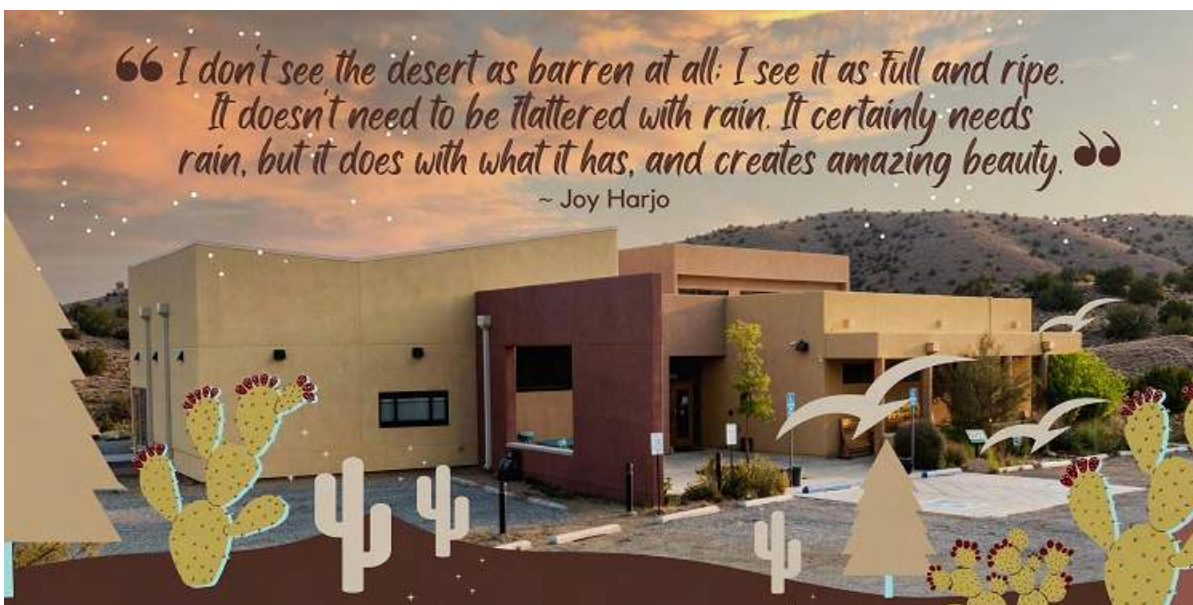


PLACITAS *Community* LIBRARY



NEWSLETTER MAY/JUNE 2023

*“I don't see the desert as barren at all: I see it as full and ripe.
It doesn't need to be flattered with rain. It certainly needs
rain, but it does with what it has, and creates amazing beauty.”*
~ Joy Harjo



PLACITAS COMMUNITY LIBRARY HOURS

**SUN: 1 - 4
TUES: 10 - 7
WED/THURS/SAT: 10 - 5**

ADULT PROGRAMS

- **MAY 6 (2 PM):** Anne Hillerman *The Way of the Bear* reading (*signed copies of the book will be available for sale from April 25*) and celebration of Placitas Community Library's (PCL) 20th birthday!
- **JUNE 11 (2 PM):** *Women on the Edge*: A program featuring authors Hilda Raz, Phyllis Skoy, and Lynn C. Miller

ART RECEPTIONS & EXHIBITS

- **Through MAY 21:** Exhibit: Placitas Studio Tour Preview
- **JUNE 9 (5-6:30 PM):** Artist Reception: *Born to be Wild!* (exhibit will be displayed May 23–July 6)

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

- **MAY 20 (1 PM):** *Having Fun with Art* with Placitas artist, Dianna Shomaker

Summer Reading Program: All Together Now

Our Summer Reading Program for children begins in June with seven exciting programs for your children – three in June and four in July. In June, we emphasize science that makes the earth better and the community connections that help us do that.

- **JUNE 10 (1 PM):** Children will hear the story, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer. They will then use the scientific method to build their own windmill.
- **JUNE 15 (1 PM):** *Protecting Animal Habitats* by Albuquerque BioPark educators. The BioPark will be at the library with interactive activities and live invertebrate animals, if possible.
- **JUNE 24 (1 PM):** Explora! will be at the library with hands-on STEM activities for the entire family.

RECURRING EVENTS

- **Volunteer Coffee & Connect** (2nd Sat of each month at 9 AM): Meet our volunteers, enjoy coffee and snacks, and learn about all the different ways you could be part of the library (*NOTE: May event is canceled*)
- **Chess Club** (Every Saturday at 10 AM and every Tuesday at 7 PM): Adults and children are welcomed
- **Drumming Circle** (1st Sunday of each month at 4 PM): Bring your own drum or use one of the many we have
- **Social Justice Discussion Group** (3rd Tues of each month at 1 PM): Meet to discuss issues of social justice and how we can make a difference in the world today!
- **Dungeons & Dragons Group:** Email Anne Frost (annegrey3@gmail.com) for more information

Library BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Meetings are held the
3rd Thursday of each
month at **6:00 PM** in the
Collin Meeting Room.
The public is invited
and welcome to attend.
Agendas are posted here
and at the library.

UPCOMING BOARD MEETINGS:
THURS, MAY 18, 6:00 PM
THURS, JUNE 15, 6:00 PM

PLACITAS COMMUNITY LIBRARY



Volunteer Coffee & Connect



JUNE 10 at 9:00 AM (NOTE: May Coffee & Connect is canceled)

Gather to learn more about volunteering at the library every 2nd Saturday of the month at 9:00 AM. Meet our volunteers, enjoy coffee and snacks, and learn about all the different ways you could be part of the library.



Artwork by studiostock at www.fregatik.com



NEWS FROM YOUR LIBRARY BOARD

By Lynnette Fields, PCL Board Chair



Please join me in welcoming two new Board members, Susan Brown and Linda Lucero Hughes. They join our current board, Phillip Clark, Doris Fields, Jillian Gonzales (Secretary), Jill Kennedy, Kate Miller, Harriet Neal (Treasurer), and Nancy Southern (Vice-Chair).

Susan Brown

My husband and I moved from Kansas City to New Mexico in 1986. After living in Albuquerque for several years, we moved to Placitas.

In the 28 years we've lived here, PCL has grown substantially and become a central community hub. I hope to help the library maintain its progress and grow to become even more important in the life of the Placitas community.

Before retiring I was a family law attorney with a practice in Albuquerque. Now that I'm retired, I have time to enjoy knitting, reading, hiking, and watching the beautiful Placitas sunsets.



