



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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***“In the fall of 1845 a group of New York men formed the first organized baseball club. They called it the Knickerbockers, and the following spring they played the game in a meadow...This meadow ...was called Elysian Fields.”***

-From *The Golden Game, the Story of California Baseball* by Kevin Nelson

Kevin Nelson will be the visiting author at the annual membership meeting of the Friends of the Albany Library on November 17 at 7:30 p.m. This idea of having a visiting writer is logical for anyone connected with libraries and in fact, many libraries have programs of this kind.

For instance, the San Ramon branch of the Contra Costa County library system has a series called the Writer’s Wednesday Series, which presents a free author reading on the first Wednesday evening of each month. The next one, on December 1 at 7:30 p.m., will feature Firoozeh Dumas, the author of *Funny in Farsi: a Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America*. The Danville Library also has visiting authors and Karen Joy Fowler, the author of *The Jane Austen Book Club*, will be featured there on Wednesday November 17, at 4 p.m. The Berkeley Public Library frequently includes author visits in their program-

ming, as do branches of the Alameda County Library system. The poetry series I run at the Albany Library also features a different poet every month.

What is the draw of going to hear an author? For me, it is the allure of actually seeing in person a writer I admire. As far as I can remember, the first author program I ever attended was a reading in San Francisco by poet Robert Frost. Even now, many years later, that experience continues to be a part of his poetry for me. When I listen to recordings of his work, I am taken back to that secure feeling of sitting between my grandparents and hearing his low rumbling New England voice read the familiar lines.

The two writers that stand out in my most recent memory are Reynolds Price and Thatcher Hurd. At Black Oak Books in Berkeley I listened to playwright, poet and novelist Reynolds Price read from his

works, tell charming stories and answer questions from the audience. Thacher Hurd, who wrote *Mystery on the Docks*, *Art Dog*, *Mama Don't Allow*, and many others, was part of a library program I attended. He was also entertaining and I was thrilled to have him autograph a copy of his book for one of my daughters. *Mystery on the Docks*, in case you haven't read it, is a simple and quirky adventure story, much loved by my children.

Library conferences and workshops of all kinds include popular authors reading from their works and sharing thoughts about books, literature, libraries and life. At the last Public Library Association conference I heard Anna Quindlen speak. Ms. Quindlen, whose books include *Blessings*, *One True Thing*, and *A Short Guide to a Happy Life*, was low key yet passionate about

reading and libraries and she was a pleasure to listen to.

Hearing someone read from their own work can be a great opportunity to find out more about the writer, the subject and even the audience around you. I have to admit I always worry during the question-and-answer part of the program - my fear is that actually seeing the author in person will take away from my positive feelings about their work. But so far, all my experiences have been great. So, if you haven't attended an author program recently, I recommend trying one of the many available at bookstores, libraries or other places where people who like to read get together.