

What I Learned on My ALA Vacation by Braverman Award Winner Denise Scott

Before I discuss some of my experiences at ALA's Annual Conference, I'd like to begin by expressing my sincere thanks to the Progressive Librarians Guild for awarding me the Miriam Braverman Memorial Prize and for inviting me to present my winning paper at your committee meeting at ALA. It was an honour to be selected and to be able to meet several PLG members at the conference.

Fish out of Water?

I attended this year's ALA conference in Las Vegas not only as a first time attendee but also as a recent graduate who is not yet employed in a library. I have an interest in teen librarianship and I'm Canadian, currently located in Toronto. All of these factors shaped my somewhat contradictory experience of simultaneously fitting in and feeling out of place. Being at ALA did give me a sense of being a part of a community of likeminded individuals, of being amongst my "people" so to speak, but there were definitely also moments of imposter syndrome. Although I have knowledge and experience of the library world from the perspective of a library science student (who also has two other degrees), I don't yet have the professional and personal experience gained from having worked in a library. As a result, I often felt reluctant to contribute to certain conversations or as if I had to provide an explanation for my lack of experience and employment. This sense of disconnect was, of course, entirely self-imposed. Everyone I met at ALA was very friendly and supportive, and one of my favourite sessions included a lively discussion about supporting young/new librarians (more on this below).

As a Canadian at an American conference, the issue of funding was one area where I noticed a significant difference in American versus Canadian public libraries. Many of the sessions I attended included details on specific programs and events that the speaker had organized at their library. As part of these talks, I heard a lot of references to grants from IMLS, the MacArthur Foundation, or other major funding sources. Unfortunately, Canada does not really have an equivalent to these institutions. Funding sources, especially for new programs or special events, are few and far between, and many come with corporate sponsorship. In Canada, our libraries have the "TD Summer Reading Program" (TD is one of our major banks). While it may be encouraging to see that companies recognize the value of literacy and education, this type of sponsorship also exemplifies the corporatization of our cultural and heritage institutions. When the government funding isn't there, libraries are forced to look elsewhere. This money generally comes with strings, including the requirement to display the company's logo/name. This is not to say that American libraries do not also have to jump through hoops to acquire necessary funding. The struggle for adequate funding is a constant reminder of the need for strong, visible advocacy efforts before both nations end up with McLibraries.

Continued on page 2...

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“May the Odds be Ever in Your Favour!”

The exhibition hall was probably one of the most overwhelming and fascinating areas of ALA. There were people and free books everywhere! I happened to be in the convention center prior to the opening of the exhibition hall on Friday afternoon and, as a librarian with a background in sociology, I found this to be a particularly interesting people-watching opportunity. There was a sense of excitement and anticipation in the air. And, perhaps, just a hint of competition as well. Crowds of people swarmed around the closed doors, eager to make it to specific booths and vendors before the coveted prizes, promotional material, and books were all gone. One person I spoke to likened it to the Cornucopia from *The Hunger Games* (hence the quote used for this section’s subtitle). For those who are not familiar with this reference, the Cornucopia houses a variety of necessary supplies and weapons for the contestants, known as “tributes,” who are forced to compete in the Hunger Games. When the competition first begins, tributes hurriedly and violently scrambled for the best and most easily accessible supplies before scattering throughout the “arena.”

This scene is not entirely dissimilar to opening of the exhibition hall. We librarians, however, are much more polite. We may have rushed to booths with the best free stuff first, but we generally formed some kind of orderly line when we got there. And I admit to finding myself caught up in the excitement of the quest for as many free books as the airline’s weight restriction would allow me to take home in my suitcase. It’s interesting how so many people, myself included, feel almost compelled to take something we don’t necessarily need/want simply because it is free. Of course, many of the giveaways will be put to good use as prizes and promotional material but I couldn’t help but wonder how much of it went directly into the recycling or garbage bins.

Connections and Conversations

While at ALA, I attended several sessions, explored the poster presentations, and repeatedly wandered through the book displays. I was inspired by new ideas, disappointed by cancelled or mediocre sessions, and was weighed down by my daily haul from exhibition hall trick-or-treating. Each of these aspects contributed to my overall experience at ALA, but they weren’t what had the most impact. At the risk of sounding cliché, it was the people I met and the conversations I had that have stayed with me long after I returned home to Toronto.

The session that stuck with me the most was presented by one of the founding members of the Harry Potter Alliance, an organization that combines fan culture and social justice. The presenter was speaking about youth engagement and the ways that librarians can use popular stories and fictional characters to spark conversations about real life issues and inspire youth to take action. The talk was about encouraging youth to find their voice and then use it. Interestingly though, the group discussion soon shifted to the topic of young/new librarians and the power of

Continued on page 3...

