

planned for 6/5/96 unused

Nancy Drew and the case of the trashy books

The new San Francisco main library got a real round of criticism recently for *not* carrying some schlocky, badly written, repetitious, poor quality books. What's more, while the books in question fit those words to a T, I agree with the criticism. Public libraries should carry the Nancy Drew series.

I'm pleased to report 146 Nancy Drew titles listed in the Peninsula Library system catalog. There are multiple copies of many in the series.

I don't read Nancy Drew. Never have. However, when I was eight or nine, I devoured Horatio Alger in bunches. Alger's books make Nancy Drew look like Shakespeare. They were written in a hurry. They had little literary value. They recycled plots. They were paid for by the word, and looked it. They were literary trash. I enjoyed them thoroughly.

When, at 12, I asked Dagny Juell, the children's librarian in Santa Rosa, for Tarzan of the Apes, she probably cringed inwardly, but she took the positive approach. There were no Tarzan books on the shelves, but she introduced me to a series she thought better quality. I've forgotten its name. So has everyone else. Meanwhile, Tarzan still rules the jungle.

I've never read Tarzan, having passed my window of opportunity over fifty years ago. Today I would have no problem recognizing the lack of literary merit, but at the time I wanted to read it, I might have gained reading practice and some reading pleasure. Even trash has its place.

For the past 10 or 15 years I've gathered paper back westerns, science fiction, news magazines, mysteries, and other publications that appeal to young men in jail. The stuff solicited for the Jail Outreach program also includes Ebony, Jet and Playboy. Incidentally, if you have any magazines or pocketbooks that might be enjoyed by County Jail inmates, drop them off at the Pacifica branch library labeled "Jail Outreach."

The more prisoners read, the better they can read. They will read mostly what they enjoy. Sometimes that may even include the classics, but I've learned not to let my taste dictate what I gather. My taste isn't important. The prisoners don't want to read Sunset or Harlequin romances. Adventure is more their style.

My taste in classical music dates from my childhood. I didn't spend my time listening to opera. I listened to the Lone Ranger, Challenge of the Yukon and the Green Hornet. These were the radio equivalent of Nancy Drew, but they taught me there was pleasure to be had from good music. I enjoyed the William Tell Overture, Les Prelude, the Flight of the Bumble Bee, and the other bridges and themes. The classics cut program expenses, since they were out of copyright, but I got a lot more out of the music than an appreciation of the producer's ability to keep under budget.

If you too recognize the value of books, even trashy books, drop by Florey's Book Store on Palmetto, pick up a Nancy Drew title, and donate it to the SF Public Library children's book collection. Reading is fun, and fundamental.