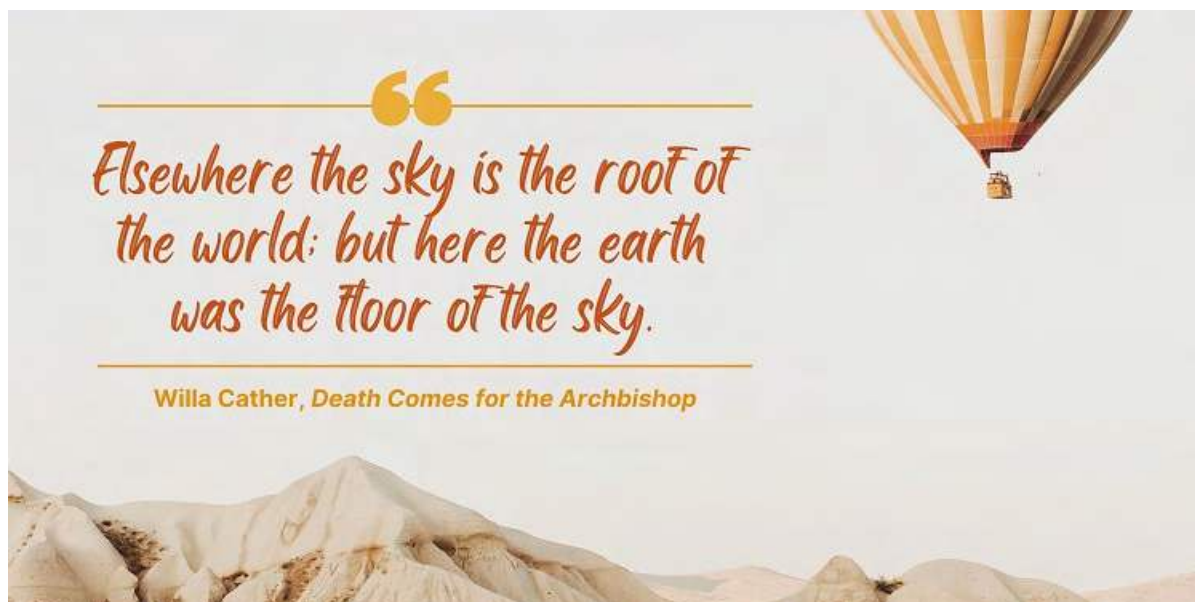
Linda Lucero Hughes

As the daughter of a teacher, our family moved frequently around the state of New Mexico. With family roots from Taos, my early years were spent in Las Vegas, Las Cruces, Grants, Gallup, with a final landing in Albuquerque, just in time to graduate from West Mesa High School. The travel bug remained with me through an enlistment in the United State Air Force, a stint with American Airlines, and various nursing positions working in Home Health, Medical/Surgery, Critical Care, Cardiac Care, and Outpatient Surgery.

Placitas has been my home for the last 31 years. I have a daughter that lives and works in New York City (a graduate of Placitas Elementary) and a recently airline-retired husband who is enjoying our remarkable skies immensely. Since I retired from Presbyterian in 2021, volunteering has become a new calling. As Audrey Hepburn once said, "As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands — one for helping yourself, the other for helping others."

Having seen our library evolve from the little house near the Merc to a welcoming social/educational hub of activity has been inspirational. I am thrilled to be a part of PCL's vision of growth, diversity, and community support.

The Library Director search is progressing nicely. The Search Committee interviewed two prospective applicants via Zoom in April. In-person interviews at the library will be conducted for both candidates in May.



Here, we want to extend our gratitude for the support rural libraries received in the 2023 New Mexico legislative session. Of course, we are cautioned not to mention names in the likelihood we will forget someone inadvertently. Recognizing that possibility, still, I venture to mention some of the key figures that led the advocacy and education initiatives. First, here is a brief reminder about the Rural Library Endowment Fund (RLEF) – brief because more detail was provided earlier in the PCL March–April 2023 newsletter.

In a previous year, legislation passed and was signed by the governor to create a Rural Library Endowment Fund with \$13 million. The goal was \$50 million for each of the 50 identified libraries to have \$1 million in the fund. Thus, the fund was short by \$37 million. Shel Neymark, founder of the Rural Library Initiative was/is the primary community advocate, and Senator Jerry Ortiz y Pino was/is the primary legislator, sponsoring Senate Bill 214 (SB 214) requesting \$37 million in the 2023 legislative session. SB 214 did not pass; however, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham included \$15 million for the RLEF in her budget request. In the previous report, we were waiting for Governor Lujan Grisham to sign the legislation that was passed in both the NM House and the NM Senate. She met the deadline for signing; thus, there is now \$28 million in the Rural Library Endowment Fund!

In the process of hearings, it was determined there may be an additional two or more libraries to be included in the Endowment Fund in the future. Of course, this would mean additional dollar amounts to reach \$1 million for each library.

Big shout-outs go to Representative Matthew McQueen, who voted for SB 214's passage on the House

Floor; and Senator Brenda McKenna, who voted for its passage on the Senate Floor. All the while, Joe Sabatini of the New Mexico Library Association kept us updated with legislative bulletins on every measure of SB 214's progress. We are grateful for the broad support we have in our community and around the state for libraries in general and for PCL specifically.

PCL Legislative Committee members (Susan Brown, Phillip Clark, Andrea Cohen, Doris Fields, Lynnette Fields, Jillian Gonzales, and Harriet Neal – real troupers!) as well as PCL volunteers and a broad range of the Placitas community are to be commended for their advocacy, commitment, and persistence in contacting legislators when the bill was to be heard in the various committees, attending hearings, speaking on behalf of the legislation, and providing education to Senate committee members about the benefits of a rural library endowment. Thank you!



Fossil harvesting, ancient lore, greed, rejected love, and murder combine in this gripping new installment of New York Times bestselling author Anne Hillerman's Leaphorn, Chee & Manuelito series.

The Bears Ears area, at the edge of the Navajo Nation, is celebrated for its abundance of unique fossils and early human habitation sites. For Chee and Manuelito, the area glows with geological interest and spiritual insight. But their visit to this achingly beautiful place is disrupted by a current of violence that sweeps them both into danger.

An unexpected death on a lonely road outside of Utah's Bears Ears National Monument raises questions for Navajo Tribal Police officers Jim Chee and Bernadette Manuelito. Why would a seasoned outdoorsman and well-known paleontologist freeze to death within walking distance of his car?

A second death brings more turmoil. Who is the unidentified man killed during an apparent home invasion in which nothing seems to have been taken? Why was he murdered?

A fossilized jawbone, a mysterious disappearance, and a blizzard heighten the suspense. Manuelito and Chee need all of their experience, skill, and intuition to survive the threats that arise and solve the mysteries so that justice is served.

