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

Leah Gregory: Hi everyone.

Janette: And our producer Ola Gronski.

Ola Gronski: Hello.

Janette: It's great to see both of you, as always. How have you both been?

Ola: Surviving.

Leah: Busy and cold pretty much sums it up.

Janette: Busy and cold. It sounds like winter in the Midwest.

Leah: Yes.

Janette: Okay. But we're in the month of love, so hopefully you're also feeling the love?

Leah: I do love Valentine's Day. And I don't know why. I think it's because it's like pretty, pink, and hearts and lace and flowers and all that stuff. But as far as, like, romance in our house, that's like long dead since we've been married, like, forever.

Janette: I don't want to say ours is dead, but we are definitely, like, nontraditional gift people, like.

Leah: Yes, so are we.

Janette: I don't want flowers. I don't want chocolate. You better either give me something like just unique or just don't give me anything at all. Like, it's fine.

Leah: We have a tradition where we get the heart-shaped pizza in my family, and it's like, it's mostly for my son. He's the one that wants to keep that tradition going. But.

Janette: I love that so much.

Ola: That and the heart-shaped pastas.

Janette: Oh, yeah.

Ola: Any sort of like seasonal-themed pasta shape, I am here for.

Janette: I think one of my favorite things about this month is just like how it kind of brings people together. I know we make it a lot about romantic love, but I love the connections between people. And so, like I, you know, on social media, I just saw a woman sharing a post from her granddaughter's kindergarten class where they're looking to get Valentines from around the world and do a little mapping project. And I kind of really love the message that that sends, like how to connect people.

Ola: I do miss in school, those like themed Valentine's cards.

Janette: Like the ones in the little box?

Ola: Like, we need to go back to that. Yeah, like, give me that, give me some [..]

Leah: Marvel or whatever you love the most.

Ola: Because it also says a lot about the person's personality, about which like theme they pick, so.

Janette: That’s true. What was your favorite theme? What did you always pick?

Ola: My God, that's actually a great question.

Janette: I mean, it was way different when we were growing up because it was, you know, like the seventies, eighties. So.

Ola: Wait, truly, I have no memory.

Janette: I feel like today they would all be like Bluey or [..]

Ola: Oh, they've got to be Bluey.

Janette: Right.

Leah: Paw Patrol.

Ola: Yeah, yeah, things like that.

Janette: I do love those little valentines. Like getting them ready.

Ola: I expect one on my desk now, Janette, from you.

Janette: I'll do my best. I was that mom who, like we would do the, like little box valentines. But then it was always like or like a sucker turned into a heart or, you know, those kinds of things. So I liked crafty Valentines.

Ola: Are you candy heart message people? I feel like those are divisive. They're like candy corn, right. Like where you either hate them or you love them.

Leah: I like how they look. They're very cute, but I don't eat them. They taste like chalk to me.

Ola: I was going to say chalk. Yeah.

Janette: No, I love them. Okay, so.

Ola: Really?

Janette: Yes. Okay, this is I guess where we're going to agree to disagree because like candy corn? No, that tastes like wax. Wow. But, candy hearts, like the original, like the ones in the pink little box that do taste like chalk, I don't know why I love those. I do. I don't like the Brachs, the ones that are kind of, like, hard and tart. Like, I don't like those.

Leah: My husband always made, like, very creative valentines for my kids. Like editing and photoshopping them. Like my daughter once sent one out where it was her sitting on, like it was in the sky and she was on a bank of heart shaped clouds.

Ola: Oh my god.

Janette: Aw, I love that. That's so cute.

Leah: And they usually featured a pet, one of the dogs or the cats or something. So. I also liked to always put, you know, like treats with their name on it, but it's getting harder. I was just reading, I follow this website like talking about baby names and it was like, it's really, really hard to get everybody's name right anymore.

Ola: Yeah, that’s true.

Janette: We used to get lists. I mean, without the list, like, forget it, we would have gotten them all wrong. So, thank you for the lists. Okay, so we have to like, definitely talk about romance books, right, because we are a group of romance stans like this is our thing. Well, at least Leah and I, I don't know. I'm bringing Ola in by default. She has no choice. So do you have any favorites that you want to talk about?

Ola: I am a, not so much like a traditional, like Harlequin Romance reader, but I do love, my ideal romance novel is like a rom com in a book, right? I want to laugh, I want to be emotionally destroyed. I want there to be some, you know, hot romantic moments. But I feel like for me, a good romance book is one that, like, makes me weep. Is that so sad?

Janette: No, I do get it.

Ola: Like, I just want to feel so strongly.

Leah: No, that’s the ones I love. Like, Emily Henry. I never read one of her romances without crying my eyes out. Kristan Higgins. Are you guys a fan of her? Oh my gosh. I haven’t read her.

Ola: Emily Henry Book Lovers was like the first romance that I absolutely devoured and I was like, this is how they should all be. Because it was, yes, about like, that romantic love. But it was about, like, the main character finding herself and what she wanted in life. And I don't know, I just love, I love when they feel real, you know?

Janette: I like that a little bit. But I also read to escape. So, like, sometimes too much realism is like a little bit too much, right? I once read a romance book that it was, I mean, more contemporary romance. And like, to me the book was wrapped up. They had gone through all their trials, tribulations. They were together, they were happy. And then at the end, the author kills one of the main couple. Like he just dies.

Ola: That’s rough.

Janette: And I was like, yeah, that was, talk about emotionally distraught. Like I almost couldn't finish it. I was like, there's only 5% of this book left, like she's not going to meet someone else.

Leah: She’s not going to be able to fix this.

Janette: Like, this is not going to happen. So yeah, I mean, but part of it was setting it up for I think there was a spinoff series, which I did not read because I was so like just distraught over that. But Leah and I talk a lot about how growing up we didn't have young adult books the way that they are now, right? So like you went from middle grade to adult books and so I jumped kind of right into historical romance was a lot of what my mom read. She either was reading mystery or that. So she didn't want to give me all the death and dying and crime. She gave me historical romance, probably at 13. Wasn't really ready for that, but I learned a lot very fast. But so I do really like historical books in general, but I tend to really gravitate a lot to stories that have romantic elements but maybe aren't romances. Like I know Leah and I both read The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue by V.E. Schwab, which is a really great book. Has a romance plot line.

Leah: It's not a romance.

Janette: It’s not a romance. There's not a happy ending.

Leah: But it has romance.

Janette: Yes, but it's like the love story in it is just so good and heart-wrenching, but also like at the end you are kind of like, distraught. I mean, honestly, Ola you need to read it.

Leah: The one I just finished, it's called Listen for the Lie by Amy Tintera, and this combines all my favorite things. It's about a woman whose best friend was killed and she was kind of suspected to be the main suspect in it, but there was no evidence to prosecute her. But she does not remember the event. She does not remember anything that happened. So she's trying to, like she's moved away from her hometown. She's trying to fly under the radar. And then somebody starts a true crime podcast about her and the death of her best friend.

Ola: This sounds right up my alley.

Leah: And there is a romance. And it's one of those things I'm like, is this seriously, is there going to be like a little romance here? And there was a little romance here. And the whole time you're thinking, I don't think that these two should be getting together because it seems like it's not going to work out.

Janette: Sometimes it's a toxic romance, Leah.

Leah: It wasn’t quite toxic, but it was a little inappropriate maybe. I don't want to say too much, but it did work out satisfactorily to me.

Janette: So if we're going to talk about romance, we have to talk about tropes, right? Like, do you have a favorite romance trope?

Ola: Fake dating, always.

Janette: Oh, I love the fake dating.

Ola: Fake dating is my favorite.

Leah: I love the like, hire an escort to bring them home so your family will leave you alone. I love that one.

Janette: Fake dating is probably my favorite. Second favorite, forced proximity. I feel like, but I feel like almost [..]

Ola: Like a just one bed type of scenario?

Janette: Or like, yeah, forced to share an apartment with someone and then you meet their brother kind of situation or like, you know, whatever, you work together, those types of things. Like, maybe that is one of the parts that translates to real life, because I do feel like some of that works in real life. Some of it doesn't work so well.

Leah: I love it when a couple hates each other at the beginning.

Ola: Because it’s that passion.

Leah: Yeah.

Janette: So I know we've talked before about The Most Wonderful Crime of the Year by Ally Carter, and I think that's one of the things I loved about that, is that they are adversaries at the beginning and then they spend time together working on this mystery. And then that's kind of what does. I mean, okay, let's be real. He's very into her from the beginning, I think, but.

Leah: It's obvious. But yeah.

Janette: She's oblivious, which is also what makes that storyline work.

Leah: I just read an advanced copy of Totally and Completely Fine by Elissa Sussman. I loved that. The other thing I love about romances is I love it when it's set in a common area. So and then there's like three or four books that you get out of it because they have to go back to like the main character’s best friends and brothers and sisters and stuff. So that was a follow up but it was the main character in that book’s sister. It was her turn to find true love.

Janette: Everybody deserves a turn to find true love. Come on. And I will say I have a pet peeve. My sister calls me a serial reader like I do love to read a good series, but I do have a pet peeve where every side character does not need their own story. Like sometimes a supporting character is just there to support, but you know, like. So if you've ever read a spinoff book or a subsequent book where they're writing this story about a character who deserves, I mean, I do believe everyone deserves love, but sometimes their love story is not that exciting. You're like, they're just not that interesting.

Leah: So do you guys know Suzanne Brockmann?

Janette: Yeah.

Leah: You know the Troubleshooter series?

Janette: I mean, I don't know know her, but I’ve read her books.

Ola: Do you know her personally, Janette?

Janette: Right.

Leah: She has written a series and it's a long series. It's like 18 books or something, maybe more, called The Troubleshooters series. And it's about like this elite group of bodyguards, and it sounds ridiculous, I know when I'm talking about it, but they are really good and really well written and they’re romance and they're like romantic suspense. So there's like [..]

Janette: I love that. I love romantic suspense.

Ola: Yeah.

Leah: You'd love it. But like, through the books, all the stories are intertwined because they work together and it's always like high stakes, like the FBI is involved and the Troubleshooters are linked with the Navy SEALs team, which is the other reason I love it because I love a good Navy SEAL.

Janette: Military, yeah, military theme is always good.

