A child’s picture book about the Holocaust? About death and dying? About disasters? “Yes,” said children’s book author Alexis O’Neill, featured speaker at a Friends of the Library-sponsored forum, “those are just some of the many topics already covered in picture books. Some children’s books are simply fun, even silly,” but the best of the genre “…expose young readers to big ideas. Some of the richest writing in the world is in picture books.”

But in children’s stories, horrific topics such as these are never presented as bluntly or as frankly as they might be in a book intended for an adult audience. A tale about the death of a pet, for example, might be used to introduce a child to end-of-life issues involving humans as well as pets. Or a story about tragedy might be written in an almost poetic style, as was Jane Kurtz’s River Friendly, River Wild, a true tale of a flood that devastated her town and inundated her home when she was a child; reading such a story can help children cope with other unforeseen events. Or the story might be presented as an allegory, as in Eve Bunting’s account of the Holocaust—Terrible Things—in which animals, stand-ins for human ethnic groups, are one after another taken from their forest home by an amorphous force. Such stories are intended to convey an important message—a big idea—as does Bunting’s parable, which ends with a soliloquy by a single bunny, the only one of its kind remaining: “If only we creatures had stuck together, [the outcome] could have been different,” an echo of one of history’s tragic lessons.

Today’s market includes a plethora of picture books that deal with big ideas of importance to children, said O’Neill, from anger, sadness and bullying to sibling rivalry, separation and loss of friends. Told at a suitable level, any idea can be made understandable to children, she said. “All are about hope and survival. They show kids how they can solve problems and change the future.”

As examples of picture books with less dramatic, but no less important, messages than those cited above, O’Neill identified Russell Hoban’s A Baby Sister for Frances and Barbara Cooney’s Miss Rumphius. In Hoban’s tale, on the birth of a new baby sister an older sibling feels rejected and unimportant. “Sibling rivalry,” a common problem in growing families, said O’Neill, “is an evergreen topic for children’s books.” On the other hand, Cooney’s message is one of contributing: of an old woman who plants lupines that spread and add beauty to the countryside. “What power that gives to kids,” exulted O’Neill. On hearing the story, children realize that they, too, “have the power to make the world a more beautiful place, though perhaps in a different way.”

O’Neill’s comments about picture books in general were informative, but for many in her audience her reminiscences about her own development as a writer were the highpoint. Her interest in the written word first blossomed, said O’Neill, when as a youth she read stories to a younger sister, always with expression and intensity so as not to bore her sibling. Looking back, she realized that reading with punch and enthusiasm allowed her sister to experience the “rhythm and beauty of language that is missing from ordinary conversation. Picture books are best when read aloud. Strong verbs provide bounce and carry the story.”

Though O’Neill did not set out to be a writer, in retrospect she realized that even as a youngster she was perfecting her writing skills. “Composing factual reports bored me,” so in a fifth grade class she structured her reports as “historical fiction,” in one instance using a fictional survivor as narrator of the siege of the Alamo. “My teacher loved it. The positive feedback he gave me—and the fact that he read my reports to the class—built my confidence. Others enjoyed what I had written and eventually I realized that writing is a pleasure.”

Although picture books are small—usually 32 pages and a few hundred words long—the path from an idea’s inception to a full-blown story can be long and tortuous. Using her first book, Loud Emily, as a case in point, O’Neill noted that the story germinated from a friend’s description of a nurse’s response to a newborn’s wailing cry in a hospital nursery. Struck by the baby’s exceedingly loud vocalization, far more intense than the whimpers of her crib mates, O’Neill sought to develop a story around a little girl whose loud voice embarrassed her parents and disturbed the neighbors. “But, the story went nowhere,” she lamented, until three years later she came to the realization that the heart of her

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Oviatt Library Dean Mark Stover:
“Things that Keep Librarians Awake at Night” —as told to Jim Parker

“Years ago my mother used to say to me, she’d say, ‘In this world, Elwood, you must be’—she always called me Elwood—‘In this world, Elwood, you must be oh so smart, or oh so pleasant.’ Well, for years I was smart………………… I recommend pleasant. You may quote me.”

