



Number 12

(September 2007)

"It is the function of some people to be a lamp and some to be a mirror. I have been very pleased to function as a mirror of others' work." – Arne Nixon

"Painted Words and Spoken Pictures" in October

A conference titled "Painted Words and Spoken Pictures" is planned for Saturday, October 6, 2007, on the Fresno State campus. Presented for authors, illustrators, teachers, librarians, collectors, and fans of children's and young adult literature, the conference is sponsored by The Arne Nixon Center and the North Central California Chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Conference speakers include:

Aliki, the award-winning author or illustrator of 200+ children's books including *How a Book is Made*; *William Shakespeare and the Globe*; *My Five Senses*; *The Play's the Thing*; and *Painted Words and Spoken Memories*.

Karen Cushman, the Newbery-winning author of *The Midwife's Apprentice*; *Catherine, Called Birdy*; *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple*; *Matilda Bone*; *Rodzina*; and *The Loud Silence of Francine Green*.

Steve Moser, president and co-founder of the SCBWI and the author of dozens of children's books including *Elvis is Back and He's in the Sixth Grade!*; *Lights, Camera, Scream!: How to Make Your Own Horror Movies*; and *The All-Star Meatballs and Goofball Malone* series.

Yuyi Morales, illustrator of *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez*; *Sand Sister*; and *Los Gatos Black on Halloween*, and the author/illustrator of *Little Night* and *Just a Minute: A Trickster Tale and Counting Book*, winner of the Pura Belpré Medal for illustration.

Carolyn Yoder, author of *George Washington: The Writer* and the forthcoming *John Adams: The Writer* and editor of *Calkins Creek*, the United States history imprint of Boyds Mills Press.

Authors' books will be available for sale and autographing. Registration is \$85. For information send e-mail to anc@listserv.csufresno.edu or call (559) 278-8116.

Help us celebrate our anniversary!

Everyone is invited to ANCA's annual meeting on Friday, December 7, at 5:30 p.m. on the fourth floor of the Henry Madden Library (which is the current but temporary location of the Arne Nixon Center). The event will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Arne Nixon Center. Following a gala reception, ANCA President Denise Sciandra will chair the festivities, offering special memories of Arne Nixon. Guests of honor will include the Center's Governing Committee: Library Dean Peter McDonald; Dr. Maurice Eash, whose essay about his friend Arne Nixon appears elsewhere in this issue; and Michael Cart, the well-known author, librarian, columnist, and past president of the Friends of Freddie (the Pig). As the country's leading expert on young adult literature, Michael Cart will discuss new trends in that genre, which is a major focus of the Arne Nixon Center's collection.

All are welcome; there is no admission fee. Free parking is available in lots E and D, closest to the Library. ANCA members will receive invitations to this event closer to the date. To RSVP, call (559) 278-8116 or send e-mail to anc@listserv.csufresno.edu.



Save these dates!

October 6, 2007

SCBWI Conference,
Residence Dining Hall

December 7, 2007

ANCA Annual Meeting,
10th Anniversary Celebration
Madden Library, 5:30 p.m.

April 20, 2008

Secret Garden Party, 3-5 p.m.



Lemony Snicket visits Fresno State

More than 700 people—fans of all ages—packed the Satellite Student Union on March 27 for a lecture by the best-selling children's author in the United States. Daniel Handler, better known as Lemony Snicket, author of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, spoke as part of the University Lecture Series. Handler, who lives in San Francisco, delighted the audience with wry descriptions of his life to date. Somehow his failures—being dumped by his college girlfriend and fired as a screenwriter for the movie based on his books—cheered the crowd, who asked dozens of questions and waited in line for hours to have their books signed.

Handler took time to talk to everyone who wanted to meet him, both after the lecture and earlier that day at a pre-speech reception for special guests, including ANCA Life Members.

As a child, he said, he was influenced by his great-aunt, Vera Wells, a well-known Los Angeles librarian. She seemed grumpy, old, and spinsterish to him. One day he waited with her outside a restaurant while his parents went to get their car. She amazed him by opening her purse and taking out a book.

"Where's your book?" she asked.

He didn't have one.

"You can't go wrong with a book," she advised, and so now he carries one, at the ready, in his red backpack.