Leah: So the problem with this thing is that she's, the series is, she's quit writing. But there is one very deserving character that has not gotten his happy ever after yet. And I am really salty about it.

Janette: I'm just thinking, I mean, okay, so there are some times that they're worthy. I will give you that. And like you're dying to know, but you just will never have that closure. But like there are some author’s fandoms that you see on social media, like people are like, aw, what about the guy leaning against the wall at the bar? And I'm like, he doesn't need a story.

Ola: You're like, you don't even know his name.

Janette: Right? Can you tell me what he looked like? Like, I don't even know what he looked like. It was dark in there, so, yeah. I don't think everybody needs a story. But I do love a series, especially when they work together. And I do like a lot of authors now do write like a more of a universe as opposed to just like a singular series where a lot of their characters will like go to the other town where the next series takes place and you'll see like cameos and things like that. I'm a sucker for those Easter eggs.

Leah: Are you a fan of Emily Giffin? Have you read any of hers?

Janette: No.

Leah: Okay. So she's a very interesting author because she writes from the point of view and you find yourself sympathizing with people that you would not sympathize with.

Janette: Oh, I love that.

Leah: Her first book that I read was called Something Borrowed, and it's about two best friends where the friendship is kind of toxic and the good girlfriend ends up basically stealing her fiancé. And so, like the whole time, you're like, of course you would not condone that. But is she is right?

Janette: Yeah.

Leah: You start to realize that it's not all just black and white. So then she wrote Something Blue, which is the follow-up. And they're both romances. They have romance in it. But then I was reading some others of her and they're like, in the same universe. So it's like they may know each other, you know, they don't feature it prominently, but the other characters may wander in and out.

Janette: Yeah, I love that. And I love, like when the places are familiar, like you already know things about like the park or the, you know what I mean, who works at the hospital.

Leah: Or the bar they often go to.

Janette: Yeah. Or whatever. The places are the same. And you're like, it feels familiar. It's like putting on an old pair of jeans, kind of. That's that feeling, I love that. Books are great. It's a great way to transition to our episode for this month.

This month's episode we're calling a Love Letter to Libraries, and it's all about library joy.

And we're really excited to share some amazing ways that school libraries and librarians are experiencing joy every day in their profession. But we're also extra excited to welcome a special guest to the podcast that we think you might recognize. We would like extend a warm welcome to the podcast librarian and TikTok star Mychal Threets.

Mychal Threets: Hello. Hello. Thank you for having me.

Janette: Thanks for being here, Mychal. So can you just get us started by just telling us a little bit about yourself?

Mychal: Yes. Yeah. My name is Mychal Threets. Some people just refer to me as the librarian or library guy. I always love when people kind of forget that I have an actual name. I've been, I was a library worker for a little, for close to 11 years. I started as a library shelver and worked my way up to supervising librarian. I was basically raised in the library as a homeschool kid, as a library kid, and a PBS kid. Got my library card at the age of five. So I'm very happy that in 2025, I will celebrate three decades of having a library card. I think that's the biggest achievement of my life.

Janette: That’s awesome, yes.

Mychal: I share stories of library kids, library grownups, library people, library joy, and I talk about mental health and literacy in hopes that people will know they belong in books, they belong in libraries, in the world, just as they are. And a lot of people, for whatever reason, have been kind enough to listen to me talk obsessively about those things. And I think in a nutshell, that's who I am. I'm a regular human being. I'm a mentally ill person, but I'm also a librarian who loves stories, who loves learning about people and is just trying to hope that people see a little bit of the joy that's in the world, even amongst all the misery, and that they decide to stick around for another 24 hours and keep it going day after day, month after month, year after year.

Janette: That's amazing. I love that. I love that you're willing to do that work. It's very important, especially in the library space, I think.

Mychal: I agree. I never realized what was going to happen for me. Again, I grew up in libraries in the nineties. Never saw a person who looked like myself behind the library, let alone people of color. Didn't see any men behind library desks. As much as I was in the library, checking out all the books, trying to read every single book in the children's section, it never dawned on me that it could be a possible career. And I'm glad that I kind of stumbled into it. And I'm honored to do the work because of all of the other wonderful librarians and library workers that are out there.

Janette: That's amazing. We talk a lot about the fact that, like the pipeline to librarianship is not one that people know about. Like I wish I would have realized that that was a career I could have done earlier. I think I would have joined this profession a lot sooner.

Leah: And I think that that's the reason why we fight so much to keep libraries open and to keep school libraries open because they don't know it's a job if they never see it. So kids can't grow up and dream of being a librarian if they've never seen it.

Janette: Also like, especially in schools, like you have that whole like place thing that you're fighting where you think your teachers live at school. So you think the librarian just stays at the library all the time. Like, you don't really think of them as being a person outside of that space. So it's a challenge.

So I discovered you on Instagram. I'm going to be honest, like not on TikTok. I'd found you on TikTok after that. But I'm curious to know how you got started on social media and how you amassed your big following. Like, I mean, you're doing great work, so it's obvious why people would gravitate toward your feed and your channel. So I'm just curious how you got started and what kind of drove you to create that type of content?

Mychal: Yeah, you know what, I always love finding out where people have found me in my chronically online state of being. Because I am everywhere. I'm on TikTok, I'm on Instagram, I'm on Facebook, I'm on Blue Sky, I'm on Threads. I think the only thing that I’m really not on too much is YouTube. So I love that library kids always just, call social media YouTube and I have to tell them that's actually the one platform I'm not really on. I'm trying, but I haven't gotten there quite yet. You know, I think I've always loved social media since I was a teenager. I didn't grow up with social media. I think it came about when I was probably 13 or 14. Truly, with MySpace, was kind of like my first, that I became a big fan of social media, and just because I was a very shy kid. I had a host of mental illnesses that I didn't realize were there at the time. I didn't realize I had anxiety attacks, panic attacks, and depression as a kid and as a teenager. So discovering social media was a way for me to make friends in an easier way. I was still being myself, but I was able to kind of like talk a little bit more because of social anxiety. It's a bit easier to manage in the Internet spaces. So I love social media. I think that's honestly what led to me sharing things on social media, just sort of like, this is what I know, this is where people are, this is where my people are.

And I just started doing it on Facebook when I first became a children's librarian. I heard so many zany things at the library. Kids were saying to me at storytime, at the schools, being their silly, brutally honest selves, being their walking embodiment of all of our intrusive thoughts. And I was like this happens every day these kids are too much. I can't be the only one who knows about this. And I just started sharing it on Facebook. And my friends, my friends and family were like, this happens all the time? I'm like, every single day I get roasted by library kids all the time. They tell me secrets from their library grownups that they're not supposed to tell me. And people loved it. I love sharing it.

And then I think when the pandemic hit and I had shifted from being children's librarian to being a marketing librarian, the pandemic was very much in effect. So people didn't realize that libraries were open. They didn't realize that we were starting to have more and more special collections. We were adding the Library of Things and TikTok had become a thing. So I was like, you know what? The youths of the world, the people younger than me, they're on social media, they're the people that we’re trying to get into libraries. Maybe I can use TikTok to reach them. And I just started talking about everything that the library has to offer. I mentioned our musical instrument collections, video game collections, to the dismay of the library grownups. Talking about our huge manga collections, all those things. And I thought maybe, if we were lucky, maybe 100 people would get more library cards, maybe, a thousand people was viral to me when I first started, would be like, libraries, library cards. And to my surprise, people really liked it.

I think my enthusiasm, my passion is able to come across in those 90-second videos and people were like, hey, that's how I feel about the library, that's how I feel about books. So really I just started because, almost because of the pandemic, but I've been doing it for a long time on social media. A lot of people think it was overnight that I got on social media and I'm like, nope, I've been doing social media for close to 20 years. I’m having fun with it. I’m learning more and more about platforms, learning about what it takes, and just being, just trying to engage with people or trying to comment on other people's profiles and just knowing what it takes to kind of like amass a following, if you would say. I've never been fond of a following. I think I've kind of gone viral on different platforms for various niche interests of mine in the past and I just didn't like the attention. I still don't like the attention to this day, but I'm just like, but this is what libraries need. This is what I love. This is my thing.

Janette: No, but I think that that's one of the things that libraries do need right? Is like we got to reach people that are in non-library spaces. And I think that's one of the things you do really, really well. And one of the things that attracted me to your content is of course the positive messaging. And I do love libraries, but also I feel like you're so very real. You know, like Facebook isn't called Fakebook for, you know, for no reason, right? Like, there's a lot of that like very curated content or like people trying to make their lives look very idealistic. And I love that you're keeping it real. You're telling those stories. I mean, little kids roasting you, like what adult doesn't love those stories, right? Because kids are truth tellers. Like they do not lie.

Leah: They do not lie.

Janette: I love to tell the story about me getting my hair highlighted once when one of my daughters was little and I was like, how does it look? My husband's like, it looks great. And she's like, you look like a zebra. And I was like, see, that's the real answer.

Mychal: No, I love it. It's so very true that even like, even like right now, I currently have a goatee and my hair in braids. And of course, usually I have like a big giant afro, which is still there. It’s just tied up in braids. And I'm usually clean shaven. I remember being at a school library, I used to go visit school libraries all the time. And they would get used to seeing me. I think at one point I had my goatee like I do now and went to the library and a kid was like, Mr. Mychal, are you a dad now? And I’m like, I am not. What about me gives all of a sudden dad energy? They’re like, you have a beard, you must be a dad now. Just such a kid observation, that’s just who they are.

There have been so many. I love being at conferences and I tell people, talking about secrets that library kids share, about how they say, yeah, my mom is pregnant. I'm going to have a little brother, little sister. And the grownups are like, I told you to keep that to yourself. I know you trust Mr. Mychal. But he is not vetted. We are, I guess we're going to hope he keeps the secret.

Janette: Who is he connected to, where is this going next? We don't know.

Leah: Yeah, because the best way to keep a secret is to tell somebody who has millions of followers, right?

Mychal: Exactly.

Janette: But this is, I think, brings up a really good point, too, about why kids need to see themselves in the books that they read. Right. Because they need to understand their world in a way that's safe for them to learn about it. And so maybe not even just seeing themselves, but seeing other people too, that aren't like them to have that exposure because otherwise you might not get it, you know, unless you have an adult who's willing to answer your questions really honestly like that, you know. Like you were obviously very approachable for him, or them, you know, to be able to answer the question about the beard. Right. Yeah. So maybe some adults aren't.

