

## The Annual Report of the Ontario Library Association

# OLA 2009

## Peggy Thomas, President

*'Don't ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.'* Howard Thurman

As Michael Ridley proposed both at last year's AGM and in a recent article for OLA's Access magazine, we have entered the "Age of Imagination," where creativity, imagination and innovation are the keystones and challenges for our profession going forward. (Ridley, 2010) To that list, I would add passion; passion for the profession, passion for the vision of where we see ourselves going forward and passion for how we can connect with other likeminded professionals worldwide to form powerful and imaginative communities. This is a time of such wondrous possibility, the excitement is palpable.

As such, it has been an absolute pleasure and honour to have been the OLA president and I want to thank all of you for the support and opportunities offered me as I steered my way through this year. OLA has for me been a place to explore and realize my passions; My passion for social justice through the Be the Change project, my passion for intellectual freedom and freedom to read through the Forest of Reading® program, and my passion for this profession. In fact, for those of you who may not be aware, I am in the second semester of my MLIS program at the University of Western Ontario. Where this will lead me is not clear, but what it offers me is an opportunity to stretch and grow, imagine and wonder, and I am

enjoying every minute of it.

The foremost activity of the board this past year has been the creation of a new strategic plan for the Ontario Library Association. I want to personally thank all of the members who took part in the process, whether by attending one of the imagining sessions or by joining in on the online discussions or surveys. Your voice is valued and important; our organization can only be as strong as the members we serve. From that process we have honed our vision and mission for the OLA as well as identified four key strategies: growing career paths and potential, collaborating to extend libraries' strategic voice, strengthening our organization and transforming ideas into solutions. All of these strategies speak to the

comments we received from our members, and all are important. One, however, truly speaks to me, and that is transforming ideas into solutions. Here is where the "Age of Imagination" can actually be realized. I invite anyone with an idea that excites and drives them to consider bringing that forward to their division, or to the OLA board itself. All of the transformative programs of the OLA have started with an idea that was nurtured and developed and eventually blossomed. Think of the Forest of Reading®, Knowledge Ontario and even Super Conference. Each program started small and grew to be quite amazing through imagination, creativity and (it must be said) a lot of hard work.



On the note of hard work, the Ontario School Library Association has released the final version of *Together for Learning*, funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education, and written by the OSLA. It is a forward thinking document, looking at how the entire school community can become a Learning Commons with the concept's early coordination and leadership resting with the expertise found in the school library. There have been many contributors to this endeavour over the three years that it took to create, and they all deserve accolades. There were a few, however, who worked tirelessly on the final version, and to very tight deadlines. I would like to thank Larry Moore, Bobbie Henley and Diana Maliszewski, who joined me in this journey to rewrite the document. Carol Koechlin also deserves special recognition for the heroic efforts she put forth to help us make some very tight deadlines. The document was officially launched at Super Conference and has been met with very strong approval from the school library sector. Now the challenge begins to implement the vision and make this a living document.

Two years ago, when Larry Moore retired as executive director of OLA, he initiated the Larry Moore Challenge, a tri-annual leadership competition to encourage and foster leadership and innovation in librarianship and libraries in Canada. The challenge is supported by the Larry Moore fund to which contributions are most welcome. This is the "Age of Imagination" at work.

2009 was the inaugural year of the challenge, and OLA received a number of very intriguing ideas. A jury met to discuss the submissions and decide on the winner. On behalf of the OLA board of directors and the jury, I am pleased to announce that Check Out a Living Book @ Your

Library, submitted by Sophie Gorski, Hamilton Public Library was selected as the winner of the Larry Moore Challenge.

Libraries are the community's living rooms and already enjoy public trust. Developing the Human Library project as an Ontario-wide program will increase the visibility of libraries and tackle diversity head-on by exploring many of the current social issues faced in our communities.

We would also like to thank Hamilton Public Library, and Chief Librarian Ken Roberts for graciously matching the \$2,500 OLA prize to enable the project to really gain traction in its first year. Look for information concerning this project in future communications from the OLA.

The Forest of Reading® continues to grow and develop. In addition to other obligations at the OLA, I have served as the chair of the Forest of Reading® for the past several years. The program would not be the incredible force that it is without the hard work, energy and imagination that the authors, volunteers and OLA staff put into it.

To the authors, thank you for your words, your creativity and vision and willingness to be alone with your ideas so that as readers we can imagine, explore and dream about the worlds you create.

To the members of the steering and selection committees, you rock. Having served on both types of committees, I can attest to the time, dedication and perseverance necessary to make the program come alive. We could not do it without you. And while I am at it, thank your respective spouses, partners and family. I know that my husband groans every spring as the boxes of books start to arrive with startling regularity.