If that doesn't pique your interest, you are neither a lover of the Southwest nor a mystery reader. It is always exciting when Anne Hillerman offers one of her Leaphorn, Chee & Manuelito books. As usual, signed copies of *The Way of the Bear* will be available for sale at PCL starting April 25. You may call the library at (505) 867-3355 to reserve your prepaid copy.

Anne has a special place in her heart for our little library and with this title has been able to include us right up front in her book tour. We will also be celebrating the library's 20th birthday (and the 9th anniversary of our Labyrinth)! And yes, there will be cake. **We hope you can join us on May 6 at 2 PM!**

CHESS CLUB

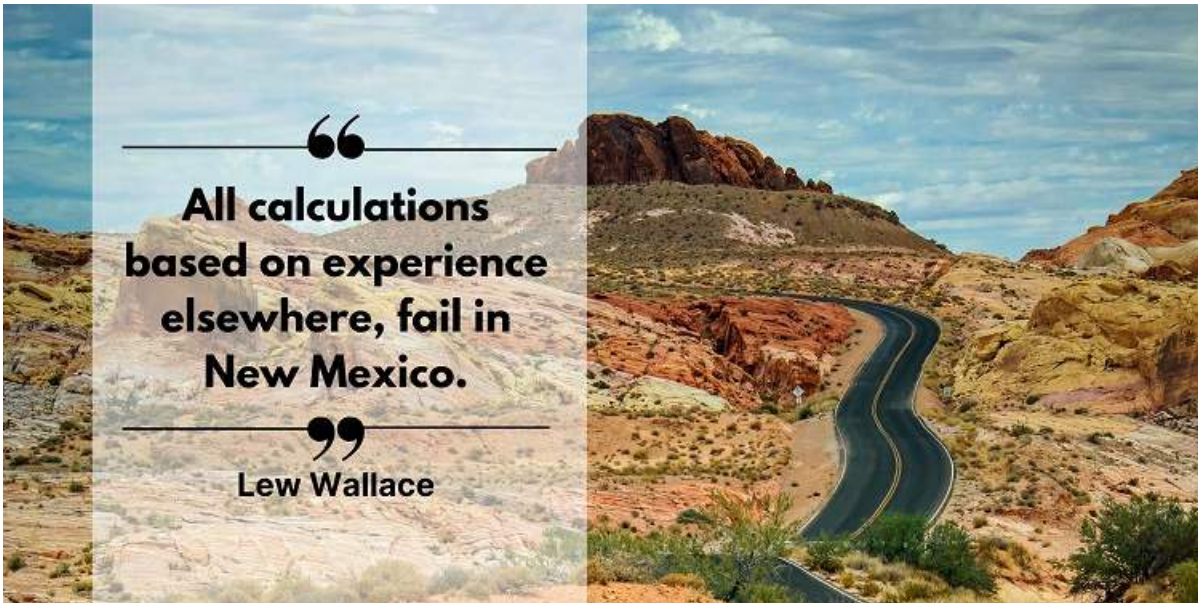
EVERY SATURDAY AT 10 AM
AND EVERY TUESDAY AT 7 PM

Adults and children welcomed



“
**All calculations
based on experience
elsewhere, fail in
New Mexico.**

”
Lew Wallace



PLACITAS COMMUNITY LIBRARY HAS A DONOR WALL

BY DORIS FIELDS, PHD



The new Kellum-Rose and Deuel Wing, which had its grand opening in September 2021, now has a “Donor Wall”/recognition plaque. We acknowledge the “Donor Wall” was a long time coming (good things take time!) and we wanted the recognition to be worthy of the commitment of our donors. A great THANK YOU goes to our community for your patience. We are fortunate to have a wide range of talent in our community (in addition to generosity).

Andrea Cohen provided leadership in chairing the “Donor Wall” committee; we wanted to present an image that is reflective of a library, of reading, of books. Judith Roderick, a locally and nationally acclaimed artist, created a design of the idea. Doris Fields and Lynnette Fields reviewed and gave creative input. We wanted elements of nature and we wanted a local artist to create it.

We were fortunate to have friend, a Placiteño, and an artist, Jerry Van Slambrook, who created what we all saw was beyond any of our expectations. He brought the entire committee along during his process to be sure he was on the right track. He created virtual images, 3-D drafts, and searched for and used a collection of exotic woods: Cherry, Gum, Hard Maple, Honey Locust, Mahogany, Padauk, Paldao, Purple Heart, Red Oak, Walnut, and Wenge. Jerry's skill was matched with his care and enthusiasm –these are exemplified in his process and the outcome. His enthusiasm is expressed in his email tagline:

"All woodworkers know you're never too old to have a happy childhood." Jerry very much enjoyed this process and so did we.

On March 23, we held a celebratory unveiling of the Donor Wall. Most major donors were able to attend the "party" that was held in their honor. Comments we have heard: *"It looks so real, I want to take some of those books off the shelf and read them."* *"It is beautiful."* *"I LOVE it."* *"How fitting –it is just perfect for a library."* We hope everyone will be able to take a look at the "Donor Wall" plaque while in the library checking out books, signing up to volunteer, attending a Children's or Adult educational program, or just browsing the donated books for sale. THANK YOU to our community.



(L-R): Jerry Van Slambrook, Doris Fields, Judith Roderick, Lynnette Fields, and Andrea Cohen

Photo by Chris Sollart



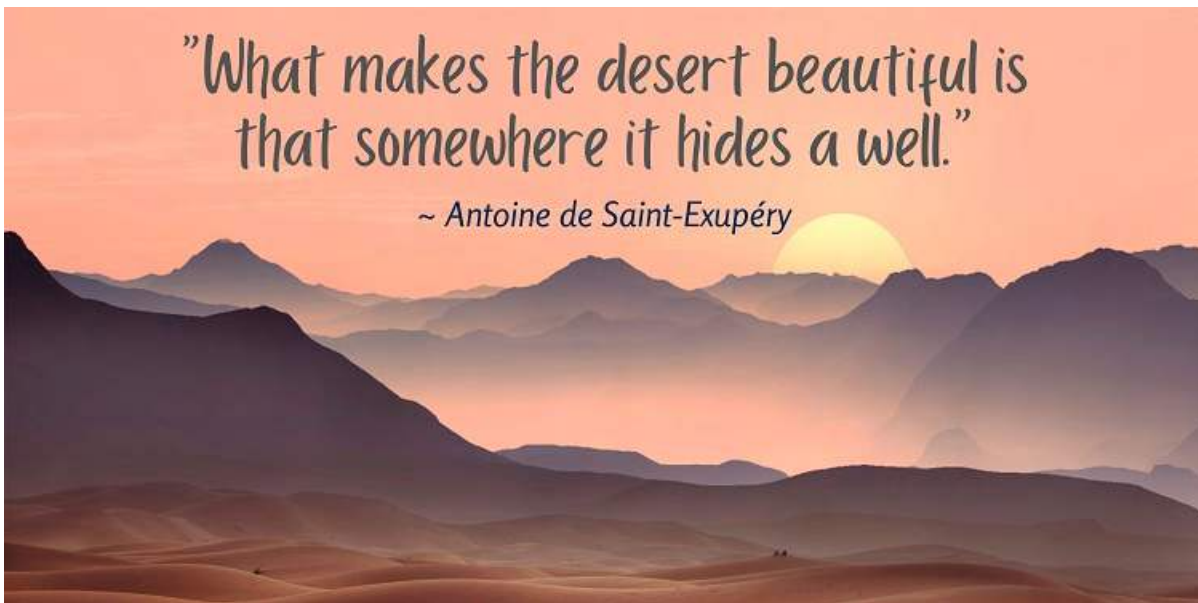
**DRUMMING
CIRCLE**

JOIN US!