Elwood P. Dowd, played by Jimmy Stewart in HARVEY (1950)

The first thing you notice about Dean Mark Stover of the Oviatt Library is his smile. Pretty soon you realize that his gentle and genial nature seems to come naturally to him. Not much later you realize that he is not only pleasant, but also oh so smart. His geniality probably grew out of his childhood, following his military father around the world: “I traveled around quite a bit…I suppose that moving around so much did give me an appreciation for diversity, for different kinds of people in the world…how to get along with people, how to make friends, how to build relationships.”

“I’m very excited to be here at the Oviatt Library…there are lots of challenges that face libraries, especially academic libraries in the coming years, but I feel that we’ve got a wonderful staff of library assistants, library faculty and administrators to support the library. And of course we’ve got 36,000 great students, too, to use the libraries.”

Dean Stover also had kind words for the great accomplishments of the last Dean, Sue Curzon, among which were bringing the library through the Northridge earthquake, expanding the collection, and, “she also built up the information literacy program, one of the highlights of library outreach.”

How he came to head the CSUN libraries, and to lose sleep at nights worrying about the care and feeding of books is probably not so straightforward. It was a long time in coming; 25 years of professional library experience, following years as a student assistant in libraries. And, a direct move from San Diego State, where, about a year and a half ago, he was interim dean of libraries, after years in other administrative and faculty positions.

“I’ve always been interested in literature and technology, and those two things together, I think, form the basis for any good librarian. Someone who appreciates reading, appreciates those two things together, I think, thinks, form the basis for any good librarian. Someone who appreciates reading, appreciates the

and database publishers don’t really acknowledge that, so they think. An individual researcher can do that for their own purposes, but a library can’t necessarily scan it and then put it in its collection.”

Migration, rather than immigration, is also a worrisome issue for librarians: “…another challenge I think libraries will face in the future is preservation of materials. Not so much print materials—I think that libraries have figured out how to do that properly—but preservation of electronic materials. Most of us used floppy disks back in the early1990s. If you still have any floppy disks around, you’ll have a problem accessing the information. And that sort of demonstrates the issue we face. How do we continue to migrate from format to format? How do we make sure that the information we are storing electronically will be available to be accessed, is not going to be corrupted in any way, 20, 30, 40 years from now? So libraries are working on how to solve those problems. That’s one of the things that keep librarians awake at night, worrying about the future of the electronic library.”

Oviatt library today, Dean Stover noted, has about 1.4 million volumes in its collection, and “for a library of this age, a little over 50 years old, we’ve done a tremendous job of acquiring books and journals, and preserving them.” However, fiscal realities increasingly rear their ugly heads: “One of the problems we have with our journal subscriptions, whether they’re print or electronic, as well as our database subscriptions, is that they’re really unsustainable because we’ve experienced pretty flat budgets from the state in the last few years. And the journal and database publishers don’t really acknowledge that, so they continue to raise their prices. And if you just do the math you realize that’s unsustainable. We can keep up with that with one-time money for a few years but eventually we don’t have the money to pay for all these subscriptions. So we have to decide, ‘what are our priorities?’ What are the most important journals to keep, the most important databases to keep? Or, to try to find other sources of income besides the state.” Furthermore, Dean Stover noted: “Ten, twenty years ago our book budget…was

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Scholarships, most valued at $1000, were awarded in 2012 to sixteen student library workers, winners selected by a Friends of the Library committee. Eligibility requirements included a minimum number of semesters as a CSUN student, a GPA of at least 3.0, a well-written essay, and eligibility for financial aid. Photos and names of awardees are shown below with the scholarship each received.
To whom do federal security agencies turn as they seek to identify potential national security threats? Why, to science fiction writers, of course, says Dr. David Brin, renowned Sci-Fi author and featured speaker at the September opening of the Oviatt Library’s newest exhibit: Fantastic and Strange: Reflections of Self in Science Fiction.

