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**Janette Derucki:** Hi, welcome to *Can't Shelve This*, the podcast where we hammer home the importance of school libraries. I'm Janette Derucki, and I'm joined by my co-host, Leah Gregory.

**Leah Gregory:** Hi, everyone.

**Janette:** And our producer, Ola Gronski.

**Ola Gronski:** Hi, everyone.

**Janette:** Happy September. So glad to be back with both of you for another episode of *Can't Shelve This*. This is going to be an exciting one. I'm really excited to talk about getting people connected and networking and all the ways that they can find support in the library community. One of the best places to do that is actually coming up, the AISLE Conference will be coming up in October. It's a great place for school librarians in Illinois to get connected with each other.

**Ola:** And with us.

**Leah:** Oh, yes.

**Janette:** Oh, yes.

**Ola:** Yeah, so we are going to be having a live podcast at AISLE. I don't know how we are allowed to do that, but [chuckles] we are going to be recording a live episode and hopefully hearing from our audience members, and they can be guests on the podcast in person.

**Leah:** I'm so excited about this.

**Janette:** I'm really excited about this, too, but I do want to make sure people know that it's going to be an audio-only episode. So if you are camera-shy, please still feel free to join us.

**Leah:** Important to know because a lot of people don't want to be on camera, so audio only. We don't know exactly, we've never done this before, so it's going to be like a little bit of a guinea pig session.

**Ola:** Trial and error, you'll be there with us as we figure out this format. [chuckles]

**Janette:** We are going to help you out a little bit with a prompt.

**Ola:** Yeah, so we want to explore the topic of a school library utopia. And so we’re going to be asking audience members to think about what is one thing that your library has or does that you think every library should have.

**Janette:** I love that. I'm hoping that people are going to share not just materials and platforms or resources that they have, but also programs and other things that they do, because a lot of school librarians are out there doing some really cool things.

**Ola:** We want to make sure that the stories that people have are attainable because when we think about a school library utopia, things would probably be far-fetched, like unlimited budgets and this and that, but what are attainable things that your colleagues have or do that maybe they can help you get started with?

**Leah:** I think we will have so many great ideas. It's just typical of librarians that they have all these great ideas, and then they're like, "Oh, well, nobody really wants to hear that," but I assure you, we do want to hear it. Somebody will take your great idea and put it in place in their library and just be absolutely thrilled with it, so please come and share because we're all better together.

**Janette:** I definitely think people have a tendency to discount the work they do every day as just routine or nothing special, but you would be surprised at how what you consider to be an everyday thing is someone else's great new idea that they can implement in their library that's going to really improve their situation. Please come and share.

**Leah:** Just look at our track record of guests on this show. Every single one of them has shared something with me that completely blew me away and made me think about how it can be done in other locations. Everybody has something to share.

**Janette:** I think it's also a great place to meet people and connect. It makes me think of situations where you're with a large group of people and they're all strangers, but you have something in common, so you kind of bond through that shared experience. Have you ever been in a situation like that?

**Leah:** Like the DMV. When you're all just stuck there?

[laughter]

**Ola:** Shared misery? Yeah.

**Janette:** It's funny how, to me, most people in that environment are open to conversation with strangers because you're all stuck there together. Occasionally, you get the death stare that's like, "Leave me alone." I'm thinking about recently I met up with a friend in Detroit, and we went on the Detroit Princess Riverboat cruise. Have you ever been on that?

**Leah:** It sounds like fun, though.

**Janette:** It was fun. It was a lunch cruise. It was like they have a little Motown show, but there's a DJ. When they don't have the Motown show while you're eating, you are listening to this DJ. He does a show, and he's calling up audience members, and he's like, "Does anybody have a birthday? Is anybody from out of town?" The woman at the table next to ours, it was her birthday. And her partner is pointing to her like, "It's her, it's her." And she’s like, "No."

My friend and I are dying laughing because we're like, we wouldn't want to go up there either. To our right, there's another table with a girl who it is also her birthday. Her partner is like, "You should go." She looks at me, and I was like, I wouldn't go. She's like, "I'm not going." Immediately, we start this conversation about getting up in front of people and crowds or whatever. It was funny, though, because then the DJ turns the tables. He lets all the people on the stage pick another person to take their place. And then they do a hula hoop contest.

It was one of those situations where you would just talk to everybody and anybody. We're talking about things on the shore, and someone was like, "Is that the distillery he was talking about?" And somebody else would answer. It didn't matter that you weren't together. So I feel like a lot of times conferences for librarians can become those same types of things. You're in a session, and the person next to you may be somebody you don't know, but you're both interested in a particular topic, and so then you kind of bond over that.

**Leah:** We were stuck in a line when we were in Europe. We went to see Windsor Castle, and we were in line to get in, and the tour guide was telling us a story. She was telling the story of Edward VII and Wallis Simpson.

We're just standing there listening because my whole family are history buffs and we knew the story. She goes, "Oh, just a minute, hold on." And apparently, two of the people in our tour group were in the wrong tour group. So she took them out of line and took off. And the people in front of us turns around and goes, "Well, what happened? Did they get married?" [laughs] We're like, "Yes, they did. He had to give up being the king, though." We were finishing the story.

Anytime you're in a line, I think that's a great place to bond with somebody that you've never met before. Then you're like, sometimes you meet really cool people and you're like, oh, here's a good one. I was in line to meet Jason Momoa.

**Ola:** That's how every great story begins.

**Leah:** We were in line, and it was a very long line, and it was about two hours of shuffling back and forth. I met this woman in front of me. We chatted the whole time. We were so excited to meet Jason Momoa. Then we're getting closer and we're getting closer and the anxiety [laughs] is building. You get your picture taken with him, which I have the famous picture where my husband is looking at his watch very sadly, when I'm standing up against Jason Momoa. [laughs] Honestly, I don't remember meeting Jason Momoa because I was so keyed up. But I get out, and you go over to wait for your picture. That woman comes running up. She's like, "Didn't he smell great?"

[laughter]

**Janette:** You're like, “I don't remember anything about this experience.”

**Leah:** Yes.

**Janette:** “The scents, the sights, the sounds, nothing.”

**Leah:** I would love to talk to her again because that was a really fun way to pass two hours. I can guarantee that the people at the AISLE Conference are going to be amazing. The more you connect with people, the more you will get out of it, so don't be afraid to strike up those forced proximity conversations.