Leah: Especially for teenagers, I think it's very important that people see that, you know, mental health is a thing that we all have to deal with. It's not a secret. It's not shameful. We should talk about it. And I always say, because I'm an anxious person and I totally identify with your feeling that social media is a safe way to have friends for somebody with anxiety. I always tell my husband, because he luckily does not have a lot of anxiety, I said, if you had a failing kidney, you would go out and find a way to treat it. And it's the same way for mental health. So I just really appreciate that.

Janete: Yeah, I think that's also why my most successful participation in a book club was an Internet book club, because, I mean, being online is it's at your own volition, right? Like you, it's when you have the time and space and energy to do it. It's whatever you can put into it.

Leah: As they say in mental health circles, when you have the spoons for it.

Ola: Yeah.

Janette: Right. Yeah, yeah. Exactly. So can you talk a little bit about how I mean, I'm going to say amassing your following and I know so you don't like to have a following, but you do. How has that changed, your success, changed your life?

Mychal: I never actually know how many followers I have on any of the platforms. I only, if I ever say a number, it means that it's the last time that a library kid saw it and mentioned the number to me. It's the reason, like on Instagram, that the likes are hidden. No one can see how many likes I get on Instagram. And it's very, very purposeful, very intentional for me and for others. Just because I'm just trying to encourage everybody, especially library people and teachers and educators, to kind of do what I'm doing. I don't try to have the monopoly. I don't get upset when I see other people making library videos. I'm like, yes, please tell library stories. Please talk about library joy. Talk about what libraries have. I do not have the monopoly, I haven't cornered the market on this. It's not my copyright, my trademark social media thing to do.

But, no, it’s completely changed my life. I mean, I left the library in March of 2024. I had no idea what was going to happen. I left for my, for mental health reasons. Just a lot of burnout, a lot of things happening, trying to take care of library people, my own self, and my family over 11 years, over 30+ years as an existing human being. I left the library thinking I was just going to have to be on my own for maybe a couple of weeks and I was going to go figure out my next steps, figure out jobs from there. And then I think I shared it on social media. And by then I had somewhat of a following and I announced my resignation from the library. I honestly, I don't think I thought anybody would truly care. I think I shared it on social media just in case a library kid saw it and they wondered where Mr. Mychal had gone.

And I did not realize as many people were going to see it and talk about it. I think to this day, it still surprises me that actual publications carried the story, I was like, wow, I didn't realize it was an actual story. And that led to, I had the picture book deals with various publishers, more and more library conferences that reached out and invited me to come talk with them. PBS kids reached out about the social media partnership between them. So my life has entirely changed. I was just a library person. I still think I'm just a library person.

Before that, just going to work five to six days a week, going home to my cats. And now I still come home to my cats. But now I go to New York, I go to Arkansas, I go to Chicago, I go to Florida, I go to Indiana, and I go to Ohio. I go to all these places and talk about libraries. So it's very, very wild. It's very interesting being able to, like, meet people who I watch on TV, who I watch in movies and talk with them about libraries and have them sometimes reach out to me, but it still is like, it’s still something where I like, I still take the most joy in talking to library people, talking to library kids.

So even though my life has entirely changed, I still think I'm somewhat still, I'm still the same person. It just is very interesting to be out in public, be at airports and have people say, hey, are you the library guy? To go to Petco and people say, hey, you're a librarian, right? And I'm like, yes, I am a librarian. And they talk with me and they share their library stories, so. I always say, I think, overwhelming is the best word I use when I talk about how things have changed. Oftentimes it's good, it's good overwhelm, but sometimes it's the actual Merriam-Webster definition of overwhelming. But I'm still just trying to make it day by day, even with the changes that have happened in my life and also still hoping to one day, hopefully soon, return to being a public-facing librarian or even a school library media tech in the future.

Janette: I say this a lot, but I love when good things happen to good people and I feel like that is the embodiment of your story, right? Like or like when life happens, when you're making other plans and it sounds like you were kind of looking for the path and the path found you, but you're such a great advocate for this profession, for libraries, librarians in general. Like I love that you're willing to share that message so far and wide. And we are super grateful and very lucky as a profession that you're willing to do it.

Leah: I always say that librarians have to be missionaries going out to spread the good word. Because so many people who have not had, who were not library kids and were not brought up in the library, do not realize the impact that a library could have on their lives.

Janette: Okay. So before we really jump into the episode, we like to ask all of our guests a very important icebreaker question. So are you, or would you consider yourself to be primarily a print book reader, an e-book reader, or an audiobook reader?

Mychal: I just made a TikTok today about audiobooks counting as real reading, audiobooks being real books. So I am, at this point, I am primarily an audiobook reader, but I also love physical books. I would say definitely audiobooks, physical books, and then e-books. I'm not the biggest fan of e-books. They're just not for me, even though I have a book club on a reading app and it is basically primarily e-book based. It’s definitely audiobooks, especially with a great narrator. And then physical books, I just love looking at the covers, I love being able to feel the book in my hands.

But there’s just something special about having someone read a story aloud to you. I mean, that's the whole point of being a kid at storytime, having the storytime presenter read the stories aloud to you. It’s very nostalgic for me. And my mom read stories to us until I was a teenager. She would do all of the various voices. I grew up when cassette tapes were still a thing. So I'm obviously much older than people think I am to know what these things are, and to have had a Walkman. I think oftentimes me and my brother, we would just be playing Crash Bandicoot, we would be playing Donkey Kong and different video games and we would turn the volume all the way down and we would be listening to our cassette tapes that we borrowed from the library. So I think listening to audiobooks takes me back in time to just listening to things with my brother and just falling in love with stories.

Janette: I love that memory. That is giving me like little goose bumps right now. That's such a great memory.

Ola: Crash Bandicoot gave you goose bumps. Mark this day in history, Janette.

Janette: No, it was him listening, well. Yeah. Okay, yes, at its base, Crash Bandicoot was involved but, like, just like that sharing that moment together. Because I feel like so many times we talk about libraries as a feeling, right? Like when you walk into the library, how does it make you feel? And I think that that's one of the things that it could inspire, is memories of, you know, a time where you were with someone that you love doing something great, listening to a story or, you know, your mom reading you books. I love that because how many times in this episode am I going to say, I love that? Because I feel like it's a lot.

Ola: Well, it is a love letter to libraries so.

Janette: Right. Okay. If I'm going to love things, this is the time.

Ola: This is the episode for it.

Janette: But, you know, like books do bring people together in that way. Like, I think about me reading, being read to as a child, but also me reading to my own kids, right? It's a mental, emotional, physical connection through that story. Whether the story means something to us or not is a completely different thing. It's that moment in time that we're sharing that, you know, kind of cements that relationship.

Leah: I have to love that you said that your mom read to you, even up through your teenage years because I came from a middle school and I implemented this thing around Christmas time where the last few weeks before Christmas break, we would have like a storytime in each homeroom and we would take hot chocolate in and read a story. And I was really like nervous about doing it because I'm like, these kids are going to think they're way too old for this and they aren't going to enjoy it. But it was far and away, the most popular thing I did. They loved for us to come in and read them a story. And the hot chocolate didn't hurt either.

Mychal: Drinks, snacks and books. No, I think that's the best part. I mean, I was homeschooled, so my mom reading aloud to teenagers, that's also part of why read-alouds happened so long for me because of homeschooling and there only being a few other students in the school. But no, I was the same way. When I was a children’s librarian I would go to the various schools and I would still offer to read storytime books to the fourth graders, fifth graders, sixth graders, seventh graders. And of course, I mean, no one can beat kindergartners’ excitement for books, but the sixth graders and seventh graders, they still came very close and they were like, you're going to read Mo Willems to us. You're going to read The Very Hungry Caterpillar to us. You're going to read Dr. Seuss with us. They're still like, yes, we always loved those books.

I mean, they're always worried about reading levels. So to be able to just like sit back in their own nostalgic time, even sixth and seventh graders have nostalgia. And just be like, look at the illustrations. Look at the words. Look at this person reading the story aloud to us, and they just get to kind of relax. Like we talked earlier about mental health being for all ages. That's the same thing, they're going through their own problems sometimes just being a sixth grader or seventh grader. And just to be able to sit there and hear a story means so much for what they're going through just in one person's simple day.

Janette: And I think it's just one more way that society kind of just pushes you to grow up too fast a little bit, right? Like you do still want to listen to books and stories and have someone read to you. But there becomes a point in education, especially, where they're like, no, you're going to do mostly solitary work now or you're going to do this now. And you know, there's some of that that's like, okay, yeah, you have to learn to adapt to the change. But it does make me sad, right. Because you're taught that this isn't something you should enjoy, even though maybe inherently you do need it.

Mychal: Yeah. I mean there's so much enjoyment to go on and I think that's always like, not the battle, but like the difference between school libraries and public libraries is the reading levels that have to happen in school libraries because of the curriculum, because of the policies, because the standards the various states set forth. But reading levels are so difficult because they discourage kids, because they're worried that they're not the same level as their fellow seventh grade classmate. They're getting pressure from their grown ups who are so worried, they have their stressed teachers who are trying to meet the various parameters, making sure they pass certain test scores.

And it’s just like, there's a literacy crisis, but if we just talk about the joy, the love of libraries, the love of reading, the love of books and letting them read these different things, letting them see themselves in the books, they're going to flourish because there's so oftentimes where I've met people who would say, my principal, my so and so, these state legislators, you city council members, they don't think reading in school is important. But they're always so worried about the test scores and how are they going to even take the test if they can't read? That's why it has to start, everything starts with reading. So having them read in school, read for fun, is so important. So yes, you want them to read at a sixth grade reading level, but graphic novels are at that sixth grade reading level. They exist.

And also just, like, let them keep on reading those books that they love at maybe a lesser reading level because they're going to keep on loving it because you're showing them it's what's most important is that they love reading. It's not important for them to be at a sixth grade reading level and hate it, because if they love their fourth grade books, they're going to eventually read every single fourth grade book and they're going to move on to fifth grade and sixth grade and so on. So it really is just knocking over all the dominoes, if you just are patient with them and let them keep on going.