Tales & Tidbits from ANCA

(Arne Nixon Center Advocates)

by Denise Sciandra, ANCA President

Young adult author Janet McDonald earned degrees from Vassar College, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, and New York University School of Law, and was a member of Mensa. In her autobiographical book, *Project Girl*, she gives us insight into just how difficult these accomplishments were for someone raised in "the projects."

I became aware of Janet McDonald through an article in *The Horn Book Magazine* (November/December 2005). What attracted me was her philosophy of writing to entertain and educate and her authenticity in writing for at-risk kids based on having grown up in public housing. I immediately wrote up these thoughts in a letter to the editor of *Horn Book* that was published (July/August 2006).

On July 17, 2006, the author sent an e-mail to the Arne Nixon Center that said, "I am Janet McDonald, a young adult author living in Paris. Recently, friends forwarded me a copy of a letter written by Denise Sciandra (whom I Googled and believe to be affiliated with your group). I just wanted to thank her for such a touching expression of appreciation and understanding of what I'm trying to accomplish in my writing. The letter made my day!"

Well, her letter made my day, too. We exchanged a few e-mails, mostly about writing and the Tour de France. She could see the final laps from her window and like me, was pulling for American Floyd Landis. She never mentioned that she was fighting cancer.

I told her that I don't like books in which moralizing drives the story. Here is Janet's unedited response to that comment. "bonjour Denise, thank you again for your words. i so agree with you about the moralizing thing. a well-known black YA author with whom i was friends refused to blurb *Spellbound* because she found it immoral . . . why? because Raven leaves her baby with her mother to go off to the college prep program! i was so surprised but go figure. i was like 'at least she is trying to get her life together so she CAN be a help to her mother.' i was hurt . . . until the award winning author of *Bud not Buddy* [Christopher Paul Curtis] was thrilled to do it. anyway, i hope we will stay in touch best, Janet www.projectgirl.com."

Janet McDonald's friends contacted me on April 13, 2007, with a "we hate to inform you in this way" message that Janet McDonald had died of cancer at age 53. This remarkable woman entered my life suddenly and left just as suddenly. Her writing is her legacy. A scholarship fund is being established at Vassar in her memory.



Pictured with David Handler are, left to right, Brenda Martin, Frances Neagley, and Lisa Schoof.

Answers to quiz:



- 1 Catherine, Called Birdy by Karen Cushman
- 2 Miss Nelson is Missing by Harry Allard
- 3 The Higher Power of Lucky by Susan Patron
- 4 Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O'Dell

Published by

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Magic Mirror

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by Angelica Carpenter

CURATOR'S
CORNER



The last edition of *The Magic Mirror*, which focused on high stakes testing and other problems related to the No Child Left Behind Act, evoked more responses than all previous issues combined. We who wrote the articles heard from authors, retired teachers, grandparents, and people who just plain love to read, thanking us for informing them about alarming new trends in public schools and asking what they could do to help (work to repeal No Child Left Behind—we don't need the federal government running our schools!).

Meanwhile, I was reading an amazing book, one that I cannot get out of my mind: *The Pox Party*, volume one of *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing*, by M. T. Anderson, a young adult novel written as the memoir of a slave boy in colonial Boston. The child Octavian lives in a college where he is taught by respected scientists. Later he learns that his education is an experiment to determine the capacity of Africans to learn.

Octavian excels at his studies until the college changes hands and a new man takes charge. This scientist, convinced that Africans have a natural tendency toward narrative, forbids Octavian the further study of history and literature. Banned from the library, the boy continues his study of Latin and Greek, now limited to translating fragments of boring documents.

Although Octavian suffers incredible cruelties, both physical and mental, this literary deprivation is also significant. "I missed my studies . . . inveterately," he writes, "for reading, once begun, quickly becomes home and circle and court and family; and indeed, without narrative, I felt exiled from my own country. By the transport of books, that which is most foreign becomes one's familiar walks and avenues; while that which is most familiar is removed to delightful strangeness; and unmoving, one travels infinite causeways, immobile and thus unfettered."

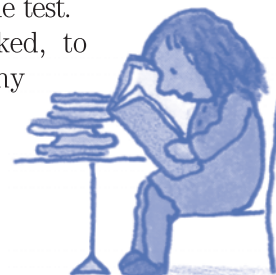
The change in Octavian's curriculum reminded me of changes in California where, in some schools, trade books (picture books, novels, biographies, etc.) are being removed from classrooms, and children are limited to the excerpts and phonics exercises in their reading textbooks. I wrote to M. T. Anderson, to tell him how much I liked his novel and to ask whether he, too, had thought of this connection.