In an entertaining and enlightening ramble about science fiction’s place in the literary world, Brin threw in a surprising twist when he explained that almost yearly he and other science fiction writers are invited to the nation’s capital to ruminate about possible security-related scenarios. The idea of such meetings, called by agencies such as the Department of Defense or the Department of Homeland Security, he said, is “to scare [security personnel] with possible failure mode experiments.” Of potential “ways to destroy America.” The authors’ wild-eyed brainstorming about potential threats, said Brin, enables the agencies to anticipate possible future events. The importance of these sessions was made clear to Brin when in the middle of one wide-ranging flight of fancy the host agency declared the group’s deliberations to be “classified,” the participants sworn to secrecy. Though they write about non-existent worlds, it appears that the Sci-Fi writers’ ability to envision an unknown future is greatly valued by the cloak-and-dagger set!

Declaring the session classified “was one of the nicest things you could say to a science fiction author,” Brin exuded, second only to, “I almost lost my job because of your book.” According to Brin, “It’s my job to make it hard to put the book down...If you almost lose your job because you can’t stop reading, you will buy my next book!” In his efforts to create his hard-to-put-down, easy-to-be-fired-up-over stories, Brin relies on a bevy of Sci-Fi devotees who constantly help him identify where changes in a prospective novel are needed. Typically, he writes about a fifth of a book, then seeks feedback from his cohort of fans. Based on their feedback, “I improve what I’ve written, write another fifth, ask for comments again, write another fifth,” then repeats the process again and again until the book is completed. With each round of review and revision he identifies “where the pre-readers put the book down to go to bed, to feed the kids or the cat,” and, more importantly, where they could not stop reading even when essential tasks beckoned. Gleaned information in hand, he improves his story so as to engross his readers, to make it more difficult for them to stop reading.

A successful science fiction writer, said Brin, must first be a storyteller. But, he explained, the writing of fictional accounts of things that by definition are unknown and unknowable also requires an author adept at performing Gedankenexperiments, or thought experiments, asking “What will happen if...?” and then logically thinking through the possible consequences. An actual experiment is rarely possible, of course, so the goal is not to discover a definitive, realistic answer, but instead to imagine and predict potential outcomes in a non-existent world. It is a Sci-Fi author’s well-developed aptitude for performing thought experiments that makes him or her so valuable at anticipating future national threats.

Brin, said Dr. Charles Hatfield, Professor of English Literature at CSUN, who introduced the evening’s speaker, is more than just a best-selling author. “He is a futurist...he lives in the future, loves thinking about transformational possibilities,” and is a “…scientific advisor, predictor, inventor and seer.” Unlike the majority of Sci-Fi writers, most of whom hold degrees in literature, Brin is a scientist with “a doctorate in physics, expertise in astrophysics and optics, and extensive knowledge of exobiology, cognition, and computing.” With such credentials, it is easy to see why he was chosen to officiate at the opening of a science fiction exhibition.

Perhaps more than any other literary genre, said Brin, science fiction is “almost genetically bound to the notions that underlie the American experience,” by which he meant “a sense of boundlessness, of seeking a frontier, of the inevitability of change.” Echoing Frederick Jackson Turner’s pronouncement in the 1890’s, he noted that an un-crowded frontier was for centuries a unique aspect of the American experience, its very presence responsible for a mindset that new opportunities were inevitable. Though America’s Western frontier is long gone, the mindset persists, said Brin, and is a driving force among science fiction writers, whose modus operandi is to constantly imagine new frontiers to be conquered.

Science fiction, said Hatfield, traces back to the 1926 publication of the first Sci-Fi magazine, Hugo Gernsback’s Amazing Stories. Although Gernsback envisioned such literature as little more than “a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision,” today, said Brin, the genre’s pinnacle is not occupied by stories that accurately predicted the future, but by those whose predictions were wrong. Citing as examples Orwell’s 1984 and Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451, he noted that both predicted futures so terrifying that they evoked prodigious and ongoing efforts to prevent a “big brother” society from becoming a reality; their very existence proved to be a “self-preventing prophecy” that blocked the development of their predicted future.

