South African-born and recently naturalized U.S. citizens Pauline Ditla Manaka make it easy to appreciate the special rewards and challenges of a life of both shared engagement and permanent rootlessness. She’s a librarian, professionally curious, working as your docent and mine in personal and public archives of shared credentials, esteem of colleagues and students who work with her in the library and classroom.

Manaka might begin by telling stories about the south: the monsters of the former apartheid South African regime, the one-time liberal Southern segregationist L. William Flowers, the Southern U.S. President Jimmy Carter. And since 1988, she’s lived in, yes, the southern part of the opportunity, the excellent student without a school application for a Fulbright Scholarship, choosing Atlanta University. In part, she says, because of Gladys Knight and the Pips. Indeed, best about America were our own revolutionary civil rights leaders, including Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but the reality stole with a terrific library program was also the subject of a hit song, the

UCI LIBRARIAN PAULINE MANAKA IS AN EX-PAT FROM APARTHEID-ERA SOUTH AFRICA WHO BRINGS A WORLD OF REFERENCES TO ORANGE COUNTY

BY ANDREW TONKOVICH ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY RALPH PALUMBO

memory, perception and stories, remembered or catalogued and in the stacks, or online.

Recently, the longtime research librarian in anthropology and sociology at the University of California, Irvine. (Woodbridge resident) surrendered to the urgings of her U.S.-born younger son and took the citizenship test. She didn’t need to study (probably could have created the test. It was a symbolic acquiescence, a reconciling with a richly complicated biography.

Manaka recently also voted for the first time, perhaps committing in her way to never roots. More of her life has now been in her adopted country a century that rolls the question of who adopted whom.

She must certainly get weary of explaining herself, yet does cheerfully, a lovely woman small of stature but with an implacable understanding that an act is a powerful entity laden with mischief-making, a handle Manaka would embrace. The immigrant often gets stuck teaching the world to other Americans — geography, politics, history — a mildly subversive form of intellectual training that arrives, is

The engaging and solicitous Manaka possesses every kind of go-to story framing her circumstances and ours, beyond obvious and available personal details — senior job position, impressive academic and professional

the Golden State, where the purple-flowering jacaranda trees of her other homeland grow easily and abundantly. Squatting little, Manaka says, Orange County so resembles the southern African landscape that sometimes she does a double take. In her case, a double take means twice as much, with stories about it all, joyfully, ill-generously offered but insistently, with a powerful punch line worth waiting for.

Creating the president from Plains might be a hard sell. But, as she tells it with enduring — almost personal affection, it was Carter who, softening up the murderous apartheid government, invited scholars from that racially segregated state to the U.S. to study, including a certain University of Pa HBC graduate.

She remembers her loving, strict father wanting his daughter educated toward something getting around everyday political and economic injustices, not fighting it. He disapproved of Manaka’s activism. She laughs, recollecting both her rationale and bootcamp. Shunned because punished by her government, which was under siege from international human rights campaigners, not to mention its own people.

Tom between struggle and scholarship, and encouraged by academic colleagues to gratify the

new-classic, “Midnight Train to Georgia” — not the last of many musical and American pop culture references (she is a reference librarian, after all), which animate Manaka’s stories, each framing nicely her serious bibliographic research on Steven Blay and the anti-apartheid movement.

Working nights as a newspaper librarian at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, she animated the corporate newspapers, matching her perceptions of her new country to requests for photos, say, of Dr. King. Jr. Shied sent the handiest picture she could find, via old-school pneumatic tube, find it rejected, with a request for a familiar stock photo. She’d try again, a different image, and get the same demand, as if readers wouldn’t recognize King, otherwise.

She found a more receptive career, one reflecting her big, generous worldview, where today researchers in anthropology, sociology, German, women’s studies, demography, and social analysis and a multitude of other disciplines appreciate her ecclecticism: if authorative storytelling, and nobody sends back reports or photos or suggestions.

And funny thing, she’s considered yearly by her own new country with visits from none other than demographers of the United States Census, who visit librarian Pauline Manaka, adopted and adopted, to learn best how to account for, and count, us all.