"I did indeed think of standardized testing as I wrote *Octavian*," he replied, "though of course I was trying to remain true to the intellectual milieu of the 18th century."

In June, M. T. Anderson accepted a Printz honor award (for excellence in young adult literature) at the annual conference of the American Library Association. I heard his impassioned speech, about people still in slavery today, about how history is now, and about students being tested recently in a Boston inner-city school, where his friend teaches. On the day of the Big Test, he said, four people were shot near the school. The children heard the gunfire. They had to exit through police tape. As the teachers received instructions for a lockdown, they were also warned not to let the shootings affect the test.

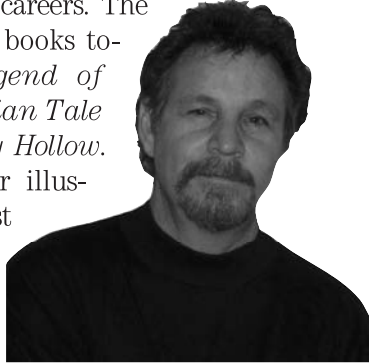
How could anyone compare those scores, he asked, to those of students taking the same test in a wealthy suburb? To even things up, he suggested firing off a couple of rounds over the rich kids' heads. "Then let them take the test!" he said.

Read Octavian! History is now!



Daniel San Souci to donate papers

Thanks to illustrator and author Daniel San Souci, who has announced plans to donate his papers to the Arne Nixon Center. Both Daniel and his brother, author Robert San Souci, who will also donate papers, credit Arne Nixon with helping to start their careers. The brothers have produced 13 books together, including *The Legend of Blackface: A Blackfeet Indian Tale* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Daniel, who has written or illustrated 40 other books, is best known for his nature illustrations in picture books, such as *Two Bear Cubs*, *North Country Night*, and *Antelope, Bison, Cougar*:



Daniel San Souci

A National Park Wildlife Alphabet Book. His Web site is www.danielsansouci.com. There is also a Web site for his *Clubhouse* series, based on his Berkeley childhood and his adventures with his brothers Robert and Michael: www.clubhousebooks.com.

Featured illustrations from our collections

The illustrations featured in this issue are from *Manners and Communication* by Alikì, pictured below in her London home. The cover illustration of *Cat, Spitting Mad*, shown on this page, is by Mark Hess.



Donations of books & materials

The Nixon Center receives wonderful and often surprising donations of books and art. Recent highlights include:

A first edition *Huckleberry Finn* in the original binding, donated by Michael Cart on the occasion of Michael Gorman's retirement as Library Dean. The book formerly belonged to the father of children's author Walter Brooks, who signed the front endpaper in 1885. Later his famous son signed it, too, in 1901.

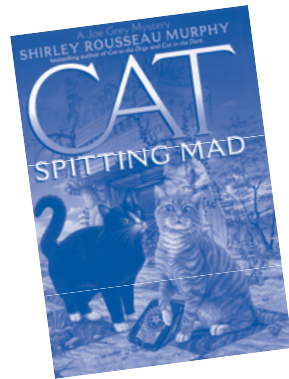
Texas collector Reed Bilz donated 244 books, including 127 Dick and Jane readers, and an essay she wrote about those readers, which will soon appear on the Center's Web site. Her sister, Pamela Harer of Seattle, already a major book donor to the Center, recently gave 95 books, including 25 editions of *The Babes in the Woods*.

The Berkeley Public Library donated 54 multicultural and foreign language books gathered for the Library by librarian Elizabeth Bacon, who wrote children's books as Betty Morrow. Thanks to Berkeley librarian Elizabeth Overmyer who thought that these titles would be more suited to a research collection.

Carmel author Shirley Rousseau Murphy, author of the Joe Gray cat mystery books, donated 46 books, including mysteries in several editions and languages and also copies of her children's books. Her Web site is www.joegrays.com.