“Science fiction is not about predicting,” said Brin.
“Rather, it’s about exploring, poking sticks in a path of an unknown country, looking for quicksand pits and landmines.” Or, as Hatfield suggested in his introduction, the exploration might take the form of an alternate history, an imagining of the present had some historical event turned out differently, as for example, had the South won the Civil War. “Only 10% of [science fiction writers] are scientifically trained,” said Brin, “but we are all steeped in history…Perhaps science fiction should have been called ‘speculative history.’”

Following Brin’s well-received presentation the audience wandered the Tseng Family Gallery to peruse an eclectic assortment of novels, short story collections, and pulp publications, almost all of them from an extensive archive donated by Sci-Fi aficionado, Milton Stevens. A long-time member of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, Stevens is also a 1965 graduate of CSUN (then San Fernando Valley State College).

In addition to a copy of Amazing Stories, the magazine that started it all, exhibit-goers were able to view a plethora of Sci-Fi and related works arranged so as to depict the genre’s historical development: the introduction of robots, cyborgs and androids in the 1940’s; the increasing importance and gradual sexual liberation of women characters from the ‘20’s to the ‘80’s; the introduction in recent decades of intergalactic aliens, a world without gender, artificial intelligence and apocalyptic events. Prominently displayed were several classic works: Dune, Frank Herbert’s 1965 exploration of future connections among economics, politics, religion, spiritualism, ecology and technology, oft-cited as the best-selling Sci-Fi novel of all times; Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, published in 1932 and ranked fifth best among English-language novels of the 20th century; and The Final War, a prescient 1932 novel by Carl Spohr that depicts two superpowers who divide the world, both with huge weapon arsenals, including nuclear bombs, with which each seeks to deter the other.

Brin’s first novel, Sundiver (1980), and his award-winning breakout novel, Startide Rising (1983), were also on view, along with a few works that pre-date the recognized beginning of the Sci-Fi era. Among the latter were two that accurately predicted future developments: H.G. Welles’ When the Sleeper Awakes, that in 1899 envisioned technological advances, including automatic doors, a full half-century before their actual invention; and Jules Verne’s 1863 novel, Paris in the Twentieth Century, in which he imagined a future with carriages powered by gas-burning motors that ran on asphalt highways.

Ellen Jarosz, Special Collections and Archives Librarian, along with staff and volunteers, curated the exhibit. Cindy Ventuleth, former Special Assistant to the Dean, now retired, was instrumental in bringing the collection to the library. The volunteer organization, Friends of the Library, sponsored the evening’s reception. The exhibition runs until July 26, 2013.
After 28 years of service to the Oviatt Library—initially as Development Officer, more recently as Special Assistant to the Dean and Director of Special Projects—Cindy Ventuleth decided to hang it up. Effective July 6, 2012, she officially retired from the University to devote more time to other interests.

During her almost three-decades-long tenure at CSUN, during which Ventuleth worked under the direction of three Library Deans and four Vice Presidents for Advancement, her primary responsibility was to garner private funds for the Library. In this endeavor she was extraordinarily successful, over the years bringing in endowments, grants, scholarships, special collections and archives, as well as additions to the general collection, with a collective value exceeding $2.5 million. “Cindy was instrumental in developing the Library’s large network of supporters,” said Sue Curzon, former Library Dean. “Her sincere interest in people, her lively conversation and her good humor drew friends towards her.”

Among her proudest accomplishments, said Ventuleth, was “the creation of the beautiful Tseng Exhibition Gallery,” an accomplishment made possible by a gift she was instrumental in procuring from T. S. and Teresa Tseng. Her legacy also includes several large library endowments, the largest among them the WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) fund, initiated with a contribution from Dr. Bonnie Campbell, that funded a study room, the purchase of a bevy of books, and sponsorship of yearly programs designed to encourage young women to pursue careers in the male-dominated fields of science and engineering. Ventuleth also played a major role in establishing the Library’s highly successful scholarship program—initially with contributions from the University Women’s Club, enhanced more recently by funds from several additional donors—that in recent years has grown to 16 scholarships, collectively valued at more than $14,000 yearly, awarded to outstanding student Library workers.

