



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“You have been given the right to take leadership.”

-Dr. Blanche Woolls,
Professor and Director
Emerita, San Jose State
University School of
Library and Information
Science, Commencement
2006

On May 27, 2006, I walked the stage and graduated from library school. I actually received my diploma in the mail earlier this year, since my official graduation date was December 2005, but at San Jose State University graduates from the winter and spring semesters share the commencement.

I was ambivalent about participating in this event. Partly, I couldn't decide whether or not to continue my perfect record of not attending any of my graduations - I missed both my high school and my college ones. In addition, I was reluctant to spend \$80 on a gown, hood and tassel that would never be used again. However, that issue was solved when I received an email from the school saying there were free ones for anyone who could come pick them up. So I did, although it meant the hat was even odder than usual, the hood was different from everyone else's and the tassel - while the right color - said 2001 and I

never got around to buying the right one.

My other concern was with graduations themselves. Since I have three children and three stepchildren, I have attended many over the years, including high school ones, college ones and even the master's graduation of my oldest daughter. And, in general, I find them too long and forgettable. I also find them frustrating, because I wish they would offer an opportunity for people in the audience to speak up, as is done in some memorial services. Because - being a writer - I have things to say, and I'm sure others do, too. For instance, when my first daughter graduated, I wished there had been a chance to talk about what it's like to be a college student's parent. I actually wrote a letter to the president of her college, suggesting they have a parent speaker - but I doubt my suggestion was acted upon.

In my own graduation I wanted to talk about the profes-

sion of librarian. How it's changing, yet staying the same. How when I look fondly around the room at my fellow graduates, I wish I were seeing more diversity. How I was changed in the three years I attended graduate school, because I became more than a practicing librarian - I became a professional. But no one asked me to speak up and in an act of great self-control, I didn't stand up and express my opinions.

There were speakers, of course. The first was the new director of the library school, Ken Haycock. He talked about the mission and vision of the library school, and described a few of the new courses and procedures he has implemented in his brief tenure. Barbara Conrey, who is the Associate Dean of the College of Applied Sciences and Arts, followed him. Her remarks were quick and direct, and I appreciated her final words: “Merge into the

world and make your mark.”

Marsha Schnirring, the student speaker, spoke of potential, change and possibilities. She commented, too, on the fact that no one remembers what is said by graduation speakers, and I agree - without my new SJSU pen and the back of the program, I would probably not have remembered what anyone said.

Blanche Woolls was the keynote speaker. Her theme was changes, constants and trading places. Perhaps the most inspiring part of her kind and thoughtful speech was her reminder to all of us that we must protect the rights of others to have free access to information. This sentiment, above all others, received a round of applause and, for a brief moment, brought us together not as fellow students but as fellow librarians.