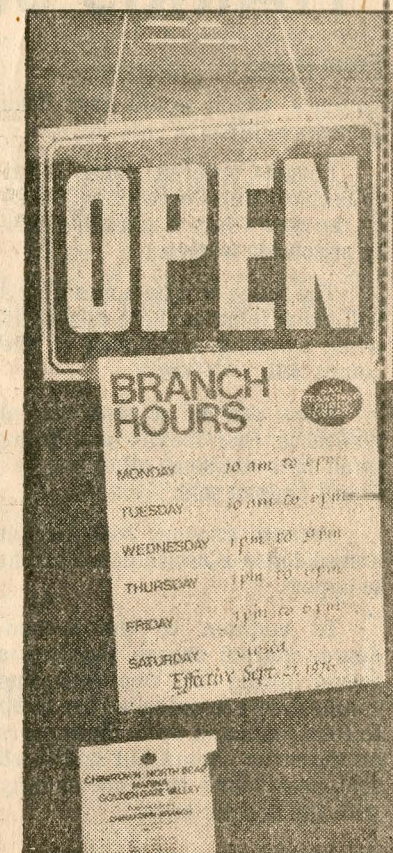


'The people here are avid readers, they stop by several times a week' — but now it looks as if this branch will be closed



Photos by Susan Gilbert



The sign still reads 'OPEN' at the Golden Gate Valley branch of the public library, but budget cuts threaten to close one of the city's oldest and best-loved libraries for good on July 1

Ode to a 'Unique' Community Library

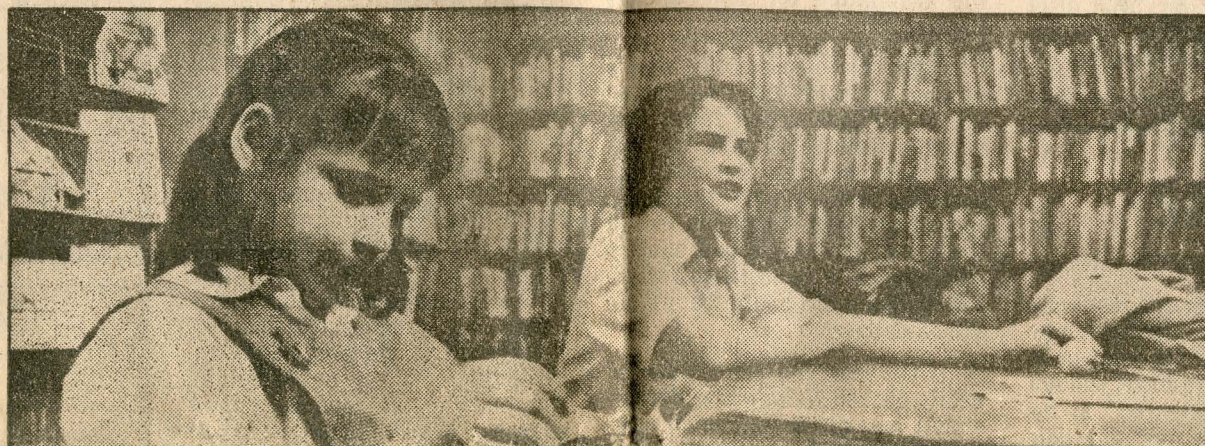
By Joan Chatfield-Taylor

I have a soft spot in my heart for the Golden Gate Valley branch of the San Francisco Public Library.

To start with, it looks like a library. Its classical facade punctuated with Corinthian columns suggests a respect for things past. Inside, the shelves are sturdily built of oak, the checkerboard linoleum floor shines brightly and arched windows soar to the high ceilings.

It is a place, both distinguished and comforting, to spend a half hour browsing in the stacks, leafing through the magazines in their red plastic holders or reading the restaurant reviews kept in a binder on the front desk.

It is the place where a gifted children's librarian convinced my daughter that whatever you wanted to



blocks of Golden Gate Valley. For Jennifer, Kimberly and Larry Krueger, the library is their afternoon refuge, the place they go after school to wait for their parents to pick them up. They depend on children's librarian Betty Schwabacher to help them with book reports and advise them on reading.

"I think this library integrates the neighborhood," Evelyn McKeever said, as she looked up from a table covered with books on psychic phenomena.

Golden Gate Valley's loyal patrons are convinced their library is unique.

It evidently attracts a more literate clientele than most libraries in the city. Librarian Kathy Hunsicker said, "The people here are avid readers. They stop by two or three times a week, they belong to book clubs

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It is the place where a gifted children's librarian convinced my daughter that, whatever you wanted to read about, tigers or dinosaurs or fairy princesses, there was always a book on the subject.

It is a place where people park bicycles and tie up dogs at the front steps — and find them still there an hour later.

