

of the six-acre Peralta Hacienda Historical Park on 34th Avenue in the depressed Fruitvale section of Oakland. When the city renovated the park's Italianate house three years ago, she feared it would be a "prime target for vandalism."

At the Open House, she welcomed children in to talk about history, then invited them to become part of a personal history project. If they were part of the house, she reasoned, they wouldn't want to deface it. Sixty-one minibiographies were written and mounted for a wall exhibit. The children were enormously pleased. They had gained the concept of history in a society and they had become part of it. It was "cool."

"That year," Alonzo said, "violent crimes in the park went to zero from eight the year before."

And there was no vandalism. But the beautiful experiment was short-lived. The year after, Alonzo pointed out following the discussion, violence and vandalism resumed in the park.

The Main Library's own bout with vandalism, classified also as a hate crime, had ended in a laudable reversal.

Van Buskirk at first found one or two volumes behind the stacks, then three or four. The volumes were slashed beyond repair and often the cuts were almond-shaped. Targeted books ranged in subject matter from gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender topics to women's health, religion and HIV/AIDS.

The word gay so triggered the vandal that in one volume the words Enola Gay (the name of the plane carrying the A-bomb in World War II) were attacked, Van Buskirk said. "Kill Faggots" and "HIV" were also carved in table tops, he said.

"We knew it was probably someone we saw every day, maybe even a staff member," he said. "We were terrified."

The early reports of gay-book vandalism had come to the police from the Chinatown branch, where it had been going on for a month. So when Hate Crimes Inspector Milanda Moore responded to the Main Library's call, and heard Van Burkirk's story, she knew "the case had blossomed into a monster. But the Police Department wasn't going to pay me overtime to stare at the stacks," she told The Extra in an interview.

Installing surveillance cameras on the third floor was a possibility. But one longtime staff member, Nancy Silverrod, volunteered to come in on her day off to keep a vigil. And when she saw a man dam-

age a book and hide it, she called security. He was taken to the police station. (Silverrod was later given a cash reward but turned it back to the library.)

But because the vandalism was a misdemeanor, and the incidents in the two libraries were not connected right away to the vandalism wave, John Perkyns was cited and released. Moore had to get two warrants to eventually arrest him at his Tenderloin apartment on Ellis.

"You'd never suspect him," Moore said. "He blended in very well. He was short, thin, well-dressed and didn't look crazy. He didn't resist and acted like he expected this."

Perkyns, then 48, was convicted in October 2001 of vandalism and a hate crime. He got five years probation and 200 hours of community service. He was ordered to pay the library \$9,600 in restitution and to receive gay and lesbian counseling. He is also

under a restraining order to stay out of San Francisco libraries.

In the aftermath, faced with a worthless mountain of books the taxpayers bought, a distraught Van Burkirk thought that tossing them away would only "complete the vandal's crime." He began to e-mail his artist friends for ideas. Using found objects in collage and assemblage had been grist for such modern artists as Pablo Picasso and George Braque. And the challenge of transforming wrecked books seemed irresistible as the e-mails from artists multiplied.

"It struck a nerve," Van Buskirk said. "It was unbelievable. The word was spread by the artists."

Van Buskirk ended up mailing out all 600 damaged volumes; 200 came back from 20 states, Japan and France. Each had a statement by the artist about the creation of

the piece. And the exhibit was born.

"The works of art produced are each lessons in tolerance and illustrate how the Library has chosen to turn tragedy into a positive experience for its staff, community and collection," Susan Hildreth, San Francisco city librarian, said in a news release.

In the discussion following the panelists' talks, huge questions arose – How do you heal the perpetrators? How are they ever going to feel like they are somebody? How do we create a place where everyone respects each other? – and went unanswered.

Another panel discussion stemming from the vandalism project, "The Art of Altered Books," is scheduled for April 10, 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the Koret Auditorium. Panelists will be contributing artists Steve Woodall, Sandra Ortiz Taylor and Mary Marsh. ■

TENDERLOIN, SOMA RANK 2 AND 3 FOR ANTI-GAY VIOLENCE

The Tenderloin in 2002 was the second-leading neighborhood in the city for violence, vandalism and harassment against gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders, according to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs.

The Mission led all districts with 69 incidents, as reported to the San Francisco-based Community United Against Violence nonprofit, which furnished the figures. The Tenderloin had 37 reported cases and South of Market 22. The Castro was fourth with 17.

"People get targeted outside of queer clubs both in the Tenderloin and South of Market," said Tina D'Elia, director of CUAV's Hate Violence Survivors program. "But there is so much violence in certain areas of the Tenderloin. Some of it, too, is police targeting transgender people."

"But people lack the resources to move out of those areas, and they are totally scared."

The 2003 report is due out in April. ■



Oakland's Sherry Karver created "Blackbird Singing" using a book whose slashed leaves suggested wings. Photo courtesy Main Library

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