



FOCAL Points ~ ~



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FOCAL AWARD LUNCHEON, JANUARY 28, 2017 TEXT AND PHOTOS BY CAROLINE ARNOLD

Celebrating *Angel Island: Gateway to Gold Mountain* by Russell Freedman, Winner of the 2016 FOCAL Award



On Saturday, January 28, 2017, librarians, teachers, students, parents, and lovers of books for children met at the Border Grill in downtown Los Angeles to celebrate noted author Russell Freedman's book *Angel Island: Gateway to Gold Mountain* (Clarion Books, 2014), winner of the 2016 FOCAL Award. FOCAL (Friends of Children and Literature) is the support group of the Los Angeles Public Library's Children's Literature Department.

Angel Island: Gateway to Gold Mountain tells the story of the immigration center on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, once called the "Ellis Island of the West", that processed immigrants, mostly from China and Asia, between 1910 and 1940. It highlights a tumultuous time when immigration policies were used in discriminatory ways. The book gives the reader insight into the struggles and hopes of the people who passed through this center and to the efforts to preserve it as a historic site. Russell Freedman was unable to come to the luncheon, but in his stead, his editor, Dinah Stevenson, VP and Publisher at Clarion Books, came to accept the award.

As people arrived at the restaurant, a wonderful slide show of all the past FOCAL award winners, prepared by Mara Alpert of LAPL, played on a screen at the front of the room. Tables were decorated with incredibly detailed mini-sculptures portraying the themes of the book. They were made by art students at Nobel Middle School under the guidance of art teacher Ray Moszkowicz.

The program began with a welcome by Renny Day followed by a delicious lunch, beginning with my favorite, green corn tamales, and then main courses of our choice. I chose the torta but everything looked delicious! In addition to the "chef's signature cookies" for dessert we also had fortune cookies, in keeping with the theme of the book.

After lunch we heard the student essay winners read their excellent essays telling why they liked the book and would like to meet the author. Then Sada Mozer, the FOCAL Award Committee Chair, intro-

duced Dinah Stevenson, who accepted the award for Russell Freedman and read a letter from him telling us about his childhood in California and how he got the idea for the book—from a suggestion by librarian Milly Lee—and his subsequent research. Dinah then told us about her experience working with Russell over the years. It was an excellent presentation!

Finally, Dinah was presented with a puppet depicting a Chinese immigrant dressed like many who came to Angel Island. The second puppet will become part of the collection of puppets at LAPL.

For many years I have admired the books of Russell Freedman, who, as Dinah said, has been called the “guru of nonfiction writing for children.” I’m sorry I didn’t get to meet him in person, but Dinah Stevenson’s presentation made me feel as if I had.

As a former FOCAL Award Committee member, I know how much work goes into selecting the book and planning the luncheon. Thanks to the Award Committee, the essay judges, the FOCAL Board, the Children’s Literature Department at LAPL, and everyone else who contributed, for another great luncheon!



FOCAL AWARD ESSAY 2016 WINNER

ANGEL ISLAND

By Russell Freedman

Angel Island is not only an interesting book, but also an inspirational one. I learned that almost all of the immigrants came from hardship like war, drought, famine, and poverty, seeking a new opportunity in America. I was inspired by the courage of the immigrants leaving everything they knew to go on a dangerous journey to America. From the journey, to the detention barracks, to the check up and questioning, the process was harrowing. My grandparents emigrated from Korea, and though they didn't go through Angel Island, it was still hard for them to come to America. The book helped me appreciate the huge privilege it is to be an American citizen.

Chapter five talked about how horrifying the barracks were. The immigrants must have had all of their hopes crushed when they found out that they would have to stay in such miserable conditions. The barracks were crowded and smelly. The immigrants must have wondered if coming to America was worth it, and what they would do if they couldn't enter the country. And the immigrants must have been worried about their families back home. Some stayed in the barracks for weeks on end filled with fear, worry, and loneliness. During the long hours, some scribbled poems to express their anger and rage, covering every inch in the walls. Thinking of all they overcame to get into America shows me how much courage the immigrants had and how much America represented hope and opportunity to them.

Angel Island helps us appreciate the hardships the immigrant went through, and the benefits that they gave our country. It also gives us respect for those who have immigrated. This gives dignity to all the immigrant families, including my own. It would be my honor and privilege to meet and thank Russell Freedman.

Noah Kim, 5th Grade, Creative Minds Academy

Angel Island is a very touching book about the incredible journey of immigrants coming to America. They made the long journey across the ocean, put up with the terrible conditions and brutal interrogations at the detention barracks, and then overcame cultural and language barriers here in America. Angel Island gave me much respect and admiration for minorities in our country. They demonstrated immense courage to immigrate here. It's also greatly increased my regard for my grandparents, who faced their own hardships to immigrate to America. This book helped me realize how much we share in common. Regardless of how we look or talk. We all long for freedom and a life with fair opportunities.

