



*School librarians teach the learners of today the lessons of the past and guide them into creating the society of the future.*

## School Librarians Lead through Time

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Long, long ago, in a lifetime that seems far, far away, a ten-year-old girl lived with her mother, father, two sisters, and two brothers in a 300-square-foot house with no electricity or indoor plumbing. Evening and weekend family time consisted of gathering, cutting, and stacking firewood or hauling water from the spring at the bottom of the hill. The firewood heated both the house and the bathwater. After chores were done, the girl and her family would do homework or read books—borrowed from the library via the card-and-pocket system—by the light of kerosene lamps. Everything seemed right with the world when she was home with her family. Life was simple, but it was good.

In the not-so-distant past, a young boy, six years old, sits at a small table in the living room of a 2,400-square-foot house connecting with his teacher and classmates via a video-conferencing program. Lessons are delivered via the program, and almost all the boy's schoolwork is done via computer interactions, either with his teacher or on his own. Family time with his parents is snatched in between work meetings and schoolwork and is often centered around the use of various electronic devices. Even communications with grandparents happen by way of a video call. The family does not leave the house much as they and most people hide away from a virus that is plaguing the world for which there is no cure or proven immunity.

If this sounds like a crazy juxtaposition of historical fiction and science fiction, it should. Your experience may not be quite as drastic as mine—yes, the child in the first paragraph is me, and the child in the second paragraph is my son. But for some of you, it may be close. The past two years have been a crazy mix of past meeting the future. When I was a child, computers were still a dream far away in the future, so living in a time in which we rely on them for connections as simple as family and school is quite remarkable if we think about it.

I have been truly lucky during this pandemic. My immediate and extended family are safe (so far). My school was closed for the first three months only (March to May 2020). I am supported and valued in my position. I know the same is not true for everyone else. One thing that my past has taught me is that each new day is an experience. It is our preparation and reactions that define these experiences for us.

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When I was a child, I knew I was very different from my classmates, who spent their evenings watching TV or, if they were very lucky, playing on new video-game consoles. This often made me feel self-conscious around my peers because I didn't know about the television shows they watched, and they didn't know about the books I read. I used to wish so hard that I could be more like them. As an adult, I look back and see how that experience shaped my life by teaching me resilience, family values, and the confidence that I can survive what the universe may throw my way.

Now, as we start to move forward through—if not out of—this pandemic, I can already look back and see how this experience has shaped me and my family. There are numerous moments from this experience that I am ready to toss away, like remote schooling, closed school libraries, and the anxiety about going out to get a gallon of milk.

However, there are more than a few things I think may be worth keeping. Remember: I live in Wyoming. This pandemic may have been the push my colleagues and I needed to jump into the virtual world to connect a little more as a state library community. Being involved in AASL, I have absolutely LOVED our monthly town hall meetings, a chance to regularly meet with people who really get me. I love the creativity and sense of community that has come from artists doing classes online, authors and actors providing reading entertainment (I hope I am not the only one who tuned into Patrick Stewart's daily Shakespearean Sonnet), publishers reaching out to help us make sure our learners had access to resources, online music concerts, virtual museum tours, and so many other

amazing experiences. I even have had the opportunity to tell stories at an International Online Storytelling Festival and organize an online festival for Wyoming storytellers.

I know that for many, 2020 was hard, and 2021 sometimes seemed even harder as our society tried to stretch and find its footing in the post-pandemic world. There are absolutely growing pains. We can see this in every story we encounter about the current hot-button topics: vaccines, hospitals, healthcare workers, education, race, gender, politics, teachers, librarians, etc.

As school librarians, we must remember one of the biggest lessons we should have learned: whether our communities know it or not, we are vital to the rebuilding of society. We are the connectors, the conduits, between our learners and the human record. We light the kerosene lamps and curate online resources. School librarians teach the learners of today the lessons of the past and guide them into creating the society of the future.

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**Jennisen Lucas** (*she/her/hers*) is the 2021–2022 AASL President. She is the district librarian for Park County School District #6 in Cody, Wyoming. She earned her MLS from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2003, and earned National Board Certification for 2006–2026. She has been chair of the Wyoming School Library Interest Group and has been a member of and chaired multiple AASL committees.

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