“The Special Collections is my favorite place in the Library,” said Ventuleth, so it should come as no surprise that she was responsible for procuring several valuable and coveted archives. Among those she acquired are: The Mulholland Collection, an assemblage of memorabilia from Catherine Mulholland, granddaughter of William Mulholland, the engineer who brought Owens River water to the Valley; the Valley History Collection, which was recently digitized using funds from two Library Services and Technology Act grants that Ventuleth, working with other library staff, helped garner; the William Hogarth Collection, comprised of 189 works by this prolific 18th century printmaker; and the archives of the Junior League of Los Angeles. Said Curzon, Ventuleth’s success in these endeavors was in large part due to her “…knowledge of CSUN, of Valley history, and her wide interests in many fields of study,” enhanced by “…her ability to easily relate to people from many walks of life and to discuss with them almost any topic.”

“Cindy loves libraries, believes in their mission, and understands their centrality to a university,” said Curzon. Ventuleth’s steadfast pursuit of the Library’s mission was abundantly obvious to Friends of the Library volunteers, to whom she was mentor and guiding light. Among her many duties in this regard were oversight of the Friend’s bookstore, its volunteers, this newsletter, and the group’s many sponsored events. Her gracious and thoughtful suggestions, punctuated with her ever-present winning smile and gentle demeanor, were all that was needed to win the day and prod the group to action. I know I speak for all of the Friends when I say that she will be sorely missed and that the Library is lessened by her absence.

—jdole
WISE Presents “You Can Do It!”

What do Mary Engle Pennington, Virginia Apgar and Annie Dodge Wauneka have in common? Give up? All were women. All encountered major obstacles because of their gender. All made important and lasting contributions to society in spite of impediments thrown in their way. And, all were included by Jill S. Tietjen, engineer and co-author of *A Timeline of Women Who Changed the World*, in her presentation—*You Can Do It!*—to 350 local middle and high school girls last March.

Pennington in 1895 completed—but because of her gender was not awarded—a bachelors degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Yet she persevered, became a bacteriologist and chemist, earned several patents related to the safe handling of food, developed the refrigerated railroad car, and helped write the first Pure Food and Drug Act.

In the 1930’s, Apgar completed medical school with aspirations of becoming a surgeon. Discovering that no one would use the services of a female surgeon, she became a pediatric anesthesiologist and, shifting focus from mother to newborn, developed a test—the Apgar test—now used worldwide to evaluate the health status of newborns and save the lives of countless babies.

Wauneka, the first woman elected to the Navajo Tribal Council, was largely ignored by her male colleagues and was appointed to the committee deemed least important: the Health Committee. From this lowly platform, she created a community health service on the reservation, helped eradicate tuberculosis and reduce infant mortality among the Navajo, and for her efforts became the first Native American to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Among other little-known success stories of women in the sciences and engineering Tietjen mentioned:

- Eliza Lucas Pinckney, who at age 14 found a way to cultivate indigo, the dye used in blue jeans, and in so doing altered the economy of the Carolinas for 30 years;
- Lillian Muller Gilbreth, a founder of industrial engineering, a branch of that profession that seeks to optimize the efficiency of homes and businesses, and later was used to more effectively accommodate the disabled;
- Gertrude Elion, developer of the drug AZT used to treat AIDS, the first immune-suppressant drug, thus making organ transplants possible, and the first effective childhood leukemia drug, for which she received a Nobel Prize;
- Admiral Grace Murray Hopper, computer pioneer who developed the first compiler—software that translates ordinary language into the 0’s and 1’s a computer understands—and helped create an early computer language, COBOL.

The point of Tietjen’s talk was to inspire young girls to consider careers in the hard sciences or engineering, a major focus of Women in Science and Engineering (WISE), the organization that sponsored the event. Only time will tell if her spirited review of little known science and engineering heroines changed any career choices. But there was no doubt that the girls enjoyed the outing, their joy made evident by gleeful shrieks when at the program’s end, gift cards, all personally donated by WISE members, were handed out as door prizes.

