

Orlando

COGNOTES CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION JUNE 23-28, 2016

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HIGHLIGHTS
Edition

ORLANDO, FL

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AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION



Jazz Touches the Soul

By Michelle Kowalsky, Rowan University, NJ

Librarians shared their appreciation of transgender teen Jazz Jennings on June 27 as they asked her questions about her experiences, read letters sent from others at home, and described their emotional reactions to her story.

"It's hard to find good friends who will love you for who you are, and who you can be comfortable with and open up to," said reality TV star Jennings, who is the recent author of *Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen* (Random House, June 2016). "It's sometimes strange when people I meet know more about me than I know about them," she said.

Jennings received audience applause when describing her strategies for helping people realize that transgender people are essentially just like everyone else and deserve to be treat-

ed equally. "Some people are still ignorant, so we must continue advocacy work so that people will learn more," Jennings explained.

Jennings recommended that the best thing librarians and educators can do is to help others to not feel alone. By offering support and respect freely to those you meet, you can help to remove fears that no one will love and accept them. Librarians can also share books with diverse characters, help to avoid repeating stereotypes, and maybe even write some new stories themselves.

When asked about her future, Jennings was encouraged by several members of the audience to continue on to college. "Reading books and watching shows on my computer immerses me in a world where nothing else matters and I can relax," said Jennings. "I will just have to keep sharing my story until we come to that point where we are accepted."

Holly Robinson Peete, RJ Peete, and Ryan Peete Share Family Life with Autism

By Sara Zettervall, Hennepin County Library

Actor Holly Robinson Peete thought she was blessed with a perfect "instant family" when she gave birth to a twin boy and girl in 1997. But she and her husband, former Detroit Lions quarterback Rodney Peete, soon faced the unexpected challenge of an autism diagnosis for their son, RJ. "We call it 'Never Day,'" she said, referring to the day of diagnosis, when she was told her son would never speak, play sports, or have meaningful relationships. Peete decided to do everything she could to help her son. On June 27, Peete, RJ, and RJ's twin sister, Ryan, took the stage as part of the ALA Auditorium Speaker Series to share some of their struggles and triumphs as a family united in autism advocacy.

One of the first steps Peete took as an advocate was cowriting a children's picture book, *My Brother Charlie*. Ryan, an elementary school student at the time, sparked the idea for the book by saying she wished other kids her age could understand more about RJ, but she hadn't been able to find a book to share in the library. Peete also found inspiration

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Reciprocal Fandom for Libraries from Hollywood

By Michelle Kowalsky, Rowan University

Movie star and children's author Jamie Lee Curtis spoke to hundreds of librarians on June 27 during the Closing Session as if they were her longtime personal friends, recounting poignant library stories and amusing reactions to events in her life. She closed the conference with a lively and candid talk about the impact of libraries in her life outside of her career in the "showoff business."

Curtis spoke effortlessly about the value of libraries from her own experience as a learner and as a parent. She explained that she creates her own personal curriculum of library materials when she becomes interested in a topic, reading nonfiction, fiction,

biographies, and primary sources, as well as viewing movies and documentaries. Her current research is on Native Americans and the American immigrant experience.

"One of my favorite errands was going to the library with my children and their wagon to pick up the maximum number of books we could check out," Curtis said. "For all of you who have ever sat with a child on your laps, sharing a storybook together, you know that the connection between you and the child as you turn the pages is one of the most beautiful aspects of being a parent," she explained.

Incoming ALA President Julie Todaro described Curtis as one of the most outspoken and consistent advocates for libraries,

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2016 ANNUAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS



Changing the World through Creativity

By Talea Anderson, Washington State University

Teen entrepreneur and activist Maya Penn spoke as part of the Auditorium Speaker Series on June 25, about her new book, *You Got This! Unleash Your Awesomeness, Find Your Path, and Change Your World*. Penn is passionate about “changing the world through creativity.” At 16, she has shown prodigious talent as a young creative and entrepreneur. Among other things, she manages her own eco-friendly fashion line, is the CEO of Maya’s Ideas, a company she started in 2008 when she was eight years old, has developed animated films, and has delivered three TED Talks, with one of these having received more than 1.3 million views online.

Penn noted that she intends *You Got This!*



to encourage others to use their creative gifts to improve the world. She reiterated the importance of giving back in her own

work – using her companies and products to advocate for girls’ rights, promote environmental protection, and empower women

and youth to be more active in computer science and STEM fields. Penn indicates that 10 – 20 percent of her own profits go to local and international charities and environmental organizations. By pursuing her creative interests and passion for activism, she has found points of synergy. For instance: her animated short films about the importance of pollinators and her line of eco-friendly sanitary pads developed for use by girls internationally.

