



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“The ALA Midwinter Meeting is convened for the primary purpose of expediting the business of the Association through sessions of its governing and administrative delegates serving on boards, committees and Council.”

-From “Midwinter Meeting Policy,” in the meeting guide

This year I attended my first ALA Midwinter Conference, held in Philadelphia. I went to participate in two committee meetings, but I was also curious to see how this conference differs from the regular annual one.

The biggest difference is that there is no lengthy schedule of programs, because midwinter really is all about meetings – hundreds of them. It is astonishing to read the daily schedule, which includes all meetings, discussion groups, special events and exhibits.

There are so many acronyms, it takes two pages to define them. The names reflect the fact that ALA is made up of members from all different kinds of libraries – special, academic, school and public. Examples include LISAN, Librarians on the Information Superhighway Advocacy Network; MAGERT, Map and Geography Round Table; and STARS, Sharing and Transforming Access to Resources Section. The two committees I’m on are

the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) School-Age Programs and Service Committee, and the National Association to Promote Library Services to the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA) mentoring and recruitment committee.

The current charge of the ALSC committee is to create a list of recent (2005-2007) memorable and worthy kindergarten through 4th grade books. We each came prepared with a sheet of suggested books and it was amazing to sit around the table with other children’s librarians discussing book after book. I was awed by the collective knowledge of our group. Like me, these women must spend a great deal of time reading the latest children’s books. As one member pointed out, you can’t afford to get behind in the reading, because you will never catch up.

The REFORMA meeting was centered around the concept of mentoring, in particular the importance of informal mentoring. This is something I

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firmly believe in – that the greatest power we have as librarians is to take the time to support and encourage people who could help make our profession more diverse.

One of the exciting aspects of midwinter is the opportunity to attend other meetings or discussion groups even if you aren't a

member. One of the ones I sat in on was the Diversity Council meeting. The Diversity Council is made up of two

representatives from various constituent groups, including: American Indian Library Association; Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association; Black Caucus of ALA; Chinese-American Librarians Association; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Round Table; and, Libraries Serving Special Populations Section. I was glad to find out that one of the ongoing tasks of this council is

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to recommend actions and initiatives that will contribute to the diversification of leadership within ALA and the profession.

I also attended a program called “White Privilege 101.” It was standing room only and with good reason. Presenter Art Munin was obviously committed to taking his re-

search findings and observations to as many people as possible and yet because of his inclusive and relaxed approach to speaking, the presen-

tation didn't feel mechanical or stale. Part of his talk covered highlights from a timeline that ran from the early 1600s to 2001. Included were 1924, the year Native Americans were granted United States citizenship and 1996, the year California's Proposition 209 was passed.

And best of all, at the end of the talk I got to shake hands with renowned civil

rights librarian and activist E.J. Josey, who sat in on the presentation. It made my day.