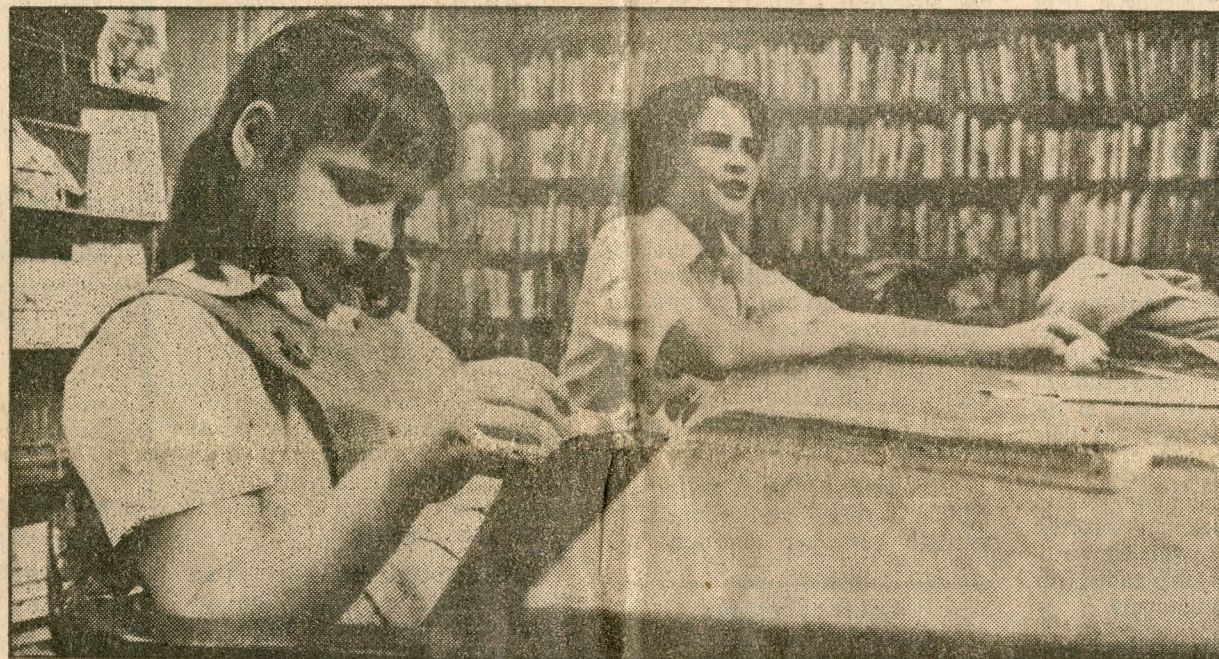
Golden Gate Valley has been at the corner of Green and Octavia Streets since 1917. In a neighborhood now dominated by the flash and jangle of Union Street, it is a visible reminder of quieter times.

For all its virtues, it is an endangered species. The current library budget doesn't include the \$106,000 it costs to run Golden Gate Valley for a year, and the library may close its doors in July.

Ever since a little newspaper story about the budget appeared, the regulars have been arriving at the desk with worried looks.

"Am I going to lose you?" a white-haired woman in a neat blue suit asked plaintively.

Another said, "It's appalling. The supervisors vote themselves a \$10,000 raise (the new yearly expense account limit) and then they close the libraries. It



Kimberly and Larry Krueger are among the patrons who use the library several times a week

makes me sick."

"I've been coming here since 1929," said one patron. "A lot of elderly people use this library as a lifeline. For them, it's a place to go where there's someone to talk to."

She, like several other regular patrons who were in the library one afternoon earlier this week, said, "I would be in favor of paying a little money to support the libraries."

Eleanor Edelman said, "I live two doors up from this library. When I moved to San Francisco three years

ago, I chose my apartment because it was close to a library."

About the closing, she said, "I went through this in New York when our branch was going to close. It was only saved because a neighbor covered the rent. I'd be willing to accept a partial schedule, if necessary."

Dorie Hilgers said, "The thing that upsets me is the children. So much has been taken away from them. This is something they deserve, and they shouldn't have to go out of their neighborhood to get it."

There are five elementary schools within a few

blocks of Golden Gate Valley. For Jennifer, Kimberly and Larry Krueger, the library is their afternoon refuge, the place they go after school to wait for their parents to pick them up. They depend on children's librarian Betty Schwabacher to help them with book reports and advise them on reading.

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Golden Gate Valley's loyal patrons are convinced their library is unique.

It evidently attracts a more literate clientele than most libraries in the city. Librarian Kathy Hunsicker said, "The people here are avid readers. They stop by two or three times a week, they belong to book clubs and they're extremely interested in new books. It's different than the more suburban libraries, where the patrons are mainly interested in the best-sellers."

"We have the highest quota in the city of new books, in spite of our size," said Betty Schwabacher.

Golden Gate Valley's problem is not lack of readers. It's geography. As with the six other branch libraries currently scheduled to close, there's another branch not far away. In this case, the Marina branch is seven blocks away. It's a nice enough library, modern and spacious, but it's not the same, say the regulars.

"There's a strong feeling of community and a strong feeling for the library. Many of these people have come here as children, then as adults, and now their children come," said Schwabacher.

Right now, the regulars are being urged to write a letter to the mayor. They're hoping that some miracle will protect their little island of civility. So maybe this story should have started out:

"Dear Mayor Feinstein: I have a soft spot in my heart for the Golden Gate Valley branch of the San Francisco Public Library."