

New novel combines satire, humor and a touch of sci-fi



Photo provided

Local author Sally Tubach

By John T. Miller

Longtime Orinda resident Sally Tubach has published a novel, “The Grande Dame and Hitler’s Twin: A Comedy of Errors,” to many positive reviews.

While it’s difficult to imagine Hitler and Comedy in the same title, Tubach makes it work in this fantastical mixed-genre novel, with elements of magical realism, satire, humor, and

a touch of science fiction.

One of the elements that make the story work is the wealth of eccentric characters that drive the plot. They are drawn with a Dickensian flair, their faults and foibles colorfully sketched along with their believability.

What starts out with an absurd premise—Hitler had a twin brother who was cryogenically frozen—turns into a comic tale which asks the question: What might have happened had Hitler not been rejected by the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and went on to become a successful artist? Tubach plays with this idea in contemporary San Francisco.

Two of the main characters are based on real-life personages Tubach knew. The elderly old lady, Myrtle Halstead, formidable, erudite, and overbearing, was modeled on a teacher her husband had at San Francisco City College, and Bruno de Carlo is based on an actual Italian aristocrat who was a notable celebrity in the San Francisco social scene and gossip columns. The town in France where the fictional twin was raised is modeled on an actual village where the Tupachs owned a vacation home.

The book began as an attempt by Tubach to write a short story about the literary snob (Halstead) who attempts

to educate the classless aristocrat (de Carlo). She began work on it in the ‘90s while living in Bordeaux, France, but when they returned to California, other projects took over.

Her husband, Fritz Tubach, a child in Germany during WWII, and his friend Bernie Rosner, a Holocaust survivor, decided to write a double biography about their experiences: “An Uncommon Friendship” (see Aug. 8, 2018 issue in the Lamorinda Weekly archives for story). Sally Tubach got involved with that project, and after its publication went on speaking tours and promotional events, putting her novel on hold.

In 2012, Tubach said that the continued focus on the Holocaust was becoming depressing. “I wanted to write something lighthearted and fun,” she says, “and I added the idea of Hitler’s twin. The novel then took off again.”

Tubach, who has a PhD in German Literature from UC Berkeley, wondered how a cultural hotbed like Germany, which produced forward-thinking writers such as Goethe and Frederic Schiller, and musicians such as Bach, Mozart, and Brahms, could give rise to such a despot as Hitler.

“I started imagining things; it was fun to play with all my characters’ relationships,” she says, adding, more

seriously, “One of the messages I’m trying to deliver in the novel is the function and importance of literature.”

Tubach had a widely varied career before her studies at Berkeley. When she married Fritz, she inherited two stepchildren whose mother had died, so she chose a career in freelance writing in order to be home and help raise the kids.

She has previously published “Memoirs of a Terrorist,” coauthored “Michael Mann: Fragmente eines Lebens;” “An Uncommon Friendship: From Opposite sides of the Holocaust;” and “German Voices: Memories of Life During Hitler’s Third Reich.”

Most of her work to this point was published by university presses, but when it came time to peddle this novel Tubach had difficulty finding anyone interested and became discouraged. Finally, in April of 2020, a small press out of Eugene, Oregon – Wipf and Stock Publishers – decided to pick it up. When it was published, Tubach had many personal matters to attend to and is disappointed she hasn’t been able to publicize the book much. She is now getting into readings and other ways of promoting the book, including a possible tour from Budapest to Amsterdam next December.

Local bookstore and libraries start summer reading challenges



Photo Sara Valbuena

Summer Reading Bingo offered at Reasonable Books in Lafayette.

By Grace Gonsalves

The start of summer for many of the literary individuals in Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda means the start of some good reading. This summer, Reasonable Books in Lafayette is less quiet as owners Betty and Rudy Winnacker are getting the word out regarding their summer reading challenge.

The challenge involves bingo cards, with participants marking off boxes as go, and is open to all customers of Reasonable Books. Each square on the card is a book genre, such as a coming-of-age story, a book adapted to a movie, or a Pulitzer Prize winner. Some squares can prove difficult, like a book set in a city that hosted the Olympics.

When a reader gets a bingo, they can come into the store and receive a prize. “Once they fill it out they bring it in and get their name entered for a prize. We’re hoping to have weekly drawings,” said Betty Winnacker, who added later that they might “let readers pick from what is available and see how it goes, because everyone will be different.”

According to Winnacker,

there is a large variety of prizes, adding to the fun of the challenge: “The prizes will include a free puzzle, a gift certificate, a book, one of the puppets, we have some local area attractions like free passes to the Oakland Museum, [and] train tickets to the Tilden Railroad.”

Granted, the reading challenge at Reasonable Books is among one of the most difficult in our area: “Nobody has finished a row of their card yet, not even my daughter or myself,” Winnacker said.

For some, the annual Contra Costa County Library summer reading challenge might be a bit easier. Each year, Contra Costa County libraries have reading passports open to children of ages 5 to 18. The reading passports track how many books have been read in a given summer, along with how many hours have been spent reading them.

