Looking Back While Leaning Forward

Nearly 2,700 librarians, exhibitors and guests brought excitement and enthusiasm to the 1975 Conference. The Big Apple never looked better! To help keep it from getting warm, a special budget crisis session was called by the Legislature. This unfortunately created some eleventh-hour program appointments. Legislators Warren Anderson, Rosemary Gunning and Leonard Stavisky had to be in Albany.

With amazing imagination, librarians found a way to get to 152 meetings in rooms which were casually marked, if at all. Once there, response was overwhelmingly positive. Virginia Hamilton drew the largest crowd, Marya Mannes the most comment, Laurence Feasal the most reaction, and Alex Haley the most reverence. A hushed audience heard him detail the painful and joyous search for his own roots, and by extension those of every black American.

Not so happy were the several hundred librarians who came to the Job Placement Office with eager expectations, punctured by grim reality. Robert Kinchen, NYLA Personnel Administration Committee

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EVERYONE SHOULD BE A YOUNG ADULT LIBRARIAN!

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Perhaps the most misunderstood service model in public libraries today is that of the young adult librarian. Started by the visionary Margaret Scoogin in New York Public and developed further by Margaret Edwards (Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore), young adult services attempt to meet the informational and enrichment needs of adolescents, specifically those related to the developmental tasks our society imposes on that age group. The most important tasks are 1) finding a personal adult identity and set of values 2) learning to relate to society at large 3) coping with school and prolonged financial dependence 4) adjusting to the idea and demands of work 5) finding a sexual identity 6) learning how to use leisure time constructively.

While “young adult” is an artificial term used to describe people whom society does not yet view as adults, but who no longer see themselves as children, the service concentrates on the early adolescent, often as young as middle school age, and attempts to introduce that person to a sampling of the wide range of options among which he or she will have to choose as an adult. The service promotes the library as an empathetic place in this decision-making process through materials, furnishings, programs, personal contact, the media, and any other viable way, so as not to lose this age group at a crucial developmental time.

The success of YA services depends primarily on the librarian responsible for it. If there is no one, or if the slotted person is not well suited temperamentally to working with teenagers, or is required to wear too many “hats” with YA given the lowest priority, or receives no administrative support, the best selected collection of materials will make little difference to the usual adolescent library community.

Although YA librarians are specialists, the interests of adolescents are so eclectic, that they could more accurately be called two-way library interpreters. With all the resources of the library and the community as their province, YA librarians interpret the library to young adults and young adults to the library. A good YA librarian is limited only by lack of imagination, training, initiative, and administrative support, and serves as an exemplary role model for all other public service areas and specialties.

It has often been whispered that if all librarians had approachable personalities, topical subject specialties related to societal needs, and human relations skills, the YA specialty would not be needed. As it now stands, that is still a service ideal in most libraries, and the soaring YA crime rate, the increasing incidence of broken homes, the continuing impersonal, violent, and fantasy-ridden experiences of television and film, and the

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