



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“There are writers in Germany who drink the Absolute like water; and there are books in which even the dogs make reference to the Infinite.”

-Friedrich Von Schegel,
1772-1829; from the
Columbia Encyclopedia

I spent last week at the annual conference for the Public Library Association (PLA), in Seattle. There are many such conferences: American Library Association (ALA) and California Library Association (CLA) are good examples. But PLA is unique in that it is just for public librarians. So, if you can imagine 8,000 of them in the same convention center, you'll get an idea of what it was like.

The conference began with talks by author and columnist Anna Quindlan, who spoke about her lifelong love of books, and William Gates, senior. Mr. Gates apologized for being there instead of his son but, since he was articulate, charming and funny, it didn't seem like he was substituting for anyone. He talked about the Gates Foundation and their commitment to the vision of "If you can get to the library, you can get to the Internet," which was the impetus for their program in which 47,000 computers have been installed

in 11,000 libraries. When he was talking about the importance of libraries, he told us: "You don't close hospitals during epidemics, you don't cut employment benefits during a recession and you shouldn't close libraries during hard times." Now that's support.

There were over 100 programs offered over a three-day period, so it was difficult for me to choose. It helped that some of them were held at 8:30 a.m., since I have never been described as a morning person. But that didn't eliminate many, so I had to make choices.

I ended-up with quite a variety. There was one on furnishing teen areas, one on fund-raising, one on great fiction and non-fiction for grades 5 and up. The librarian who did the book talking for the non-fiction was incredible - I wanted to read every book she described. I even went to one that was basically three wonderful poets reading their work, while we relaxed and

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listened.

But my favorite was the workshop on the program called R.E.A.D., which stands for Reading Education Assistance Dogs. I had heard about this program a few years ago and thought it sounded interesting, so I was glad to have the opportunity to find out more about it. I think there is no way to describe it so that it doesn't sound like a joke, but I'll tell you, anyway.

The R.E.A.D. program involves young children reading aloud to dogs, in a library. The dogs are therapy dogs, which means they have been trained to work with children and adults in settings like hospitals and rest homes, where they provide companionship and affection. The idea is that dogs provide a non-judgmental audience for the kids, so that they aren't embarrassed if they struggle as they read. We watched news

clips about the program, which included interviews with the children, who love the program and the dogs. It was moving to watch them carefully pronouncing their words, as they lolled against the side of a large dog or held a small one in their laps. It is a great literacy program and I hope you will be hearing more about it from me.

This week's book review is from David and the book is Kathy Reichs' *Bare Bones*. This book is “a mystery that involves tying together clues from various bones of humans, bears and a bird, with drug smuggling and exotic wildlife.” One word David would use to describe it is “methodical” and he recommends it because “the description of the work a forensic anthropologist does is fascinating.”