

Texas Library Association Conference April 25th – 28th

The theme of the 2006 Texas Library Association Conference was “Libraries, Igniting the Passion”. The librarians who attended TLA were definitely leading by example as the George R. Brown Convention Center rang with eager voices. Certainly, I never saw such a happy, friendly bunch of people, all of whom were very excited about the future of librarianship.

I arrived in Houston on Tuesday; after finally finding the right door of the Convention Center, I registered, spotting a sign advertising that tickets to the Julie Andrews signing started at 7.30 the next morning. It was going to be an early start... 7.15 AM the next morning saw me standing in line for a ticket, beaten only by people who started queuing at 4.45 am! I finally got my ticket and made it into the auditorium in time for the opening ceremony. It was interesting to finally put names to faces, and I was excited to see APL won an award for its literacy scheme in detention centers. Finally, Julie Andrews arrived to talk about literacy; she also managed to sneak in many references to her new range of books...

At 10 AM sharp we dispersed, and I made my way to the talk on “Multi-Cultural Library Trends”. Five speakers addressed trends, patterns and various initiatives to encourage multiculturalism. I was particularly excited to hear Pat Mora speak about El Día de las Niñas. I slipped out before the end of that talk to attend the “Poppies, Flying Monkeys and Good Witches” talk by Stephen Abram. This was a lively debate about future technologies. I was lucky enough to arrive at the point where he was discussing the digital divide; Mr Abram went on to discuss new wireless infrastructures that are being set up to complement the \$150 computers being developed by MIT. He was slightly wary of the city wide wireless networks currently being implemented, but mentioned several alternatives, including a \$30 plug in box.

My last talk of the morning was “Get that Job and Love it”, a talk designed for library school students transitioning to their first job. It was full of sensible advice about resumes, interviews and more importantly, the first year of the new job. Finally, it was book-signing time! I rushed along to the main auditorium, only to wait as Julie was 45 minutes late. Still, my turn eventually came and we exchanged a few words about England as she signed my book. I really enjoyed meeting her- she is over 70, but still looks very young and was very excited to talk to us.

In the afternoon, I attended the exhibits fair, which was very impressive, though it was more geared to school and children’s libraries. Still, I managed to come away with bags, books and pens, so it was a fun afternoon. My afternoon talk was “You need my Metadata” by Shawne Miksa- I don’t want to be a cataloger, but I had to write a paper on the future of cataloging, so was keen to hear her thoughts. The afternoon was nearly done- I just had to attend the Book Cart Drill teams. This was almost the highlight of my visit! Every team went to great lengths to decorate their carts and make up original amusing routines- my hands were sore with clapping afterwards!

Thursday dawned bright and early as I made my way to the “Sixty sites in sixty minutes” talk. Two librarians talked about useful Internet sites, although there was far too much information to take in and that time in the morning! After a cup of tea, I headed to the Technology Sampler Platter to learn about virtual reference, ILS, and RFID. It was interesting to hear the presenter’s viewpoints. Finally, on the recommendation of my neighbor, I spent the rest of the morning in the Net Fair, wandering round and eavesdropping on the various talks taking place.

After that I had to run, as I had an evening class back in Austin. My backpack was certainly heavier, and my head was spinning with all the information I had absorbed! I really appreciated the chance to go to TLA, and I had a great time there. I met remarkable people, heard interesting points of view, met Julie Andrews, and above all felt excited to be part of the crazy book cart drill team library world. Thank-you once again for this opportunity, it was really kind, and something I won't forget.