Thanks to these donors and to all who gave books or materials in recent months:

Beverly Hills Public Library: 154 books
Bulfinch Press: 1 book
Juan Carnero, Moina Mary Fairon Rech, and Helga Haas: 1 book
Children's Book Press: 2 books
Wendy Costa: 1 book
Fresno County Office of Education: portrait of Arne Nixon
Gibbs Smith, Publisher: 1 book
Michael Gorman: 2 books and a poster
Caroline Harnly: 10 books
Houghton Mifflin Company: 12 books
Rosellen Kershaw: 13 books, Beatrix Potter materials, Leo Politi artwork
Lydia Kuhn: 1 book, 1 Mr. McGregor doll
Lerner Publishing Group: 42 books
Little, Brown and Company: 30 books
Laurene Madsen: 2 books
Aileen Martin: 10 books
Peter McDonald: 2 books
Colleen Mitchell: 3 books
Blossom Norman: 11 posters, 1 audio book, 1 book
Bette Peterson: 1 book
Michelle Poulton: 1 cat coffee cup
Random House, Inc.: 180 books
Bertina Richter: 50 cat books
Roaring Brook Press: 11 books
Scholastic: 92 books
Patricia and John Taylor: 3 books
Dave Tyckoson: 11 books



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Arne John Nixon, 1927-1997

by Maurice J. Eash

To appreciate Arne John Nixon and his place in children's literature requires the examination of two major influences that shaped the personal and professional self he projected as a teacher. As a teacher who made story telling a focus of his presentations and interpretations, he frequently harkened back to early revelatory influences in his childhood, spent in rural South Dakota.

As a child of the Great Plains, Arne saw Finnish farmer-ranchers struggle to wrest a living from the marginal land and often uncooperative climate. Hard work and a firm trust in God fueled their efforts.

Despite his departure from childhood exposure to Lutheranism and its super-naturalism, Arne took from this religious heritage a broad knowledge of the Bible and its literature. This knowledge base served in his exegesis of literature as a profound understanding of myth and ritual in human experience. Isolated as a child on plains of endless horizons, Arne felt the connection to the church as community center as a limited but primary focus for early childhood memories. He enjoyed singing the gospel songs that were so much a part of the services he attended as a child. Often as he and I traveled together in later years, we teamed up singing, I as driver and tenor, Arne as baritone and music director. Our rendition of gospel songs may have been viewed as third-rate music, but they were a joyful noise for Arne.

The limiting set of social circumstances found in isolated homes and small churches contributed to the source of loneliness that was to be a significant part of Arne Nixon's self and it was reflected in his professional endeavors in story telling and in the teaching of children's literature. As an avid reader from early childhood (his reading was admittedly a formidable defense against loneliness), he committed himself as a teacher to passing on that great pleasure of his life to others. To read was to know about life in dimensions that did not always have to be experienced directly. He often said that a reader, when identifying with characters, was performing one of the central acts of literary understanding.

Arne enrolled in graduate school in 1956 at Columbia University. Here he was to encounter the second set of formative influences that served to shape his doctoral studies and much of his future teaching. Through classes and seminars he learned about a theory of interpersonal development explicated by a psychiatrist, Harry Stack Sullivan [Perry, H. S., & Gawel, M. L. (Eds.) *Henry Stack Sullivan and the Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*. W. W. Norton & Co., 1953]. The gist of the theory was that an individual's personality developed in an interlocking pattern of social relationships. Life experience was consti-

tuted of a series of involvements whereby the individual sought satisfaction in relationships with others. To be denied these interlocking relationships was to experience the most painful of continuous human experiences: loneliness.

Arne was to explore Sullivan's basic theory with its subset, anxiety, in a study of reading as perceived by five-year-olds and later in children's literature [McConkie, G. W., & Nixon, A. J. *The Perception of a Select Group of Kindergarten Children Concerning Reading*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, NY, 1959]. On the use of literature with children, he came to the view that the major contributors to children's learning were the insights they received into human behavior that emerged from the analysis and interpretation of character. (Sullivan's emphasis on the significance of patterns of social relationships is visible here.) Early on in his approach to story telling, Arne discarded the exiguous plots that characterized much of the genre to pursue the in-depth examination of character. In his analysis, he used a three-stage approach: a) state in the briefest form the crux of the story; b) explicate the characters' relationships to one another; and c) ascertain the in-depth meaning of these relationships. A well-known folktale, "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," serves as an example: a) the boy tricks the villagers by falsely crying wolf; b) why did he trick the villagers by crying wolf; and c) what might one ascertain the moral purpose of this story to be for personal relationships, inasmuch as the boy paid with his life for his falsification. For Arne, children's literature was first and foremost a doorway to achieve interpersonal understanding of self and others.