They're already stressed by the school that they have to go to and they're dealing with peer pressure, they're dealing with bullying, all these different aspects. So with all the things that they have to deal with, the least we can do is let them enjoy books and enjoy reading while they're there.

Leah: One of our school administrators who, like, well we need to get down to serious reading. And I would be like, okay, well, Diary of a Wimpy Kid is one of the highest Lexile books in this library, so let's just let them read it.

Janette: Well, like one of the things that you said that stuck out to me, Mychal, is reading for fun, right? Like, I know when my kids were growing up, like, I have three daughters and two of them were bigger readers. And, you know, for them, the Accelerated Reader program was great but also kind of the bane of their existence, right? Because, you know, when you do achieve a higher reading level, your teacher is trying to keep you on your level like, no, you can't read that book. It's too easy. You have to, or only books at this level count, and you can't read the next book because it might be too hard or, you know, those types of things. So there was like more restriction on choice than I feel like they probably would have liked. And then as a parent, that's frustrating. And for me now, like, you know, working in library spaces, it's very frustrating to see kids directed away from books.

Obviously, age appropriateness is a completely different topic, like you don't want kids to be reading things that are not appropriate for them. But if a kid, you know, wants to keep reading Captain Underpants or Diary of a Wimpy Kid, let them do it. Like, reading is entertainment, too. It's not just all about learning. And, you know, then too, going back to like the fundamentals of just teaching and education in general, sometimes you go back to the basics, right? Like that all reinforces what you're going to learn next anyways. I don't know. It's a tough balance, right?

Mychal: Very, very complicated, everything that you just described, because you talk about serious books and it's like, well, what are serious books? What qualifies as second grade for serious books? What qualifies at eighth grade, high school, and even into adulthood? Like, I’m always talking about the joy of reading, the joy of books. And you can have joy, you can love reading with different emotions. I mean, yes, you read the zaniness of Mo Willems and Jon Klassen differently. You're experiencing a certain emotion, but some people love reading biographies. Like you have That Librarian by Amanda Jones on your bookshelf, like that's going to elicit a different emotion. You may love reading the book, but you may not necessarily feel happiness because of what she’s discussing in the book.

I'm part of a book club where we love reading thrillers, we love C.J. Tudor, we love Lucy Foley, Stephen King, and you don't necessarily experience like a joyful, happy emotion while you're reading those books. What sort of seriousness are we talking about? Is it talking about like, do you want them to read the classics? Like you described, are we saying, oh, we want to get them away from Dog Man and Diary Wimpy Kid? Which those books are perfectly serious because Jeff Kinney and Dav Pilkey wrote those books because they're autistic, they have ADHD, they have dyslexia, and they wanted books for kids who didn't have to struggle as much as they did when they were reading books. They never knew that they would become bestselling, the most beloved authors of all time.

And then it gets into all the other things about, like you said, being able to be seen in books, being able to say, what's your reading level? And even being a public librarian versus a school librarian. And you have these people come into the library and they’re like, my kid’s teacher said that they need to have 3.5 reading level. And the public librarian says, our library is not set up by reading level. It's set up by easy readers, easy books being picture books, juvenile books, YA books, and so on. And then oftentimes they forget that at the library, they can check out more than one book. So their kid will be super excited by oh, they have Wings of Fire, they have the newest Dog Man book. They have the newest Kelly Yang book, Jason Reynolds wrote another Miles Morales book. And their parent, their grown up is like, no, you have to get this reading level book.

And then the people like me are like, okay, they can get that book but remember, they can check out, at my library, they could check out up to 50 books. So they can get the book they really want and then they can get the book that will make you a little bit less worried. So it really is just like you said, it's very, very complicated. It's very, very difficult. And I think that's when we focus on the love of libraries is trying to say, how do we get them to fall in love with books? How do we have these conversations so that we can lessen this literacy crisis by getting them to love reading books and keep on going and seeing that there really is a book for everyone.

I used to love visiting libraries and I'd bring a suitcase full of books every two weeks, I’d bring a suitcase full of books. And I would do that repeatedly. But I always made sure to bring as many books as possible that had covers of people of color, people of various diversities, people of different backgrounds. And sure enough, all the kids were always like, hey, I want this book. Either because it looked like them or looked like their fellow students.

One of my main favorite stories I love to tell is one where a kids saw on the book cover a little girl who had a hijab. The kid was just so excited to see that book, like their mouth and their jaw drops. They were so excited because they had been trying to befriend one of their fellow classmates who also wore a hijab. So they saw that book and they were like, this must be my friend's story. I'm going to learn all about them. And of course, their classmate was like, that's not my story. I didn't write that book. I didn't tell anybody what I’ve been through. I didn't tell anybody my memories. But that kid saw that person on the book cover and they checked out the book. And they didn't wear a hijab, they didn't look like that. They didn't have the skin color of that character. But they were like, yes, I want to be this person's friend. And that's the joy, that's the jaw dropping ability of books, of literature, of literacy, is to connect us in that way.

Janette: You know, one of the reasons that we kind of set this episode to talk about library joy in this space is because librarianship is really tough right now. You know, there's a lot of book challenges, book banning, and I think that speaks to like one of the things people are trying to restrict is only allowing books that they think should be about certain people of certain types and certain lives to be represented in their libraries. And I understand wanting to see yourself in the library, but I also need that to be a space that's open and safe for people to learn about other things and thoughts and ideas and ways of living and religions and races and ethnicities. Right? Like, where else can you do that in a safe space that, you know, you're not going to be violating someone's privacy? Anything that's offensive in a way that would hurt someone else.

Mychal: No, it's very true. I mean, you mentioned the hardships of what library people are going through, the banned books, the ability in some states to be imprisoned, to be fired for providing certain books to people. It really is outrageous. I think earlier in this conversation, you talked about how I talk about things in a very real way. And I've always tried to do that, one, because actually there's a lot of, there's several library kids who want to becom librarians. They want to become library workers because they see their beloved library people. They see me talking about the library and how much I love it.

So as much I talk about library joy, I also try to talk about the struggles, the difficulties that come with being a library worker or library person because I don't want them to be like, Mr. Mychal always talked about this at the library, but he didn't mention all the mean things, he didn’t mention all the emails, didn't mention the angry people in customer service about the libraries. I have to talk about those things.

Ola: Or the weird stuff that comes in returned books.

Mychal: The various bookmarks that we see that are not bookmarks, the problems in the bathroom, our unofficial plumbing hacks. All those different things. I talk about it very intentionally. And also just trying to acknowledge the greatness of who library people are and the wonderful things that they do. And they don't get enough credit for, it’s not simply checking books in and out. So when it goes into the banned book, we’re just saying, that's not fair, I think I recently saw a post on Facebook or some other social media platform about like a town hall and one of the library people’s sign was, parents have always had the ability to ban books for their children. You've always had the ability to restrict your children from reading certain books. It doesn't mean that other children are not ready for it.

We've all, school librarians, public librarians, have always said, we can have a conversation with you if your child is not ready to read this book. Public libraries, we don't restrict. At least in my library, we didn't restrict kids from being able to check out certain books. If they checked it out, if they knew their number, we weren't going to call them on it. We would just say enjoy the book. If their grown up came and talked to us, we would say, that's a conversation for you and your library kid. Totally understand if they're not ready. But everyone's ready for different books at different times. And I think that's the whole, that's the conversation people aren’t willing to have about banned books, is saying, yes, it's okay if your child is not ready for this book. Other kids are ready for it.

I talked earlier about my mom reading books until I was a teenager. She, my mom read A Child Called “It” by Dave Pelzer to us aloud when I was probably ten or 11, and I'm the oldest of my siblings, so my siblings have heard it much younger than me. And that is not a book that should probably be read aloud to anybody, let alone kids. But me and my siblings were ready for it. We had devoured enough literature that my mom was like, let's read this next one. It’s not a thriller, it's a true story. It's pretty dark. There's a lot of things that happen, but they were ready for it. So that's our household. My mom wasn't going around to other families and saying, you need to read this book to your 11 year old. She just, in our household, that's what we read. We were homeschooled because my mom wanted to read us books about about Nat Turner, about Emmett Till, about Harriet Tubman, about Selena Quintanilla Perez, about all the different historical figures that we wouldn't read about in public school. So that's the whole point, is like library people are not authors or illustrators. We're not trying to indoctrinate anybody with books. We're not trying to change your children. We're just trying to present them different stories.

And a lot of times the fact that people who look like me never had stories as kids. As much as I love all these different books, I didn't see a person of color in a book until I read Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis. That Grace in Junie B. Jones only appeared every so often. So as much as I loved all the books I loved as kids, they did not look like me. And now we have these people who are writing these stories, who are letting them see different things. And again, it goes in the fact that kids experience different things. So being able to read about it is such an extraordinary thing for them to be able to see. And that's just such a, so the whole conversation of banned books, I just want them, I wish people would just have open, honest conversations about it instead of going straight to banning the book. That they would come to a library and say, hey, what is this all about? Why is this being discussed in this book? And maybe we would see the banned books lessened.

But honestly, I mean, as you all I'm sure know, which is that there's such a few percentage of people in America, in the world, who are calling for books to be banned. They just see certain titles, they see certain topics, they see conversations, and they jump on the bandwagon and say, someone else says this book should be banned. I want it banned, too. They must be right. They don't ask librarians, they don't ask teachers, they don't ask neighbors. They don't ask anybody. They just go straight to let's ban this book. Let's take away other children's chance to fall in love with reading. So I wish we had more room to have honest conversations with people about what books are actually trying to do, which is just get people to enjoy reading them.

Janette: Yeah, I once used, this is not by any means a glamorous example, but I once used, so my past career was in health sciences. And so the example I like to use for people about talking about books with target audiences, right? Like, not every book is going to be for everyone. A book for a heart surgeon is not for every doctor. But you wouldn't not allow the heart surgeon to have that book, right? And you wouldn't say that it shouldn't be available just because every doctor doesn't need it. And they were like, no, I definitely wouldn't do that. I was like, it's the same thing, right? Like, books have an audience. You might not be the audience, but someone is. So it still needs to be there.

Leah: I love the saying that librarians make room on the shelves for everyone's story. Nobody says you have to take that book off the shelf.

Janette: Right.

