



A Message from Friends of the Piedmont Avenue Library



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Piedmont Ave Library Update

Last month, we reported the Oakland Public Library was beginning to plan and to negotiate with the union, steps necessary for opening branches in early 2021. Unfortunately, the recent surge in COVID-19 cases in Alameda County has thrown a wrench in those plans, and while the library continues to plan for “inside services,” there is no estimated date for allowing the public inside the libraries according to OPL Director Jamie Turbak.

While we still cannot go inside the library buildings, OPL continues to provide many services and programs for the community, including sidewalk pick up, rain or shine (10am to 1pm, Tuesday – Saturday at Piedmont Avenue branch) and a new children’s services program – Winter Bingo. Winter Bingo is a fun family literacy game recommended for kids ages 0-12. To play Winter , visit our sidewalk pick up to collect a Winter Bingo card, or download one from the OPL [website](https://www.oaklandpubliclibrary.org).

2021 Friends of PAL

The Friends of PAL continues to work with the Piedmont Avenue Elementary School community to encourage more students and their families to make use of the library now.

We continue to work toward securing a permanent home for the Piedmont Avenue Branch. The Friends of PAL will continue to monitor and support Oakland Public Library’s efforts to lease the former Child Development Center building from the school district. It is Oakland Unified School District that owns and controls the building. If the branch library could be housed in that building, it would triple the available space for activities and events.

The next virtual meeting of Friends of Pal will be Tuesday, January 12, 2021, at 7pm. We will send out a notice, with Zoom instructions, in January. Please join us in supporting our library.

The current shut down orders from Alameda County will be in effect until January 4. Updates from the county, as they relate to the Piedmont Avenue branch library, will be posted on our web site – [friendsofpal.org](https://www.friendsofpal.org).

Piedmont Avenue Branch Library Functions During the Pandemic

Even in these unprecedented times, the Piedmont Avenue Branch is a running smoothly. That it is even open in the face of the daunting challenge of COVID-19 is testimony to the spirit, ingenuity, persistence and commitment of the four people who make it happen – **Emily, Hana, Nikki and Colette**. Three of them work inside and one is at the outside table from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm five days a week.

Here is what they do inside: wearing a mask and gloves, they collect the books that are returned to the Echo Avenue receptacles, take them inside and spread them

out on a table where the books stay for at least twenty-four hours. Then, they reshelve those books. They receive books delivered by Oakland Public Library van, as described in last month's column. They process those immediately, since they were held in quarantine before OPL delivered them to the branch.



The inside workers check email requests, find the right books and package them in a bag with the patron's name showing. When the patron arrives at the outside table, the outside worker calls the inside desk on the walkie-talkie and one of the inside workers brings out the correct bag. Outside, our patrons and visitors come by and get what they have requested.

On a recent day, **Jenera Burton**, who was our branch librarian a few years ago, and is now the Supervising Librarian for West and North Oakland was visiting PAL to see how things are going. She said that all the librarians in all the branches miss the close-up patron contact.

Morany, a second grade teacher at Piedmont Avenue Elementary School was using her lunch hour to collect books for her class, which is now on Zoom.

Inside and outside the library building, there was agreement that everyone will be happy when they can hold and look through a book before deciding to check it out, and when they can get input from our helpful and prized staffers, and when they can interact with other library patrons. That will be a day of celebration for all of us.

By Ruby Long, a neighbor whose work has appeared in local and national publications.



The Oakland Youth Poet Laureate program is an unprecedented citywide effort to celebrate literacy through poetry and connect young writers to far-reaching opportunities. Each year Oakland Public Library Teen Services accept applications from talented Oakland writers (ages 13-18) to join a community of young poets. The Laureate earns an educational scholarship. The Laureate will, and all the Finalists are invited to, serve as ambassadors for literacy, arts and youth expression with ongoing opportunities for performances, projects, and peer support.

Applications for the 2021 Oakland Youth Poet Laureate will be open January 1 to February 1, 2021 - the OPL [website](#) has all the information and application

Notes from an Avid Reader

I've been an avid reader since I was 5. In high school I used to cut



school to read in the Berkeley Public Library. In college I spent hours and hours in the school libraries. Books transport, entrance, amuse, captivate, tickle your fancy, provide shelter from storms, take you on a trip to a foreign clime, make you laugh, make you cry, make you think, distract, attract, and, yes, make you rebel.

My abiding interests are literature, history, criticism, and, when I can slow down my pace, poetry.

I'm writing this column to share some of the books I love. I hope, perhaps, you might grow to love a few of them.