**FIRST SUNDAY OF
EACH MONTH AT 4 PM**

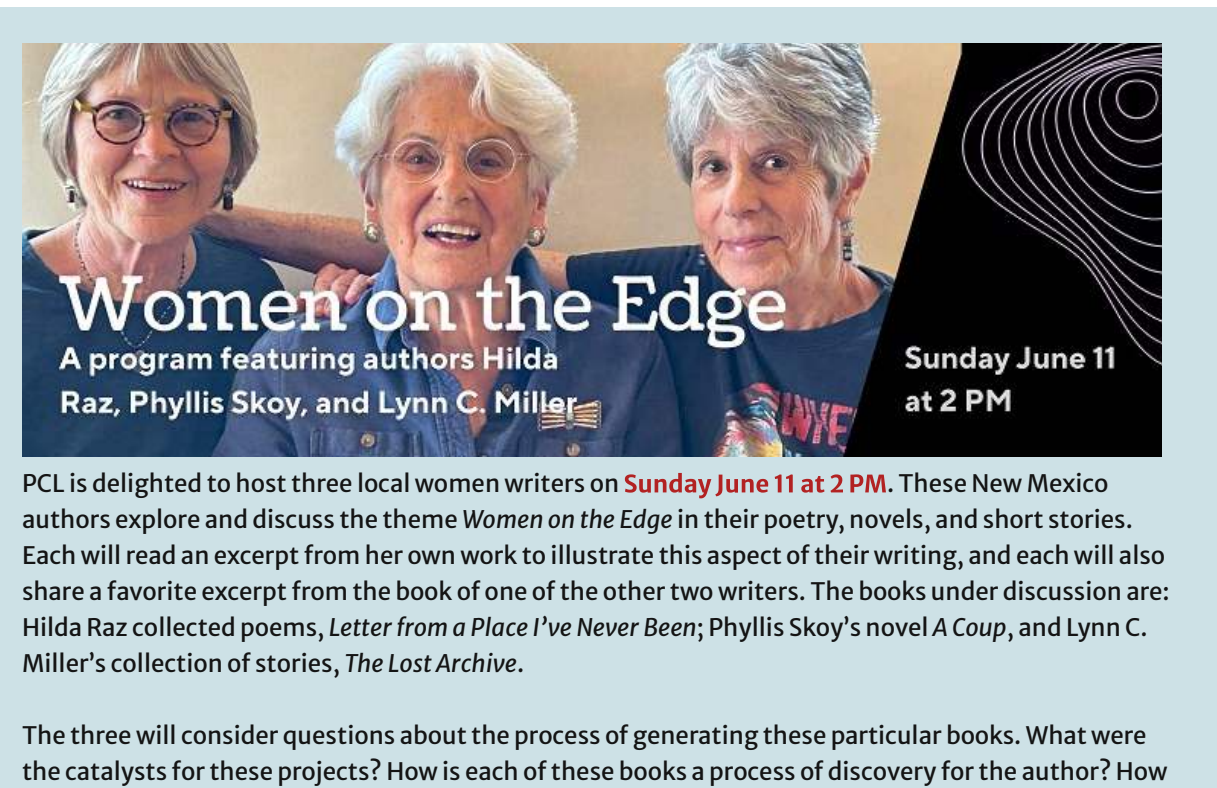
Bring your own drum or use
one of the many we have!

*Children are welcomed but parents should be
aware this is an adult, meditation-like experience



"What makes the desert beautiful is
that somewhere it hides a well."

~ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry



Women on the Edge

A program featuring authors Hilda
Raz, Phyllis Skoy, and Lynn C. Miller

**Sunday June 11
at 2 PM**

PCL is delighted to host three local women writers on **Sunday June 11 at 2 PM**. These New Mexico authors explore and discuss the theme *Women on the Edge* in their poetry, novels, and short stories. Each will read an excerpt from her own work to illustrate this aspect of their writing, and each will also share a favorite excerpt from the book of one of the other two writers. The books under discussion are: Hilda Raz collected poems, *Letter from a Place I've Never Been*; Phyllis Skoy's novel *A Coup*, and Lynn C. Miller's collection of stories, *The Lost Archive*.

The three will consider questions about the process of generating these particular books. What were the catalysts for these projects? How is each of these books a process of discovery for the author? How

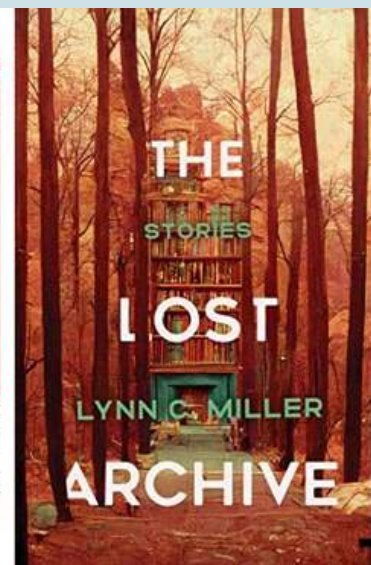
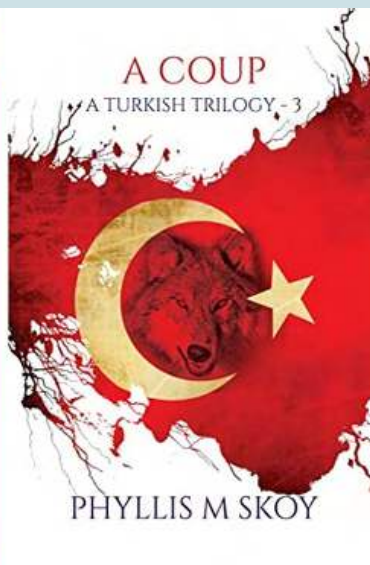
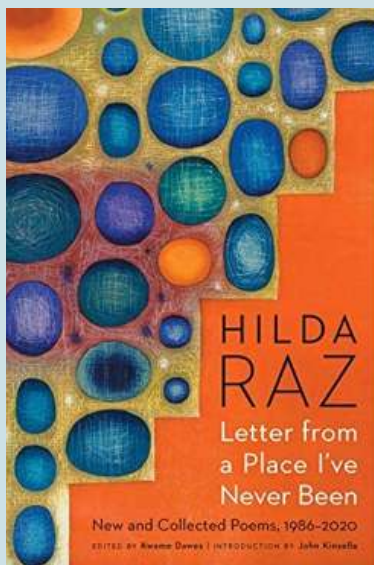
did the role of the audience/reader figure into the writing? Was there a particular goal? How do gender, culture, and place relate to each book?