Leah: And that's why I wish parents wouldn't be afraid to discuss it with their children. Like, we're not going to read that story because it has this mature topic that I think that we may not be ready for. And I agree with you, Mychal. I wish that they could just talk about it instead of just trying to pretend that they don't exist.

Janette: Next up, Leah and I will start a podcast about parenting. No, just kidding. Because I do feel like that's really what this discussion needs to be part of. It intersects with parenting and the way parenting has evolved in America in general, right? Like that's part of this and the fact that parents don't have time or don't have the interest or the skills maybe to have the conversations they need to have with their kids. Like I've had people flat out tell me like they have a hard time telling their kids no. They ask them for something and they don't want to disappoint them. And I'm like, but if you don't teach your child how to be disappointed, how are they going to learn how to accept when they, you know, don't get the role in the school play or maybe don't get the grade that they want on a test? Like part of that is all coping and we got to set them up for success. And part of it is giving them a safe space to feel those feelings, right, and work through that with them.

Mychal: It's a lot of worry into what we think they're going to see. We don't give them enough credit. I remember reading certain books and being worried, reading picture books and being worried that kids would react a certain way to certain books, certain parts in the story, but they're just so in tune to the story. They're just like, this is just a story. Read the next part, please.

I think there's a recent Ryan T. Higgins picture book where at one point, spoilers, I'm sorry, at some point in the story, the monster, which is basically like a tiger mammoth creation, essentially appears to eat the grandmother in the story. Like it basically gobbles up the grandmother, is what you're supposed to think as a reader. You go on to find out that that didn't happen. They just, the grandma is sitting over there on the bench. I remember reading that story aloud to kids and I was like, are they going to be very afraid? But as I read the story aloud, the library kids didn't notice that at all. They were just like, why are you looking at us? Aren't you going to read the next page? They just sit there and they’re just like, yeah, this is a story. I like stories. Please keep on going. I think there's so much worry by library grown ups, by parents, into what their kids might be ready for, what they're reading. And oftentimes I think they're shocked that they’re like, my kids are actually perfectly okay.

I was just listening to a TikTok, and there's a little kid reading the book, reading their school texts and they're reading like Abraham Lincoln quotes. They're reading quotes from the president and this kid who's maybe ten years old at most is like, why are they saying all men are created equal? Isn't it all people are created equal? Why are they saying manmade? Isn't it people made? And it’s just this brilliant little kid. The grown up, the person recording is like, I don't know. Good question, though. All those things need to be asked. So it’s just like, that's what that kid just thinks naturally as a human being who is coming across things, who are seeing things.

That's all to your prior conversation. I'm just saying that the parenting aspect is, I think that's the reason for the banned books, is that they're worried about what their kids might do, how they might react to their fear of the story for whatever reason. And I think that's a powerful thing that I think if we start addressing, maybe it will be. So that's why maybe we have more town halls with library kids and less town halls with library grown ups and adults. Maybe we'll get to the crux of the matter.

Janette: I like that. I think that's a great idea.

Leah: I always feel like, when I was growing up as a library kid, books were a way for me to, a safe way for me to explore things that I worried about because, as I said, I have a lot of anxiety. So I would always read things that were scary for me on Saturday mornings while the sun was still up, because then I could be scared and I could think about that safely for a little while. But it was enough time that by the time it got dark and all my nightly worries would creep in, I would have forgotten about it. So I just think it's so important for kids to have a safe place to explore that.

And then I used to always tell the kids in my middle school, this one might be a little mature for you. If you are uncomfortable in any way, just bring it back and no questions asked and we'll switch it out. So that worked really well because school librarians especially have the difficult job of spanning so many grade levels. And what's appropriate for sixth grade is not appropriate for eighth grade and vice versa. And I just, I feel like being honest with kids is one of the things that we don't do enough of as a society, much less a library culture. We just need to say, you know, bad things sometimes happen and kids and grownups are going to feel bad in life. And we, and scary things happen and we just kind of have to deal with that. We can't take it off the shelf and pretend it doesn't exist.

Janette: We talk a lot in libraries about toxic positivity, right. Like it's that idea that you've got to be happy all the time. Like we're constantly trying to, you know, you see it online, even. People say, oh, I just, this year, I wish for everyone to be happy. And it's like, I wish for everyone to be content. Like, you don't need to be happy. You can experience highs, lows. I just wish for your life to be what you want it to be, right? And maybe that is happiness, but maybe it's not. I mean, everybody's got a different space and you have to recognize that you're going to go through those cycles. It's normal. That's just life.

Okay, so with libraries being such a evolving, dynamic space at this time, how do you think people find their peace or their balance in that work? Because sometimes you're allowed to be unhappy while you're also doing something you love, right? So how do they, how do you suggest or what kind of words of wisdom do you have for them to kind of like make it through those tough times?

Mychal: Yeah, library work is such a difficult job. I always talk, I've tried to make videos every so often on social media talking about the realities of what goes into library work, about the politics, or about the various nuances that people don't see because they only see us at the library desk. They don't realize that it's a difficult job. It doesn't need to be so difficult for both school librarians and public librarians. School libraries, I think it’s much more political. It's the worries of having a principal, having teachers coming in there and having different expectations about trying to meet with a whole bunch of different students. Whereas for public libraries, I think a lot of that burnout comes, I think it’s very similar in school libraries, it’s just not as prevalent because of the lack of presence of grown ups.

But for public libraries, it's the fact that we're often verbally assaulted. There's often physical fights in public libraries because there are people who come in there on their worst day, and they take it out on library people. So there's so much more room than people will ever realize, for burnout, for library people. We joked about the different hats. We talked about the different things. We talked about the plumbing, we talk about these different things. And I think that's honestly how we kind of keep on going as library people. We kind of, we joke through the pain, we smile through the misery. That's how we try to make it through each day.

But I think for me, I always encourage library people to take breaks, to take their breaks as often as possible, take those 15 minute breaks. Take those lunch breaks. And that comes from a person who never did that. I almost, in almost 11 years, I took maybe 11, 15-minute breaks. Literally, I never took the 15 minute breaks. I should have. It just wears on you because you're just emailing, you're going through different problems. I mean, library people, school library workers, and public library workers are the unofficial therapists for the library kids, for the public library people. They just trust you in a different way than they do their teachers and even their grown ups, their neighbors, their family. And they just tell you certain things. That's how we learn that everyone is going through something.

Again, I just encourage people to take breaks and also just to form their own mental health support team. Even though I left the libraries, I still talk about libraries. I still love libraries because of the support people that I worked with, that I trusted to tell, hey, I'm having a hard mental health day. I'm experiencing a lot of anxiety. I'm trying to manage all of these library people. I'm trying to listen to the public. So just being able to have people that you vent to, even if it just very, very briefly, where you're just like, I don't need a response. I'm not looking for advice. I just want to tell you about this, then we can go back to talking about the Great British Bake Off and go back to talking about a reality show. We can talk about our favorite sports teams. So having that healthy balance of venting and also just talking about silly things, being real.

I’ve worked for some libraries where they basically think you just show up and you only talk about libraries, you only talk about work. They don't want you to be a person and that's the only way you get through life. This is, for most libraries, it's either a government job or it’s a school job, and you're going to have to work there for quite a few years before you get to retire and just read books all the time. Because as you all know, library people, we don't get to read many books at work. That is not the job. That would be a wonderful job, being paid to read books.

Janette: I'm still trying to figure out how to get that job, Mychal.

Leah: It’s a common misconception.

Mychal: If you figure it out, please let me know. So, talking about joy, talking about being content, whatever the goal is, it’s not being toxic positivity, it’s trying to encourage people to keep on going, to find the joy, to see if they can ever get back to that point. And that's why we have to talk about library workers and say, hey, what will it take for you to get back? What will it take for you to commit to five, ten, 15 more years of doing this day in and day out? What will it get you to be honest when you're having a hard day, when you needed to stay home because you're having a panic attack and you don't tell your supervisor, I just don't feel well, I'm having a headache. But you could be honest and say I'm experiencing a lot of anxiety, I'm depressed, I can't come in today.

And I think that's where we need to get to as library workers, is being there enough to support one another so we can say, you know what, this rule doesn't exist. I can't just let you do this because of the rules. And that's when I say as a person who disagrees with a great many library rules that don't factor in that library people are human people is, that's when we have to bend those rules until they recognize that that's the only way that we can help one another out.

Leah: Somebody came to me who was considering changing careers and they wanted my advice on coming into the library. And he was actually leaving church work. He was a pastor and he was going to, he was interested in becoming a librarian. And I said, well, let me warn you that a lot of the same problems that you deal with as a pastor, you're going to deal with in a library, no matter which kind of library. You're going to work with people who are in despair and you're going to work with people who are needy and you are going to work with people who are experiencing the worst problem of their lives who might think that the answer is in the library. And luckily I think he felt that those were his strengths and he thought that that would be a good career move for him.

But I also just want to add that Ola and Janette, you are part of my mental health support team, just so you know.

Janette: Same, same.

Ola: Glad to be a part of it. Happy to do it.

Janette: We have a group chat, so full disclosure. Yeah, like that gets me through a lot of days.

Ola: Truly.

Mychal: Here you go, here's some memes, here's some gifs, here's some TikToks and Instagram reels to get you through the day. And that is just so important because, I mean, even I'm an introverted person. I'm also slightly extroverted where like during each day I really want to talk to people, I want to text friends, I want to hear from them. I want to see silly videos, silly things, just to be able to get me to coast through the rest of the day.

Janette: I can really relate to that. I think that a lot of what you've touched on is all really why like making this episode about library joy and paying attention to what brings you joy in the library is so important, right?

Mychal: I think almost every single video that I shared early on is moments of joy. Just like the things that got me to keep on coming back to the library. I think like when I first started sharing things, I had become a supervising librarian, and I was very stressed as a supervising librarian. I did not like being a supervising librarian. I am very capable of doing the job, but I despised it. And I'm very sorry to people who are supervisors who are trying to encourage their library people to pursue library leadership. It is not for everybody.

Janette: I agree.

Leah: I agree 100%.

Mychal: It's totally fine, you can be a leader as a circulation person, as an assistant, as a media tech, a children's librarian. You don't have to have leader, supervisor in your title to succeed, to lead people towards joy, towards the library, towards whatever it may be. But that's my leadership Ted Talk.

