



# Passaic Valley Today

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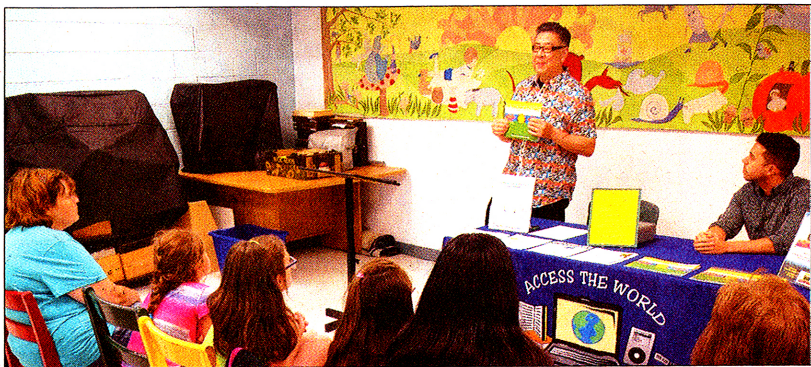


PHOTO COURTESY OF TOTOWA PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mel Hioki, who wrote the book "The Other Side of the Pond," recently gave a presentation at the Totowa Public Library. The book brings the message of hunger awareness to young people.

## Children's book raises awareness of hunger

BY TINA PAPPAS  
Staff Writer

**TOTOWA** – The Totowa Public Library recently hosted an author who aims to help feed people and change lives with the proceeds of his book.

Mel Hioki wrote "The Other Side of the Pond," a children's book about two communities of frogs who share the same pond that's separated by a huge log.

Hioki is a volunteer with CUMAC, a non-profit, outreach ministry of the United Methodist

Church dedicated to the alleviation of hunger and its root causes in Paterson. He visited the library recently and presented the idea of what happens when two groups, those who have an abundance of food, and those who do not, finally come in contact with each other.

"The two groups of frogs never met but have heard scary rumors about each other," Hioki explained. "Both communities are exactly the same except for one thing – food. The red frogs have plenty of food to eat, while

the polka dot frogs have almost nothing to eat. The story unfolds on how the problem will be solved."

Hioki presented a reading to families in attendance, along with a book signing. Originally from San Jose, Calif., he saw firsthand the large amount of homeless people on the West Coast.

"I have an art direction and graphic design background and have worked on many notable advertising campaigns over the

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### HIOKI

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years," he explained. "My job eventually took me to New York City, where you also come across many homeless people on a daily basis. By getting involved with outreach and community service, I became involved with a soup kitchen in Hackensack. It was with this experience that I was also amazed to see that on the other side of Route 4, there was a different lifestyle of people out and about at shopping center. In this instance, it was a matter of where they chose to get their next meal from. The story is based on this experience."

The goal of making the story meaningful through hunger awareness for children was important to him, he added. He sought to develop his own characters to depict his story. He credits Pastor Eugene Kim of Hackensack United Methodist Church for encouraging him to get involved in outreach programs. Eventually, he was introduced to CUMAC, and the support of staff like Lynne Bruger, development director, and Adrian Diaz, community engagement, where he became a volunteer. Now a board member, he also credits Rev. Patricia Bruger, executive director for CUMAC, for giving him the drive to complete the book.

"Just working with her and

being in board meetings with such passionate people really motivated me to finish this book," he noted. "CUMAC really was a big influence on me and changed me for the better."

According to Anne Krautheim, library director, Hioki's story has an appeal for all ages.

"Mel was really wonderful," said Krautheim. "He brought the subject of hunger to a very basic level so all can understand it so the children really appreciated it and asked questions. It was amazing to see how much they knew and understood. Brian Sedita, our library assistant, read the book and the story is so moving. Adrian also spoke and really explained hunger to kids. Kids were also given coloring books by Mel. Each child received two coloring books and was asked to give one to a friend."

Annemarie Shapiola, children's librarian, shared the sentiment and said it makes impression on young ages, which makes a difference for the future.

"The book is so special, and there's not a lot written about hunger on children's level, which is another reason I like it so much," she said. "It didn't just cover the topic of hunger but other issues, like misconceptions about others. Mel teaches the timeless lessons, like finding out about others for themselves. Sending so many messages in just one story is a great book for chil-

dren. Adrian also got the white board and started to sketch out graphics and illustration and how kids could help. He engaged them so much and they were so excited. It's a terrific program."

Shapiola added that the theme ties into the library's summer reading program, "Every hero has a story." Additionally, a food drive is tied into the program that will benefit CUMAC's food pantry.

"It's such a great program, and we'd love to have him come back, maybe around Thanksgiving," added Krautheim. "It's great that he brought awareness to others about the fact that kids go to bed hungry. So many young people don't realize this."

Hioki said he hopes that the message of the book will make a difference and eventually help towards helping hunger in Paterson.

"The big goal is to hopefully come up with a solution to put an end to hunger," the author noted, adding he plans a sequel to the book.

Copies are available via CUMAC's website at [www.cumacecho.org/book](http://www.cumacecho.org/book). All proceeds benefit CUMAC's mission to fighting hunger. Hioki also created a 2016 calendar/coloring book for kids that features the characters and hunger facts.

"The calendar is a great touch point tool for hunger awareness to be a part of their daily lives," he noted.