

CONFERENCE- GOERS ANONYMOUS

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*Hello, my name is Laura and I'm a
conference-aholic.*

(Hello, Laura.)

I started out small: the ALA Conference in New York City while I was still in graduate school. Javits was huge and the exhibit hall seemingly endless, but the people

I met didn't treat me like a fraud. Of course, with no one to really guide me, I picked up way too many brochures and catalogs and didn't grab much of the wonderful swag being offered (okay, maybe a Tootsie Roll or two). Luckily, I lived in Brooklyn and could easily drag my hundreds of pounds of dead trees home!

The next April, I went to AASL conference in Portland. I'd signed up for two preconferences, and during the lunch break I met two women I still consider friends. There were others at the sessions (Nancy Everhart, for example) that I've now had the privilege of working with professionally. Then it was on to the ALA Conference in San Francisco. Things seemed to steamroll from there. By 2001, I was on the Editorial Board of *Knowledge Quest*, and the Communications Coordinator for the Hudson Valley Library Association. I attended ALA Annual Conference in San Francisco, ALA Midwinter Meeting in New Orleans, AASL in Indianapolis, three HVLA meetings, the New York State Association of Independent Schools' annual conference for Managers of Information Technology, the Association of Independent School Librarians' 2001: A Library Space Odyssey conference (which tied in to the New England Independent School Libraries conference) and the New York City School Library System's Professional Development Day. All this was out of my own pocket. I was hooked on seeing friends from all over the country, sharing ideas and learning about new programs, new products.

Since that first conference, I've learned to always have catalogs sent back to school. To wear comfortable shoes. To pack an extra bag for all the swag (particularly the breakable stuff, like the Greenwood bobbleheads). To find an early time to meet with friends and compare conference schedules: spreading ourselves out during the sessions = more ears and eyes and less "oh, I wish I could have gone to ____." I've learned to read the program carefully and to pick and choose my

sessions so as to maximize my time with the vendors. I've gotten to know vendors and look forward to seeing them as much as I do my friends (it's not just about the swag . . . really!).

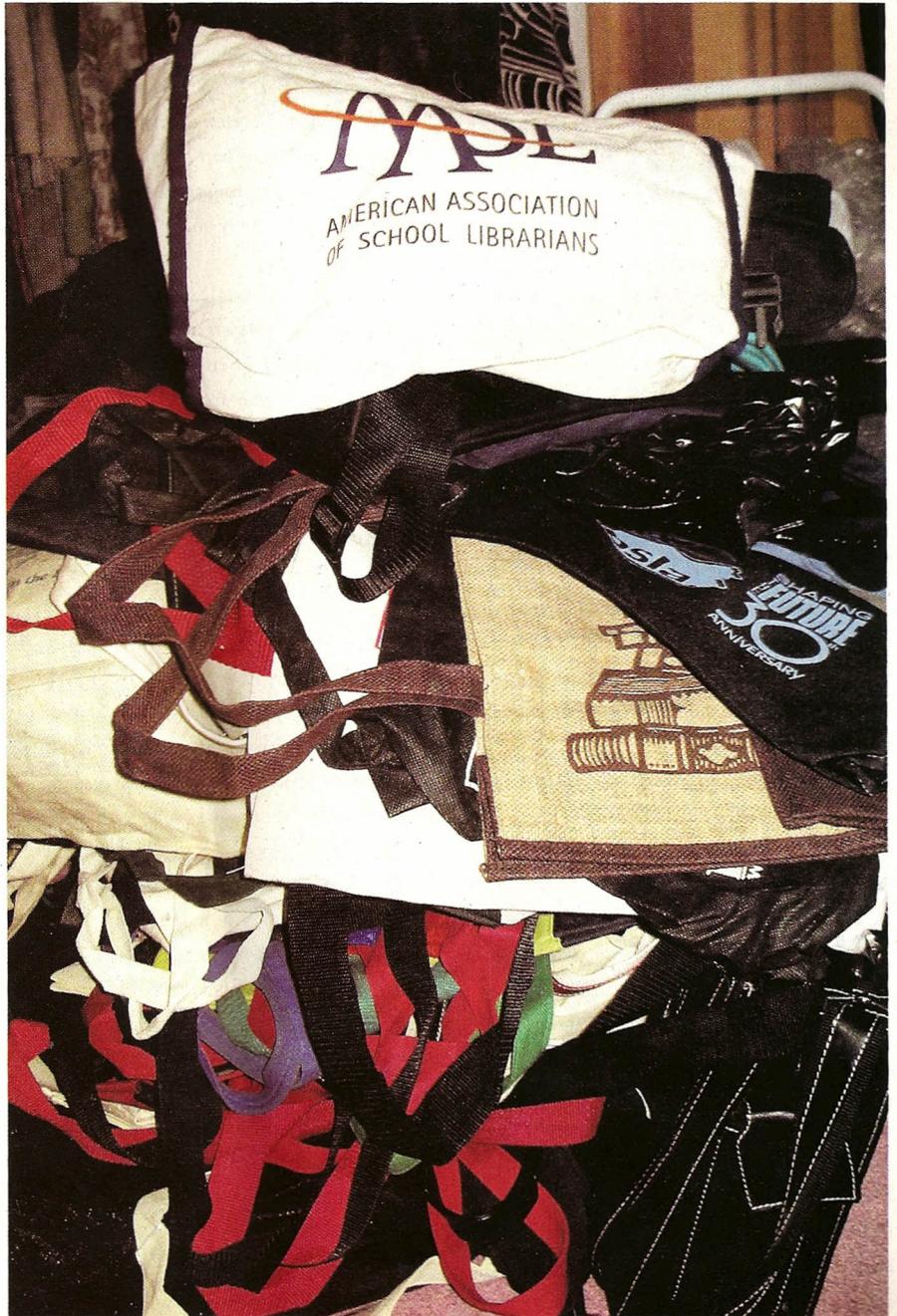
Hello, my name is Sara and I'm a conference-aholic, too.