This year, the Contra Costa County Library summer reading challenge is called “Reading Colors Your World” and it is open to all ages. It began June first and can be completed both online on the site Beanstack and with the physical reading passports

that can be picked up at the library. “Everyone who completes Summer Reading will win prizes, including a free book, and be entered into a drawing for a chance to win amazing prizes.”

The prizes for both reading challenges are tailored specifically to what readers may enjoy receiving: “We’re trying to keep them reading related,” said Winnacker.

Of course reading can be done everywhere, but special news is that what with the new COVID regulations, Reasonable Books will now have seating and reading areas for customers to come inside and read their books: “We are excited that the restrictions have loosened up so that we can have more people in the store and we’re looking forward to having people come in, browse, [and] read.”

Readers are also welcome back to the libraries: “The libraries will be open with limited occupancy. The whole family can have a fun and colorful summer together.”

For information about Reasonable Books, visit <https://reasonable.online/>

For information about Contra Costa County Libraries, visit ccclib.org

Resistance in accepting care: Why does this happen?

By Linda Fodrini-Johnson

“My husband is refusing to have his memory loss evaluated.”

“My mom and dad are 90 years old and need help with everything; I worry about their safety.”

“My wife and I know we should update our Advance Health Care Directives and we keep finding excuses for not getting that done.”

I have heard comments like these and hundreds more that might be interpreted as resistance. This is especially frustrating when you are the caring or concerned family member; losing sleep with worry about a loved one’s health or safety.

In this article we are going to look at some of the patterns of resistance, what the brain function is that comes into play during these times and the how and when to proceed with an intervention and/or the steps needed for success.

I am going to start with the No. 1 reason many older adults refuse help especially when suggested by adult children or a spouse: control or the fear of loss of independence. The second reason could be denial and if the person you are concerned about has a dementia it might be denial and impaired judgment, both hallmarks of the

illness.

Other words for resistance are: blocking, defiance, fight, refusal, struggle, friction, obstruction, rebuffing, withstanding and protecting.

Here are some of the behaviors associated with resistance:

- Wasting time
- Making excuses
- Avoidance
- Distraction
- Delaying
- Perfectionism
- Inertia and feeling stuck
- Overthinking or paralysis by analysis
- Taking a break from change
- Giving up and falling off the wagon

You might actually see some of these behaviors in yourself. Resistance is normal and when you look at nature, this response can be protective in a positive way. As a counselor these behaviors might also buy you time to make a better decision; it is only when the behaviors get in the way of the quality of your life, or your health or safety that they become problematic.

The brain’s process in “resistance” is seen in something that scientists call the “triune brain.” It starts with the prehistoric portion of your brain, located near the brainstem called the amygdala. It is sometimes referred to as the lizard brain, something we share with reptiles – a brain

that focuses on the basics of food and shelter. It is responsible for fear, anger, revenge, sex and survival. When the amygdala is aroused, when it feels threatened, when there is a sense that people might laugh at you, it takes over. It rises up in rage and fear and shuts you down. This is often referred to as the hidden brain.

The second and third layers of resistance in our brains are the limbic system (mammal brain) that has the protective role keeping us from changing in favor of the familiar; then there is the prefrontal cortex (human brain) which is the reasoning part of the brain. Think of it as the central processing unit of a computer. Using this part of our brain is hard work; the brain uses 20% of our energy.

If the family member you are concerned about has a dementia, keep in mind that their frontal cortex is impaired, thus they can’t make decisions based on rationalizing, reasoning or their earlier patterns of coming to conclusions and making decisions. The change or care you want to add will most often be resisted because that “reptile” brain and the limbic system is protecting the status quo. You will need to be creative or wait for an organic opportunity (such as an illness, accident or hospitalization) to present the intervention. Do not ask their permission. I

know this is a challenge, but use the excuse of “doctor’s orders” or “when you get well, we can go back to X” (knowing that will not happen). You become the neocortex for your family member and make all the decisions around safety and health at the same time as respecting their dignity.

If your family member does not have a dementia, but is resisting more out of fear of change or the limbic part of the brain, you can assist them by using “I” messages and giving them options (but just a few to reduce anxiety). An “I” message is something like, “I am concerned about your weight loss and recent falls, so I am going to do some research on how we can help you stay more independent.” Avoid using “should” and “you need to X.” What you want is to give options so that the decision is theirs and they understand the “why.”

If you hear something like “I just can’t keep up this house,” you might respond with a question to get the conversation moving before you give suggestions. That question would be something like “What can you tell me about the options you might have to keep the house like you want it?” Then you could talk about hiring a housekeeper or caregiver who might also do the cooking that Mom is not really doing either. Often older adults are stuck because they don’t know where to start or

how to secure trusted help and that is where you can help but still let them make the final decision.

Sometimes, the best way to deal with resistance is to plant seeds by telling stories about others you know who have made changes resulting in greater happiness in their lives.

If you are caring for someone with a dementia please go onto my website and sign up for the free classes – www.LindaFodriniJohnson.com.



Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC, is a Licensed Family Therapist and Certified Care Manager. She has been practicing professional care management since 1984. Linda founded Eldercare Services, a full-service care management and home care company in 1989. Eldercare Services is now a division of Home Care Assistance and continues to provide Bay Area families with care management, advocacy, counseling, support groups and education.