A Q and A with the audience is a major part of the program.

Hilda Raz lives in Placitas and is a writer and editor. Her 14th book is her collected poems called *Letter from a Place I've Never Been*. She is poetry editor of Bosque Press and editor of the Mary Burritt Christiansen Poetry Series at the University of New Mexico Press.

Phyllis M. Skoy is the author of three novels, a memoir, short stories, and essays. Her most recent novel to be released this June, *A Coup*, is the third in her trilogy, *A Turkish Trilogy*.

Lynn C. Miller's fifth work of fiction, *The Lost Archive*, came out in April of 2023. She is the author of four novels, co-publisher of Bosque Press, and co-host of the podcast, "The Unruly Muse. She lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico.



SOCIAL JUSTICE



Artwork created by philsuperstar at www.freepik.com

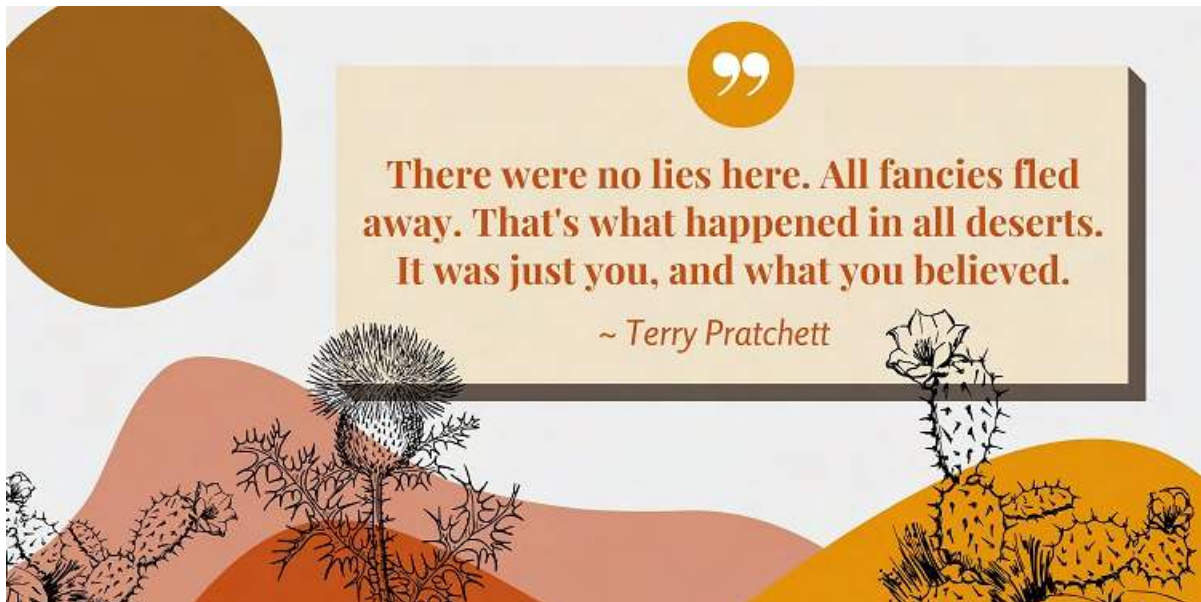
DISCUSSION GROUP

★

Meet to discuss issues of social justice and how we can make a difference in the world today!

Please contact Anne at annegrey3@gmail.com for more information

Meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 1 PM in the Collin Meeting Room



There were no lies here. All fancies fled away. That's what happened in all deserts. It was just you, and what you believed.

~ Terry Pratchett



EMAIL ANNE FROST (ANNEGREY3@GMAIL.COM) FOR MORE INFORMATION



FROM THE LANDSCAPE & BUILDING MAINTENANCE COMMITTEES

BY DAWN FOSTER, SEMG 2017,
LANDSCAPE COMMITTEE CO-CHAIR

RECENT UPGRADES to PARKING and GARDEN AREAS



Many thanks to Vulcan Materials for supplying the gravel (60 tons free of charge!), and the Sandoval County workers (Richie Tafuya and Brandon Casiquito) for spreading the much-



needed gravel across our parking lots, moving the concrete parking bumpers, and placing a huge rock next to the flagpole area. And thank you for your understanding while the County workers came back to address the “too-deep” gravel situation that resulted from the initial spreading.

Once that activity was completed, the Landscape and Maintenance Committee volunteer members rounded out the above efforts by positioning the bumpers for perfect alignment, and securing each with purchased rebar. So, let’s see how long we can keep them that way!

You may also have noticed that we reduced the number of parking spaces west of the brick-colored wing wall (from three to two), and moved parking bumpers (again, with the County’s help) back from the west-end gardens to better accommodate getting in/out of patron vehicles without entering the garden spaces, and protecting the plants (no plants have been harmed...yet), drip system, and light bollards from vehicular intrusions/collisions.



And coming soon: Plant labels and hopefully shortly thereafter, an in-library reference guide to the PCL plant inventory. The reference guide will contain important plant information for each tree, shrub, and plant in the various PCL gardens to help you select xeric/low water plants, should you be interested in these species for your own home gardens.

