



Valerie Diggs *Lifetime Achievement*

What does a *lifetime* mean to someone who is not retired, or really ready to retire?? I have to say my award was a total surprise, and one that prompted a series of soul-searching sessions around just where I am going with my career, as well as where I have been. While I know that the award is not contingent upon retirement, but on years of service, having received this award evoked an introspection of my career in school librarianship.

Before I begin on *that* account, I want to sincerely thank the awards committee and the Executive Board of MSLA for bestowing upon me the *MSLA Lifetime Achievement Award*, given in gratitude for years of service and contributions to the profession. It is not often in one's life that such prestigious recognition is received.

My beginnings in the profession of school librarianship are humble and relatively recent, compared to the 30 and 40 year careers of many of my colleagues. However, once my career was launched, I seemed to want to be on the fast track at all times. I began my professional career as a classroom teacher in the early 1970's (old, huh?) and took many years off shortly thereafter to raise four children. When I was just about ready to re-enter the workforce, I received a call from a family friend who also happened to be the principal of a PreK-2 elementary school in the next town over. He asked me if I would be interested in helping his school establish a school library, something the children at this particular school had never had.

A school library? I had no knowledge whatsoever of the workings of a library. However, I was anxious to re-enter the world of schools, so I accepted the position. Little did I know that this decision would be one of the best professional decisions of my life. I walked into my new job with no knowledge of school libraries. I was shown to a large, double classroom, with an enormous mound of books thrown on the floor in the center of the room. No shelving, no program; I was on my own. Well, not completely on my own. I had a wonderful cadre of parent volunteers who came in day after day. They helped me order shelves, place tables and chairs in the room, and clean the closets of old pizza pans and trash. The rest is history. I was on a professional track I did not want to leave behind.

Fast forward to 2010. I have now been a school librarian for 14 years, and spent all of those years in Chelmsford. I began my

professional career in Chelmsford's elementary schools, even as I was working towards my masters' degree in Library and Information Science. In 2001, the high school position became available, and I jumped at the opportunity to work with students at this grade level.

Much of life is 50% luck and 50% deliberate choice. I think for me this is very true. I happened to be lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, and opportunistic enough to understand this. Building a program at Chelmsford High School was a labor of love, involving a mixture of creativity, hard work, and risk taking. From the program came the facility re-design, and the opportunity to add even more to what we do at Chelmsford High School each day. From library to Learning Commons did not take place overnight, and was not accomplished without the same program-building skills mentioned above. We have received state and national recognition, but more importantly, have added a new and powerful dimension to the lives of students at Chelmsford High School. Our motto, Ask, Think, Create, is paramount to all that we do.

I also value and treasure my work at Simmons College, as an adjunct professor teaching students how to manage school library media programs; my work with the Massachusetts School Library Association and the excitement of the impending presidency of this wonderful organization; and my work with the American Association of School Librarians as Director-Elect of Region One. All of these professional opportunities offer breadth and depth to my primary role of school librarian. It is fulfilling this role to the best of my ability that brings me the most professional satisfaction.

In conclusion, thank you MSLA for bestowing the *Lifetime Achievement Award* upon me. It is an honor that I treasure above all others, as it comes from the group I have the highest respect for: my peers.

Just a fair warning: I am not done quite yet!