**Janette:** I think this is a great segue into this month's episode topic. Today, we're excited to welcome two guests to the podcast to discuss professional organizations, whether you love them or hate them, and how you can get connected to your fellow librarians beyond your own library walls. Our first guest is Cyndi Robinson. She's the executive director of the Illinois Library Association. Welcome, Cyndi.

**Cyndi Robinson:** Thank you for having me today.

**Janette:** We're glad you're here. Next, we have K.C. Boyd, who you may know as the boss librarian. She's a librarian in the Washington, D.C. public school system and also was the 2022 School Library Journal School Librarian of the Year. We are so thrilled to have you here. Welcome, K.C.

**K.C. Boyd:** Thank you for having me.

**Janette:** So we like to kick things off with a little bit of an icebreaker just to get the conversation started. We're going to ask you the real hard-hitting question of what kind of reader do you consider yourself to be? Do you primarily read print books, e-books, or audiobooks?

**Cyndi:** So I used to read a lot of books, but in the last few years I've been listening to more audiobooks.

**Janette:** Yeah, that’s your preferred medium?

**Cyndi:** Yeah. I don't have a lot of time to sit down and read, so I can, like, doing laundry or working in the garden while listening.

**Leah:** Or driving. [laughs]

**Cyndi:** Exactly, yes, across our beautiful state.

**Janette:** I'm impressed by people who can listen to audiobooks while they work. I cannot do that.

**Leah:** I cannot do that either.

**Janette:** I cannot attend to those tasks. I will tune out of the whole story, and then pretty soon, people are getting married. I'm like, when did you even start dating? I don't even know what book this is. That's amazing. How about you, K.C.?

**K.C.:** I used to be a print and e-book reader. And when I moved to the DMV area and started working for the District of Columbia public school system, and had to start dealing with DMV traffic, I started really getting into audiobooks. So I'm now an audiobook lover because this traffic is horrendous here. It's the worst in the country. Recently announced the worst in the country.

**Janette:** Oh, wow. Even worse than Atlanta?

**K.C.:** It is.

**Janette:** I lived in Atlanta for a while, and let me tell you, that traffic is no joke.

**K.C.:** It was just recently announced, so I was like, yes, I agree 100%.

**Leah:** I've driven in all the worst, I've driven in LA, Manhattan, Atlanta, and the D.C . area. I have been to all the worst traffic areas. That's just another traveling milestone.

**Janette:** Your claim to fame.

**Leah:** Yeah. [laughs] I love that everybody that answers this question is committed still to reading and literature and doing what they love, but they are just adapting it. And thank God for technology that makes it possible for us to do that.

**K.C.:** Thank goodness.

**Cyndi:** Absolutely.

**Janette:** Do either of you have a favorite genre to listen to or a favorite narrator?

**K.C.:** I have a tendency to try and listen to as many books that my students are interested in, especially on the fiction side. And then second is always me, [chuckles] what I'm interested in. I'm a big romance lover.

**Leah:** Yay.

**Janette:** Yes, woohoo. You are among romance friends, let me tell you that.

**Leah:** Yes, we are big romance fans here.

**Cyndi:** I mostly listen to mysteries and horror, and history.

**Janette:** Nice, nice.

**Leah:** And I have a favorite narrator that I almost don't listen to audiobooks unless it's Julia Whelan narrating.

**Janette:** Oh, interesting.

**Leah:** I have a very strong preference for listening to her over anybody else.

**Janette:** She is good. She does good work. Let's get started by just another pretty easy question. Let's start with K.C.. I was just curious how you got into librarianship?

**K.C.:** Oh, real easy. It was my late father.

**Janette:** Really?

**K.C.:** Yeah, and actually, I am a native Chicagoan.

**Janette:** Aw.

**K.C.:** I started working for Chicago Public Schools eons ago. Before then, I was working in corporate America and hated it. My late father, who was a veteran Chicago Public Schools teacher, swooped in and he said, "Okay, look, [chuckles] you finished in college in this field, but I can see you're not happy. Why don't you go back and go into education where you can really make a difference, because you're a creative. You like to help people."

I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was like, "Okay, I could be a fourth-grade teacher." Then we started really talking more deeply. Then he's like, "You like to read. Why don't you get your degree in library information science?" Then I talked to the librarian at a school and I shadowed her for one day, and I was hooked at that point.

**Janette:** That's amazing.

**Leah:** I'm a fellow former corporate employee turned school librarian. [laughs]

**K.C.:** Yeah, yeah.

**Leah:** I felt like if I'm going to work all the rest of my life, I'm not doing this. I wanted to do something, just like you, that makes a difference.

**K.C.:** Yeah, and I was in corporate recruiting. I went from corporate recruiting into librarianship.

**Leah:** Wow.

**K.C.:** School librarianship at that.

**Janette:** That's amazing. How about you, Cyndi? How did you get started?

**Cyndi:** You know, it was just an accident. [chuckles] I graduated from Loyola in 1990, and I kind of feel like I want to work at a nonprofit, do something to make the world better. I worked at a small organization that wasn't a very good place to work. I was like, I think I want to get a new job. [chuckles] So I was at my parents' house, and they had the Sunday Tribune. Which is now this big, but it used to be that big.

**K.C.:** Yeah, I remember those days.

**Cyndi:** Yeah, andI saw this ad for the American Library Association for the Office for Intellectual Freedom. And they wanted this really specific, an app that they used. We didn't call them apps. That was the long days. I can't remember what it was called. But it was like I knew how to do it from my old job.

That's how I got the job because I knew how to use this. And we were using it to, this is when we had just started tracking banned books and calls to the library for challenges. And so that’s kind of how I ended up there, and within the first year, I was like, I found my people, and I'm going to library school. The end.

**Janette:** That's amazing. So were you at ALA before you transitioned to ILA, or did you go-

**Cyndi:** Yes.

**Janette:** -somewhere else in between? Okay.

**Cyndi:** I worked at ALA. Judith Krug was the director. She was an icon. When I told her I was going to go to library school, she was so delighted. I was there for about seven years when Bob Doyle called me up one day-- Bob Doyle, I feel like everybody should know who Bob is. Bob was one of the people that created Banned Books Week. He worked at ALA and then he came over to ILA to be the executive director.