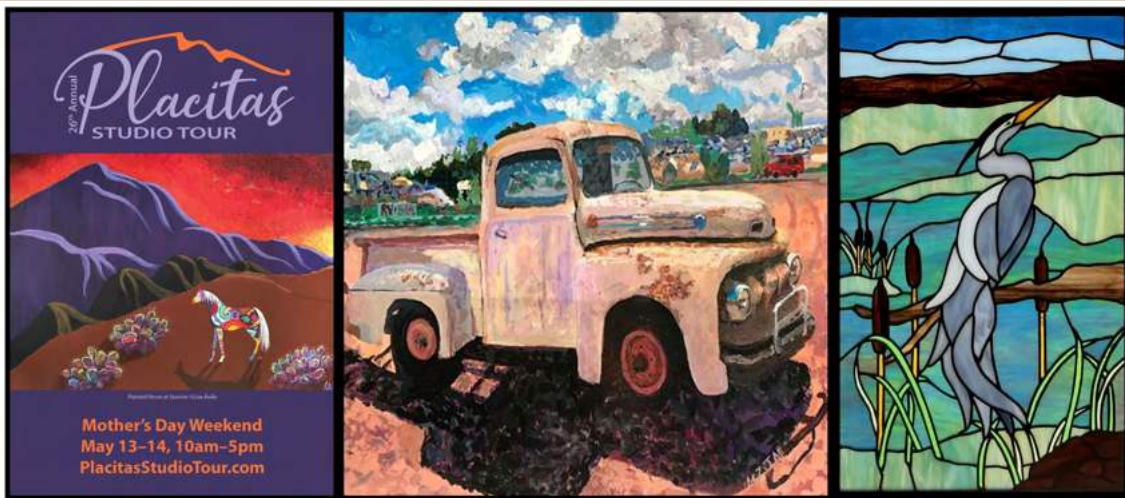


“

If seeds waited for perfect conditions to grow, there would be no plants in the desert.

~ MATSHONA DHLIWAYO

”



**FREE PREVIEW EXHIBIT AT THE PLACITAS COMMUNITY LIBRARY APRIL 29—MAY 21.
OPEN FOR THE PLACITAS STUDIO TOUR MAY 13-14, 10AM-5PM**

Twenty-six years ago, a small group of artists created the first Placitas Studio Tour (PST), which has become one of the most highly-anticipated studio tours in New Mexico. In advance of this year's tour, PCL will feature an exhibition in the library's Gracie Lee Community Room of works by each of the seventy-five 2023 PST participants.

Visitors to the library will be treated to a representative sampling of sculpture, glass, steel, wood, photography, ceramics, fiber, jewelry, collage, basketry, pottery, bronze, mixed media, and painting by each artist on the tour. This unique overview during and prior to the May 13-14 Mother's Day Weekend PST event will provide a convenient opportunity for art shoppers to identify the artists and works they most want to visit and to plot an efficient course through the seven neighborhoods featured on this year's tour. On Sunday, May 14, the library will be open from 10 AM-5 PM to correspond to PST's hours. Works in the library will also be available for purchase.

The PST Preview Exhibit continues through May 21, and will be followed beginning May 23 by "Born to be Wild!" an exhibition presented by the library's Art Committee.



While you might never do a “Thelma and Louise,” you secretly envy that unrestrained streak of adventure they followed.

Do you fantasize about getting a bike and joining a club to head out on the highway in a fearless leather motorcycle jacket, decked out and ready to rumble?

We all have a bit of wild in us.

The “Born to be Wild!” exhibit invites artists to let everyone have a peek at their unique wildness. **Join us on June 9 (5–6:30 PM) for the artists’ reception. Artwork will be displayed May 23–July 6.**



May Art Activity – Having Fun with Art
Saturday, May 20 starting at 1 PM

With the help of Placitas artist, Dianna Shomaker, children will create their own fun piece of art. This program is recommended for children ages 6–10. All materials will be provided. Hope you can join us!

(Left: *Rush of Spring* by Dianna Shomaker)



June Activities – Summer Reading Program: “All Together Now”

Our Summer Reading Program for children begins in June. The theme is "All Together Now," emphasizing working, playing, and living together with friendship and kindness. We have seven exciting programs for your children—three in June and four in July.

During the month of June, we are emphasizing science that makes the earth better and the community connections that help us do that.

- **Saturday, June 10 at 1PM:** "Harnessing the Wind" presented by PCL patrons, Stephanie and Walt Witowski. Children will hear the story "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind" by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer. They will then use the scientific method to build their own windmill.
- **Thursday, June 15 at 1 PM:** "Protecting Animal Habitats" presented by ABQ Biopark educators. The Biopark will be at the library with interactive activities and live invertebrate animals, if possible.
- **Saturday, June 24 at 1 PM:** Explora! will be at the library with hands-on STEM activities for the entire family.

As always, we ask you to help your children as they attempt these activities and to keep them focused on learning. Each week, your child will receive a new book for attending these programs.

The above presentations are only one part of our summer programs. **READING** is the most important part of the summer.

We are emphasizing the **4 R's**: **Reading** books, **recording** the titles on their reading logs, and **remembering** to bring their logs to each program to receive a **raffle** ticket. Only children who participate in this reading challenge will be eligible for the raffle. Summer reading helps your child be better prepared for the upcoming school year.

For those children just learning to read, parents can read books to them and record the titles on their reading log. Additionally, children may add wordless books and audiobooks to their reading log as well.

We have also prepared a “Kind Deed Log,” where children can record the nice things they do for family members, friends, and others. Prizes will be given to those that complete this activity as well.

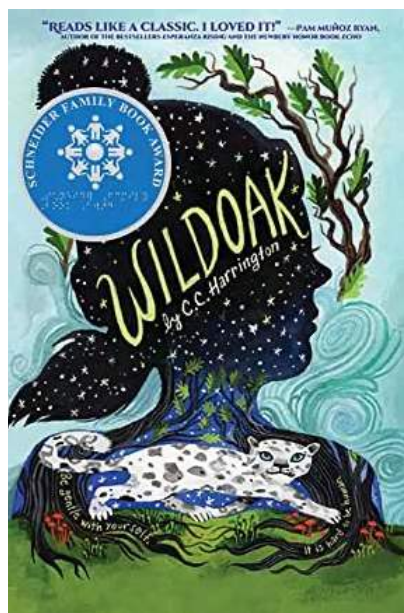
We hope you and your children will join us this summer. Online registration will begin in May. Stay



tuned! To receive updated information, send a request to childrens@placitaslibrary.com to be placed on our email reminder list or visit our website www.placitaslibrary.com.



With warmer weather, children's attention turns to the wonders of nature as the outside world wakes up. We are reminded of the miracles and beauty of new life as well as our connection to it. The following books are testaments to both.



Wildoak

by C. C. Harrington

Suggested ages: 9–12 years

Wildoak is a beautifully narrated story of the interdependence of all forms of life – human, fauna, and flora. Harrington weaves her tale using the alternating voices of Maggie, who must cope with a stutter and finds school often unbearable, and a young snow leopard, Rufus, sold as an exotic pet and now escaped from captivity. Maggie's father has threatened to send her to Granville for treatment, about which she has heard frightening rumors, but her mother insists on an alternative. She suggests Maggie spend several weeks with her grandfather, a doctor, who lives in the country surrounded by the woods of Wildoak.

