



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“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.”

-William Gates, senior
March 2004, Public
Library Association
conference, Seattle WA

For the third year in a row I am going to be the guest writer in an online library school class. The San Jose State University class, called “Publishing for the Library and Information Science Profession,” was one of my favorite classes and I am still honored and pleased that the instructor, Laurie Putnam, has continued to invite me.

For those of you who have never taken an online class, you may wonder how one could be a guest writer, since the class doesn’t meet in person. Instead, the students and the teacher engage in discussions, ask and answer questions and exchange documents using the Internet. Comments are posted on something called a discussion board. As the guest writer, I join this discussion board for a week and the students can ask me questions.

To get ready for the class, I reread the written interview she did with me three years ago. There were a few updates, the most impressive to me being the number of

columns I have written in the last four and a half years. At 52 a year, it comes out to about 234, which seems like a lot. It means that 234 times I have sat down at my computer and gotten to write about a topic that has caught my attention. It means that 234 times I have thought to myself: What would be a good issue this week?

When I first started writing this column I had no idea there eventually would be so many – somehow the time has gone by and week by week I have written yet one more. Getting ready for the class prompted me to go back and read some of the past columns. Since I tend to write about my interest of the moment, I was curious to see the range of topics I had covered.

I looked back at each year, starting in 2003. That year included a column about a road trip to Clarksdale, Mississippi, where I saw a dead armadillo and visited the Blues Museum, which started in a public library. In another column I

continued on page 2

talked about bibliotherapy – using books to communicate with and understand children. The Children’s Internet Protection Act was also covered, as well as the importance of intergenerational library programming.

In 2004, there was the Gettysburg National Military Park, where I got to stand on the same spot as Lincoln, and a column reminiscing about the arduous task of writing book reports when I was child. The PATRIOT Act and meeting the needs of a multicultural community were discussed as well.

2005 brought the importance of storytelling in our daily lives, the ongoing concern about unattended children in libraries, and book challenges in schools.

In 2006, there were columns about diversity, class visit thank you notes and quality children’s books. This year I have covered the American Disabilities Act, budget cuts and the importance of bringing

along books when taking a trip with children.

As I contemplate the variety of subjects, I realize it perfectly reflects the daily life of a public librarian. When a young woman recently asked me about becoming a librarian, I started by saying “It’s never boring.” It turned out that was exactly the same comment another staff member had made to her a few minutes earlier. And it’s true: there may be challenges, it may be stressful at times – as described in a column on July 27 - but I have yet to meet a librarian who is bored.