A couple of years later, he called me up and said, "Hey, do you want a job?" [chuckles] I was like, well, that sounds interesting. I think that might be fun. Because I was getting tired of people yelling at me on the phone.

**Janette:** That does get tiresome.

**Leah:** It does.

**Cyndi:** It was, yeah. Seven years was about enough time.

**Leah:** A good example of how connections are important in library world because-

**Cyndi:** Absolutely, yes.

**Leah:** -a lot of us are where we are because of the connections that we have made.

**Janette:** Yeah, that is very true. K.C., I'm curious where you got your library degree?

**K.C.:** I earned my degree at Chicago State University, and I had some wonderful professors there that really trained me very well in school librarianship. I'm forever grateful to them, especially Dr. Gayles Evans, who still is teaching to this day.

**Janette:** Oh, that's amazing.

**K.C.:** She's in her 80s, and she's still teaching a course or two for Chicago State University. She's well known there at that school.

**Janette:** I love hearing that because their program, I believe, just got, a couple of years ago, was just re-accredited. It's really exciting times. It opens up another avenue for people to get into the profession, which is much needed, especially in the Chicagoland area.

**K.C.:** Well, we’ve long had students at Dominican that have been taking coursework at Chicago State University. That's a quiet known fact. Folks were like, "Really?" I'm like, yeah, our program was more developed than Dominican was.

**Leah:** That's good to know. Another place to refer people to. Because I'm like your former boss, who was so delighted when somebody goes into librarianship. I'm just like, yes, here, let me sign you up.

[laughter]

I just think it's important. I feel like in a state like Illinois, it's such a populous state. We have the third-largest city in the country, but we have very few schools that are accredited for librarianship. It's kind of shocking out of the number of universities we have. I feel like the more access points we have, the better off we are, especially in the Chicagoland area, just because that's where there's a large population.

**K.C.:** It’s just like that in D.C. There's a lot of library schools here in the DMV area. When I say DMV area, I'm talking about D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. There's a lot of library schools here to take advantage of.

One of the more populous ones is a Catholic, which has a strong program for school libraries, and of course, University of Maryland, which my former boss, who's now retired, he just retired, Dr. Kevin Washburn, was a professor there for a while. University of Maryland has a strong program, too.

**Janette:** That's nice. I think, too, it's worth mentioning. I did my program at Rutgers, but I live in Chicago. I did it all online. I think there's a lot more potential for that type of work, too. If you find a program that meets your needs, the opportunity is there in a lot of different attendance.

**Leah:** I did my online, out-of-state as well. I think that's the wave of the future, and library schools are obviously embracing that because many librarians get their degrees through a program like that.

**K.C.:** But how do they do cataloging? That's what I always say.

[laughter]

I had to do cataloging face-to-face. I don't understand how can you do cataloging? Dr. Jashuel Patel at Chicago State taught us cataloging, and it had to be face-to-face. I don't know how it's taught online. If you're able to do it, God bless you and your ministry. I don't know how you're able to do it, but me, and the way I learned, I had to learn cataloging face-to-face.

**Leah:** Here's a little-known fact. I almost became a cataloger because I loved it so much, and I ended up in schools. [laughs]

**K.C.:** I almost did. I almost went on that side.

**Leah:** I loved cataloging. He almost convinced me to get into cataloging.

**Janette:** And here you are. Somehow, you resisted. One of my daughters just finished her MLIS. She got her degree at Dominican, but the cataloging class she had, I believe, had a Zoom component to it. So I think that's maybe how they're handling that. It's not in person, but you still get a little bit of that face-to-face. I can imagine some of that is you need to ask questions, and someone needs to guide you. Otherwise, you can go really off the rails with cataloging if you're trying to teach yourself.

[laughter]

**Leah:** And the good thing about school librarianship is that you get to do everything. You don't have to specialize. You get to do everything as a librarian.

**Janette:** All of those skills are valuable. All of them.

**K.C.:** They definitely are.

**Janette:** So we invited you here today because you are both connected to various library professional organizations. I would love to hear more about the organizations that you're affiliated with, and then just how you got started. What was your interest in getting connected to those groups, and what do you get out of it?

**Cyndi:** So I kind of ended in the lap of ALA. [chuckles] But one of the things that I really appreciated when I moved from ALA to ILA was that I could now be on ILA committees. And I immediately, of course, joined the Intellectual Freedom Roundtable.

Over the years, I was president, I was treasurer, I've been on lots of committees, and I served two years on the Freedom to Read Foundation and other things. But the thing that I'm actually most excited about is that I'm a trustee of the LeRoy Merritt Humanitarian Fund, which supports librarians facing discrimination or being fired for supporting intellectual freedom. Intellectual freedom is the reason I went to library school. It's why I'm in this job, because it's so important to me.

**Janette:** How about you, K.C.?

**K.C.:** I got involved with the American Library Association when I was a student at Chicago State University. And the reason being is that my professor, Dr. Gayles Evans, really stressed the importance of being a member of a national organization. I was a member of a local and state, and I thought that was good enough. But she really stressed the importance of national organizations. There were a myriad of reasons. I'll be on this podcast all day explaining the reasons that she gave us during that time.

At that time, I decided to get a student membership, which was discounted, and I encourage, if you're a student listening to this podcast, take advantage of the student discount, because it's very helpful for you while you're going through school. I kept the student discount during that time. There were some times while I was in school that I couldn't afford paying for school at the time and membership.

And I didn't know at the time that I could have taken advantage of it, because I was in a different, I was working on my degree in education leadership. So it was a misunderstanding on my part. I thought that because I was working on another degree that was outside of library science, I couldn't take advantage of the student discount. I really could have at the time.

**Janette:** A student is a student is a student, right?

**K.C.:** Yeah, I missed out a couple of years while I was working on that ed leadership degree. That being said, you know, I've kept my membership with ALA during those years and attended conferences, which has always been beneficial to me. I know we're going to talk about that a little bit more. I'm really proud of the time that I've spent with ALA. Just a little back history, ALA is now going to be 150 years old next year. Founded 1876.

