



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“We are a group of children’s authors and illustrators. We gather monthly at the library to critique and inspire each others’ work. We have met for many years. Between us, we have published over 200 children’s books.”

-From the exhibit “We Were...We Are!” at the San Francisco Public Library

I recently visited the San Francisco Public Library, which is located across the street from the Civic Center Bart station, in case you would like to see this spacious, modern-looking library, with its walls of glass. I particularly like the sixth floor, where there is a huge area for exhibits - I love large spaces, because they seem so full of possibilities. This area was actually empty on my last visit - I assume an exhibit had just been removed - and so it was even more impressive in its feeling of space.

But the exhibit I did see was on two walls, outside the Children’s Area. It was called “We Were...We Are!” and it displayed the past and present of a group of children’s authors and illustrators. Included were: Julie Downing, Ashley Wolff, Yuyi Morales, Anna Hines, Susan Guevara and Dwight Been. Martha Weston, one of the founding members of the group, was represented, also, but only as a retrospective - she

died in 2003.

Each member shared some history of how they came to be involved in creating children’s books. There were old photographs and early artwork and commentaries by each person. Susan Guevara wrote about a camping trip her family took through Europe when she was eleven. She described visiting castles along the Rhine, which reminded her of Grimm’s fairy tales, and she explained it was there she decided she wanted to make children’s books.

Yuyi Morales talked about making books for her son Kelly and how she sometimes even made the paper for the book’s cover.

This display was fascinating to see for me, as an adult, but I hope that many children got a chance to view it. I believe that being exposed to the early thoughts and work of an author or illustrator can serve as an inspiration to young children, by letting them know

that they, too, can create a book. I saw this concept in action this past weekend, when the Albany Library hosted an event with the local children’s book author and illustrator, Elisa Kleven. It began with a slide show in which Ms. Kleven presented some of her early childhood creations, such as miniature doll worlds. She also showed illustrations from some of her books and explained where the ideas came from; included were slides of the original inspiration, such as a mud puddle on Solano Avenue and a dog piñata from one of her children’s birthday parties.

In addition, she brought original artwork from some of the twenty books she has written or illustrated. She talked about her childhood and how the things she created then led to the work she does now.

The slide show was followed by a workshop, where participants – mainly families with children

of all ages – created their own characters and then a world for that character. Using scraps of wrapping paper, yarn, lace, doilies and colored pencils, pens and crayons, adults and children produced wonderful richly-colored and textured worlds. It was a pleasure to watch each person create something unique, using common materials.

I hope some of the children went home and continued to add to their new world, maybe even creating a story and putting together a book. In this world of computers, it is important to remember what can be done with something so simple as paper, glue and a pair of scissors.