FOCAL Award for 2020: Todos Iguales - All Equal, by Christy Hale

*By Michelle Marot*

In Todos Iguales, Christy Hale recounts the details behind the events of a groundbreaking 1931 school desegregation case. Written in Spanish first and then English, on each page, Christy Hale has done a truly wonderful job of presenting all of the historical details of this story while, in keeping with the book’s theme, giving equal access to all readers. Christy also illustrated the book, designing each page to resemble vintage citrus crate labels. She also included actual photos of Roberto Alvarez, his classmates, the judge, and others who played a part in this important event.

Congratulations to Christy Hale for creating a powerful picture book, rich in California history and relevant to young people today!

We are hoping to celebrate together at our Annual Award Luncheon scheduled for September 5, 2020. The FOCAL Committee decided to move the date to a warmer time of year so that we can hold the event on the outside patio, and auditorium, at the Central Library. We have also extended the essay due date to August 3rd. Because all LAPLs are currently closed and copies of this book may not be readily available, Caroline Gill has acquired several copies that she would be happy to send out, free of charge, to teachers who would like their students to participate in the contest (we have permission from the publisher to read the book, online, to students). If you are interested in receiving a copy of “Todos Iguales - All Equal”, please contact Caroline at: carolinegill7@gmail.com

2020 has been an unusual year so far, to say the least. The above dates are tentative, and we will have to wait to see how the next few months progress. Hopefully we can go ahead as planned. Look for updates on our FOCAL website. Stay safe.
“Look! Up there! There’s some white smoke coming from the building. What does that mean?” Some wag replied “It means that they have elected a new pope.”

We were all standing in the parking lot (now the West Lawn, with its cascading waterfalls), after being summoned from the building by yet another fire alarm. Some of us had been in a Department Heads meeting, conducted by Betty Gay, director of Central Library, and we put down our pencils and headed for the stairs. Ironically, the topic of discussion was a plan to move to a temporary location while old Central was remodeled, or rebuilt.
The fire alerts were all too frequent, the result of a patched together system of old and new wiring in the dark, confined closed stacks. So, staff wasn’t concerned about the drill. We assembled outside, and, unconcerned, watched the Fire Department personnel dash into the building.

Soon, dense black smoke replaced the white puffs, and we were directed to go across the street. From there, we watched in horror and grief as the building and its contents, burned.
After the fire, and the spectacular pack-out involving hundreds of volunteers and staff, Central Library settled into a dusty, silent ghost of its former self. Many staff members transferred to branches, or took early retirement. Some were assigned to the “Save the Books” effort headquartered at Arco Towers. Administrative staff took up residence in offices donated by Arco. Our job was to inventory the remaining books.

Rosa Edwards, Dorothy Helfeld, Maureen Wade, and Renny Day were the only staff left in Children’s Lit. The puppet shows mirrored the new normal: Uncertainty. Monotony. Helplessness. We cheered each other up with humor and jokes. That photo of a pile of burned books...there were ashy heaps inside the building as well, and the acrid smell permeated the rooms and halls. They were a daily reminder of the enormity of the disaster.
“I know, we’ll do a puppet play.” was Maureen Wade’s response. It was seconded by Dorothy Helfeld and Renny, and a tradition was born.

The date was April 1986, after a devastating fire had swept through Central library. Morale was low among the staff members who were left to create an inventory of all the books left in the fire-blackened and sooty building. Cold in winter and stifling in summer, with minimal lighting and barely functioning restrooms, Central Library was a shell of its former self. The magazine room had been converted into a staff gathering place: The Embers Lounge. At one of our weekly meetings, someone suggested a party….with a talent show.

Thus was born Zing and Zang Zong, and their hapless supervisor, Mr. Figg. Zing and Zang were eager, though not too bright, workers, constantly confused by conflicting orders that Mr. Figg relayed from his faceless superiors in administration: “Pull the author cards!” “No, pull the shelf list cards.” “Count the cards” And every morning, someone would arrive, saying “I need your statistics!”

The author should take no credit, as the plays represented the constantly changing directives from the towers across the street. Your reporter now realizes that they were inventing the engine even as it was driving forward. But the plays provided some levity. Soon, staff members would report funny situations, with hopes that they would see the tale represented in the next production.
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please send renewals to: Renny Day/
15221 Via de las Olas/Pacific Palisades, CA 90272

Name __________________________________________
Address _________________________________________
City/State/Zip __________________________________

Membership is for the calendar year, January through December. 
Dues are tax deductible.

☐ New       ☐ Renewal
☐ Basic $25    ☐ Contributing $60    ☐ Sustaining $100       Lifetime $1000

Dewi Ochoa, FOCAL Points editor

If you prefer to receive this Newsletter electronically, Please send an email request to
carolinegill7@gmail.com

FOCAL
Children’s Literature Department
Los Angeles Public Library
630 West Fifth Street
Los Angeles, CA 90071