It's hard to believe that it's the largest and the oldest library association in this country. We've got to support it, and we've got to help fund it. And most importantly is that it's got to move into the future to help support another wave of librarians.

**Janette:** I think that's a great point to make, especially with all the challenges that we're facing right now as a profession, just in the state of the world and what's going on with our government in the United States and the funding for libraries and things like that. The American Library Association is able to leverage their numbers and their reach in order to represent us in a way that we couldn't all do individually or at a local scale, right?

**Leah:** I know in my work, because I work for the system, sometimes something will happen, and the first thing we'll say is, "What does ILA or ALA say?" We want to know what position are we taking on this. We'll often look to those two organizations. I completely agree with you.

**Cyndi:** I've had several conversations with colleagues and friends that are like, "I'm done with ALA." And I come back to them and say, do you want librarians to have a place to go to when someone is challenging books in your library? Do you want that? Then be a member. Do you care about what's happening in D.C.? The Washington office is there. Do you want that? Okay, so that's two things that you are down with. Just rejoin and be a member again.

**Janette:** Well and I think it's reassuring to me as a librarian to know that someone's got my back in a big way.

**K.C.:** Exactly.

**Janette:** Someone's going to bat for me, and I don't have to just do all the heavy lifting. Let me tell you, I have not the first idea how to lobby Congress. No clue, right?

**Leah:** Right. I love ALA’s like, “do this now.” They give you the link, and you just do it. [chuckles] I love that.

**Janette:** Yeah, all the campaigns.

**Leah:** I will fully admit that I was a lone wolf when I was a librarian, and I did not join a lot of organizations. Mostly because I was too busy doing my job, and I just kept my head down, and I was like, oh my God, I can't do one more thing. And I just want to say, do it. You need to join an organization. Being a member of these organizations has enriched not only my professional life, but just my life so much. It's so important to get connected and meet people. As Cyndi said, it's where your people are.

**Janette:** That is very true. I was going to ask K.C., if you don't mind, can you share a little bit about what your experience was like as a student member? Because I know for me, I joined also ALA and ILA both when I was a student.

But it's like I was apprehensive, or intimidated to get involved as a student because I felt like I'm just a student member. Everybody here knows more than me. What was your experience like? Did you take advantage of anything as a student, or did that come a little bit later?

**K.C.:** That came much later. I was more of an observer when I was a student member. I attended the conferences. I really enjoyed a lot of the, of course, the presentations from librarians from across the country. That's what I really benefited from. Then, of course, going on the conference floor and enjoying getting all the free stuff.

[laughter]

**Janette:** Swag, swag, swag.

**K.C.:** Also, hearing all the great speakers and everything. Those were beneficial to me because even though I was from Chicago, and I was a member of Illinois Library Association for school libraries, and at that time, Chicago Teacher Library Association. I still have access to meeting authors and so forth, and having great experiences. I had even more experiences through ALA. That's what I was benefiting from at that time.

**Janette:** That's really interesting.

**K.C.:** It hasn't been of the last 10 years that things really have done a shift in my career, where ALA has changed for me, as well as another organization that has been very supportive in the work that I've been doing.

**Janette:** How about you, Cyndi? Do you have any interesting stories about how you got connected to—I mean, you went from ALA, working for ALA, to getting involved. So maybe it seems like it was a no-brainer. Do you have any tips, maybe for people who are trying to figure out how to get started?

**Cyndi:** Yeah, you know, it can be really overwhelming. So many times, like, you can tell the people that are at ALA conference for the first time because it's sort of like, "What do I do now?"

**Leah:** Deer in the headlights look. [laughs]

**Janette:** Right.

**Cyndi:** Yes. There's so many things, so many places to be. How do you make those decisions? Obviously, I knew where I was going to fall into. So yeah, it's just visiting different groups, divisions, programs, the roundtables, see what's going on and what excites you when you see it.

**Janette:** So you mentioned divisions and roundtables and i need someone to-- This is something that me, as a student, I was like, I'm trying to figure out what's the difference between a forum and a roundtable, and a division, and can someone decode ALA for me on this podcast? Because I think a lot of people are confused about where to go.

Maybe for school librarians, it's a little more obvious because AASL brands itself as the organization or the division for school librarians. But there are a lot of different ways you can connect and get involved with ALA, right?

**K.C.:** Yeah.

**Janette:** Would anybody want to talk about any of those, like the subdivisions or the roundtables?

**K.C.:** I just stepped down with being a chair of a roundtable. [laughs]

**Janette:** Which roundtable?

**K.C.:** EMIERT..

**Janette:** Oh, nice.

**Cyndi:** Nice.

**K.C.:** The interesting thing is EMIERT is really special to me because one of the things is that EMIERT represents everything that’s multicultural. It's Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Roundtable. It is a roundtable. And it serves as a source of providing information, services, programs, for collections, for various multicultural resources for various librarians and library types, so anything, we do it, which is supportive.

One of the initiatives that they're working on right now is to start an Islamic committee, which is greatly needed. Our Jewish committee is very established, so now we want to work on an Islamic committee so we can service those libraries and librarians that have those special collections or working with students in that case that need extra support. That's one example of a roundtable.

There's other types of roundtables. There's the graphic novels roundtable, rainbow roundtable. You name it, there's a lot of different special interest roundtables that are within ALA. Then you also move on to the divisions. I belong to the American Association for School Librarians because I am a school librarian. If you were an academic librarian, you would join ACRL, or if you were a public librarian, you would join PLA. These are library groups. that are directly aligned with your specialty area.

There is a cost differential, like the cost for my membership for AASL is $65 a year. It includes access to a quarterly magazine called *Knowledge Quest*, as well as a wealth of resources that includes monthly webinars that are produced by AASL, as well as toolkits, resources to help us just do our jobs every day. Then we have a conference that takes place every two years.

Of course, we have a strong presence at the annual conference every year. We have a bank of programming for our school librarians. Like I’m explaining all the programming for AASL, it's the same for the academic librarians, the public librarians, also our special librarians. It goes on and on and on.

**Janette:** That's amazing. I'm glad you mentioned the AASL conference because we are really excited for us, especially in Illinois, because this year it's being held in St. Louis.

