



# FOCAL Points~~



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## A "Sun" Trip and a Happy Accident: FOCAL Honors Author H. Joseph Hopkins

by Alexis O'Neill

Arms full, Mr. Ray Moszkowicz and three of his art students from Noble Middle School hustled to the tables at the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual FOCAL 2014 Award Luncheon, placing this year's handmade centerpieces on each. Highly anticipated by the 85 attendees, the centerpieces depicted a charming scene from *The Tree Lady: The True Story of How One Tree-Loving Woman Changed a City Forever* by H. Joseph Hopkins showing the subject of his book, Kate Sessions, under a tropical tree surrounded by miniature gardening tools and plant cuttings, and even tiny, stamped envelopes.

The event began with Renny Day delivering a touching tribute to puppet-maker Carol Onofrio who recently passed away. Dramatic photos of Carol's puppets, taken by Madeline Bryant, Senior Librarian in the Children's Literature Department, were beautifully rendered in a slide show loop by Mara Alpert, also of the Children's Literature Department, showing each puppet in a spotlight with a black background. Stunning.

Surrounding FOCAL Award author H. Joseph Hopkins at lunch were this year's essay contest winners. According to judging committee chairperson, Sandy Schuckett, 57 entries from 38 teachers had been submitted. The four winners, all confident and poised, delighted the audience as they read their winning entries.

Third grader Fernanda Pereyra, of Vintage Magnet in North Hills, told how impressed she was with how brave Kate Sessions was to fight for her dream of becoming a scientist in 1881. Fernanda was inspired "by how one person can make a big difference in the world."

The audience chuckled when they heard the title of the essay by fourth grader Janice Park of Apperson Street Elementary in Sunland: "The Girl with Guts." Janice admired how Kate "must have used her inner strength and didn't let anyone judge her." The "guts" that Kate displayed inspired Janice to believe in herself "and work hard to achieve my goals no matter what others say."



Mi'Joi McGee, a fifth grader at Children of Promise Preparatory Academy in Inglewood, made the audience laugh when she admitted, "When we first began reading this book in class, I wondered why my teacher had us reading a picture book." But Mi'Joi identified with Kate's persistence in becoming a scientist when it wasn't popular and that "she went on to do a phenomenal thing. I plan to do phenomenal things one day too," Mi'Joi promised.

Finally, eighth grader Simon Brewer of Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies in Los Angeles, told how he appreciated Kate as she "defied conventions" over and over again. He was impressed with Kate because she "surpassed people's expectations" including turning a "dusty wasteland in San Diego into a rich habitat for trees."

Before he took the stage, author Hopkins was presented with a puppet of Kate Sessions created by puppeteer Jesse Kingsley, founder of The Mystery Bird Puppet Show. The moment was a bit bitter-sweet as the audience remembered the puppet artistry of Carol Onofrio, but all were charmed by Jesse's expressive handiwork, inspired by the work of *The Tree Lady* illustrator, Jill McElmurray.

Then Lisa Schloss, chairperson of the FOCAL Awards Committee, introduced author H. Joseph Hopkins. She said, "Although we were presented with other notable books, *The Tree Lady* surpassed our guidelines. . . We could not stop discussing the merits of this book and the many uses it would have for additional subjects like women's history, California history, city planning, drought resistant gardening, environmental protection, biomes and ecosystems . . ."

When Hopkins took the stage, he said the inspiration for the book came on a "sun" trip from Portland to San Diego, when the tour guide invited passengers to look out of the bus window. On one side, he pointed out a typical California landscape. On the other side, he gestured to lush Balboa Park. Hopkins drank in the beauty that Kate Sessions brought to San Diego, which led him on a research quest to find out more about this woman -- a plant hunter, popularizer, scientist and feminist -- who broke ground both literally and figuratively. When he married his story with a repeating refrain, "But not Kate" and "But Kate did," he called it "One of my best decisions ever in my whole life."

The publication of his book came as "a happy accident." After bringing his manuscript to a writing retreat, a faculty member, author/illustrator Marla Frazee, called and asked him to email his story to her editor, Allyn Johnson at Beach Lane Books. The next thing he knew, he had a contract in hand.

Hopkins said what he admired about Kate Sessions was that she didn't challenge the Southern California climate, she cooperated with it, and was persistent in her advocacy as a "botanizer." In conclusion, he complimented the student writers and asked if they would autograph his collection of their essays.

