Editorial

Dianne Oberg

University of Alberta, Canada

Do you remember your first contact with IASL? Do you have some particularly vivid memories of a conference or a project? Each of the articles for this special issue, celebrating the 25th Anniversary of IASL, brought to my mind many images and perspectives of IASL from over the years. I am sure that, as you read, you will be making connections that are meaningful to you.

As I read the history article, I was marking the time when I entered that history as a member of the Association. Throughout the report of the membership survey, I found myself comparing my responses to those of other members. The analysis of Association projects and programs brought to mind the development of School Libraries Worldwide. I also thought about my participation in the International Book Exhibit, each year looking for that perfect book to portray my Canada to students in another country. The future perspectives article brought me to the vision of the Association and to the many questions that we are facing about how best to achieve the goals of the Association.

Like many IASL members, I am sure, I came to the Association through a personal contact. My participation was the result of the encouragement of John Wright, who was my professor at library school at the University of Alberta and who, over the years, has been mentor, colleague, and friend. John was Conference Chairman for the 1982 conference, the 11th IASL conference but the first one to be held in Canada. John invited me to be a part of the Red Deer conference and it was the first of many IASL conferences for me. The theme of that conference, Sharing: A Challenge for All, expresses something of my own interests and connections with IASL. As I looked through the Proceedings for the 11th conference recently, I was amazed to see how many of the participants have been an important part of my professional and personal life.

Jamaica in 1985 was the first IASL conference where I presented a paper. I remember how nervous I was about speaking to an international audience; I wondered how the ideas that I was going to present about education for school librarianship in Canada would be meaningful to others who worked in very different social, cultural, and economic contexts. In my presentation, I was speaking not as a library educator, but as a school library association president and a recent library school graduate. Little did I know that a year later I would be working at a university implementing a program of the very sort I had been talking about. On the way to the conference, to avoid the
nightmarish chance of losing my luggage and my presentation materials, I put everything in my carry-on luggage, a decision I was later to regret as I sprinted through the Miami airport trying to make the connecting flight. The presentation went well, despite my fears; the local hosts were warm and welcoming, and I was able to enjoy the rest of the conference and the postconference study tour. The latter was memorable for many reasons but most of all for the friendships that began on that trip.

Professional learning made the 1987 Iceland conference particularly rewarding for me. Two papers, one from Israel and one from Scotland, helped to change some of my thinking about the nature of the research process and how it could be more meaningfully taught in schools. I remember the postconference tour for the discussions about literacy, for visits to tiny community libraries, and for the incredible landscapes. A special memory for me, because of its connections to Canada, was the memorial to the Icelandic poet Stephan G. Stephansson who lived most of his adult life only a short distance from my home.

The 1990 conference was held in a small city in northern Sweden. The conference theme, Bridging the Differences, focused on service to diverse clienteles including multicultural and immigrant groups. Although I live in a multicultural nation, a country of many immigrants, this conference opened up for me many new ideas about how countries and schools could be more welcoming to those who are different in some way from the mainstream culture. The hospitality of the Swedes was demonstrated when my travelling companion and I managed to buy a train ticket for a nonexistent itinerary. But Swedish Rail came to our rescue, with a bus ride and a cab ride with no additional cost to us, and they got us to our destination on time as well. We wondered how we might have fared in Canada in such a situation.

The hospitality to conference participants who are visitors from other countries has been an outstanding feature of every IASL conference, but what has kept me active in the Association has been the many opportunities to learn and to share what I have learned. Through participation in the Association, I have learned more about school librarianship and I have learned more about other countries. The mutual trust and respect that enhances the work of the Association comes from getting to know each other personally as we work together. And, as President Hannesdóttir points out in her article, we have much work to do. Learning and working together, we will sustain the vision.