Here Maggie discovers a new world as she explores the forest and senses the connection between all living things. When she investigates an ancient oak – its hollowed-out trunk, its spreading branches – she feels an energy that speaks to her. "Be gentle with yourself. It is hard to be human." This new awareness brings to Maggie a sense of purpose and drive. When she encounters the snow leopard cub, scared and bewildered in its new environment, Maggie discerns a bond between the two of them. Soon Maggie finds herself a determined advocate, not only for Rufus but for Wildoak, which is threatened by impending development. The book, *Wildoak*, is filled with beauty and hope – a very special read.

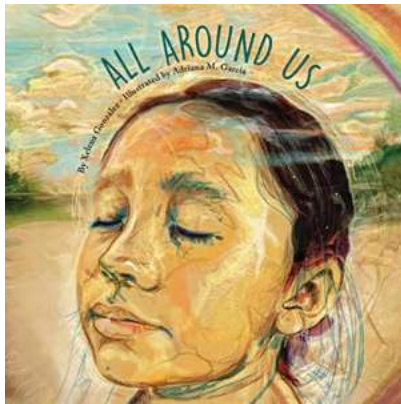
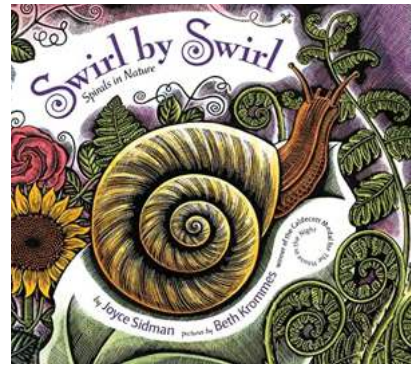
The *Author's Note* at the book's end includes valuable material on trees and reforestation efforts, on the reality of the sale of big cats and their conservation, and on stuttering, along with resources for young people who stutter.

Swirl by Swirl: Spirals in Nature

by Joyce Sidman, pictures by Beth Krommes

Suggested ages: 3–8 years

Swirl by Swirl is truly an elegantly created book. From Krommes' intricately detailed scratchboard art to Sidman's lyrical text, it is a reading experience that must be shared. It awakens in both child and adult the many forms the spiral shape takes in nature. The pictures and text also reflect the important functions of this special shape. Art and science are engagingly intertwined. Each animal and flower are labeled throughout, and the back notes add more detailed information that supports the spiral shape's roll in nature. The notes conclude with a brief explanation of the Fibonacci sequence. *Swirl by Swirl* is a reading experience for a variety of ages.



All Around Us

by Xelena Gonzalez, illustrated by Adriana M. Garcia

Pura Belpré Honor Book

Suggested ages: 4–7 years

All Around Us also focuses on one of nature's shapes – the circle. A young girl shares the outdoors with her grandpa who points out the many circles all about them. But he goes beyond the physical circles in nature as he speaks of the circles of life. The two plant a garden together. Later they return the stems, leaves, and seeds to the earth. They walk over to

the tree that was planted when the young girl was born. Here the grandpa shares a circle of life tradition that is often practiced by the Navajos of our country and the Maori of New Zealand.

The beautifully composed art work shines with glowing curvatures. *All Around Us* is a book that adult and child can easily extend as they share their own observations of the world about them and discover their personal circles of life.

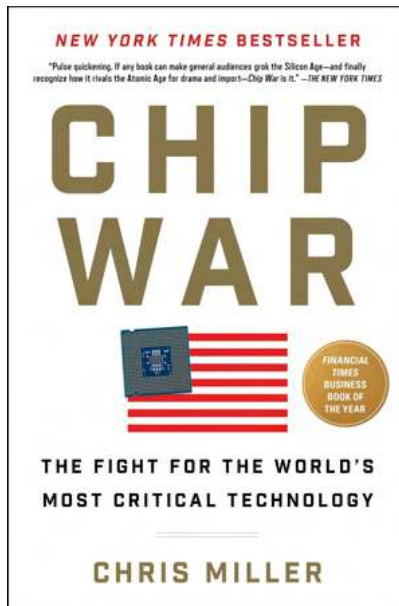
Susanne's Selections

***Reading Recommendations
By Susanne Domínguez***



Available for e-Checkout!

The titles in *Susanne's Selections* have been added to our [Online Catalog](#) (which you can access with your library card).



Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology

by Chris Miller

“Chip War” is an illuminating account of how everything depends on chips: armed drones, data centers, automobiles, missiles, the stock market, electrical grids, and smartphones. Until recently, America designed and built the fastest chips in the world. “Chip War” discusses the history of the semiconductor business, the relentless global competition, the importance of the role of Japan, South Korea, the Netherlands, and Taiwan in the industry, and the rise of Silicon Valley. Also included in the narrative is the creation of Intel and the world’s most important chip maker, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC). They were founded by two incredible men: Andy Grove (Intel) and Morris Chang (TSMC).

Over a fifth of all chip fabrication happens in Taiwan. “*The world is dependent on Taiwan for semiconductors. If production at one company in Taiwan stopped, the world would lose 37% of its capacity to make vital semiconductors and an even higher percentage of the most advanced semiconductors.*” This is another reason the Chinese government wants control of Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait. China, an oppressive surveillance state, is in an aggressive race to dominate and control the semiconductor industry. It spends billions of dollars each year to accomplish this, along with egregious acts of spying, blackmail, and theft of intellectual property.

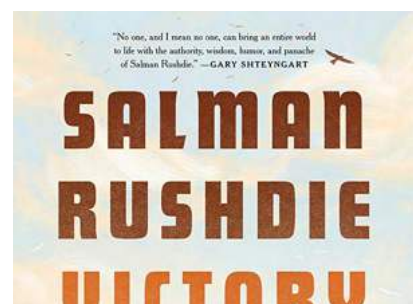
Highly informative, the *Financial Times* named this book their *Best Business Book of the Year*, while *The Economist* named it their *Best Book of the Year*.

Chris Miller is Assistant Professor of International History at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He also serves as Jeane Kirkpatrick Visiting Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, Eurasia Director at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and as a Director at Greenmantle, a New York and London-based macroeconomic and geopolitical consultancy. He is the author of three previous books—*Putinomics*, *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy*, and *We Shall Be Masters*—and he frequently writes for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *The American Interest*, and other outlets. He received a PhD in history from Yale University and a BA in history from Harvard University.

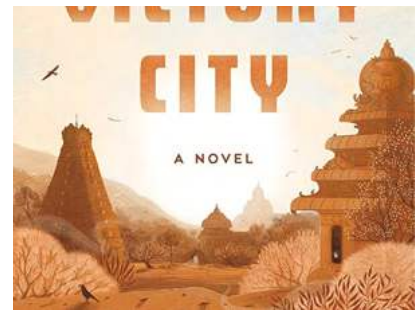
Victory City

by Salman Rushdie

“While they lived, they were victors, or vanquished, or both.
Now they are neither.
Words are the only victors.”