Penn noted the impact of libraries on her life and career. She indicated that books – too many to name – have guided her in evolving her interests. Addressing the audience, she said, “You guys are like the keepers of portals to other worlds. I think that’s a super power you need to keep.” She remarked, finally, that it is an honor to participate in ongoing conversations through books – to inspire as she has been inspired by others.

Atwood Delivers Shakespeare With a Modern Twist

By Michelle Kowalsky, Rowan University, NJ

Librarians received a graduate-level crash course on interpreting Shakespeare from author Margaret Atwood during the first Auditorium Speaker session June 25. Atwood is one of several best-selling authors commissioned by the Hogarth Shakespeare Project to retell the Bard’s works in novel form, while using their own unique style and flair.

The prize-winning Atwood authored *Hag-Seed* (October 2016), a retelling of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, which is one of her favorite works. The title of her book is also a Shakespearean insult, which foreshadows some of the plot’s excitement. Atwood regaled the audience with short scenes from the book, commentary on American and Canadian politics, and humorous critique of required school curricula.

Atwood’s naturally melodic writing evolved into iambic pentameter at times during her talk, which provided another testament to her expertise and mastery of language. In response to Shakespeare purists’ natural critique of anyone trying to adapt these classic works, Atwood explained, “All interpretations of Shakespeare are slippery, just like most of his characters. ... As one of the main contributors to development of the English language, Shakespeare’s words are infinitely interpretable.”

Attendees received a galley copy of the work along with Atwood’s admonition, “No spoilers on the Internet, or else you’ll be imprisoned in the cloven pine!” This and many other literary references received a hearty chuckle from the clearly cultured audience, especially when Atwood amused them with humorous tales she witnessed as a fan of amateur and professional Shakespearean theater.

Wedding Heard ‘Round the World

by Michelle Kowalsky, Rowan University

For some couples, the same-sex marriage fight is still not over, even after getting married legally. Michael McConnell and Jack Baker, the first legally married couple in the United States, spoke about their experiences and their new memoir June 25.

McConnell grew up in Oklahoma, had lots of strong role models, and even went to a family psychologist. His decision to come out as a gay man was obvious to him and his friends, and he credits his family for giving him the courage to live honestly and be himself. McConnell’s mother said to him, “We know you are strong-willed and will do what you want,

but please do what is right.” These words would never be truer than when McConnell met his future husband, Jack Baker, at a barn party. Theirs is a love story renewed repeatedly against a lifetime of litigation.

Baker was the first openly gay college student body president in the country, who took on the military for overt discrimination and won, and who ran for city council and the Supreme Court in Minnesota. Baker and McConnell wanted to get married legally, so Baker went to law school to figure out how to do this. He discovered that Minnesota law at that time did not specify gender, so the two applied for a marriage license in 1970 and, after addressing multiple loopholes in the existing laws, were married in 1971.

This made them instant celebrities

whose lives were covered by multiple news outlets at the time of their legal union. They would become newsworthy again in 2015, when gay marriage laws were revised at the federal level. After nearly 40 years, their union was declared no longer valid, creating additional legal loopholes in which the couple became stuck. Blue Earth County, Minnesota, had improperly recorded their initial marriage license so they are still unable to either correct this problem, remarry each other, transfer assets to their spouse upon death, or claim Social Security survivor benefits. “I learned in law school that under the rule

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Thanks to the thousands of attendees who helped build the mosaic, which was donated to the Orange County Library System in Orlando, FL

GALE
CENGAGE Learning



The Library of Congress Booth stands out on the Exhibits floor.



At the Gale booth, exhibitors hosted a photo contest and encouraged ALA attendees to take a picture and contribute to a digital mosaic. No one knew what the final image would be, but everyone's smaller shots were grouped together into one bigger image. The words "Orlando Strong" with a rainbow overlay were added. The completed artwork is being donated to the Orange County (Florida) Library System.



ALA attendees pack the floor during the Exhibits Opening Reception.

Seen in the Exhibits



The Exhibits contained more than just booths with book publishing as their forte. Furnishings, financial information, the newest tech gadgets, games, computers, and software exhibitors could also be found.



Giveaways continue to be popular in the Exhibits at many booths. Attendees found preview copies, discounted books, and popular titles, posters, postcards, highlighters, and a host of other essential supplies to take or mail home.



The Maker Pavilion was a popular spot to visit. Attendees found ways to incorporate Makerspaces into their libraries without spending a lot of money by investing in people rather than equipment, building good relationships with community members who can present programs, and by creating a culture of problem-solving.