But no, library joy, I think it was my favorite thing. To this day, I don't know if I'm the person who coined the term library joy. I’ve probably said it more than anybody in the entire world ever has. I love it very much. But it just, it's what kept me going all the time. So I think my biggest library joy moments were the little things. I think that's kind of like, if I had to pinpoint what people like about the library kid stories that I often tell is I think I am just able to find joy in the little things of library life. And just like those little, tiny interactions. I just observe everything at the library, I’ve seen people take joy in finding like, I didn't know that the library had Studio Ghibli books. I didn't know there was books about My Neighbor Totoro. I didn't know there were Pokemon graphic novels. That's so cool. My kid doesn't like reading at all, but they love Pokemon. Maybe I can get them hooked on reading with Pokemon.

It's library grown ups. It’s the simplicities of helping them on the computer, which of course as public library workers, we do far more than anything is help them, is try to help them get into their email addresses, get their email account started up. And it’s these people who have no idea how to use any component of the computer, they don't know how to use a mouse. They're like, what's this thing? And I was like, I did not think that the first lesson was going to be holding the mouse. And it’s the joys, the success of them like, I held the mouse. I right clicked. I know how to do it now. And they come back next time they tell you, hey Mychal, look. And they right click. You're like, good job.

Janette: I love how their success also becomes something that's your success, right? You've taught them and helped them master this thing and like, they're so happy and proud, and you can't help but feel that for them. At least, I mean, I just am a super empathetic person. So I'm like, always, like, yay.

Leah: Yay, you.

Janette: Yeah.

Mychal: I loved those interactions so much. And for me, like, I wasn't, it wasn’t that I wasn’t a fan, but I'm a person. I didn't like the monotony of library work. I didn't like all the emails. I didn't like the meetings. So I was like, you know what? I'll take all the desk hours. I don't mind sitting with somebody for half an hour and helping them on the computer. I will, I will show a library kid four stacks of books for half an hour if that's what it takes. I'm all for it. I’m like, I have to be here eight, nine hours no matter what. If I can help as many people as possible, let's go for it.

And then, I've always loved the relationship between school libraries and public libraries. It's always been my favorite thing. That's why I admire school library media techs and school librarians so much. It's where the vast majority of my early library stories happened was visiting various sites, visiting schools, and just seeing them be so, so zany, so silly. We talked about being, about knowing if library life was for you. I don't usually tell library kids’ names, but I think one of my favorite one at the school libraries was of a kid whose first name was Mister. His literal name was Mister. And I was introduced to their class, their school librarian was like, okay, kids, Mr. Mychal is here. And this kid named Mister stands up and he just is like, I didn't know Misters could work for the library. It was just so funny. He thought my name was Mister, last name Mychal. And he was like, see, my mom told me there were more Misters in the world. And it’s just little interactions like that, that’s just so much joy to see that kid.

Another kid who came in there, I usually wear very colorful clothing. But I think that certain point I was wearing like a black, nicer shirt, black pants. And the kids came into the school with their school librarian and the kid, they all filed in. The kid looks at me and he just is like, are you the president? And this kid just thought I was Barack Obama, which was very silly at the time because I had my full-on afro. And to this day I don't think Barack Obama has ever had as big an afro as I have. But that kid just saw me and he was just like, the president is here. And then they found out I’m the librarian and they were talking with me and the school librarian the whole time about what it takes to become a librarian. You never know if that kid's going to become a librarian. They could be like, no, I don't want to be the actual president. I want to be a CEO. I want to be these different things. But because they just saw me sitting there, they had conversations. They knew what it takes.

And then so many different stories, all the stories that I've told. I think one of my favorite ones is that Child Start site of kids who saw me every single week. I would read them stories every single week. And then one kid left, that was leaving. They were moving away. And they’re like, Mr. Mychal, I cannot wait. One day I'm going to be a Brown librarian, too, because they had brown skin like I do. And another of their classmates who was white was like, I want to be a Brown librarian. And the other kid is like, we can all be Brown librarians.

Janette: I love that.

Mychal: I love the hope of that. I think that's one of my more, I've seen some controversial reactions to that story because some people think too deeply into it and they're like, these kids think that they can just become Black, they can become Brown. And it's like, I get where you're going. But the whole point of it is that this kid was like, I'm Brown. I can be a Brown librarian and they’re like, I want to do it, too. And they're just like, well, I don't know how we're going to do it, but we'll find a way. You will become a Brown librarian.

Leah: It’s just honesty of kids.

Mychal: But the point is, they’re honest. They're reacting. Essentially, they're like, I want to be a librarian, too. For me, library joy, it was just the library kids. It was the library grown ups. It was just seeing them be themselves and me just trying to convince them that they could be exactly who they are at the library. And I just appreciated every single moment of it. I looked forward to the next chronicle of silliness that they were going to bring each and every library visit.

Janette: The chronicle of silliness, there needs to be just like a book, a coffee table book, just about library joy stories called The Chronicle of Silliness.

Ola, let's go ahead and move into some of the submissions, because I think some of it's going to dovetail really well with some of the examples that Mychal gave of like what people said does bring them joy in their libraries.

Ola: Absolutely. So the first listener submission we have is from Sara, and Sara writes, I absolutely love when a student is describing a book and cannot remember the title or author. And with very little information, I can usually find the book that they're looking for. I love the moments where they yell, that's the book.

Mychal: The librarian superpower.

Ola: It is. Although sometimes the librarian superpower, at least in my experience, is Google. So I used to work, I used to work in the audio visual section, so I would work with the movies. And there were so many patrons that would come in and say, like, I'm looking for a movie and this thing happens and this, this and this. And little did they know I would just be typing exactly what they said word for word into Google. And, you know, most of the time it would pop up and they would think I'm a genius.

Mychal: The little known librarian skill is Googling. Being a library worker for 11 years, I was like, I am just shocked by how many people do not know how to adequately search in Google. And just like you said, oftentimes it just is whatever they're saying. You're essentially a parrot on the keyboard, and you’re just like is this it?

But there's also something special about like them being behind, especially the children's librarian, them being behind the desk with you, because they never would have been able to do it without you as a library person. You're just like, that's it, and that moment of just joy, of recognition of like, sometimes because they don't even know what the book is. They have no idea. And they're like, now I know the title of my own favorite story.

Ola: Our next story is from Brenda from Chicago Public Schools. And Brenda writes, when the I Love My Librarian award season arrived last year, I never thought I would be nominated, let alone by middle schoolers. These now seventh and eighth graders wrote about how much they love our library. They talked about how they had discovered things about themselves they didn't know they loved, a stop motion animator, a fantasy reader, a creative writer, a Lego builder, etc. I cried when I read all the things I didn't know meant so much to so many people.

I told them all about Mychal Threets and that I watch his TikToks when I'm having an especially tough day. I told them that I was honored that they thought our library was so amazing that they, moody crabby middle schoolers, felt that I was as cool as I think Mychal is. I printed those emails and read them whenever things get tough.

Mychal: That's so amazing. I think that's my favorite thing about the I Love My Librarian award is that people don't realize how many people truly are nominated by so many people, especially by library kids and by library peers. I love that they actually send, that they send the nominations to the library people for them to read. And oftentimes it is from those kids.

I remember being at my, my little library, and the children's librarian, she was known as the strict librarian at the library. So she was considered kind of like the mean librarian. But as much as she was strict, as much as she kept them in their place, they loved her. I think they loved to just mess with her. They loved to see her be strict towards them. At one point, the kids that she thought didn't like her very much because she was always strict, they brought her a tiny potted plant. And just that like little show of respect, just like, I thought of you. Yes, you're the mean, strict librarian, but you're my favorite. You care. Your the mom that’s not the mom. You're that level of library grown up. If you're being very real, if you're showing them all your emotions, they see that and they trust that. They trust in you and that's why they love library people.

Janette: I think it's easy for those little things to also get lost, like in the everyday work of the library. Right. Like, her not realizing like certain things were important to those students because just on an everyday basis, she's just trying to get kids in the library, get them what they need and get them back to class. And, you know, it's, you don't really realize what the impact is that you're having in those moments sometimes.

Mychal: We talked briefly about mental health. I think that's what goes into, without us knowing, that mental health is not an adult problem. It's a problem for kids, teens and adults. I think those are those little, little unseen things. It's the library worker or the school librarian talking to the library kid. The kids that come in the classroom, asking them questions, asking them how they're doing, and asking them about their life. And sometimes people, their peers, they may not have as many friends as they want. So the library worker is their friend. They're the person that just acknowledges them. The fact they say that, this is a person who's not my parents, who's not my siblings, who's not my grandparents, and they care enough to say hi to me. They high-five me, they ask me questions, and that means more to anybody in the world.

I think it’s just because, people always talk about mental health. They talk about the power of interrupting someone's day, of saying, hey, how are you? How's life? How's it going? Yo, what's up? Whatever the simple greeting is, it's more powerful than we’ll ever know. And I think that's exactly, that sentiment is a presence of a school librarian, our library workers and library people in library kids’ lives.

Ola: All right, next we have Barb from RAILS. She writes, my first year as a librarian, there was a student who was out of P.E. due to a broken arm. So he spent that period in the library with me. He was telling me about how he wanted to get a Chevy Vega body and put a 430-V8 engine in it. I pointed out that the horsepower of an engine that size was not suitable for a car that small. He looked at me like I was nuts. Next period, the shop teacher, Mr. L, appears at my desk. He says that the student came to him about the “crazy stuff” the librarian told him and expected Mr. L to prove me wrong. Mr. L confirmed to the student that what I said was correct and then decided he had to meet me and proposed that he and I develop some research projects for his classes.

Most of Mr. L’s students never set foot in the library. My partnership with this teacher led to his students becoming comfortable with me, seeking me out for help with assignments, and frequenting the library. While I've collaborated with many teachers through the years, working with someone outside of the usual academic subjects was one of the best experiences I've ever had.

Mychal: That's so great. I love everything about that. That's the whole embodiment of like the library being for everyone. That's the simple power of libraries. Sometimes it's an argument about does that engine fit, apparently. And that's the gateway to loving the library.

Janette: Well, and you mentioned earlier like something about the bane of the existence of adults being like video games in the library. But I am all about bringing non-readers into the library for things like that, right? Because the library has something to offer for everyone. It's not just books, so like, you know. And in this case it was her knowledge.

