

*(This is the first in a series of weekly columns about books I wrote for the Ventura County Star called Shelf Life.)*

## **Shelf Life**

### **Reading is a cornerstone of my life**

By Karen Lindell

June 7, 2014

I will introduce myself with my favorite number: 26.

Just 26 letters in the (English) alphabet, formed into words that become stories, songs, poems, essays, blogs, homework, tweets, articles, love notes, whatever.

As the new "books" columnist for The Star, I'll do my best with 26 letters to honor and keep you informed about all things bookish and literary in the county, whether it's events at a library or bookstore (yes, we still have a few of those), news about a local author, or anything related to pages, words and literacy.

I respectfully step in to take over for Jo Ellen Heil, who started this column 20 years ago and braved the loss of local bookstores, the outsourcing of operations at libraries, poetry slams, and the release of all seven Harry Potter books and three "Shades of Grey" novels.

My literary column credentials are somewhat informal. I majored in English (who didn't?) in college. I was a staff reporter and editor at The Star from 2002-14, and am now a freelance writer. I write lots of stories about the arts and entertainment for Time Out.

But mostly, I am a reader, just like you.

"I spent my life folded between the pages of books," writes the main character in Tahereh Mafi's young-adult novel "Shatter Me."

That was me, then and now, always tucked into a book. I'll read anything with an open mind. I especially love children's books. Every year I read all the books in the Harry Potter and Little House on the Prairie series. And my favorite character is Winnie-the-Pooh — A.A. Milne's classic version, not Disney's.

I think libraries are heroic and underappreciated.

And I'll end the introduction there, because libraries are the more enticing subject of this

week's column, in particular their summer reading programs.

The good-for-you reason to take part in a summer reading program is to keep brain cells firing. Nutritional reading is fine, but seems kind of bland and compulsory. Instead, consider the lazier days of summer an opportunity to devour as many books as possible, no matter how old you are.

This year, Ventura County libraries are offering two themed reading programs that include incentives for reading, recommended books, special events and story times. And they're all free. At most libraries, participants keep a log of books read or hours of reading that they turn in weekly to be eligible for prizes.

The Camarillo, Blanchard and Thousand Oaks/Newbury Park libraries are hosting a Fizz, Boom, Read program focused on science. Most of the other libraries are offering iREAD's Paws to Read program, featuring animal-themed books and activities. Some libraries offer reading programs for teens and adults as well.

Here's a list of kickoff events; I'll list additional weekly activities in future columns:

The Blanchard, Camarillo and Thousand Oaks/Newbury Park libraries will blast off with Astronomy for Everyone: Size & Scale of the Universe family presentations by astronomer Kevin Manning of Look Up to the Stars: 7 p.m. June 16 at Blanchard, 7 p.m. June 17 at Camarillo, 2 p.m. June 18 at Newbury Park and 7 p.m. June 18 at Thousand Oaks.

The following libraries will kick off Paws to Read with wildlife presentations by The Reptile Family: 9 and 10:30 a.m. Tuesday at Piru, 3:30 p.m. Tuesday at Fillmore, 3:30 p.m. Wednesday at Oak View, 4 p.m. Thursday, at Soliz/El Rio, 11 a.m. Saturday at Ojai, 2:30 p.m. June 17 at Oak Park, 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. June 18 at Foster, 3 p.m. June 23 at Prueter.

The Simi Valley Library's Paws to Read program will kick off with non-animal events: a magic show by Tony Daniels, 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Thursday; and a "Music to Your Ears" concert featuring "classic children's movie music," 6 p.m. Thursday. Those who attend the concert dressed as their favorite cartoon character or fairy prince/princess will earn a treat.

The Avenue and Meiners Oaks libraries are participating in Paws to Read, too, but have already presented their kickoff events.

Enjoy tucking yourself into a book this summer.

### **Library locations**

Avenue: 606 N. Ventura Ave., Ventura. 643-6393.

Blanchard: 119 N. Eighth St., Santa Paula. 525-3615.

Camarillo: 4101 Las Posas Road. 388-5222.

Colonia: 1500 Camino del Sol, Oxnard. 385-8108.

Fillmore: 502 Second St. 524-3355.

Foster: 651 E. Main St., Ventura. 648-2715.

Moorpark: 699 Moorpark Ave. 517-6370.

Newbury Park: 2331 Borchard Road. 498-2139.

Oak Park: 899 N. Kanan Road. 818-889-2239.

Oak View: 555 Mahoney Ave. 649-1523.

Ojai: 111 E. Ojai Ave. 646-1639.

Oxnard: 251 South A St. 385-7535.

Prueter: 510 Park Ave., Port Hueneme. 486-5460.

Simi Valley: 2969 Tapo Canyon Road. 526-1735.

South Oxnard: 4300 Saviers Road. 385-8129.

Thousand Oaks: 1401 E. Janss Road. 449-2660.