The Bonita J. Campbell Endowment funded the event. —jdole

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**STOVER continued from page 2**

much higher than it is now. It’s now down to about $300,000 a year. Part of that is because we’re spending more money on electronic databases and electronic journals, but part is just because we don’t have the funds from the state to purchase the number of books that we used to purchase…We do supplement that with private money, either endowments or gifts that are either for specific purposes or for book acquisitions in general, but our book budget has certainly gone down.”

Yet another challenge was raised by the Dean: “I think it’s how to use our physical spaces in the most efficient ways to reach out to students. How do we continue to bring students into the library? If resources are electronic, students don’t need to come into the library; what’s the purpose of the library? I think we need to figure that out. How do we repurpose our spaces? One of the ways that we are trying to answer that question is by building in our library a learning commons. We’re taking a traditional space that was used for the reference desk, reference materials and some study areas and we’re changing it around. We’re reshaping the reference collection to make it much smaller. We’re retaining the reference desk, but we’re purchasing a lot of new furniture and new technology to fit the needs of students and the studying and research practices of students today. Which frankly are different than they were 20 or 30 years ago.”

“I do want to emphasize that we have this wonderful space here. The Oviatt Library building is about 40 years old, so it’s not the newest of libraries, but given the state’s budget resources we’re not going to get a new building anytime soon. So, we have to make do with what we have. We are investing in repurposing, refurbishing, renovating the library. Trying to figure out what students need and what they want, the different ways that they study and research. Trying to bring them into the library, and also bring faculty into the library. And we also want to reach out. Our librarians talk to faculty, talk to students, go into classrooms. And that’s one of the marks of a good library that we do quite well. It’s an exciting time, but it’s also a scary time. Not just because of the lack of fiscal resources, but also because of all the challenges and phases of the transition from print to digital to me it’s fun to think about, but also fraught with peril.”
Small Books... continued from page 1
tale was the child’s feelings about being different, not her parents’ embarrassment. In the story’s final form, Emily’s raucous voice proves ultimately to be a gift, the book’s message, that it’s okay to be different.

The creative spark for O’Neill’s second book, *The Recess Queen*, was a bullying boss. Composing the story, she acknowledged, was a long, drawn-out process, as for seven years she repeatedly attempted to build a story around changing the behavior of a playground bully. The book finally gelled for her, she said, “when I introduced a second character, Katie, who invites the bully to play. Kindness proved the answer,” and with that she brought her story to fruition. Similar struggles were a part of the process of creating *Estela’s Swap*, a book about intergenerational friendship and generosity, and another soon-to-be-released book: *The Kite That Bridged Two Nations—Homan Walsh and the First Niagara Suspension Bridge*.

Typically, a picture book’s creation is a partnership between the story’s author and an artist who translates the author’s words into pictures. Good illustrations, said O’Neill, make the story come to life in a child’s mind. And oft times an artist will add a sub-story or two among the images, some for the child, some for the adult reader’s amusement. As an example, O’Neill showed illustrations from *The Recess Queen*, her story of a bully’s transformation, in which the artist inserted a small girl. Initially depicted as a petrified scaredy-cat secretly perusing a book on “self defense,” as the story unfolds the girl undergoes a metamorphosis and after the bully’s transformation is seen happily cavorting on the playground.

O’Neill ended her presentation with an emphatic declaration to wannabe authors in her midst: “Don’t expect to get rich!” Of each book’s retail price, she noted, 90% goes to the publisher and the bookseller, leaving a mere 10% to be split equally between the author and illustrator. Though a pittance, the miniscule sums can add up inasmuch as really good picture books may be reprinted for decades. But O’Neill was emphatic that what keeps her and her ilk going is not money but “…the love of writing, the love of kids and a desire to promote good reading. We are like missionaries,” she said. “We want our books to be the last thing they hold at night. That’s what makes the job so exciting.” For those fortunate enough to hear O’Neill’s dynamic and heartfelt depiction of her lifelong love affair with children’s literature, the truth of those statements was abundantly clear!

—jdole