Leah: The first thing you have to build is trust.

Janette: Yeah.

Leah: So I feel like that little story illustrates like that student trusts her now, no matter what, knows what she's talking about.

Ola: Yeah. Well, I also like how Barb’s story kind of like breaks the librarian stereotype, right? Like that kid was probably forced into the library against his will because he couldn't go to P.E. And so like, he thinks that the librarian probably just talks about books all day long and here comes Barb with like some very technical car knowledge. And they're like, wait, what? Like, and I'm sure then, you know, obviously because she paired up with the class, like there are books about cars. There are books about things that you are interested in that you just had no idea existed. I love that.

Mychal: I think for me it always shocks library kids if I'm not wearing a cardigan or sleeves, the amount of tattoos I have. They’re like, wow.

Ola: They’re like, wait, the librarian’s cool.

Mychal: Is that why you're wearing cardigans all the time?

Janette: That's it. We're all secretly hiding our tattoos.

Leah: I once blew a class of kids away by singing the Perry the Platypus song from Phineas and Ferb. It was a while ago, but they were like, what? That’s amazing.

Mychal: I know things.

Ola: All right, here's a good one for us library workers. I feel like we'll relate to this one. This is from Jennifer at Kishwaukee College. And Jennifer writes, we removed over 10,000 old, moldy, dirty and outdated items from our college's collections this year. There's space on the shelves for new acquisitions again, and the stacks don't smell of musty books.

Leah: A good weed is a library joy for many people.

Ola: Oh, it's so satisfying.

Mychal: It really is. That's oddly such a controversial thing for people who don't know about libraries, about the process of weeding, where they don't realize what is happening. So many library people have gotten in trouble because people see them seemingly dumping boxes of books. People just don't know that we're like, we're not throwing away decent books. We would gift them to others, we would give them to bookstores. But there's that special thing about weeding the collection, having room for the new Diary of Wimpy Kid, for the new Dog Mans to be able to fit.

People don't realize how important they are to taking the books out of the library so that we can keep on replenishing the stacks. Yeah. That's why it's important and that's why that process is so joyful. Library people to say, we can actually shift the shelves. Oh, shifting. We can actually put new books on there. We can actually put books on display so they know that this is the cookbook section, so they know that this is the section about dogs. This is the section about illustrating your own book and those kind of things. And we get to have those forward-facing books with the beautiful covers, so that they're enticed to look for more books to take to their own homes.

Ola: Talk about library joy, mine is when, like, a freshly-shifted section and all the spines are aligned, all the edges are even.

Mychal: It’s special. I always feel bad because I'm like, I can't turn it off. I go to, I go to bookstores in airports [..]

Ola: You just start [..]

Mychal: Just putting them all in order.

Ola: I've done that before.

Mychal: I'm so sorry. I am incapable of not doing this.

Ola: Next up, we have Monica from Winnetka-Northfield Public Library District. And Monica writes, my biggest joy is found in mentoring others in the profession and watching them move into roles of increased responsibility, ranging from getting their MLIS degrees to moving into library director roles. The joy in seeing others succeed, and knowing that something I said or did helped make that happen is where my true passion lies.

Leah: I love that.

Janette: I feel like we've talked about that a lot, you know, through this discussion, right, is like the lifting other people up and helping them to reach their goals, whether it's patrons or whether it's your own staff.

Mychal: It's so special just seeing those little successes, even the gigantic successes of getting promoted or finishing library school. I don't check too many messages and comments on social media anymore. I just, one, I don't honestly have the time. I wish that was my job was to respond to messages and comments on it and also just because of trolls. But I do check a lot of emails. That's the best way to get a hold of me is via email.

Sometimes I'll see messages on Instagram, on TikTok, and I love it because most of the messages that I happen to see are ones where people are like, you're probably never going to see this, but I just had to tell you, I graduated with my library degree today. I was a circulation person, now I just became an adult services librarian. And I love those little milestones. I love those celebrations of people just acknowledging their greatness, their achievements. And those are special things because of mentors, because of people who showed them what it takes to become a children's librarian, to become a full fledged school librarian, and to be able to obtain fully this library joy that we keep on talking about.

Ola: This is from Britni at Schmaling Memorial Public Library. And Britni writes, one day, years ago, we had a father and his adult daughter come into the library. The father lived outside of town and needed a non-resident library card. He absolutely loved to read but didn't have a lot of money, so the cost of a non-resident card was of significance to him. The daughter had told him that if he stopped drinking, she would pay for his library card and continue to do so each year, as long as he stayed sober.

To this day, he has remained a regular library patron. He did later move into town and no longer needed a non-resident card. But as far as I know, the sobriety has continued. Though it was the lure of the books that gave him the incentive to get started, the fact that my staff and I played a role in such an impactful life change is truly touching and humbling. That's why I'm a librarian.

Mychal: Wow, that's so beautiful. That also just shows how important libraries are without us knowing. Where that was an incentive enough for that person to better their lives in order for their daughter to help take care of them, to get them to the next step, to be able to keep on using the library and probably at the same time to use the library, but also to continue being in their life, as I'm sure without saying, without maybe telling the library staff. That was also part of the deal, it’s just that they were going to continue existing together as family. That's what they needed. And then the library happened to be the extra, the cherry on top of staying together as family. There's such little things that library people can do to make people's day.

I was always a rogue librarian, rogue library worker. I’m like, the only rules that matter for library workers is keeping them safe and then keeping library people safe. Don't steal, which there’s not very much to steal from the library. We're not a house of money. We're not a bank. Everyone steals all the time from the library. That's the whole purpose of libraries is to temporarily steal the materials and bring them back at a later time. So for me, I was like, I feel totally justified in making people’s day. If people want a library card, I'm going to find a way to get you a library card. I would sometimes, I would I tell people, you have to have your address and I’d be like here’s a sticky note, write your address on this sticky note and I will get you your library card.

Or I loved waiving people's fines. It was my favorite thing to do to get them to return to the library. It is not a big deal, I want you to come back. If you keep on doing it, we’ll have a conversation. But I did courtesy one time waivers multiple times. Because it’s like, yes, we want people to come to the library. We want people who are down in their dumps, who may need an out of state resident card to be able to have the courage, have that one thing to hold on to, to keep on going with their days, with their lives, and with their relationships.

Leah: I used to waive the first, the fee for the first book you accidentally destroyed in my library because I didn't want them to ever be afraid to come in.

Janette: Listening to that story, I just wonder how many of those stories are out there that you don't hear. She can't be the only one.

Mychal: It happens so often that even library people, like you're saying, don't realize it. I think there have been a couple of times where, like, to me, I have never personally saved someone's life even though they told me that I saved their life just through being at the library. I think that's what, it's the presence of the library that saved their life. And I think it happens so many times in so many similar ways. Like I've shared a couple of moments of interactions with people where they’re like, hey, you didn't know it, but my dad came into your library all the time. He was unhoused. You saved his life by treating him like a person,

And I've shared a couple of those stories and people are like, oh, you shared this story before. And I'm like, I haven't. It just happened two different times, because that's the power of the library without us even knowing it. And that is just, that happens all the time. And sometimes we hear about it, sometimes we know and sometimes we've kept people going, we've saved more lives than we’ll ever know. And we just keep on existing and hoping that more and more lives are saved by the joy of the library.

Ola: Yeah, it's not just about the materials that the library offers. It's the building, it's the space, it's the staff. I feel like working at a public library, especially the older patrons that came in, like, this is their only form of socialization for the day. This is their incentive to walk over and get their steps in and browse around. And I don't think that that value can be understated.

Mychal: You know what, something you just made me remember, like how often, I think, as a supervising librarian, there was a person who would call every single week and then sometimes they would talk to us on the phone for two minutes and sometimes it would be for 45 minutes. And there were often times I would be guilty of like being very disgruntled, being like, when is this person going to hang up? Come on, I've got things to do. I’ve got emails to respond to, there's people lined up and you're like, so you feel very, very upset. And at the end of two minutes, 45 minutes, almost every single time, they're just like, I know you have other things to do. Thank you for listening. I'm going to let you go now. And you’re like, oh. Yeah. Like you just said, you see how special that was to them.

It's just two minutes, it's just 45 minutes out of your day. And you may feel rushed, you may feel like you have other things to do, but then you realize how much that little interaction meant to people, like you said, who either, who don't have people in their lives or don't have people in their life in the way that they want them to do. And they just sometimes they just, it's a phone call to their friendly neighborhood librarians.

Ola: Moving on to a school librarian. This is Michelle from Winnebago School District 323. And Michelle writes, a student came in to the library and asked me to recommend a book that would quote, emotionally destroy them. Having had a handful of interactions with the student before, I knew immediately what book I would recommend. Fast forward a couple of weeks and the student bursts into the library, yelling Mrs. Shippy, do you know how many times I cursed your name last night as I sobbed reading the last few chapters? They proceeded to show me a slideshow of selfies they had taken and posted on their social media as they finished the book the previous evening.

While I do not take joy in making students cry, it was obvious that this particular book connected with this student in a profound way and I know I have built a special relationship with them. P.S. Later that day, the student returned to the library dragging a friend, insisting she immediately check out the same book and read it. She finished it in under 24 hours.

Mychal: That's the power of a librarian, being able to find the perfect book for you, even if it's the emotion of wanting to be destroyed. And that's what, that's important in our conversation about library joy is sometimes the emotion of library joy is not necessarily joy. We talked about reading thrillers, reading different things. Like, library joy is, whatever you’re looking for is library joy. Sometimes it could be wanting to be emotionally destroyed. It could be wanting to be terrified and disgusted. Reading Stephen King or C.J. Tudor or like that kid looking for that book. If it’s just saying, I'm going to read Marley & Me, I'm going to read Bridge to Terabithia. My bookish likes [..]

Janette: Ugh, rip my heart out, Mychal.

Mychal: [..] is not going to be the same. But that just, those are such book relationships, book friendships to say, yes, now we're true book friends. I read this disastrous, heartbreaking book. I need you to read it and have your heart broken as well. We are true friends, we are now book buddies.

Ola: You are bonded together.

Janette: I mean, there is so many different kinds of trauma bonding, and I think that is one of them.