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voices within library organizations like ALA, or more specifically, their lack of power. Several people in the room expressed frustration with how difficult it can be to be accepted into one of ALA's task forces or committees. Others felt that certain ALA practices and policies did not speak to the needs and experiences of the newer generation of librarians. There also happened to be several prominent ALA members in the room, including a past president, so what developed was, I think, a fairly productive conversation about how librarians with established careers can support those just starting out, as well as ways for new librarians to get involved with ALA and make changes from the inside.

Outside of the formal conference sessions and presentations, it was also both exciting and educational to just get to talk with librarians from all across North America. We talked about the libraries where they work and about their successes and frustrations. I made friends with people waiting in line for author signings, such as the teenager who had gotten an exhibition pass while her mother attended the conference. She and I shared pretzels and stories of personal experiences with bullying and depression while we waited to meet Jay Asher, who wrote *Thirteen Reasons Why*, a Young Adult book about teenage suicide. Having a chance to meet with several PLG members, both at the committee meeting and the dinner after, was another highlight of the conference. It was encouraging to meet so many people dedicated to bringing a social justice perspective to their work. Even the quick conversations with fellow passengers on the conference shuttle provided an opportunity to discuss the various sessions we had attended throughout the day and to share what we had learned with each other.

Since entering library school at the University of Toronto in 2012, and now as I enter my career as a public librarian, I have been constantly impressed and motivated by the collaborative, community-oriented nature of the library profession. ALA's annual conference was no exception. More than anything else, it was the value of these connections that I took away from my time at the conference. Perhaps, then, collecting business cards is just as important as collecting free books, if not more so.

Week of Action: A World Without Mass Surveillance

September 20, 2014 marks the first anniversary of the declaration of [13 Necessary and Proportionate Principles](#), or the International Principles on the Application of Human Rights to Communications Surveillance, which are endorsed by PLG. In celebration of this anniversary, a number of organizations are organizing a Week of Action: A World Without Mass Surveillance. On each day of the week of September 15 - 19, organizations/individuals are asked to write a blog post about the principles. For more information, contact katitza@eff.org.

PLG Signs Statement of Solidarity with Gaza

Librarians, Archivists, and Information Workers Call for End of Siege on Gaza

July 31, 2014

As librarians, archivists, and information workers we believe it is our ethical obligation to speak out in the face of injustice. We call on our peers and colleagues to demand an end to Israel's military attacks, as well as an end to the ongoing siege of Gaza.

The current Israeli attacks on Gaza have resulted in over 1300 deaths, including over 200 children, as well as the displacement of over 200,000 people. We deplore the violence currently being inflicted by the Israeli military on the Palestinian people and on critical infrastructure, including water, sanitation and electrical services, roads, hospitals, and schools. We recognize that the current attacks on Gaza are part of an ongoing history of colonial violence and occupation inflicted by the state of Israel on Palestinians for over six decades. In particular, Israel's land, air, and sea blockade of Gaza has made it extremely difficult and in many cases impossible for Palestinians to travel in and out of Gaza and to access crucial goods, supplies, and natural resources.

Please phone your elected representatives, write letters to local and national news outlets, and join local actions demanding an end to the Israeli attacks and siege of Gaza, and a withdrawal of US military aid to Israel. We also call on our peers and colleagues to boycott and divest from companies profiting from Israel's occupation and colonization of Palestine. Find out more information here: [US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation](#) and [Samidoun list of protests](#).

Signatories (List in formation):

Librarians and Archivists with Palestine (librarianswithpalestine.org | @Librarians2Pal)

Progressive Librarians Guild (<http://www.progressivelibrariansguild.org/>)

Petition in Support of Steven Salaita

After the recent firing of Steven Salaita from the University of Illinois after posting messages critical of Israel on Twitter, many people have spoke up in his defense and several petitions have been circulated. One such petition has been started for LIS scholars and practitioners specifically, calling for a boycott against the university until Salaita is reinstated. To sign the petition, visit <http://illusionofvolition.com/lis-practitioners-and-scholars-support-steven-salaita/>.

PLG Member Wins Awards

Fred Stoss was presented with the first ever Friend of the National Library of Aruba Award by the Bibliotca Nacional Aruba for his work in Green Education in Aruba. He was also awarded the 2014 Ray Murray Award by the New York State Library Assistants Association for his efforts in promoting the roles of library assistants in New York State.

In Memory of Zoia Horn

Librarian, activist, and staunch defender of intellectual freedom Zoia Horn passed away earlier this summer. Many know of Zoia through her involvement with the trial of the Harrisburg Seven, in which she became the first known librarian to be jailed in defense of intellectual freedom.

Zoia continued to champion intellectual freedom for the duration of her life, earning many awards and accolades. For more information on her life and career, read *ZOIA! Memoirs of Zoia Horn, Battler of the Right to Know*, freely available [online](#). Issue 42 of *Progressive Librarian* is dedicated to the memory of Zoia.

Have an update you'd like to see included in next month's bulletin?

Send it to sarahbarriage@gmail.com