

Librarian stands by her high ideals

By RICHARD EMANUEL
Sentinel staff writer

4-2-89
LIKE MANY thoughtful people, Anne Turner, director of libraries in Santa Cruz, is pretty upset about the turmoil over Salman Rushdie's book, "The Satanic Verses." But Turner's concern, at least in part, seems a little different from everybody else's.

"Nobody has asked public libraries if they've got the book," she says. "I think of public libraries as being taken for granted, usually forgotten."

"There isn't a working reporter in this nation who has not used his or her public library," she continues. "But not one of you, so far as I can see from the national coverage, has thought to call up a public library and ask, 'What is your position on this?' And that annoys me, because libraries are as vulnerable as anyone."

Turner, 47, has the confident, no-nonsense manner of someone used to making decisions. When she arrived in Santa Cruz five years ago, she had already established a track record as a strong manager in two libraries in Massachusetts. In the years since, she has guided the system into the computer age and charted a course for its future.

When she's not on the job, Turner shares with her husband, a freelance journalist, an interest in California history. She shares a passion for local theater with her high school-age son.

Turner talked recently in her library office. She wrapped up work on her computer terminal, rose and

High profile

emerged from behind her desk to sit at a cleared table. After asking if it was all right, she lit a cigarette and smoked as she answered questions.

Turner is a second-generation California who, after 20 years of living and traveling outside the Golden State, seems finally to have found a home, in Santa Cruz.

WHEN IRAN'S Ayatollah Khomeini announced that British author Salman Rushdie should die for "blaspheming" Islam in "The Satanic Verses," many American writers and book industry spokesmen appeared unsure how to react. Turner, it seems, knew her own mind all along.

"Our job is to select the best books," she says simply. "The Rushdie book came up as part of the regular reviewing process. And because of how it was reviewed, and because we have other books by Rushdie, we bought two copies."

The books remain in circulation. Two more copies have been ordered and the waiting list for "The Satanic Verses" has grown to about 40.

Libraries, Turner says, "make information available — other people can make judgments about whether they like the information or not. I would not consciously buy children's books which are racist. But for adults who are capable of making up their own minds ... I

rely on the intelligence of our public."

The theme of purveying information to the public rings through everything Turner says about her job. This is a high calling, as she looks at it.

"I see public libraries as crucial to the maintenance of a democratic society," she says. "Our entire democratic society is based on having an informed populace."

To a modern librarian like Turner, informing the populace means much more than books. Reference work — answering questions of all kinds — is increasingly important. Newspapers and magazines, audio records and videotapes, display cases, story-hours for children, tax information and public talks are all part of the job.

Long gone are the days when libraries were dusty places where patrons spoke in hushed voices, as if announcing a golf tournament.

"The first thing I always check in a library is whether it's a warm and friendly place," Turner says. "Are there people sitting around, reading the newspapers? Are there kids around, toys on the floor? Are there books pulled out? Does it look like they're behind in the shelving? That means circulation was high the day before. Those are the kinds of things I'm looking at."

TURNER IS A rather private woman, somewhat protective of her personal life. She has been

married for nearly 29 years, to Steve Turner.

"We work together on being parents and on maintaining our household," she says. "We long ago realized that all of the household maintenance kinds of things were shit, that nobody liked doing them, therefore everybody had to do them. He cooks as frequently as I do and we clean as frequently together. The problem is integrating a 17-year old into that system so everybody has responsibilities."

The Turners are a bi-racial family: Their adopted son, Nicholas, is black.

"I'd rather not talk about that," Turner says. "I don't think Nick wants to be in the newspapers in my version. It seems to me very exploitive of Nick and of us to talk about how we have worked out being a bi-racial family."

For relaxation, Turner turns to reading.

"We read three newspapers a day in our family, and we read 'The New Yorker' and 'The Nation.' That is what I read — I'd hate to think how much Steve is reading — so it means we don't have much time for TV."

Turner puts much of her energy into her work.

"I really love what I'm doing," she says. But if she had to do something else, she'd like to "be writing a book about California agriculture. So I read about California history and California agriculture."

She also reads fiction in her free



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Please see **TURNER** — E2

Anne Turner's primary mission in life is keeping people informed.

Turner/ County system's head librarian prefers the active voice

Continued from Page E1

time, "certain mystery writers that I enjoy for escapist reading."