**K.C.:** Yes.

**Leah:** Very close to us.

**Janette:** We're hoping that a lot of our local librarians are going to be able to attend, whereas maybe they can't travel farther. It'll be my first AASL. I'm so excited. I can't wait to experience it.

**Leah:** I've been to one other one. I went to the Tampa one. I liked it, but I didn't know a lot of people there yet. I didn't know a lot of people in AASL yet. This year, I'm hoping that I'll know a lot more people because we're so close to home.

Also, I have to plug that if you are an Illinois librarian attending AASL, please reach out to me or Jessica Silva from RAILS, because we are going to host a get-together one night at AASL for Illinois librarians.

**Janette:** I think, K.C., you can be invited. You're included since you are a native Illinoisan. [laughs]

**Leah:** You are a native Illinoisan, so you can come to the meetup. I think we're going for barbecue.

**Janette:** Oh, nice.

**K.C.:** See, that's the point, is that that's how you get to know people within the association. I didn't mention this at the beginning because we started just talking and chatting, I am now on the executive board for the American Library Association.

**Janette:** Oh, wow. Congrats.

**K.C.:** I just started my three-year term. As a result of that, this is a culmination for me on many levels of just my work and volunteering, doing different things over the years with ALA. This is my 27th year working in school libraries. I haven't been working in ALA for the same length of time as I mentioned earlier. But I have been a member and participating, and doing some things off and on over the years.

For the most part, I deeply care, and I want to see the association move forward. I don't want to see anything happen to it, especially in the day and times that we are experiencing of late. I look at the young people that are in library school right now, and I want to see this organization be there for them when they exit. That's why I want to lend my voice for the next three years to make sure that it's here for them.

**Janette:** That's amazing. Congratulations. Thank you so much for stepping up to lead. We are all so much better for it. I really appreciate that.

**Leah:** Cyndi, could you tell us a little bit about forums and committees at ILA? I have to tell you a little funny because obviously, I work at the system and we're all very invested in ILA. We had an orientation for being on the committees. You had the orientation last week, and I think everybody in our building was in that meeting that day.

[laughter]

**Cyndi:** Oh, that's great.

**Leah:** You have a lot of us serving in various capacities.

**Cyndi:** That's so great. Yeah, we're so fortunate to have people from both systems and really engaged and bringing so much information. It's just wonderful. Okay. Committees and forums are different things. Committees are appointed by the incoming president, and they do the work of the association. Like public policy or advocacy, which Janette is going to be on. We have intellectual freedom.

**Leah:** That's me. [laughs]

**Cyndi:** So all of the work of the association is done by committees. Forums are focused on a topic. We have library trustees, and we have about 450 or so trustees that are members of the association. We have an academic forum, IACRL. We have young adult, children's services. I'm blanking all of them, but we have all of these different things to talk about. They're really active. We have one for new members and students. That's a good way to bring more people into the association as well.

**Janette:** Yeah, I have attended some of the new member and student forum events when I was a student. It's great because there's a lot of how-to-get-a-job sessions or exposure to different people in different career paths. Especially non-traditional career paths, and the skills that they had, and how they got to where they were. Those are really invaluable sessions for students to attend. Would you say that the forums for ILA are more like affinity groups or similar to the function of the round tables for ALA, right?

**Cyndi:** Yes.

**Janette:** So they’re around a common interest or some other commonality aside from your professional role or the library that you work in.

**Cyndi:** Right. And we, our most recent forum is the retired members.

**K.C.:** That's good.

**Cyndi:** We're still building, but we're getting out there and getting more people involved, which is great because people want to stay connected, even if it's just paying your dues every year. It's just a way to be connected with your profession.

**Janette:** I know I get a lot of questions, I can't speak for Leah, but from school librarians who are retiring, about how to stay involved with the profession. That's a common thing that I hear because I think it's hard to just walk away. You've built this network of people. You're used to being in the know and busy. I'm sure they're all enjoying a lovely retirement and all their free time, but it is hard. You don't think about that side of it when you're stepping away.

**Leah:** A lot of school librarians retire and go on to become school librarians at a different school on a part-time or a paraprofessional basis, which is a problem in Illinois because superintendents are like, "Yeah, I'll hire this person who has the professional degree and the training, but I'll pay them peanuts and take advantage of them."

**Janette:** We don't want that.

**Leah:** I see so many first retirements, second retirements, third retirements in librarianship as a whole, but especially in school librarianship. I wanted to go back for a minute to what K.C. said about the culmination of you serving on the executive board.

The other thing that I want to stress is the importance of being a leader in this profession. I think school librarians tend to say, "Well, I'm not a leader, I'm just a school librarian," but you have to be a leader. You have to be out there. You have to be promoting the profession. You have to be showing that you are the expert, that your school relies on you.

One way to do that is to lead in one of these organizations because I just happen to serve on the board of another association in our state, the Association of Illinois School Library Educators. At the end of my first year on that board, they're like, "Would you like us to acknowledge to your district that you have served in this capacity for a year?" I didn't need it because I work for an organization that obviously appreciates my expertise and values my time spent there.

But I’m like, every school librarian should say yes to that question. You need your district administrators to know that you are a valued leader in your profession and in your state, and in the national arena.

**Janette:** I do want to stress, though, too, that there's different ways to lead. It's not just your traditional picture of leadership. If you are in your school library, managing and running that, that is leadership. It doesn't have to be this, like, I ran for an office and I was elected the president or whatever. Leadership takes various forms.

**Leah:** Even just being on a committee. I would honestly put membership on your resume because there are professional standards and norms, and it’s important that people know that you know that.

**K.C.:** I have something to say about that. They don't understand. They really don't.

**Leah:** They don't.

**K.C.:** I can use this example. ALA gives the executive board members business cards. So I took a picture of my business card and I uploaded it, and sent it to my superintendent and some people underneath him, all the way down to my principal. I said, okay, letting you know, to be transparent, because they know that I speak out a lot on a national level, that I am now on the executive board with the American Library Association, but my focus and commitment will always be first to the kids of this district and my school, because I do a lot of district initiatives first." I would say less than a quarter responded.

