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Introduction

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Introduction



About Michele

FALL 2013 Michele Burke is a Reference Librarian at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon. A frequent guest speaker at Emporia State University's School of Library and Information Management (SLIM) classes in Portland, Burke shares her expertise with information literacy and leadership skills. She helped found the Information Literacy Advisory Group of Oregon (ILAGO), an initiative that works to expand information literacy awareness and instruction. Burke was president of the Oregon Library Association in 2012 – 2013, and was named a *Library Journal* "Mover and Shaker" in 2012.

Community is central to our image of libraries. Oregon librarians share a vision that in 2020, public, academic, school and special libraries will be an important presence in Oregon's communities and that a library will be the place its users need it to be (Vision 2020, available online at <http://tinyurl.com/l88bfkh>).

Ritual

We create community with ritual. An ask, listen, share ritual is at the heart of our professional practice. As librarians, we ritually ask how we can help, we ask what we can do better, what others are doing, and we ask what our communities need and want from us — sometimes when they may not even know themselves. How can we help you? Then we listen. We listen to our patrons, to the data, our peers, our past, our instincts and our profession. We listen to what's said and unsaid and we pay attention to the gaps. We ask, we listen, and then we respond by sharing ourselves, our expertise, resources and collections, our energy, and our enthusiasm. The ask-listen-share ritual shapes our reference interactions, collection development, and outreach initiatives and comes always from a place of compassion and deep respect for the responsibilities of stewardship and public trust.

In this issue of the *OLA Quarterly* we hear from librarians who think broadly and respond creatively to opportunities for building an important presence in their communities. These librarians and the libraries they describe add value by being what their patrons need them to be. Expanding the definition of librarianship and library, the authors describe creative practice and communities that have grown

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out of the outreach ritual of asking, listening, and sharing. We ask what our patrons need, we listen to voices from the center and the fringe, and we respond in nimble, creative, compassionate ways. Ultimately, it is the compassion that gives our actions integrity and strength. Grounded in theory? Yes. But ultimately, it is the compassionate act that creates a strong presence in the center of a community that is healthier for it.

What can I give you?

Working with undergraduates at a community college library, I'm frequently asked for help finding a source, when what the student really needs is conversation and time. The student asks for an article, but really needs a conversation about how to ask an interesting research question. The student asks for an article, but really needs the time to articulate an idea to an interested educator. As a professional, I can see beyond the limitations of the student's request, to give her the time and conversation she needs in order to construct an authentic educational experience. I'm comfortable pushing the boundaries between librarianship and other disciplines, because I'm part of a nurturing faculty community that generously shares the insider discipline knowledge needed to confidently teach toward a realization that is bigger than the task at hand. Sure, we might be working on how to open a glove compartment and unfold a road map, but ultimately, we're headed across country, and there are many possible routes. My community empowers me to be creative.

The authors in this issue of the *Quarterly* are also part of nurturing communities and they describe interesting instances of giving that ultimately strengthen their patrons' sense of belonging. Ormes gives her students playfulness, modernity, and cutting edge technology in such a way that, if not careful, might give these students the impression that government information is fun. Tran is a community daredevil, willing to take risks and contribute herself and her personality to activities that nourish the residence community she is building. Weston examines non-traditional libraries in relation to traditional notions of libraries, including thoughts from the founders of these non-traditional libraries about their relation to community. In a match-making sleight of hand, Sjoblom gives her patrons to each other.

These folks are constructing community consciousness in ways that make me think, "Wow! I want to be part of that!" They are creative and they make me smile because that's why I became a librarian. I like to be around energy that pulls people together and encourages individuals to feel part of something bigger than who they are alone--groups that make individuals stronger, energy that opens up options, and community that empowers us both collectively and autonomously. Moore's cover image conveys the cheerfulness of this community work.

A special thanks to Dre Davey, Robin Koch, Laura Moulton, Diana Fredlund and Steve Couche for talking to me about their libraries, sharing their thoughts on community, and sending such lovely photographs.

Please enjoy!
~Michele

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