Literature

In all likelihood, **Harriet Arnow** is one of the greatest American writers you've never heard of. In 1954 she wrote an epic novel, her masterpiece, *The Dollmaker*. It starts with one of the most dramatic and harrowing opening chapters in American literature.

In this tale she follows the Nevels family, in the wake of the Great Depression, as they travel from Appalachia to Detroit. Her novel shows the family's love of the land they came from and their fear and hope for urban life. It's distinctive in its evocation of children. It's like the *Grapes of Wrath* in two aspects: it treats country people with dignity, and it shows that out of pain and suffering can come redemption.

Try the first two or three chapters and if you like them you have a rare book in your hands. If you don't, all it costs you is an hour or two of your time. If you like Steinbeck or Dos Passos or Crane or Dreiser or Mailer, or Kesey, or Roth, you'll wonder why she's not included in the mid-century pantheon. Is it perhaps because she's a woman?

Marilynne Robinson is a contemporary and under-celebrated writer. She's written a quartet of novels that take place in the Midwest. I've just finished the first of the quartet, *Gilead* (2004), and am working my way through the second, *Home* (2008). Her novels are almost Faulknerian in their close observation of faith and disbelief, of fathers and prodigal sons, lives of generations of folk who have, before the Civil War, settled in western Iowa.

A Congregationalist preacher in the 1840s became a militant abolitionist, gave aid to John Brown, fought in the Civil War, and begat another Congregationalist preacher who yet again begets another. There are four generations of families in the small town of Gilead. Robinson talks of faith and disillusionment, of obedience and disobedience, of family tsuris and forgiveness. Gilead and home are beautifully etched by a writer who loves words, human beings, and nature. I came across this author first when President Obama interviewed her in *The New York Review*, 11-5-15, a conversation that included theology and history. [<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/11/05/president-obama-marilynne-robinson-conversation/>]

I first tried *Gilead* in 2012 and I couldn't get in but now, as I'm getting into my eighth decade I delight in her artistry.

Leonardo Padura is a Cuban writer who wrote noir detective stories about Havana. Tough, hard-boiled detective, Mario Conde. Conde drinks too much, he observes crimes of passion and greed, he quarrels with his friends, he tells truth - carefully - to power, and usually he gets his man.

As the literary restrictions began to loosen in Cuba in the 90s, Padura began to spread his wings as a writer and in quick succession wrote two brilliant books *The Man Who Loved Dogs*, translated into English in 2009 and *Heretics*, translated in 2014. The canvas of these books is global, much wider than Havana, and the novels engage universal themes of illusion and disillusion. *The Man who Loved Dogs*, circles back and forth between Trotsky in exile, his assassin, Mercador, who stalks him, and Conde who spies Mercader walking two Borzoi 30 years after the assassination. His curiosity piqued, Conde figures out that Mercador is Trotsky's assassin, released from a Mexican prison. He becomes curious about Trotsky and tries to get more information about Trotsky from the National Library (not an easy task at the time in Cuba). He confronts Mercader, old and disillusioned, and the two men talk as they walk the dogs on paths overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. The narrative moves back and forth between the USSR in the thirties, Mexico in 1939 and 1940, and Havana in the seventies.

Padura's *Heretics* also moves back and forth in time. Its pivot is the doomed voyage of the SS St. Louis in 1939 from Hamburg to Havana to Florida to Canada and back into the maelstrom in Europe. On that luxury cruise liner, more than 900 Jews fled Germany hoping to reach Cuba, but were turned away in Havana and forced to return to Europe, where more than 250 were killed by the Nazis.

But it's about Judaism, Rembrandt, diasporic Polish Jews in Cuba and Florida, faith, reason, revenge, and family. And it comes back to Cuba where Mario Conde ties things together. Padura is a writer not unlike Walter Mosley; that is to say, he is a detective writer who actually has a lot more to say, and says it well. In my humble estimation, these two Padura novels are the best the 21st century has produced. Read it *before* Padura gets the Nobel Prize for literature.

By Louis Segal.

Louis was born in Oakland, raised his family in Oakland, dropped out of school in 1968, worked many jobs over the decades, dropped back into school in the 80s, got a Ph.D. in history, taught as an adjunct professor from 1993 to 2015. Retired but not withdrawn.

What's Happening at the Library

Effective March 16, the Oakland Public Library closed all Library locations to help limit the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). These closures will remain in effect until further notice. All programs are canceled while our library is closed. The Friends of PAL will send out a notice when we know the date the library will reopen.