**Janette:** Interesting.

**K.C.:** They read it. They read it, but they didn't know how to respond or how to react because they don't understand it. They don't understand the hierarchy or what leadership in library science looks like. That's really what it looks like, really what it is. So instead of taking the attitude of, oh, they don't care, they didn't

read the email. No, they read it. You still send the email. Even though you didn't get a response, you still send it because they need to know. Because, you know, I go back to 2020, when we were going through COVID, and because we weren't in a brick-and-mortar, they didn't think that school librarians were necessary. They were members of my superintendent's team that were like, "We can find a way to let these librarians go finally, and then we can use that money to pay their salaries to do this, that, and another, and use that money to pay their salaries to do something else in the budget," probably buy another program. God forbid that it did not happen that way, and we had to fight back. They learned the hard way that there were leaders all within all of us. Because we rounded up people and resources that they never heard of.

They never heard of EveryLibrary and John Chrastka, and didn't realize that EveryLibrary is a powerhouse when it comes to helping, especially school libraries, when it deals with the politics of school librarianship, and really working with local politicians. Because we got our issue on the ballot. Because ironically, 2020, that was the year it was a lot of elections. John recognized that, and so he went into full attack mode because this was election season, and this is what he does, and his team do very well, which is they know how to handle the politics side of defending libraries, where this is not our specialty.

This is an area where ALA, on the school library side, they really don't get too deep in because it deals with unions and everything. This is a touchy area. This is a real touchy area. It was helpful that we had that support from EveryLibrary to help us. We had help from ALA and EveryLibrary, and that's why we won that fight.

**Leah:** Sometimes you're forced into positions of leadership because things are happening that you don't like, and you're like, somebody should do something, and then you're like, well, I'm somebody. I think that these organizations give you a lot of support in doing that.

**K.C.:** I think it's important now with just ALA, period. ALA has got to, and they're doing it now anyway, team up with other organizations, ACLU. There's a lot of organizations that are supporting this fight when it deals with intellectual freedom. We can't do it all by ourselves. We can't. When the powers that be that are fighting against us, they see that, "Oh, not only is ALA fighting against us, we have ACLU. We also have PEN America. We also have this organization, this one." They start seeing multiple organizations that are saying the same thing.

We're in disagreement to what you're saying, and we're going to fight against you. It does send an indelible message back to that group of saying, wait a minute, maybe we need to rethink what we're saying about this issue of intellectual freedom, or book banning, or whatever the issue is. We need to rethink this and maybe come to a more sensible conclusion.

**Janette:** Yeah. And to your point about partnering with outside organizations, I think it's important. When Amanda Jones released her book, I had the privilege to hear her speak a couple different times about her battle and what she'd been going through. She made a great point that really resonated with me, and that I think about often, is that we are not good at advertising librarianship to people outside of libraries.

We speak a language that we know, and we can tell each other all the time how valuable we are and all the great work we're doing, but we've got to get better at having the greater population understand those values and how they fit into that picture. I think those other organizations are part of the key to doing that. You get involved with people who are used to connecting with social issues, and they can connect librarianship to those communities and what's happening in the world, which is really important.

**K.C.:** I agree with that 100%. I have a heavy TikTok presence. One of the things that I make a point of doing is going into areas where librarians aren't, school librarians aren't. And when I'm introduced, and sometimes they're in political areas in TikTok, very interesting in itself. And you’re like, this is a school librarian? You can hear it in their voice when they're introducing me and everything. Then when I start talking about kids, and that's always a commonplace area with everyone, which is children.

Then I start talking about the rights of kids and how our students do not need to have any type of barriers in reading because our kids generally are not reading as much as they should because they have all these competing distractions. Case in point, the cell phone and--

**Leah:** TikTok.

**Janette:** Your pocket computer.

**K.C.:** Exactly, because I got a 13-year-old nephew around here that I'm fighting with all the time. He will read, but it's almost like strangulation to get him toget the doggone phone out of his hand. So we have to make an effort. It's comfortable to stay around our librarian peers, but it's also stepping out of our comfort level to be around others that are not like us and to hold our own and then educate people about what we do.

That is just as important as anything I can say today on this podcast is that, how important it is to educate the general public about librarianship because people have formed their own opinion about us. I do not look like Aunt Bee's librarian. I have dreadlocks and tattoos and I curse. So for crying out loud, I am not your traditional librarian.

**Leah:** Yes, the old, "Oh, it must be so nice to be in a quiet room where you can read all day." [laughs]

**K.C.:** I had a new principal, two years ago, she was new. She came into my makerspace, and her eyes grew big as saucers. The noise level was deafening. She was like, "What the heck?" She was thinking it's a library, they should be quiet. The makerspace is an extension of the library, but they were working. They were arguing at the time because they were trying to figure out how to get something to work in the makerspace. They were really arguing that day. I had to prove to her that gone are the days of, "Shh, it's got to be totally quiet in here."

These kids can sit around each other and read silently with a whole lot of noise going on, and it can happen. This is a loud workspace for all kids.

**Janette:** My dad was an educator, and he used to say learning is noisy business.

**K.C.:** I always said the louder the noise, the higher the engagement.

**Janette:** I'm a very active learner. You want me to read something, sure, but I'm way more likely to remember it if I engage with it in a way that's tactile. I think a lot of kids are that way, too. That's why libraries are so great. You have things like makerspaces and learning centers, and you have that immersive experience in your learning where you can connect it to the literature, but you can also connect it to just tools, technology. All the other things that libraries provide.

It's like that battle we fight about, you're talking about the pandemic, when a lot of school librarians were replaced with, if they can just Google it, well, Google is not the same as a librarian. They're not going to teach them the same skills. You cannot replace us with computers. We're irreplaceable.

**K.C.:** That's right.

**Leah:** I do want to say about connecting with other organizations. Cyndi is aware of this, and Janette is, but in Illinois, there is no enforced requirement to have a school librarian in a school, and we're trying to change that. The school librarian organization that I belong to is very much advocating. The first thing that they did was to reach out to our organizations, like ILA and the two systems and the state library and other organizations to say, when we send an advocacy email, will you just reply to it and say this organization supports this?

That has really been effective. Those different organizations, when somebody gets an email saying you're making a bad choice, and then three other organizations, they may not have heard of one, but they've heard of some of them. I think it's very good that we have the support of all those organizations saying, yes, we agree with this. You should be doing this.