The part that stood out to me was chapter five, talking about what life was like in the detention barracks. Reading about all of the physical and emotional sacrifices they made to come here shows me the precious value of American freedom. Even though immigrants were treated terribly, Angel Island was still the entrance to a new life with new opportunities. They were able to escape all the hardships and struggles going on in their homeland. It was a place that held both horror and hope for the immigrants coming to the United States.

Russell Freedman writes Angel Island beautifully. My least favorite subject is history, but Freedman brings out the drama of Angel Island in a way that makes me want to read more and more. His descriptive writing helps me relate to the inspiring immigrant story. I now feel more connected to the many minorities that live in Southern California. Meeting Freedman in person is an experience that I would cherish because this book has deepened my appreciation for the sacrifices made by immigrants who have built our great nation.

Caleb Kim, 7th Grade, Creative Minds Academy

The book **Angel Island** by Russell Freedman is about the struggles immigrants have faced on their search for a new life in America, and I think this book is the best representation of the hardships people have faced. When first reading this book, I realized how insignificant the stories of the immigrants were to most people back then. Because most of us haven't dealt with experiences such as the ones described in the book, so many of us fail to take their journey into account and put thought into how life-changing this voyage was. The exquisite details of the book along with the pictures keep the reader captive to the immigrants' struggles.

Among the intriguing scenes that took place in the book, a scene that I can not forget was in chapter 2 "Bound for Gold Mountain" from page 11-12 when mobs of people attacked innocent Chinese settlements, drove people out of their houses and even killed several. Although the Chinese fought back through strikes, it did little to bring sympathy from the Americans and eventually led to calling the Chinese immigration as "unarmed invasion." The book mentioned in 1882 it was "...the first time the United States had excluded immigrants because of their nationality or race." The hatred toward immigrants rapidly increased to the point of passing the Chinese Exclusion Act. I find the actions Americans took to get their way harsh, and I wish they would have found a better solution.

It would be an honor to meet Russell Freedman because he has given me a new view of the struggles immigrants have faced in search of a new beginning. I want to thank him for writing this book which I hope will inspire more people to take action as Alexander Weiss did.

Rokshana Bushra, 8th Grade, Sepulveda MS



Mara Alpert's 2017 Midwinter Conference Adventure

One of the things that particularly excited me about going to the American Library Association's Midwinter Meeting in January was the opportunity to visit Atlanta, Georgia, a city I had never been to before. I don't normally get the opportunity to attend ALA conferences, but now that I'm a member of the 2018 Newbery Medal Committee, I will be attending four of them. So my main purpose for going to this one was to learn HOW to be a member of this most prestigious of committees.

Let me pause here and say that I won't be able to tell you any of the arcane mysteries that occurred behind the closed doors of that first meeting. I can say that I enjoyed having the opportunity to meet the other members of the committee and look forward to my next year of reading, reading, reading!

Much of the rest of my time was spent attending various publisher events and learning about all the new titles that are being published this spring. That was particularly interesting to me, since I'll be reading most (if not all) of them. I got to hear wonderful talks by Carmen Agra Deedy and Kate Messner, Gordon Korman (whose first book was published when he was fourteen!) and Emma Donoghue, and so many more. I also got to hear Paula Poundstone and Neil Patrick Harris, who both made me laugh and who both said very nice things about libraries and librarians (and probably even meant them).

One of the highlights of Midwinter was attending the announcements of ALA Youth Media Awards, which include the Newbery and Caldecott Medals, plus the Geisel, Sibert, Pura Belpre, Coretta Scott King, and many other awards. There was so much positive energy and excitement in that auditorium! I had a moment of anticipation, dreaming ahead to next February, when I would be sitting with my committee and hoping that our selections would be greeted with equal enthusiasm.

By sheer dumb luck the hotel I stayed in (Courtyard Atlanta Downtown) was a library-themed hotel, and directly across the street from the Atlanta-Fulton Central Library. Pretty awesome, right? Of course I visited the children's department at the Central Library and had a nice conversation about urban library services for children with one of the librarians. They have a fabulously elaborate entry into the children's department.

And yes, I did take the opportunity (and a little vacation time) to tour the city, both on foot and by bus. I visited three museums and one of the largest aquariums in the world (where I got a private behind the scenes tour – it was FABULOUS!).

I look forward to attending the 2017 Annual meeting in Chicago, where we will begin the real business of discussing the best books of the year.

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29 April-Saturday Family Program: Science Day 2017 (Mark Taper Auditorium & Courtyards, 1-4 pm)

Explore the future! Get a special behind-the-scenes look at the creation of Disney Jr.'s Miles from Tomorrowland! Meet some Wild Things and Animals of Prey, presented by Full Spectrum! Try out lots of hands-on science activities with LA Makerspace, the Theodore Payne Foundation, and more! STEAM-y fun for all ages !

******* MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION *******

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

New _____ Renewal _____ Basic \$20 _____ Associate \$30 _____

Contributing \$60 _____ Sustaining \$100 _____ Lifetime \$1000 _____

(Free autographed book) (Seat at Head Table) (Book and Head Table)

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