



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Our goal, as always, is to assist you in opening the eyes, ears, hearts and minds of children and young adults to the voices and cultures found throughout the Bay Area and the world beyond.”

-From “Welcome to Reading the World IX.”
Beverly Vaughn Hock,
Founder and Director,
Reading the World.

For a third year, I spent two days at the annual Reading the World conference, held at the University of San Francisco (USF). This conference includes keynote speakers, one-hour workshops and time to browse and buy a wide range of multicultural books. It is an intense experience and there was more than one time when I was so moved I had tears in my eyes.

The first speaker was the author and illustrator Ashley Bryan, who has received numerous awards, including the Coretta Scott King award and the international Arbuthnot Award for lifetime achievement. Associate Professor Darwin Henderson interviewed him on stage, and during the interview slides were shown on a huge screen behind them. This talk was the highlight of the conference for me, and I found myself regretting that I don't know shorthand – I simply couldn't write quickly enough.

When she presented Bryan with a Reading the

World award, author Alma Flor Ada called Bryan “a poet of life” and after listening to him, I agree. He gave us a brief overview of his early life, crediting his parents for being supportive of his art, telling him to pursue “what is important to you that is creative and constructive.” And everyone clapped when he said passionately: “What does the United States mean? It means people from all over the world.”

This year's theme seemed to be about encouraging children – and adults – to do what they love. As Bryan put it: “You have to follow your heart in what you love and not let anyone deter you in making it a part of your life.” In the slides we saw examples of the various media he uses, including puppets made from shells, pieces of bone and glass he finds on the beach, and gorgeous papier-mâché and beach glass stained glass windows.

In writer Joseph Bruchac's presentation, he talked

about thinking of each person as part of a circle, where everyone is the same distance from the center – yet each of us has a slightly different view. This was a wonderful continuation of the concept of supporting each other, yet, as Bruchac put it, “never mistaking your path for someone else’s.”

Using PowerPoint, Yuyi Morales gave a charming and humorous look at how a book is created. Her book *Just a Minute: A Trickster Tale and Counting Book* has won multiple awards, including the Pura Belpré, and it was fascinating to see how the characters in it evolved as she incorporated comments and suggestions from her editors. I love this book - it is a wonderful story with fantastic illustrations.

I can’t stop without mentioning Jane Yolen, who started us out on Sunday morning by talking about the way that contemporary culture can color

a story, adding in prejudice and racism. She talked about *Mary Poppins* (the book), “The Frog Prince” and even “Rumpelstiltskin,” who, she pointed out, was the only honest character in that fairy tale, since he lived up to his side of the bargain, unlike the others.

When I looked back at last year’s column, I realized every year I make the same discovery about this conference. It allows all of us - teachers, librarians, students, writers and illustrators - to step out of our everyday worlds and understand the power of our work as it shapes the hopes, morals and aspirations of the children we encounter. In a time of great change in libraries, I particularly appreciate this reminder.