(Hello, Sara.)

The very first library conference I went to was the New York Library Association conference at the Concord Hotel in the Catskills just north of New York City. It was eye-opening. I realized that librarians of all ages, the newbies like me at the time and especially the experienced people, were full of ideas—and fun. I made new friends (this guy making intelligent and amusing comments at the back of the room during a session introduced himself to me when it was over. “Hi, I’m Bob Berkowitz.” We’re still friends). I met my first live author, Judy Blume, and actually got to talk to her because a friend’s sister was her publisher’s rep. Hooked? Addicted!

In the school at which I spent most of my career, I was allowed to attend one professional conference a year with expenses reimbursed, but my “conference buddies” and I figured out early that we could get to more conferences if we saved a personal day to add to a weekend, shared a triple room and then saved our receipts for our taxes.

My first ALA conference was in Chicago in 1991 with my two stalwart traveling companions. Despite a few travel difficulties—like sprinting across O’Hare Airport after the shuttle was an hour late and dealing with quickly stowed posters that shifted in flight and fell on



Co-editors Sara Kelly Johns and Laura Pearle are buried underneath the pile of conference and vendor bags unearthed from closets. They can't wait to add a few more good ones!

someone’s head as the overhead bin was opened—our return flight was filled with planning: how to make the new ideas we learned apply to our programs, what books we would read next after hearing their authors speak, and what we could do next to

use technology to help our students learn better. We had listened to the people whose professional articles and books we were reading (and even met some of them!) and slipped into programs from other library specialties like public and academic

libraries. We were exhausted but knew our first ALA conference was only the beginning . . . and then I went to my first AASL conference in Indianapolis in 1993! It was like taking the portion of programs and exhibitors that related to schools at an ALA conference and multiplying it by four! Such richness, such smart people! So many ideas!

When I changed districts and traipsed to conferences with blueprints of the new libraries I was designing, got advice from the smart people who were now my friends, and took their suggestions back to my district, my new administration was sold, too. They enabled my addiction by encouraging me to enrich our school's program with what I learned. I could still only get one conference a year reimbursed, but they gave me the needed time out of school to scout for the best for Lake Placid's students and staff.

At each conference, I always make it a quest to make at least one new friend so now when I get to state conferences, ALA and especially AASL, I get to spend time with the people who are in my e-mail address book. We try not to talk shop, but the ideas flow even at parties between dancing. And at tax time, those receipts for hotels, airfare, registrations, meals, and taxis are welcome. More enabling!

(Laura and Sara)

We recognize that we are powerless in the face of this addiction. The rush of attending meetings and sessions . . . being part of a larger whole . . . previewing new products and talking with vendor friends . . . we're powerless in the face of a "conference high."

This year, we're getting our "fix" in Reno. We're going to start the conference at the storytelling festival with performers from the National Storytelling Network. It'll be an exhilarating evening of traditional and original tales—stories that we know will be funny, touching, and mysterious.

Where else could we hear thought-provoking keynotes by Daniel Pink and Omar Wasaw? We're excited to hear new ways of enlivening our library practices with programs on advocacy, assessment, collaboration, information literacy, facilities, media literacy, plagiarism, censorship, technology, and Web 2.0! Our own booktalks and collections will be energized by hearing about reading programs, promotion of reading, new books, books for boys, author visits—and authors, authors, authors! The Reno conference will have a special track in the concurrent sessions devoted to books and writing. Seven author sessions and the storytelling festival will give us information about books, reading,

and literacy that we can take to the bank . . . well, at least back to our schools.

We'll learn from experts in the field whose names will jump out at us as we skim the program and discover experts we don't know yet whose program descriptions match our school's needs or feed our never-ending need to learn.

Then we'll start "jonesing" for AASL 2009 and Charlotte, N.C.

Our bet? So will you.

Sara Kelly Johns is the Library Media Specialist at Lake Placid (N.Y.) Middle/Senior High School, the Associate Editor of AASL Community for Knowledge Quest and AASL President-Elect. Besides being a certified conference-aholic, she is also an author groupie.

Laura Pearle is the Head Librarian at Hackley School in Tarrytown, New York, which unfortunately supports her conference habit by providing professional development dollars and release time. One day she hopes to see more of a conference city than a few restaurants, the convention center and a bunch of hotels but her addiction seems to make that impossible.