Attendees buzzed as they stood in line for autographs, bid for a chance to take centerpieces home, took photos with the day's stars, and reflected on the wonderful gathering of book people that happens each year at the FOCAL Awards luncheon.

## FOCAL AWARD ESSAY 2014 WINNERS

### THE TREE LADY

When I read this book my reaction to the book was joy and happiness. I felt joyful and happy when Kate planted trees in San Diego, turning it into a beautiful city. She was not happy when she first arrived in the city because the city looked sad without trees. The reason why the city looked sad is because the city was in a desert.

The scene that impacted me the most was when Kate was the only girl who graduated from the University of California with a degree in science. It made me think about how hard it was for her to be the only girl in the classroom. I also saw how brave she was to fight for her dream of becoming a scientist. Now I appreciate the freedom that I have, even though I am a girl. I also have the right to stand up for myself and make sure that I accomplish all of my dreams.

Meeting the author of the book, H. Joseph Hopkins, will make me feel a little nervous. At the same time, it will be an amazing experience to meet the person who wrote such an inspiring book. This book teaches you how one person can make a big difference in the world.

Fernanda Pereyra  
Grade 3, Vintage Magnet Elementary School, North Hills, CA



### ***“The Girl with Guts”***

Katherine Olivia Sessions, the main character in The Tree Lady written by H. Joseph Hopkins, was a person with guts. First of all, she was brave enough to go into the woods by herself and get her hands dirty. She was also the first woman who had ever graduated from the University of California with a degree in science. I’m positive she didn’t fit in at all. However, she must have used her inner strength and didn’t let anyone judge her. She was determined to transform a desert into a beautiful park full of trees when everyone hadn’t thought about it. After reading this book, now I believe that I will achieve something like Kate did, even though I sometimes feel left out. I just need to believe in myself and work hard to achieve my goals no matter what others say.

My favorite scene that stuck with me was the picture on the front when Kate was in the woods looking up at the trees. The perspective is nicely set, and the picture illustrates how much Kate liked being in the woods and didn’t mind getting her hands and dress dirty.

It would be fantastic if I could meet the author in person because I have so many questions to ask, such as how to start a good book, where he gets ideas, what he does in his spare time, if he had wanted to be something else besides an author when he was a kid, and other books he wrote, etc. I could burn the midnight oil just asking questions to the author because I dream to be an author myself one day.

Janice Park  
Grade 4, Apperson Street Elementary School  
Los Angeles, CA 91040



**The Tree Lady** by H. Joseph Hopkins has been one of the most inspiring and engaging books that I have read this year. When we first began to read this book in class I wondered why my teacher had us reading a picture book. I did not know at the time how much more than a picture book it was. By reading this book, I learned about an awesome lady by the name of Katherine Olivia Sessions who with her can-do attitude, perseverance, patience, and leadership skills, helped to change the face of San Diego and gave us the beautiful park we know today as Balboa Park.

My first connection to this book was through Katherine herself. As a smart girl who has been teased because I was achieving what other girls typically did not excel in, I could relate to Katherine Sessions. I believe that Katherine probably had to overcome monumental odds to maintain her interest in science and to become the first female graduate to get a degree in science from the University of California. Katherine did not give up her love of science and because of this she went on to do a phenomenal thing. I plan to do phenomenal things one day too.

The part of the book that really stuck with me was when Kate looked out of her classroom window at the dry sand and trash. The picture made me step outside of the story and imagine how Kate may have felt when she first arrived in San Diego. Even though I knew that she would find the resolve to stick it out in San Diego, that part of the story made me really think about the commitment she made by staying in San Diego. I also liked the way the author used the repeated words "...But Kate knew...", or "...But Kate did" throughout the book and I loved the pictures. If the author had of written this like a text book or a straight biography, I would have been asleep in about thirty minutes, but with this book I became so engaged that I read it over and over again.

I would love to meet the author of this story because through his book I have learned something new and grown personally. I would also like to be able to thank him for sharing this book that actually inspired our class to visit Balboa Park and me to learn more about trees. I would like to share with him my experience at the park as we were "chasing Kate" in the trees and gardens we walked through. If I could meet the author, I'd have questions to ask and my own book about the park to share.

