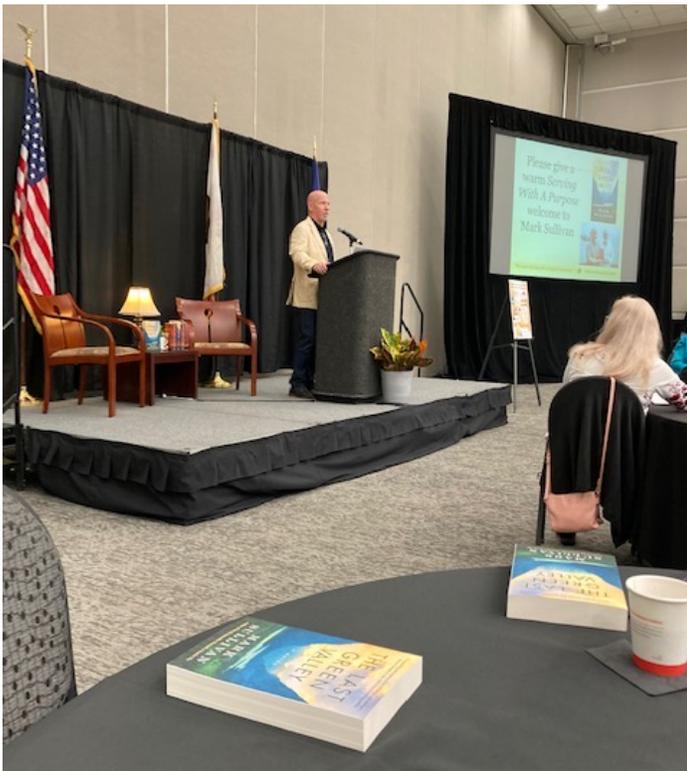
Some practical advice from Mr. Charstka:

People respond to stories; focus on your patron's/ customer's stories. Avoid being data heavy. Get them into your library and you'll win. Be compassionately engaged. Have pride in your place (people always prefer to be in an interesting place). Make sure that you mention specific numbers as some people conceptualize and respond better to data. Focus on filling gaps in what is needed. Know your audience; respect them as they are part of your tribe.

He said that a tombstone for librarians should be, "I did more with less." This gave us encouragement to volunteer at libraries, and to go beyond approaching library patrons to be members of the friends groups or to give donations, but to reach out to those in the general community who care about having a good library even if they never walk into the building. What a great start to the day!



And then to follow this up, Susan Vega spoke about America Learns, the program used by LAPL and others to efficiently track and evaluate volunteer data.



After a break, Mark Sullivan spoke about how he has changed as a writer. He talked about his life and the people that have influenced him as he faced his own life challenges. Mark is an outstanding writer whose book, "Beneath a Scarlet Sky" was a #1 bestseller. All who attended received a complimentary copy of his latest book, "The Last Green Valley." After much introspection, Mark had made a decision to only write books that make an impact on the reader's life. And having just finished reading "The Last Green Valley" I'd have to say that he did it again! His book had a big impact on me.

After lunch, all participants spent time in breakout sessions speaking with volunteers from other libraries across the area. It was a delight to share our experiences and listen to others that believe as we do that libraries are important to our communities.

This was a great day. We appreciate all the librarians that the spent time and effort to make this a wonderful conference.

Volunteers for Friends groups, like FOCAL, are invited to participate in conferences like this one. Serving with a purpose 2022 is coming up!

The Children's Literature Department at Central Library has a new Senior Librarian. Join us in welcoming Tina Princenthal!

Thank you so much for interviewing me for FOCAL Points! I'm very excited to be the new Senior of the Children's Literature Department.

It really is a dream come true. When I was five years old, my father brought me to the Central Library's Children's Department for the 1993 reopening ceremony. He was an inspector for the Department of Public Works and was very proud of the work they did to create the atrium and renovate the building. I saw all the books in the Children's Literature Department and my little heart was overjoyed. In kindergarten, when my teacher asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I drew a picture of myself as a librarian surrounded by books. I'm amazed and deeply honored to have my career lead me back to the place that inspired me to become a librarian.



Prior to becoming the Senior Librarian of the Children's Literature Department, I was the Senior Librarian of the InfoNow Department for five years. The InfoNow Department is the Los Angeles Public Library system's remote reference service, serving to answer questions by phone, email, text messaging and online chat. It is a very customer-service oriented department and we get asked questions about everything and anything, from library services to random bits of trivia. I've been asked how long parrots live, where the name "America" comes from, how to spell the word "misspell" and, my personal favorite, what sound do giraffes make?

As part of my responsibilities in the InfoNow Department, I worked in the Children's Literature Department for nine years. I've performed story times and puppet shows, hosted professional workshops, created programming boxes and maintained the picture book collection. My special projects include collection development for the "Toy Movable" collection, a reference collection of titles with "movable" elements like pop-up books, and our "Family Life Shelves," a selection of books for children and their caregivers on important topics like physical and mental health, adoption, divorce, bereavement, and sex education.

Some fun facts about me! My favorite color is the rainbow. My favorite animal is the unicorn. So, my office in Children's Literature is a colorful, sparkly, unicorn-themed extravaganza. My favorite children's book is "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" by Roald Dahl and whenever I'm feeling down, I like to reread the part where Charlie finds the Golden Ticket. Speaking of sweets, I don't drink coffee, so I keep my office stocked with hot chocolate and tea.

I look forward to meeting each of our FOCAL members in the Children's Literature Department and hope you will visit us soon. Given the childhood inspiration for my career, I can confidently attest that your support of the Children's Literature Department changes lives.



If you have not renewed your membership yet for 2022, this is the time to do it! Consider upgrading your membership to a Sustaining membership for the year (only \$100) and help support library programs.

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Dues are tax deductible.

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