**Cyndi:** Yeah, and we are so fortunate in Illinois in so many ways. I have heard from other states where everybody is separate and doesn't work together. I love the way that we all work together. We have everybody in Illinois. All of the library types are together. We come together. We share information. We put statements out together. I love so much what we have.

**Leah:** That collaboration is amazing. Yes.

**Janette:** Yeah, not to feel like you're alone because I think there's a lot of that. I've heard from school librarians who will say, "Oh, ALA isn't going to help me. I'm a school librarian." I was like, well, there's a whole division for school librarians.

**Leah:** There is. Yes.

**Janette:** That's literally what they do is support school librarians. There's always someone to reach out to. Don't ever feel like you're alone in your struggle or whatever you're trying to achieve. Just the resource sharing alone-- A lot of people can do really great work, but maybe they struggle with the idea, coming up with how to do it. If other people are willing to share the work that they're doing, maybe you can take someone else's idea and mold it into something that works for your school, which is really, really helpful.

**K.C.:** I think about Amanda Jones, Martha Hickon, Elissa Malespina. When they were having all these problems with their communities or school districts, ALA came in and helped them. They came in and gave them guidance and supported them.

**Janette:** That's a great point.

**Leah:** I think their state organization did too.

**K.C.:** Yes. And in Malespina, I believe in her case, she lost her position. They really came in and gave her the support that was needed. I think sometimes when people make comments like that, they may not know about the support or the depths of the support that the organization, like an ALA, can provide to its members. But at the same time, it's that if you are experiencing problems and you're having these problems and you are a member, you have a right to reach out to ALA and say, I'm having a problem. You can't sit back and not say anything. You got to let somebody know, I'm experiencing a problem. It goes both ways.

**Janette:** It is hard, though, for people to take advantage of those resources, though, to step up or speak up and ask for help sometimes. Do you have any advice for anybody who might be a little more timid about asking for help when they need it?

**K.C.:** Okay, so, if this person is timid, then I suggest that they go through their state organization and maybe through their state representative, their AASL representative or state president. They can be the liaison to ALA to help support them. I don't know. I’m just a really big--I'm not going to be timid when it comes to my job. I'm just not going to allow somebody to come in and take it or just write it away with a stroke of a pen. I'm going to fight for it. I've met plenty of librarians, school librarians in particular, some of them have this trait.

I've had to admonish them and said, listen, at some point in this equation, you're going to have to make some changes. This is a hard conversation I've had with some librarians where I've walked away from the conversation, and I know behind my back, they say, "Who the hell does she think she is?" But let’s just be real about this. It's easy to complain. But at the end of the day, it's like you got to learn how to fight for some things in life. And if there's one thing you're going to have to learn how to fight for, it’s your job that you worked for.

You took time to go back to school and get your degree in library information science. That was a lot of time spent to read 125 books and report on them for kiddie lit and to learn all that stuff for cataloging. And you're just going to have somebody write it away with a stroke of a pen? Come on, let's think about that for a minute. No, you're just going to let somebody do this and you're not going to say anything, but you're going to sit back and complain? Come on, we're better than this. We're better.

The late Karen Lewis, who was the president of the Chicago Teachers Union, said this one time to me. She said, "If you don't speak up for school librarians here in Chicago, nobody else will because nobody else cares. You have to show that you care about your organization, your work group. You have to show that you care enough." And she’s right.

**Janette:** That's a great point.

**K.C.:** She was right. You have to show that you care. When people see that you care and you genuinely care about the kids, because see, the organization's going to flip it. “Oh, they're just speaking up because they want their job.” When you look at it, at the end of the day, the kids lose out. You got a group of non-reading children that can't pass a standardized test. We all know that's the name of the game these days in school education, standardized tests. We all know that there's studies that date back to the '60s about the correlation between school library stories and reading achievement.

**Janette:** Yeah, that's not something that's debated, right? Everybody accepts that as fact.

**Leah:** It's a fact.

**K.C.:** There's plenty of studies, PhD studies since the '60s. Come on now, let's give this some deep thought.

**Leah:** All of those people who are a little bit timid about speaking out, I think that's where these organizations can really help you, because it does help to have somebody behind you.

**Janette:** Even if you're just somebody who's caught up in the emotion of it, right? Losing your job is an emotional thing. That's hard. It's rejection. You're grieving the loss of something. You might feel like you're floundering in a way that you don't know how to proceed. So even if you want to get started, sometimes you don't know where to start. I think that's a great point. Here's where you start.

**K.C.:** And I’ve heard this too, well, I feel like I'm going to be retaliated against. Okay, retaliation or you're going to lose your job. Let's think this through.

**Janette:** But also, isn't that where your union can also help you a bit, right? There's people who can step up and help protect you.

**K.C.:** And I’ve heard this, “the union doesn't do anything for me.” Hello, don't you pay dues? This is part of your membership. They work for you. I'm just saying.

**Janette:** The one last thing I want to ask you before we move into our final segment is you're both leaders in our field. We talk a lot about school librarians developing those skills. We already talked about it a little bit earlier in this episode. So I’m wondering, do you have any final words of advice or recommendations, encouragement for school librarians who are looking to develop leadership skills? Is it get involved in a training? Is it read a book? Whatever advice you might have. I don't think you can learn how to be a leader from reading a book. What words of advice might you have?

**Leah:** I would say get involved. Just start out by getting involved. That's my two cents on that. [laughs]

**Cyndi:** Yeah, absolutely. Connecting. In Illinois, we're fortunate to have AISLE, which is very strong. Find your association and join. Wait a while before you're ready to reach out. Get engaged.

**Leah:** Even if you just join to be on the forums, you don't have to join a committee right away. You don't have to take a leadership role right away. But at least the other big thing that these organizations do is they will keep you informed.

**K.C.:** I agree to everything that has been said so far. Committee work is really important because, really, that's where you can meet your strong leaders. And I strongly recommend that when you're around strong leaders, just close your mouth and listen.

**Janette:** That's a great piece of advice.

**K.C.:** Strong leaders will mess up. They'll misstep. And don’t ridicule them for that because they're human. They'll make mistakes. A good leader will make a mistake. Understand that. So be easy. Be forgiving. Be understanding when they do make a mistake. But look at the bigger picture, they have a skill set that is admirable, that you would want to learn from and also possess. Understand that sometimes people do make mistakes. The last thing I will say is that don't be hesitant to ask someone if they wouldn't mind mentoring you if they have the time. That's the thing.

