

# <sup>Censorship</sup> Trustees won't oust book from school libraries

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SANTA CRUZ — Children in Santa Cruz City elementary schools will be able to continue reading about Gilly Hopkins.

School Board members voted 6-0 Monday night to keep Katherine Paterson's novel about the lonely, tough-talking foster child on library shelves despite objections by a parent that the book encourages youngsters to use profane language and is "anti-Christian." Trustee Art Pearl was absent from the meeting.

The trustees' action left the objecting parent, Michael Quinton, vowing to seek support of other parents in the district in a drive to sweep Paterson's book, "The Great Gilly Hopkins," and others like it from school libraries.

Quinton wrote to the district in January to ask that the book be removed from the schools. Citing 46 instances in which Paterson had used words such as "damn," "dammit," "double damn," "damned" and "hell," Quinton, a captain with the UCSF Fire Department, claimed the book was likely to give young readers the idea "that cursing and swearing are 'okay.'"

He also charged that Paterson's book, which focuses on Gilly's clashes with her devout, church-going foster parent, was "anti-God, anti-church, anti-Bible, and anti-Christian."

Paterson, whose other books have won a number of national awards, is the daughter of Christian missionaries and the wife of a minister.

A committee of teachers, librarians, school administrators and parents who reviewed Paterson's book following Quinton's complaint recommended that the novel be retained by the district. Monday night trustees told Quinton that they didn't share his perceptions of the book.

"I read the book. I thought it was really excellent," said Trustee Nancy Matlock, "— to the extent that I'm now reading it to my sixth-grade class."

Board member Elizabeth Moore said she had known a number of foster children, including one whose life "would make an x-rated movie, compared to the way this child (in the book) behaved."

Trustee Bob Bosso said he had not read Paterson's book. But, he said, his daughter, a seventh-grader, had told him that she had read it twice and said it was "great."

Trustee Barbara Thompson said her fourth-grade child "was fascinated" by the book and "said it was absolutely excellent."

Quinton, who stepped to the speakers rostrum with a manila envelope stuffed with papers in one hand and a red, soft-cover Bible in the other, told trustees, "The whole thing boils down to the language used by the author and is it appropriate for the classroom?"

"The language doesn't have to be there to convey the image of Gilly," he said. "Children are perceptive enough to know — whether they're Christian or not — that (adults) should not condone language like that."

Quinton, who likened the book's mild profanity to "language that we find on bathroom walls at school," wondered whether "Hollywood has a higher moral standard than the city school system," and said, "If that's the case, then we, as parents, have to go down to the library and the school and review everything to see if it's appropriate."

Board members were unimpressed by Quinton's argument.

"Kids do not exist in a vacuum," said trustee Moore.

"They have heard language much worse than that in the book."

"I question your right to impose your moral code, and, as far as I am concerned, your prejudices on the rest of the people in this school district," she said.

"The language you're complaining about," said Bosso, "is basically 'damn' and 'hell.' These aren't the kinds of things I see on bathroom walls."

Talking with reporters outside the City Council chamber following trustees' vote to retain the book, Quinton said he planned to "go out and talk to parents" to see "how they feel about this book, or any book of this nature and how it's being presented in the school system."

Quinton said he only found out about Paterson's book after a substitute teacher read it aloud, and unexpurgated, to his daughter's class at De Laveaga School.

"How many others know what's going on?" he asked. "The part that scares me is that we don't know what's going on. Parents should be made aware of it."