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WALE Conference: Of Sand and Polar Bears

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MARY WISE AND ZIPPY NICKERSON **WALE Conference: Of Sand and Polar Bears**

The Friday evening banquet speaker at the Thirteenth Annual Washington Association of Library Employees (WALE) Conference in Ocean Shores was Helen Thayer, a Snohomish resident whose topic was “Reach for the Sky: Make Your Dreams Come True.” She astonished attendees with the harrowing story and photos of her trek, on foot, 364 miles to the magnetic North Pole, accompanied only by Charlie, her polar-bear dog. Thayer had purchased Charlie from the Inuit before she started her journey. Scaring off polar bears was his job, and he had plenty of opportunities on this journey. One time, Charlie took off after a menacing polar bear, and Thayer thought she’d never see him again. Finally she saw a black dot coming toward her in the white snow. It was Charlie, returning, and it was a good thing he’d returned. When they’d nearly reached the pole, Thayer and Charlie were hit by a blizzard that tore up Thayer’s provisions bag. Left with hardly any food, and nearly blind from wind-blown ice, Thayer managed to keep going by hanging on to Charlie. Having nearly perished, they finally reached the pole. She said the moral of her story is that people can make their dreams come true if they want them enough, prepare well enough, and just do whatever is necessary.

The WALE conference theme was “Catch the Wave to Your Future,” but Thayer’s moral might have served just as well.

Nearly 200 library workers gathered in October 2004 in Ocean Shores for the two-day conference. Conference chair Martha Parsons and the planning committee put together a full schedule of presentations and breakout sessions.

At the opening of the conference, Washington Library Association president John Sheller asked participants to attend at least one session presenting a topic unrelated to their current fields of interest. That was easy advice to follow, given the diversity of conference offerings.

The first speaker of the conference was Michael Meines, who spoke on “Positive Selfishness—It’s All about You!” Meines is the director of the Army Medical Department’s Center of Excellence for Customer Relations. His approach to life and work is that if you are doing things that make you feel good about yourself, you will do a better job at customer service. He related how he overcame personal adversity to recover and improve his situation. He maintains a positive attitude and that could be seen in his presentation.

Jennifer Kutzik, from Colorado State University, gave Friday’s keynote address, “Finding What Floats Your Boat to Advance Your Career.” Kutzik, a founding member of the ALA Library Support Staff Interests Roundtable (LSSIRT), emphasized the importance of the attendees’ discovering their own strengths and preferences, and promoting them to enrich their own careers. Her theory is that if people can arrange their work around what they love and what they are best at doing, they will enhance the reputation of their leaders and their institution. Her personal strengths are writing, travel,



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Top left corner: Michael Meines, who spoke about “positive selfishness” to the opening session audience. **Above, top:** Conferees in the banquet room for the business breakfast. **Above:** Conferees in a caucus.



From left: Helen Thayer, sans Charlie the polar-bear dog. Ginny Rabago spoke about the enigmatic subject of copyright. Tony Wilson spoke on effectively presenting graphical information. Friday's keynote speaker Jennifer Kutzik urged conferees to arrange their work around whatever they do best.

and organization. She has worked those strengths into a successful career that changes as her strengths grow. Her final words of advice were to speak up, to be creative, to be flexible, and to be positive. She later updated conference attendees on the status of the ALA-sponsored Third Congress on Professional Education, "Focus on Library Support Staff" (COPE III).

One of the many well-attended breakout sessions was "Outreach: What It Was, What It Is, and What It Could Be." Adeline Gomez presented a brief history of public access to libraries and bookmobiles. In the computer age, bookmobiles and outreach projects are suffering from a lack of financial support that challenges even the very creative people who provide outreach services to their constituency. The presentation reminded many participants of the reasons they became interested in libraries to begin with.


Amory Peck's presentation "From Aggravation to Appreciation" focused on treating everyone with dignity and respect. She presented methods to see complaints as a gift rather than a threat by being mindful and aware of each person's unique perspective. Peck says that there is no single right or wrong way of looking at things, and that being open-minded broadens our problem-solving options. Peck's solid, common-sense style offers practical and usable alternatives to our human tendency to fall back on styles developed though comfortable habit. She says that people communicate within a framework of past experience, assumptions, attitudes, expectations, knowledge, and personal insecurity. In public service work, and especially in library work, it is very important to value people, opinions, and possibilities, thus making it possible to truly accept the statement that "a complaint is a gift."

Another topic of perpetual interest was explored in Ginny Rabago's "A Conversation about Copyright." Rabago pointed

out that copyright laws are intentionally vague, and brought forward examples showing the different ways libraries respond to copyright questions. For example, while the principle of fair use is taken for granted in academic settings, it is not as applicable in corporate environments. Rabago distributed a useful handout of bibliographic sources regarding copyright.

Cindy Cunningham, director of cataloging at Corbis, was both the luncheon speaker and a presenter in one of the breakout sessions. Her luncheon speech compared e-commerce and libraries. In her breakout presentation, Cunningham presented ways of thinking about how to expand personal employment opportunities by taking risks and finding and promoting your own unique skills to find the perfect position.

Other excellent breakout speakers covered various topics such as Web and email information, followership, job searching, continuing education, technical services, reference, intellectual freedom, diversity, and singing with children. The final featured speaker was Leslie Rule, author of *Coast to Coast Ghosts: True Stories of Hauntings Across America*. Rule (daughter of true-crime writer Ann Rule) discussed growing up in a haunted house, and her investigation of many reports of haunted places.

Attendees at the conference agreed that the speakers, the setting, and other activities helped make this year's WALE conference an enjoyable and worthwhile experience for all those who made the trek to Ocean Shores. 

INSTRUCTIONS TO CONTRIBUTORS

Alki: The Washington Library Association Journal is published three times per year (March, July, and December). Each issue centers on a theme selected by the *Alki* Editorial Committee. **Themes** of upcoming issues are announced on the WLA website and in the editor's columns. Articles should be in-depth examinations of issues of importance to Washington libraries. All works should be original. Unsolicited contributions and off-theme articles are encouraged but will be published based on the needs of specific issues. Submissions are edited. The editor and the *Alki* committee make the final decision on any submitted material. **Deadlines** for submission are January 15 for the March issue, May 15 for the July issue, and October 15 for the December issue. We prefer article text to be submitted as digital files in .doc or .rtf format. Also, we prefer that artwork be well-composed glossy black and white 35mm prints. However, we can accept some alternatives: ASCII text transmitted as an email message, in email attachments, or on a PC-formatted 3.5-inch diskette, Zip disk, or CD-ROM; and artwork transmitted as .tiff or .jpeg files of adequate resolution. Please include informative captions with artwork. We recommend that you contact the editor before submitting artwork. Artwork will be returned on request; otherwise it will not be returned. **Typical article lengths** range from one to three *Alki* pages, including artwork. A three-page article with no artwork contains about 2800 words. News items about personnel changes, professional organizations, awards, grants, elections, and facility moves or construction are included in the "Communiqué" column as space permits. **Columns** are regular features about library service or operations. Columns are typically pre-assigned to a designated person. Anyone interested in submitting material for a specific column should contact the editor. *Alki* retains electronic representation and distribution rights to its contents. *Alki* reserves the right to re-use text, photos, and artwork in subsequent issues, with notification to the submitters, if possible. Otherwise, all rights revert to the authors.