Maybe do a check-in, or just, do you mind if I have a 10-minute Zoom call, 15-minute Zoom call with you to talk about one issue, just to get your viewpoint about it? To see where your mind is on this particular topic. It could be something that's in the news or something that's a prevalent topic in library information science that is really impacting school librarians. That's what I would say.

**Janette:** That mentor-mentee relationship is important. I've heard a number of people talk about how important and integral that has been into their own success in their careers as school librarians. That's a great piece of advice.

**K.C.:** And then follow people online.

**Leah:** That's a big one. Yep. Your personal learning network. Build and grow your personal learning network.

**K.C.:** The school librarians have left Twitter for the most part, and they're now on Bluesky. You can get on Bluesky and search for them. There are some that are on Threads, but they're more so on Bluesky. Then there is a group that's on Instagram and also on TikTok. I strongly recommend that you follow them. A lot of the leaders, they do post a lot, and they're sharing some things that they're experiencing, and that's how you can learn.

**Janette:** Absolutely. I love Bluesky, too, as a platform. That community there has been really great and very welcoming. I would not hesitate to join that if you're someone who's usually pretty reluctant to get involved on social media. It's been, so far, knock on all the wood, not a super toxic platform. So that’s been great.

**K.C.:** Some of the school librarians, it still baffles me to this day. I don't do social media. I'm like, girl, if you don't stop,--

**Leah:** You're missing out on half of the stuff that you need to know. Sadly.

**K.C.:** You don't have to post. You can get an account, just put two or three posts up, and then you can just follow people and read. That's all you got to do.

**Janette:** See, John Scalzi talk about his cat all the time. That's always great.

**Leah:** I just want to reiterate, people who know me through work will find this surprising, but I am truly an introvert. If you know me, though, she never shuts up. How can she be an introvert? But I was very reluctant to join a lot of these committees. Then I got the job that I have now, and they're like, "Well, you need to do this, you need to do this." I cannot tell you the difference it's made to my life. Just so many great people that I've met, and so I don’t feel like--when you're the school librarian with your head down doing the job, and it feels like nobody understands you, just that community.

Even if you never step up to a leadership position, just that community of someplace you can go and be like, these people get what it is like to be a school librarian. Because English teachers have other English teachers and social studies teachers, and even the PE teacher is usually a group of people. There was just me. I got adopted in my school by the exploratory team, so I was with the Spanish teacher and the art teacher and the music teachers, so I was adopted. You won't always get adopted by groups in your school, so you may have to find your own group. I urge you to do it.

**K.C.:** You know what I do? This can go if you're in a district with a lot of librarians, or if you are not. You can find another librarian that has, even from another district, that has a schedule that's similar to yours. Have a Google Meet relationship, and you could call each other just like you would call each other on the phone. Even though I don't have a librarian or an aide in my school that works with me, if I'm feeling a certain kind of way about something that's happened, I call Ebony in a minute, and I know she'll pick up.

I'm like, girl, let me tell you what just happened here. Because sometimes you need that person to talk with right then and there.

**Leah:** Talk me down from this ledge.

**Janette:** Yeah, talk me down from the ledge.

**K.C.:** You can use Google Meet and have a conversation with this person. You're not alone. You don't have anyone physically there in the building with you, but you can talk. The technology gives us the person to talk to. If you don't want to do Google Meet, you can talk to them through FaceTime, or you can talk to them just on the cell phone. Don't feel like you're alone. There's someone you can talk to, for crying out loud.

**Janette:** Absolutely. That's a great message. That is also a good segue into the last segment we have, which we like to call shelf care. This is where we acknowledge that doing the work of librarianship is hard. We all have to take care of ourselves. I just wanted to hear from the two of you what you're doing to take care of yourselves when things get a little tough.

**Cyndi:** To quote Bill Veeck, there are only two seasons, winter and baseball. [laughter] We are currently in baseball, which is what I can go to and watch a game and be relaxed. Win or lose, I don't care. I just want to watch baseball, and I feel better.

**Janette:** That's amazing. I love that. That's how I feel about hockey. In our house, we have three seasons, baseball, hockey, and everything else. How about you, K.C.?

**K.C.:** I'm in the season of telling people no, not saying yes to a lot of things. I'm finding a lot of peace in that. I do a lot of crafting at home, making things, and also doing, not clothing sewing, craft sewing, which is very different. If you're a sewer, you know craft sewing. That brings a lot of happiness and peace to me because I need the escape.

**Leah:** I do a lot of crafting because I need something to force my brain to stop thinking about whatever it is, I have to think about something else.

**Janette:** Do either of you have anything you'd like to promote? K.C., you mentioned a TikTok.

**K.C.:** You can find me, @bosslibrarian, on TikTok and Bluesky. That's where I have public accounts, and I do a lot of posting, and you can follow me there.

**Janette:** How about you, Cyndi? Anything you would like to promote or share?

**Leah:** Not anything big coming up, is there, Cyndi?

**Cyndi:** We have this conference coming up soon.

**Janette:** It's kind of a thing.

**Cyndi:** Yes, and I think it's the week after the AISLE conference, so we're going to have two. It's going to be great.

**Leah:** And AASL falls in there, too, so that is going to be--

**Cyndi:** That's right.

**Janette:** It's like a giant school library conference sandwich, is what it is.

**Leah:** Yes, it is.

**Janette:** The AISLE conference, and then the ILA Annual Conference is the 14th through 16th, and then that runs right into the kickoff for AASL in St. Louis. I know there's a number of us who are driving from Chicago to St. Louis on that Thursday to take advantage, so it's going to be a fun time. Well, thank you again, both of you, for joining us and for sharing all your insight and information. I really appreciate it. It's been great talking with you.

To our listeners, thanks for joining us, and let us know if you have any questions or topic ideas that you'd like us to cover on future episodes. As always, you can leave us a voicemail on our hotline, which is 630-734-5015. Until next time, stay legit and don't quit.

**[01:06:13] [END OF AUDIO]**