Ola: Book trauma bonding, put that on a tote bag.

Leah: I’ve been emotionally destroyed by this book, and now you can, too.

Janette: I mean, they do say, like once you're destroyed by a book, the first thing you do is tell your best friend or someone, you know what I mean? Like you need to read this because I need you to be as destroyed as I am so we can commiserate. You want to feel a connection, right? I love that there's so many types of connections in that story, right? There's the connection between the friends, but there's also the connection with the librarian, too. Like, you know, here is a librarian who's getting this look into a student's life outside of school. Here is what it was like for me to experience this book that you recommended.

Ola: With photographic evidence.

Janette: Right.

Mychal: I love that, I love it. It very much reminds me of, currently I know that Harry Potter is very controversial in book land and library land these days. But Kierra Lewis is actually reading the Harry Potter series for the first time on TikTok and Instagram. And she's made it all the way to Deathly Hallows. And she is reacting in despair at the appropriate moments of despair that we all experienced reading Harry Potter. And it's so fun seeing her massive social media platform with that fandom because they're like, I know exactly how you feel. Yes. You're sobbing at the moment, at the chapter that I also sobbed at. I am so very sorry that you have to experience that in adulthood. I felt these tears in my teenage years, but I am right there with you. And it's just that power, that connection of books and stories that we're talking about, that shared experience of having your heart ripped out by your favorite book characters.

Ola: I love that feeling. I don't know what that says about me, but.

Janette: I mean, I do love that feeling too.

Ola: All right, our last submission here is from Kim from Decatur Public School District 61. And Kim writes, I am a traveling secretary with a variety of duties and one of them is assisting with weeding libraries. I get quite a few questions from students when I'm in the library, but the drawback of my job is that I don't usually get to see if a student likes the book I recommend. On one particular occasion, a student asked me if we had any war books in our library. I suggested The Port Chicago 50 by Steve Sheinkin a Caudill nominee that I had just read. We made the agreement that if he read a couple of chapters and did not like the book, he could exchange it.

A few days later, I saw a student running on the parameter of our open library. I started to tell them not to run, and quite unexpectedly I was tackled by this little blond haired boy. I see that it is the student who I recommended the book to. He is out of breath and is talking excitedly. He showed me his hall pass and explained that he saw me from his room and asked his teacher if he could come and talk me. His exact words were I love, love, love that book. It is the best book I have ever read in my life. Do you have any more like it? Well, I'm not an emotional person, but I could have cried right then and there. This is my library joy.

Mychal: That really is such a special feeling, being ran at, being tackled by a tiny library kid just full of their own library joy from that book recommendation. That's, that is such a special feeling. I think we talked about that several times. I think that just shows who library people are, about how important that success of finding a book that a library kid, library person really enjoys. But I also love the stories because I've always found the secretaries in school libraries to be so special. I mean, I love school librarians, school library media techs, but I think my most important relationship as a public librarian and getting into school libraries was always with a school secretary. So I'm very glad that that person exists. and obviously, that library kid does, too. So that's super cool.

Janette: The feeling that that student had is one that I can very much relate to and I think a lot of people who love books can relate to that feeling too, like, reading a book and closing it and just being like, that is the best book I've ever read. But the downside of that is also knowing the next book you read might not be as good, right?

Ola: You're searching for that high for the rest of your life.

Leah: You are, yes.

Janette: You really are.

Mychal: I think that's like unofficially, that's my love language, too. It's like people appreciating the book, the book recommendation that I gave. And they're like, you were right, I liked that book. I’m like, ah, yes.

Leah: I follow a lot of people on Instagram, and I always know it's a good account because I've seen that you have liked it, too. So it extends past books. Like, oh, this is good content. Mychal likes it.

Janette: You do, I mean, that's part of finding your way. Like I have a bookstagram account and so on my bookstagram like, you start connecting with people because you're like, I see you've read this book. I see you’ve read this book. And then you get to where you're like, I see you read too much of that. And I don't really like that. So maybe I want to see your content, but not as much. Or, you know, you kind of do find your niche based on those shared book preferences, right?

So our final segment of the podcast is always what we call Shelf Care. This is, I feel like this entire episode has really focused on Shelf Care at this point, but I wanted to go ahead and ask you just, if there's anything you wanted to share with listeners about what you do when things are tough or when you need to, you know, take a little break. Is there something you're doing to take care of yourself?

Mychal: People always ask me that. I think I'm still learning about myself, about learning what it takes to take care of me. I've never been very good about taking breaks. I always say I’m going to do less. And then I find I have more projects to take on. But when I'm, in this phase of my life, visiting a whole bunch of places, visiting different state libraries, library conferences, I love being home for a day or two. I will literally come home sometimes for eight hours and then go to the next place and people look at me like I'm crazy. But I'm just like, I need to go home for a little bit. I need to sit on my couch, sleep in my bed, say hi to my cats, check on my mom and dad, check on my people, and just be in the place that I pay very expensive rent for.

That's the biggest thing I think for me taking care of mental health, I think the biggest thing that I've ever done in almost 35 years of life at this point is actually going on a journey to see if I am diagnosed with autism and/or ADHD. It's something that I've always kind of worried about since I was a kid, and just being more serious this time with my therapist and psychiatrist and ask, and actually requesting that I fully be assessed for those things. I meet with my therapist, I meet with my psychiatrist and I've mentioned it before, but every time they're like you don't meet the markers for it. I wouldn't suggest it. I don't know if it's something that I'm going to be diagnosed with. It could just be that I still have formed a neurodivergence through various mental illnesses. But I think for me, the biggest self-care that I've ever done is insisting to the therapist and psychiatrist that I begin that process, that journey to see if it's something that I am diagnosed with. And it's something that I’m currently in the process of.

I'm not sharing that journey with social media out of obligation. It's very helpful for me to be open about the journey so that I can truthfully go about the journey and so I can make sure that I keep on taking the steps all the way through. That I don't stop halfway or I don't stop right before the diagnosis. That I fully go through it and also to show, you know what, there are so many people who are going through the same experience and I'm on the same journey that they're at, and maybe we can have these shared experiences and our mental health could be a little bit better just by knowing that there are other people who are worried and experiencing it and also being plagued by anxiety and depression and other things and just trying to make it one day at a time, and all of us just sharing various niche interests, be it the library, be it books, be it Fortnite, be it Paw Patrol, be it Dog Man, be it silly cats, be it gardening, be it basketball, whatever it is, and just taking care of ourselves. And I think that's the best thing that I've ever been able to do for myself.

Janette: I love that you talk about that as self-care just because advocating for yourself is a lot harder than people think.

Ola: So much work.

Janette: You know, I think there's a lot of times where people say, well, you know, you're experiencing this symptom or this condition. Just go get help for it. And it's like, it's not that easy.

Leah: It’s not that easy.

Janette: I would say, for the majority of people. And that's if you take like barriers to access aside, right? Everybody doesn't even have access to the same resources, but just the ability to try to access the resources is not something that people inherently have. So I love that you're intentional about the way that you talk about that as an effort. It is something you're actively doing because it does take that type of intentional action to take care of yourself that way.

Ola: And the power of like learning how your brain works and learning more about yourself in that way is a huge task and it's uncomfortable and it's just so great when people find the strength to, like, tackle that, to make their lives better for themselves.

Janette: Yeah. It's really hard. It's a hard thing. Destigmatizing, it's crucial when you’re talking about mental health.

Leah: You have gone so far in destigmatizing and I, for one, appreciate and applaud your efforts because as I said, my family and every family, has that in their makeup. And it can be very lonely and very hard. So just seeing that out there is a big comfort to a lot of people. I appreciate you sharing that so much. Thank you.

Janette: This is going to sound really trivial now to move on to asking you if there's anything exciting going on that you want to talk about? We did see that you're going to launch a new podcast with Blair Imani, I believe. That's exciting.

Mychal: We kind of shared the gist of what the podcast will be on social media between myself and Blair. Blair Imani Ali, she just is a great historian, a great educator, and she just has a wonderful way of delivering just a condensed version of history, of education, to people. So I'm very glad that she is my friend. She's going to be the co-host of the podcast alongside me. I think that the basis of the podcast is essentially we just want to have conversations with people to essentially show them that they're not alone. We have no idea what each episode will consist of. It's going to be a whole host of things. It could be libraries, it could be books, it could be education, it could be history, it could be pop culture. Just having conversations about, and just being honest and truthful and just having fun talking to people as a librarian, as an educator, whichever guests we get on the show.

Other projects for me is I still remain as PBS’s resident librarian, so that's a lot of fun. I'm a PBS kid as much as I'm a homeschool kid, a library kid, raised on Arthur Reid and Mr. Rogers, and Reading Rainbow. So all the wholesomeness that PBS offers. So I never saw myself being associated with PBS at all. So it's a dream come true that I never knew was a dream.

I'm releasing a picture book about a celebration of libraries hopefully in 2026. I'm hoping it's a little bit sooner, but the expected time is 2026, so I'm very excited for that. I wrote a lot as a kid and as a teenager, so it's super cool that I’m going to be a published author very, very soon.

Janette: That’s amazing, congratulations.

Ola: Yeah, that's huge.

Mychal: Thank you so much.

Leah: I love it.

Mychal: It is. I'm so excited. And then also just still going to library conferences, talking about libraries, talking about mental health. And I'm sure there's some other projects that I'm forgetting, but those are the main ones that I'm kind of focused on for the next couple of years. And then just continuing to highlight and amplify library workers and teachers, because that's always been my goal is to get people to visit their local library, to get a library card, to thank their local library staff. I think that's my ultimate dream and I will probably always be in some form the library guy or Mychal librarian, but I would love to have to eventually drift behind the scenes and just be able to see all of the other library people just continuing to focus and amplify the greatness that they do each and every day.

Janette: I think you're doing more than enough already.

Mychal: I appreciate it.

Janette: But I wish you all the best in everything and all of your endeavors coming up. I want to thank Mychal Threets again for joining us today. I'm so excited that you're here and we are just honored to have you. So thank you so much for all of your time today.

If our listeners have any questions or topics that they'd like us to cover on Can't Shelve This, you can now leave us a voicemail on our brand new hotline, and that number is 630.734.5015. Or you can always find us on the web.

And until next time, stay legit.Don't quit.