Mi'Joi McGee

Grade 5, Children of Promise Preparatory Academy, Inglewood, CA



If you are motivated and you are willing to break from tradition, you can achieve your goals. **The Tree Lady**, by H. Joseph Hopkins, more than anything else, stresses the importance of doing what you believe, despite the naysayers. Throughout the book, the main character, Kate Sessions, was inspired to do what had not been done before. Over and over again she defied conventions and went on to fulfill her destiny. She studied science even though most girls weren't meant to, in 1881 she was the first woman to graduate from the University of California with a degree in science, and she turned a dusty desert wasteland in San Diego into a rich habitat for trees. Kate was a character who stuck with me because she surpassed people's expectations. She proved that if you work hard and do your best work, you can succeed.

For example, Kate had to find a way to plant trees in a dry climate, so she wrote to gardeners from all around the world to send her drought-resistant seeds for trees that could withstand the arid San Diego climate. Session's tireless efforts resulted in the planting of thousands of trees for the Panama-California Exposition in 1915. She took a dusty plot of land adjacent to downtown and created a public garden, Balboa Park, as vital to San Diego as Central Park is to New York City. Not only did her efforts to plant and sustain a vibrant green oasis in the desert-like San Diego improve the lives of all its citizens, but they served as an example for horticulturists who followed. Meeting H. Joseph Hopkins would be inspiring, because he used his curiosity and observational skills to discover who was responsible for the lush gardens that make up San Diego's park in the city.

Simon Brewer

Grade 8, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles, CA



CAROL  
by Renny Day

This is the 35th annual award luncheon....and the first without Carol.

I have been waiting for her to step smartly into the room with her enormous wicker basket...that was always the official opening of the FOCAL Award Luncheon.

The sting of the empty chair is lessened by the presence of Carol's family and friends, who are here today to help us celebrate her charm, wit, and talent.

I first met Carol in 1977 when we needed some puppets for our Saturday programs. Priscilla Moxom White said she knew of just the person, and we went to Carol's lovely home clinging to the hillside below the Hollywood sign.

Her sewing room was a sea of fabrics, yarn, sequins, lace and buttons. It must have seemed like fairyland to the little girls in the family.

I told her we needed a prince and princess, a peasant girl and boy, and an old woman. I figured that would provide the cast for a year's worth of folktales. Carol whipped up a prince with a purple cape trimmed in ermine. The princess was equally grand, and the little old lady came with a wardrobe of aprons, bonnets and shawls. Since then, Carol has created countless other characters, and the Children's Literature Department uses them for the Saturday puppet shows, as well as for special school visits and programs.

When the FOCAL Board decided to give an annual award, Sandy Schuckett, president, said "I have an idea -- since the department is noted for its puppet shows, let's give the author a puppet of the main character in his book." The aye vote was unanimous.

Carol was enchanted by the idea, and started right away to create Pedro, of Olvera Street fame. Every year she looked forward to the selection of an honoree, and read and reread every book looking for clues to find just the right pose and costume. Susan Patron, one of the authors wrote: "Carol's art, along with Leo Politi's, has represented the department so whimsically and faithfully. I treasure my own Onofrio puppet." They were more than just puppets. They were the authors' dreams come to life.



## EDITORS' NOTES

Photographs in this issue are courtesy of Caroline Arnold and Nina Kidd. Caroline's are available to share through Shutterfly.

<http://share.shutterfly.com/share/received/welcome.sfly?fid=aaf2fe18ab7007282a944dfefae-b216b&sid=2KZsm7lw1aNE>

Caroline has a wonderful blog about the luncheon as well.

<http://carolinearnoldart.blogspot.com/2014/12/focal-luncheon-honoring-h-joseph.html>



## SAVE THE DATE AND HELP WANTED !!!!

This year's Science Day, the Tenth, will be held on Saturday, April 11, 2015, as always in the Taper Auditorium, the Thornton and Children's Courtyards, and will feature an array of outstanding programs. Science Day is always lots of fun for children and their families, and for FOCAL members as well.

Volunteers are needed to help in this annual event, from 1:00pm to 4:00pm. Please contact Lauren Okayama, [okayama@earthlink.net](mailto:okayama@earthlink.net) or Debby Pourroy, [dpourro@hotmail.com](mailto:dpourro@hotmail.com).

**\*\*\*\*\* MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION \*\*\*\*\***

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