



FOCAL Points



VOL XLIIINO. 1

For more news: www.FOCALcentral.org

Winter 2021

Facebook / Instagram: @focalcentral

FRIENDS OF CHILDREN AND LITERATURE — CENTRAL LIBRARY

The FOCAL 41st Award Event

By Kate Aaronson

This year's event was held on Saturday, November 14, 2020. The winner of this award was Christy Hale, writer and illustrator for *Todos iguales: un corrido de Lemon Grove* or *All equal: a ballad of Lemon Grove*. The story tells of the 1931 Lemon Grove incident where Mexican families in Southern California won the first school desegregation case in the United States. The book is written in Spanish and English and is told from the perspective of Roberto Alvarez, a child who lived through the incident and was the plaintiff in the court case *Roberto Alvarez vs. the Board of Trustee of the Lemon Grove School District (1931)*. This beautifully illustrated nonfiction picture book also includes a corrido (ballad) about this historical event entitled the *Ballad of Lemon Grove*.

Every year, in addition to choosing a winning book, FOCAL has an essay contest for elementary school aged students. The winning essayists are awarded a meeting with the author along with a banquet. This year, due to the COVID pandemic, our awards ceremony was a virtual event. The two essay winners, Antonio Chow (4th grade) and Aurora Noyola (5th grade) read their essays out loud at our award ceremony and had many provocative questions for our winning author.

The text for the essays follows this article.



After that, Christy Hale gave an eloquent speech about how she was inspired to learn more about the Lemon Grove Incident that she first heard about in 2012. Hale has studied Spanish and has a love and respect for Mexican culture. She found that she was fascinated by the story of the Lemon Grove Incident and wanted to tie it into a corrido (a ballad sung in a traditional Mexican style that narrates a historical event).

Hale did her research for this book at the San Diego History Center. She also used information from the documentary on the Lemon Grove Incident that aired on PBS in 1986. She followed clues about the incident and used historical records to look up photos of the building and people of that time.

To give the book a California feel and tie it to the citrus crops indigenous to Lemon Grove, Hale used many illustrations in her book that were inspired by vintage California citrus labels. Hale's book shows the importance of a community fighting together for the rights of their children and for desegregation in schools.



Hale was presented with the traditional FOCAL award of a handmade puppet. Jesse Kingsley made two puppets of the book's main character, Roberto Alvarez, who were then styled by Moira Lael Macdonald. One puppet will be displayed in the Children's Department at Central Library and the other will live with author/illustrator Christy Hale.

This FOCAL award event was dedicated to the memory of Helene Mochedlover, longtime board member and much beloved librarian.



Antonio Chow
Grade 4

I found the book, *Todos Iguales. All Equal: Un Corrido De Lemon Grove. A Ballad of Lemon Grove*, very uplifting. At first, I was shocked to learn that Mexican-Americans were treated so poorly during the 1930s. I felt heartbroken after reading that Mexican-American children

had to be segregated. I believe everyone should be treated equally and fairly. However, after learning that the Mexican-American community stood up for themselves and fought back, I felt satisfaction and hopefulness. In the end, I felt relieved and pleased because the Mexican-Americans obtained justice by winning their lawsuit for their children's right to equal education.

One scene that particularly stuck with me was when Principal Greene stood like a guard at the [school] doors and told the Mexican-American students that [they did] not belong here. This scene made me upset and angry because I once encountered similar mistreatment. When I was 5 years old, I was out with my dad. We were speaking Mandarin Chinese. Suddenly, a stranger walked up to us and said we should not be speaking a foreign language in this country and that we should only speak English. I remember feeling offended and confused. I imagine this is how the Mexican-American students felt when Principal Greene mistreated them.

It would mean a lot to me to meet the author, Christy Hale, because I would like to ask her how she received the inspiration for her book. Did she personally experience discrimination? I would also like to ask her if she would consider writing other books about discrimination of other peoples. Specifically, my father told me about the history of racial discrimination of Chinese-Americans in the 19th century. I think it would be an educational topic to write about because many people may not know about this untold part of our history.



Aurora Noyola
Grade 5

My overall impression of “Todos Iguales-All Equal” is that we still have a long way to go to eliminate racism. I had many questions about what happened in this historical

narrative that seem to relate to today’s social unrest. Why segregate in the first place? Why did the school leadership dislike Mexican children? Why does racism exist and who started it? I think it was meant to discriminate against and make Mexican children question their identity and worth. I’m grateful that the Mexican parents didn’t allow it and organized a boycott.

The Mexican parents didn’t accept racism and discrimination for their children like they might have for themselves. They talked about coming to America for a better life, something I hear my grandparents and mom refer to often. A better life included fairness and a good education. The scene where the families gathered to discuss the discrimination stuck with me because it was so intimate like an extended family. The Mexican community got together at someone’s house to talk in contrast to an office like the school board. It was treated as a community issue and addressed by everyone coming together. I’m proud of my Mexican culture and grateful because these efforts affected my life and future.

It would be cool for me to meet the author because she BOTH wrote the book and did the illustrations. I like to draw so I was especially interested in her illustrations. It would also be nice because she seems to care about Mexican history and wants to share that history with Mexican people in their language. I also wonder why she wanted to share this history, does she have a personal connection to Lemon Heights or the Mexican-American culture?

HELENE MOCHEDLOVER

By Renny Day

“We will lead with the article about the luncheon, and use those excellent photos by Caroline Arnold.” I can still hear Helene’s soft voice as she planned each new issue of FOCAL Points. She took it to the printer, and brought the newsletters to Central, where we met to affix labels and stamps. She treated each issue carefully, her expertise honed by years as editor of the Library Guild’s Communicator.



Helene was loved and respected by her staff in Literature and Fiction and Languages departments, her colleagues in the Librarians’ Guild, and members of FOCAL and BRUCKMAN Friends Groups. She was also a loyal friend and mentor to staff in many departments, offering a sympathetic shoulder or a mini pep talk, as the situation required.

She loved to travel. We visited watering holes all over California, from the ocean to the desert. We cruised the British Isles, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic Coast. We climbed aboard buses to discover Britain, Germany and Italy. We got lost in subways, train stations and airports. But, at the end of each day, we managed to find some Johnny Walker, and a welcome, if not comfortable, bed.



We will miss you, Helene, but never forget you.

Your buddy, Renny

IN MEMORIAN - MARY WYNTON

FOCAL lost a loyal friend in March, 2020. Mary Wynton was a long-time member of the organization. She attended each annual luncheon, arriving early, and asking what she could do to help. We always asked her to sit at the “Welcome Table”, where she greeted arrivals with her smile and soft voice. She always knew all the members, and called each by name as they entered the room.

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

