

# FROM THE EDITOR

MARY DANIELS



As we move out of winter and into the long spring/summer season, there's a thought that's been rattling around my brain: why should we, as a society, care about doing "the right thing" when it seems that people who ignore it are the ones who get rewarded? Not coincidentally, one of my favorite quotes also keeps popping up in my mind, attributed only as a Greek proverb with no known author: "Society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in."

In short: good people do good for people even if the beneficiaries are people they do not know. They don't expect to get rewarded for it, or even to enjoy the fruits of their labor. An old man who plants a tree doesn't do it because he hopes to eat its fruit in five or ten years, or because he hopes to lounge in its shade. He labors through his own aches and pains because he knows that leaving his world better than he came into it is the right thing to do, and that knowledge alone must be reward enough for his hard work.

As librarians and library workers, we are planting trees every day. One branch of that tree looks like academic librarians helping students find the resources they need, and public library workers helping members of their communities send faxes and make copies. Another branch looks like media specialists making sure every reader finds the book they need. A particularly fruitful limb of the tree is seeing families grow generations of readers at story times and summer reading programs. The tree includes the catalogers, IT professionals, and technical service workers who assess materials and work to make them accessible to all. It blossoms with our pages and volunteers.

There may not be an immediate benefit or reward to those of us doing this work—most of the time, it's pretty unglamorous! But we didn't become librarians for glory and riches. We did it because some part of us knew it was the right thing to do. And we stay librarians because we know the work we do now will pay off for future generations.

Like any tree, we thrive when tended carefully. Prune out what no longer serves you. Be sure to rest, hydrate, and get some sun. Grow your orchard and root system—get to know your colleagues so you can support them, and they can support you! Celebrate yourself and each other—that's FLA President Jorge's entire message this year (and what a great opportunity we all have to meet and support one another at our annual conference. If you can make it, please consider going). As Hallie Rich, Editor-in-Chief of *Library Journal*, wrote in her December letter, "Library leaders will find power in building bridges where others seek to erect walls." This is so important to remember: as people feel more isolated and divided than ever, a key function of the library is increasingly to build community, and offer space for that community to come together.

Keep up the hard work. Keep doing the right thing, if for no other reason than doing so in the face of opposition is an act of resistance unto itself. And know that the work you do is ensuring literacy, information, community, and a future to the generations that will come after us—the true hallmarks of what makes people and societies great.

  
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