Master storyteller Salman Rushdie's latest novel opens during the 14th century as nine-year-old Pampa witnesses her mother joining grieving women in a mass ritual suicide by fire, a tradition in India at the time, when a husband dies. Pampa, declares she will never self-immolate, as custom requires. An Indian goddess appears to her and imbues Pampa with magical powers to promote and improve women's status and life. The goddess also assures Pampa she will live a long, extended life in order to accomplish these goals. "Victory City," known as Vijayanagar, will eventually be created by Pampa and become a utopia for many years.



I personally enjoy magical realism in literature, and this is a part of the charm of "Victory City." The magical realism is playfully woven into the historical fiction to create an entertaining, often witty, and satirical epic saga. Enchanting and allegorical, it is cleverly based upon a fictional 24,000-verse epic poem from 14th century India. The title comes from the last passage of Pampa's poem, written at the end of her over 200-year life. Ample philosophy to contemplate is included in the story, along with numerous references to classical mythology. A bewitching read, I thoroughly enjoyed it and was carried away to another land, another time.

Rushdie was brutally attacked and stabbed numerous times last August by a Khomeini follower. He sustained damage to his liver, lost vision in one eye, and the use of one hand due to severed nerves. With his indomitable spirit, I am confident he will write more books.



Small Things Like These by Claire Keegan

A gem of a book, it's deceptively small, yet is packed with insight and compassion. A seemingly simple story, the protagonist, Bill Furlong, is a coal merchant and father of five daughters. He's busy with the increased demand for coal during the chilly Christmas season. One morning, while delivering an order of coal to the local convent, he makes a discovery that will ultimately affect his life. He finds a scared teenage girl in terrible condition, surrounded by her own excrement, locked in an unheated coal shed. The girl, whose name is Sarah, says her fourteen-week-old baby had been taken from her by the nuns. Interestingly, her name is Furlong's mother's name.

He suddenly realizes what is happening with the young girls in the convent, where they labor in the busy convent laundry. Struggling with his conscience, he must decide what to do with this immoral situation and consider how his behavior will affect his family. There are severe consequences if he decides not to conform with the Church's demands. His daughters need to be educated in a good Catholic school and his business depends on the Church. Although he has become moderately successful, he is still considered an outsider since he is illegitimate. Would the community shun him and his family? In the 1980's, the Catholic Church still controlled every aspect of an individual's life in Ireland.

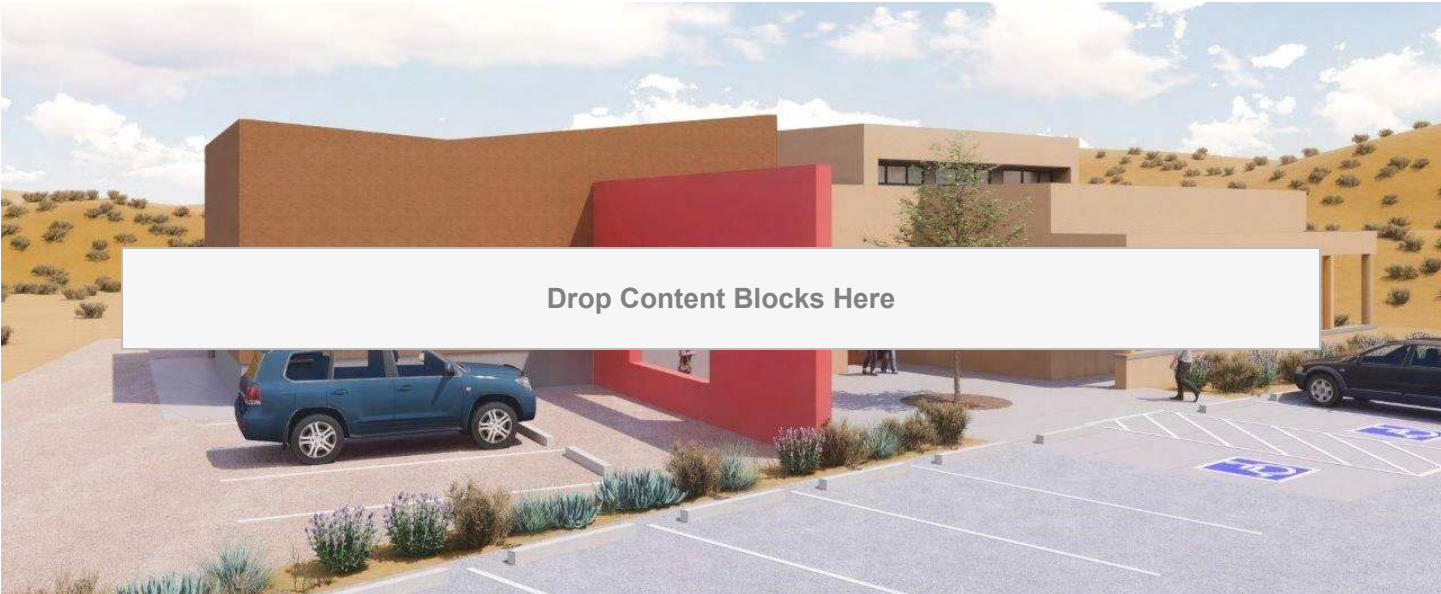
His mother was just a teenager when he was born, and thanks to the kind, generous wealthy Protestant woman in town who took the two of them in, despite being ostracized by the community, he knows his life would have been very different. Furlong found himself asking was there any point in being alive without helping one another?

The narrative poignantly explores the complicity of a community that makes it possible for such inhumanity, such evil and disregard for the lives of others, to exist. It brings to mind the question: what are you, the reader, doing about injustice and indifference that can be so easily ignored? Ending optimistically, with hopefulness, the most significant aspect of this powerfully-written novel is not said, but implied, and to be reflected on.

NOTE:

In Ireland, the Catholic Church sponsored homes in which homeless and indigent girls were put to work in the now infamous Magdalen laundries, abused, and sometimes ending up in unmarked graves. Their children often died there or were put up for adoption. After two hundred years, the last one closed in 1996. Keegan writes: *“Many girls and women were concealed, incarcerated, and forced to labour in these institutions. Ten thousand is the modest figure; thirty thousand is probably more accurate...Rarely was any of these girls’ or women’s work recognized or acknowledged in any way. Many lost their babies. Some lost their lives. Some or most lost the lives they could have had...It is not known how many of thousands of infants died in these institutions or were adopted out from the mother-and baby homes.”*

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