At the Library

By Julie Winkelstein
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"The most important thing to remember is that when you're online in any kind of public forum, you're out in public and anyone can read whatever you post."

-From "Basic Rules of Online Safety" (www.safeteens.com/teenrules)

I haven't spent much time on the popular web site MySpace, so when I saw that BALIS (Bay Area Library and Information System) was offering a program on the subject, I was glad for the opportunity. This half-day workshop included four speakers and a wonderful selection of baked goods and fruit, as well as hot water (for tea) that didn't taste like coffee. I didn't think to ask who was responsible for the refreshments, but whether it was Berkeley Public Library – where the workshop was held – or BALIS, I'd like to officially thank them now. At 8:30 a.m., sometimes it is these small things that make a big difference.

But back to MySpace. According to the first speaker, Brian Boies, as of August 2006 there were well over 100 million accounts on MySpace, with the addition of 230,000 new ones every day. It is the most viewed web site in the United States, with 60 million monthly users.

With this many users, it is obviously challenging to police, although Boies said they have gotten better. He gave us tips for teens (and adults) who use a site like this, including putting as little information into the online profile as possible and never sharing your password. In addition, he gave us a bibliography of books, articles and web sites that have safety information parents and librarians can use to protect children. His favorite book is Larry Magid and Anne Collier's *MySpace Unraveled: A Parent's Guide to Teen Social Networking from the Directors of BlogSafety.com.*

We next heard from a trio of speakers - Sandra Stewart and Jean Herriges from San Jose Public Library, and Christine Holmes from San Jose State University. The title of their talk was "MySpace is Our Space: Why MySpace, How to Do It & What to Expect." They pointed out that teens use these social networking sites in different ways: girls to "reinforce

preexisting friendships" and boys to "flirt and make new friends." In fact, this web site is very much, as Boies had pointed out, like "a fluid constant yearbook." We were given statistics on where these teens are accessing the Internet, including 89% at home, 75% at school and 50% at the library. We saw examples of MySpace pages created by libraries, frequently with the help of local teens, and Stewart showed us step-by-step how to set up a My Space page.

There was a brief description of the difference between a "digital native" and a "digital immigrant" – the second category applying to many of the people in the room. Much as I reject any kind of blanket categorization of people, I have to admit that if a digital immigrant is someone who reads the manual, I may qualify. The point of this, though, was to emphasize to those of us who

are serving the children and teens of today that these young patrons may "think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors." I think it is a point worth keeping in mind as we provide any kind of computer or technology-based services, as long as we also remember there are going to be other areas where we will find common ground.

The attendees at this workshop included librarians from as far away as Sonoma and Palo Alto, as well as closer libraries like San Francisco, Benicia and Mill Valley. What we all have in common is the desire to make our libraries more attractive to the young people in our communities. While MySpace is only one way, knowing more about it helps us with that goal.

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