I once sat in on a presentation Arne gave to a church group. He opened with a reading from a book of children's letters addressed to God [Hample, S., & Marshall, E. *Children's Letters to God*. Workman Publishing Co., Inc., 1991]. Much laughter ensued until he began asking how these children viewed a God image. There was a troubled silence. It became clear that the characteristics attributed to God came from the children's life experiences. Self examination at any age, Arne pointed out to the group, was unsettling. He himself had spent a lifetime working his way through self exploration of his life experience. When I last visited him in June 1997, he was facing a terminal illness. As we conversed, both recognizing that this would be our last visit, ending a 41-year friendship, he said, "I have no regrets as I have lived my life."

Dr. Maurice Eash, who lives in Lexington, Massachusetts, is Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois in Chicago. He met Arne Nixon when both were in graduate school at Columbia University.

Paradise

by Margarita Engle

When Denise Sciandra asked me to donate my manuscripts to the Arne Nixon Center, I was horrified. Did she think I was on my deathbed? I had never thought of donating papers as a step taken by any author who hoped to live another year or two.

Other writers who heard my tale of horror warned me that I was passing up an incredible honor. My understanding (or misunderstanding) of the term 'donating papers' began to change. The Arne Nixon Center was offering me shelf space, during my natural lifetime—bookshelves! All those sloppy, embarrassing first drafts would be safely stored, in case scholars ever wanted to read them and laugh. Now I was more horrified than before.

Still: bookshelves! I had to admit that my office was cluttered. The manuscripts consumed precious space that could be devoted to first editions, instead of first drafts. If I donated my papers, I would have an excuse to go shopping. I could hide in the Clovis Book Barn, searching for treasures. No one would know where I was. It would be a vacation!

Eventually, I realized that the Arne Nixon Center is otherworldly, and should not be judged by earthly standards. Angelica Carpenter gave me a tour. I was allowed to gaze into rare volumes that emitted saintly, book-shaped haloes of contentment. These were happy books. The manuscripts and other ephemera looked ecstatic too—fragile, luminous pages were being pampered before my eyes. I watched with reverence as dog-eared boxes of handwritten papers by amazing authors were meticulously catalogued by angelic librarians, students, and volunteers. Angelica's name even seemed significant. Suddenly, I could hardly wait to deliver my embarrassing first drafts into the hands of biblio-angels. Perhaps the deciding factor was all those cat knicknacks. Any institution of higher learning that cares so tenderly for stuffed kitty toys, and delicate porcelain kitty figurines, along with the vast collection of cat books, simply must be a good place!

Here, my papers will never be lonely. The image comforts me. I see my wild manuscripts, enjoying their tidy future, displayed on spacious shelves, tucked between the papers of truly astounding authors, both living and dead. Denise and Angelica had led me straight to Book Heaven. I am grateful.

I joyfully invite other authors to join me in the heavenly experience of donating papers to a loving, permanent, suitably elevated, upstairs home.



Margarita Engle (pictured at right with ANCA President Denise Sciandra), lives in Clovis, California. She is the author of The Poet Slave of Cuba: a Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano. Her book has won honors from the American Library Association, the International Reading Association, and the National Council for Teachers of English. She will receive the Américas Award at the Library of Congress in October 2007.

SIGN ME UP!



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Jumpstart

This *Magic Mirror* includes an insert from Jumpstart, a frequent partner in Arne Nixon Center programs. Jumpstart and the Center have worked together to fund Fresno appearances by Steven Kellogg, Alma Flor Ada, and F. Isabel Campoy. Jumpstart is a national organization that pairs highly trained college students with preschool children in Head Start and other early learning programs. The students and children have yearlong, one-to-one relationships. Jumpstart's mission is to guarantee that every child in America enters school prepared to succeed.

Can you identify book titles from these first lines?

(Answers on page 2)



12th day of September. I am commanded to write an account of my days:
I am bit by fleas and plagued by family. That is all there is to say.



The kids in Room 207 were misbehaving again. Spitballs stuck to the ceiling. Paper planes whizzed through the air. They were the worst-behaved class in the whole school.



Lucky Trimble crouched in a wedge of shade behind the Dumpster. Her ear near a hole in the paint-chipped wall of Hard Pan's Found Object Wind Chime Museum and Visitor Center, she listened as Short Sammy told the story of how he hit rock bottom.



Before I fell asleep I thought of a name for him, for I could not call him dog. The name I thought of was Rontu, which means in our language Fox Eyes.

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