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What Does the Future Hold?

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Would you want to know what happens in the future or would you like to go about your life without that knowledge?

For our purposes, let's ignore the whole debate about fate and are our choices really our own. We won't get into that here. But, if you're intrigued by this, there are many books, movies, TV episodes, podcasts, and other content that cover this topic in a variety of ways.

Instead, let's focus on the here and now for a moment. Is it better to know what will happen so you can prepare yourself or better to take things as they come? As someone who has suffered from anxiety most of my life, I can tell you at one time I always thought the latter was better. If I could plan for every eventuality, then it wouldn't be so bad if it occurred.

Then, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I lost out on a job I really wanted and had spent years preparing for, we got hit with a global pandemic, and my father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and dementia ... all in the same year. None of these life-altering events were something I had prepared for, because it had never even entered my consciousness that they could happen.

Through therapy and reflection, I have realized that the energy I was putting into worrying about

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what might happen made me miss out on what was happening. And all that worrying didn't really help much in the end, because the most significant events of the last few years in my life weren't even remotely on my radar.

I will also say that I wasn't prepared for or could have predicted the wonderful events either. I never would have guessed that I'd be the school librarian at a high school in my former college town, and that it would endlessly feed my soul. Hands down, best job in a school I've ever had. I never would have guessed that I'd be writing to you as the president of the American Association of School Librarians. That still doesn't

seem real, even though my term is almost over. It would have never crossed my mind that I would have friends—true friends—in school librarians I have met from across the country.

In my work with AASL and beyond, I have met many school librarians with a variety of superpowers, but is predicting the future one of them? As you read through the articles in this issue of *Knowledge Quest*, seek your own answer to this question: Are school librarians futurecasters?

In my humble opinion, we are in some respects. We watch trends and are first-adopters. We try to stay on the cutting edge so we can best serve our school communities. We reach out to and follow the work of our fellow school librarians and other education professionals. It's in our nature to ask probing questions and seek out knowledge. We like to know things and to share what we've learned.

But, can we truly know what the future will hold? The last four years have taught me that we cannot. We could not have guessed that the educational landscape would shift irrevocably due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I'm not sure we would have seen it coming that school libraries and school librarians nationwide would come under attack by organized groups and politicians. I also don't think we could have seen how much our shared struggles would bring our school librarian community together.

While our resources still do not include a crystal ball and we cannot predict everything the future holds, we are also excellent at pivoting when faced with the unpredictable. We are some of the most flexible and adaptable people in any profession. If we have to move fully online for the first time, we not only figure out how to do that for our own jobs but how to support our learners and fellow teachers. If the hard work we do, that we often view as simply just part of the job, is unexpectedly recognized with awards or accolades, we not only give gracious offers of thanks, we also share what we've learned and created with our fellow school librarians.

We are the communities we serve and are a part of. We want them to not only be successful but to thrive. And we do so by building connections with those around us. I have spent this past year focusing on the importance of building relationships through all of my work with

AASL. Every article, blog post, webinar, Town Hall, and presentation has come back to this key tenet of our profession, because that is what we know for sure will influence the future. It is the relationships and connections we make that will affect whatever outcomes we encounter.

It has been my incredible honor to give back to this profession that has given me so much. I never could have predicted this part of my journey, but I am ever so grateful that serving my fellow school librarians through AASL has been a part of it. And, no matter what the future holds, I know that relationships will be at the heart of the work I, and we, do. Because we are better when #StandingTogether.

Courtney Pentland, is the high school librarian at North Star High School in Lincoln, Nebraska. She is adjunct faculty for the University of Nebraska–Omaha School Library program and has served on the Nebraska School Librarians Association board as board member at large, president, and chapter delegate to AASL. She is the 2023–2024 AASL President. Follow her adventures on Twitter @livluvlibrary.