THE STRONG MORAL conviction Turner brings to her library work is a holdover from an earlier career as a low-income housing advocate in Philadelphia. Not that she started out on the East Coast.

Turner grew up in San Mateo, in an upper middle class family, "where reading and college and all that was expected."

Her father is an international management consultant, now retired and writing a book. Her mother has a master's degree from the London School of Economics. She is English.

"The most devastating thing that happened in my family was that I got married at 19," Turner says with a smile.

The catastrophe was the indirect result of an earlier disaster, Turner reveals: "I flunked chemistry in my senior year in high school, and thereby broke my father's heart." She had been expected to attend UC

Berkeley, but ended up at Monterey Peninsula College instead.

During her freshman year in Monterey, she says, she met "the man of my dreams," Steve, then a young Army lieutenant who was studying Mandarin Chinese at the Army Language School in Monterey, now the Defense Language Institute.

The Turners got married in 1960, shortly after which Steve was sent to Korea. Anne followed him to the Far East, first to Thailand where she lived for six months with his parents, who were in the Foreign Service. Then she went to Seoul, Korea, where she lived in the YWCA for six months, 50 miles from where Steve was stationed.

"You'll do anything when you're 19," she says. "And my whole life was organized around getting together (with Steve) on weekends."

After Korea, Steve was sent to Washington, D.C., where Anne completed her undergraduate schooling at American University. After Steve left the Army, they



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Steve and Anne Turner and son Nicholas share an interest in studying land and water use in the California and the west.

moved to Philadelphia where Anne worked on city planning issues and housing advocacy until 1970, when she "got tired of banging my head against the wall on housing problems."

"By then, we had moved to Cambridge, Mass., because of my hus-

band's career," she continues the story. "I was sitting in the Cambridge Public Library, trying to decide" what to do next.

She noticed people "streaming in and out of the public library, getting information, and I thought, 'Wait a minute! ... Who are these

people who are working here?'"

Most, she learned, were librarians with degrees from nearby Simons Graduate School of Library and Information Science. She enrolled and earned a master's degree in Information Science. Later, she completed a doctorate of arts in Library and Information Management.

After years of following Steve's career, the couple reversed roles and started to follow Anne's career as a librarian, while Steve turned to freelance writing. Turner worked for several New England libraries, including the public libraries in Amherst and in Lowell, Mass., where she directed the reorganization of a troubled library system from 1980 to 1983. In December of 1983, she was hired to pilot the Santa Cruz libraries.

DURING HER FIVE years as director of libraries in Santa Cruz County, Turner has addressed three problems in particular, she says. The first was the perceived imbalance between the main library, in the City of Santa Cruz, and the "poor step-sister branches" throughout the rest of the county. The system is jointly funded by the city and county, and both governments wanted to be sure they were getting their money's worth.

Turner made all the libraries branches, including the Central Branch, in downtown Santa Cruz. She also gave senior managers system-wide responsibilities.

Second, she set up a central computer with listings of all the system's books, to give patrons in all branches equal access to the collection. The books now circulate freely among the branches — 3,000 books a week now move from one branch to another.

Finally, with the help of a citizen's committee, Turner helped draft long-range plans for library growth. A children's library will open in Live Oak in May, and new branches are planned to serve the Live Oak-Capitola area and the Scotts Valley-San Lorenzo Valley region.

"The problem, of course, is money," Turner says. How quickly the plan will be implemented depends on funding from the city and county.

IN THE MEANTIME, the Turners keep busy indulging their interest in California and Western history, especially the history of land and water use throughout the West.

"Our ideal vacation was one we took two years ago, when we traveled all over Washington state talking to people, looking at water and Grand Coulee (Dam) and stuff," Turner recalls.

Having a high school-age son also keeps them busy. Nicholas attends Santa Cruz High School.

"He would love to be an actor," Turner says with a smile. "He interned at Shakespeare Santa Cruz last summer. He was on stage in 'Antony and Cleopatra.' He also washed the blood off the screens in 'Julius Caesar.' He had an absolutely great summer!"

Turner says she is glad to be back in California after her years away. Until she returned to the state on vacation in 1976, "I had not quite realized how attached I was to the California environment."

"Santa Cruz is a very nice community, because there's such a high level of participation in almost everything," she says. "And of course, this is the most beautiful place in the world!"