To the staff of the OLA, especially Meredith Tutching, a sincere and heartfelt thank you. None of the programs that the OLA sponsors and runs would be as wonderful as they are without the dedication and commitment of the OLA staff. For such a small group of people an amazing amount of work is accomplished. OLA is a very complex organization, and it is the staff that oversees the operations day to day. Without you all, we would not be able to have the Forest and the festival that follows in May, to name only two programs that you all support.



2010 Festival of Trees™

A special thank you also has to go to S&B Books, the official sponsor and great patron saint of the Forest of Reading® program. The investment they make in the children of this province through the sponsorship of the Forest of Reading® is appreciated, valued and celebrated.

As well as celebrating the Forest of Reading®, it is important to take note that controversy does sometimes surround the selections made by the committees. Many times in the past we have had challenges to selected titles, usually made by a parent to a school or perhaps directly to the OLA. But once in a while, these challenges take on a different texture and become a rallying cry for an organized special interest group to demand the removal of a book. Such was the situation for Deborah Ellis' book *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak* in 2006 and this year for

*The Shepherd's Granddaughter* written by Anne Laurel Carter. I mention both books as they were both published by Groundwood Books. Patsy Aldana, publisher of Groundwood Books, is to be commended for never shying away from publishing books that are controversial for some readers and for standing up to the rhetoric of censorship.

The following considerations, though, are important for our profession to contemplate going forward. At what point do we grant to children the rights to "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression?" How do we define school libraries with regards to these freedoms when intervention of a special interest group can supersede the decisions made by professionals? How do we support the decision of a parent for their child while upholding the rights of other children to gain access to the material in question? While not easy to answer, these questions do speak to the very basis of intellectual freedom for students in our schools and will continue to be important considerations as we move forward.

The culmination of my year as president was Super Conference. The energy and ideas that are routinely found there continue to amaze and rejuvenate me and this year was no exception. As president of OLA, certain honours are granted to you, one of which is to select the winner of the President's Award for Exceptional Achievement.

The Ontario Library Association President's Award for Exceptional Achievement acknowledges an outstanding action or contribution that has in a major or unique way enhanced or furthered librarianship in Ontario. The selection is at the full discretion of the President and is only given if

there is something of true historic significance to recognize.

This year the award went to both Deborah Ellis and Eric Walters for their commitment to informing, through their writing, a generation of children about the realities and experiences of children worldwide. But more significantly they received the award for also taking action on these passions and making real and meaningful contributions to our society in areas of social justice.

Deborah Ellis donated and contributed to many causes, usually those that deal with the issues that she has written about in her books. These include, Women for Women in Afghanistan and Street Kids International. These organizations have made life altering changes in Afghanistan and in the developing world, building women's centres and schools and creating educational and work opportunities where before none had existed. Deborah Ellis has also contributed to UNICEF to give lifesaving care for those suffering from AIDS in Africa. Her writing and generosity are inspirational and this award is but a small acknowledgement of all that she has done.

Eric Walters is also a writer of exceptional talent with a keen commitment to human rights and the rights of children everywhere. Eric has been instrumental in establishing The Creation of Hope, an outreach program in Kikima, Kenya. His ultimate goal is to create a residence where children who would otherwise not have any hope will have the care and support to reach their full potential. But this is not Eric's only venture into issues near and dear to him. He has also donated royalties to the Terry Fox Foundation, the Guluwalk and Free the Children. His book, *Shattered*, which is about a peace keeper who was stationed in Rwanda (and which, incidentally, has a forward written by General Romeo Dallaire),

generated funds for a Baptist Christian Missions orphanage in Rwanda.

I wish to end my report with a reflection on the presentation given by Lt. General Romeo Dallaire on the Friday of Super Conference. General Dallaire spoke passionately about the need to be able to see the commonalities of humanity, how we need to focus on what we share rather than on what drives us apart. In his words, a human being is a human being, and geography, religious beliefs, race or skin colour should never be a factor of how we treat each other. This speaks directly to the fundamental freedoms: freedom of conscience and religion; freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression that we hold dear in the library community. His other comment, that inaction is an action, continues to reverberate with me. We, in the various communities we serve, have both an opportunity and an obligation to act upon those words. In the past, conference speakers have provoked action on the part of the OLA and its members. Let us honour not only General Dallaire's words, but his work, his commitment and his experiences by taking action. In this "Age of Imagination," creativity and problem solving are the coin of the realm, and the OLA community has proven in the past that we have a wealth of innovation to offer. Choose to be passionate, choose to make a difference.

Thank you, I look forward to where this "Age of Imagination" will lead us, and I especially look forward to sharing the journey with all of you.



Peggy Thomas  
OLA President



OLA's  
Strategic Directions  
Innovation. Collaboration. Leadership.