

Moraga Library Wants Teens to Come Back

By Sophie Braccini



Librarian Andrea Freyler (center) with teen summer volunteers Anaisa Lowson and J.P. Bagalithog. Photo Sophie Braccini

It is not always easy to get tweens and teens to consider the library a cool place to be. By the time they are in middle school, many young people who once loved to go to the library with mom and discover new books and activities often decide the quiet, book-lined rooms are just not appealing.

While Lafayette and Orinda libraries have great central locations, Moraga's library is not near a frozen yogurt shop or a fun hangout spot. But adult and teen services librarian Andrea Freyler has not given up on older kids. Since she arrived in Moraga last winter she's been thinking about ways to attract tweens and teens to the library and this summer she launched, with the support of senior community librarian Diane McDonnell, the Teen Tuesday program for

kids entering sixth through 12th grade.

The program that began in June has started to lure young crowds back to the historic building on St. Mary's Road near the Commons Park.

"One mom told me she was so happy we started this," said Freyler. "Her children started coming to the library for Baby Storytime; but since middle school they had no interest. Now they are coming back to the library and rediscovering that it is a place that welcomes them." The Tuesdays are designed for this age group and always include drinks and snacks.

The first Tuesday in July was "Lights, Cinema, Pixar," followed by "Fear Factor," which challenged teens to taste unusual food, and "Cupcake Decorating 101." July 23 will feature

"Game On" – adolescents will be offered board games and electronic games to play with.

"Girl Scouts from Troop 30114 came to us looking for a Silver Award project," explains Freyler. "They collected board games they will fit in a large box that we will use on the 23rd and that will stay with the library."

Incoming Campolindo freshman Kim Baxter decided to invest her babysitting money in board games to donate to the library. "I bought seven games that are fun to play as a group," says Baxter. "It includes Apple to Apple, Twister, Janga, chess and card games. I'll come on the 23rd to play with the group of teens." The games will be permanently donated and groups will be able to borrow them to play at the library.

There is also a movie party planned for July 30, and Teen Tuesday will continue through Aug. 17 when a game truck will come to the library.

"The library is a fun and safe place for teens to be," says Freyler with enthusiasm, "and it gives them something constructive to do in the summer." Freyler employs 10 teen volunteers from local high schools to help with the program, and is planning other teen-oriented offerings for the fall.

"There are some public libraries that are popular with teens," she adds. "Sometimes it is the location ... and sometimes it is appealing programs that draw them in."

Libraries Seeking Feedback from Lamorinda Residents

The Contra Costa County Library wants you to share your insights – about what local libraries are doing right – and what needs improvement. CCCL staff are conducting an online survey through July 31 to assist them with their future strategic planning, and are asking everyone to participate. So, take three minutes to share your two cents by responding to the questions at: ccclib.org/mylibrary. Then, share the survey link with family, friends and neighbors.

L. Snyder

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Author Examines Complex Life of Jesus of Nazareth in New Book, "Zealot"

By Lou Fancher



Reza Aslan Photo provided

Rising like a rigorous intermission amid a summer of escapist beach reading, writer and scholar Reza Aslan's "Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth" (Random House, 2013) is this season's muscular literary entity. The author of the international bestseller "No god but God" will appear courtesy of the Commonwealth Club at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center on July 23 to read from and discuss his new book.

Twenty years of research and a vigorous, intellectual thirst for clarity fuels Aslan's comprehensive, boisterous writing style. Widely regarded as a leading scholar on Islam and religion, the biography unfolds – or rather, plunges – into an investigation of Christianity's most vexing question: Who was Jesus the man and how did he become Jesus the Christ?

Relying on the gospels for narrative outline only (Aslan emphasizes the gospels were not written as eyewitness accounts but were authored well after-the-fact and presents a strong argument for their being colored by political, religious and cultural agendas), Aslan has said Jesus's biography "writes itself." Key to the factual architecture he prefers, historical writings and Roman documents support his central claim that Jesus the man's story is as good news as was (or is) Jesus the Christ's.

Aslan is a Muslim, he tells us in the book's intimate opening. After temporarily becoming a follower of Christ in his teens, he fell away when his studies exposed a gaping divide between fact and mythmaking within the folds and filters of Christianity. Ironically, a return to his ancestral faith stripped the shadows from the Jesus he thought he was leaving behind: revealing a social activist, possibly illiterate, an insurrectionist, a zealot, who nevertheless influences Aslan's beliefs and the

principals he imparts to his children. **Jesus of Nazareth**

First century Palestine was a morass of grand and minuscule religio-political skirmishes, we learn, as Aslan lays the contextual landscape of Jesus' time. Searching within the mess of messianic movers, Roman rulers and Temple priests, two truths are all that are certain about the life of the man who has shaped Western thought and culture more than any other: Jesus was a Jew and Rome crucified him for the crime of sedition, or "striving for kingly rule."

Distinguishing between "zealot" and a later, 66 C.E. (Common Era) Zealot Party movement, Aslan defines Jesus as a member of a "Fourth Philosophy" whose undying devotion to the rule of One God and Israel's independence required "zeal." Marching through religious and political history while never losing sight of the man leading the charge, "Zealot" tells two stories simultaneously.

The first is the tale of the birth of a religion amid an era rife with apocalyptic feverishness and profound nationalism. Civil strife, miracle workers and declarations of the coming of the Kingdom of God filled the streets and temple courtyards; causing tumult in the minds of pious Jews and fury in Rome's imperial circles.

The second is the story of a boy who barely became a man before he was crucified. Jesus was a peasant, teacher, minister, messenger, wonder worker – and almost more than anything else, Jesus was a keeper of secrets, a fascinating mystery. Aslan makes the point concrete in a chapter about Jesus' parables, noting that Jesus "consciously chose to veil the Kingdom of God in abstruse and enigmatic parables."

Aslan is a skilled scavenger who never tosses aside contradictory evidence without close examination: the book's "notes" section is a repository of authoritatively researched counter arguments. He freely acknowledges the limitations of his search and an academic mindset allows him to skirt dogmatism. Fortunately, with impressive investigation and unambiguous scholarship, Aslan makes the "abstruse and enigmatic" life and times of Jesus of Nazareth an elegant, illuminated read.

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