

Rogue Librarians, Bonus Episode

ALA President-Elect Cindy Hohl

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Welcome to a special episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians discuss banned books.

We are your hosts, Marian, Dorothy, and Alanna, and we are the Rogue Librarians.

We would love for you to participate in our discussion.

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Today, we are excited to share our interview with the President-Elect of the American Library Association, Cindy Hohl.

Cindy Hohl, MBA/MLIS, is a member of the Santee Sioux Nation and works as the Director of Policy Analysis and Operational Support at the Kansas City Public Library.

She is a past President of the American Indian Library Association and works with librarians to share information across the globe as a member of the International Federation of Library Associations Indigenous Matters Section and in her work as Co-Chair on the Tribal Library Council for the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums.

With a passion for upholding intellectual freedom, Cindy serves as an ex-officio trustee on the Executive Board of the Freedom to Read Foundation and as a member of the Missouri Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee.

As a proud ALA spectrum scholar, she strives to increase diversity in the library field through mentorship, recruitment and advocacy.

Cindy is also the 2023 to 2024 President-elect of the American Library Association and its first spectrum scholar to be elected to the role.

Cindy holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Friends University, a Master of Business Administration degree from Baker University, and a Master of Library and Information Science degree from Wayne State University.

Cindy begins her tenure as president on July 2nd, right after the 2024 ALA Annual Conference and Exhibition.

The annual conference starts on June 27th in San Diego, California.

Cindy spoke with us about the conference, her goals for her time as president, the Freedom to Read Foundation, and the ALA's current efforts to fight censorship.

We were thrilled to have the opportunity to talk with her and get to know things about her background and her passions.

And I found the conversation to be really inspiring.

What did the two of you think?

Well, I definitely felt deeply moved by our conversation with Cindy.

She just, she is so eloquent and everything she says is so true and heartfelt.

And she speaks about issues that are controversial without feeling like there's any controversy.

It just was really very moving for me.

What do you think, Dorothy?

Yeah, what really struck me was everything she said was said with kindness.

And she said a couple of times the idea of doing things with a good intention or in a good way.

And it came across, it came across in her demeanor, you know, everything that the way that she spoke, that those good intentions were there.

Yes, definitely.

The other thing you just reminded me of, Dorothy, and thank you for that, is, you know, she really just, she was unapologetic in a sense about, you know, where we are in the current situation politically and just continued to implore librarians and library supporters to become more vocal, to let our leaders know what our stand is and, you know, that we want to continue to have the freedom to read diverse books, and that it's our responsibility as individuals and also collectively to continue to make our voices heard and not to bury our heads in the sand or just give up.

And I thought that was really inspiring too and a great message to pass on to our listeners.

Yeah, beautifully said.

Well, without further ado, here is our interview with Cindy Hohl.

Cindy, thank you so much for joining us on Rogue Librarians.

Thank you so much for having me, I'm thrilled to be here.

We are thrilled to have the opportunity to talk with you.

Congratulations on being elected the President of the American Library Association.

Thank you so much, I appreciate that.

We can't wait to talk about your plans and learn more about you.

We'd like to start by asking you a few questions about your background.

So first, what was one of the most influential books that you read when you were growing up and why?

Well, I am a voracious reader.

I have always had a love of reading and learning.

I'm a lifelong learner.

I have always been a person who stands up for injustice and I'm a huge animal lover.

I had an immediate connection with the animal farm, but I had a profound understanding of the relationship between the injustice of that storyline in regards to how the animals were being treated and that they sought a more just and fair society for themselves to be acknowledged and recognized.

And so I share this with you with an indigenous lens because I am Dakota of the Santee Sioux Nation.

And in our ways of knowing, our ways of being, relationality is the root of who we are together in this space at this time.

And so when you're raised to understand that the Creator placed you here with a reason and a purpose, that's for everyone.

We're here to protect the earth, our children, future generations, the animals, the land that gives back to us.

And so when you think about any member of that society being oppressed, it's really something to think more about and to lean into.

And so as a young child who had a mind for justice, I immediately started thinking, well, yeah, that isn't fair.

And growing up in the Midwest, you are surrounded by animals everywhere you go.

So you think about how can we treat them with the respect that they deserve?

And then you think about human beings and that need and desire for respect and reciprocity, how we treat each other, that is the investment in our future.

And I remember holding my little beagle when I was reading that thinking, you know that it is up to me to help make the world a better place.

And I do have the power and the authority to be able to do that.

That's beautiful.

Beautifully put.

I love that book.

I really enjoy teaching it to my students as well.

So thank you so much for sharing.

So how did you decide to become a librarian?

Well, my husband is a second generation librarian and he came home, it's a funny story.

I was cooking and he brought home a job description and it was for customer experience manager.

And he said, I want you to take a look at this.

And so I was reading it and I said, wow, this is so great.

Oh, this is why your library is so wonderful.

You guys think of everything.

I love that you care about the experience of your patrons and the community at large.

I said, I'm so proud of you.

I love that you love your work and you're so happy there.

And he said, well, do you know who I think should apply?

And I'm sitting there, you know, just stirring pot cooking and looking at him like, I was trying to think, who do we both mutually know?

He said, you, I think you would be perfect for this role.

And I said, but I'm not a librarian.

And he said, well, you just need a master's degree.

And at that time I had an MBA.

You know, the rest is history, obviously.

And, you know, I just, I love my work and what we do every single day.

I feel that there's always a positive takeaway during the day, no matter what challenges may come up.

So our next question is we saw that you were the president of the American Indian Library Association.

Would you mind telling us a little bit more about Ala and its goals?

Yes, I was president of ALA in 2020, you know, that monumental year of our lives up until this point of our existence.

And it was such a wonderful time to serve in that role because we had our monthly meetings on Zoom and it was the most joined meeting space we've ever had because before we would just meet up at conferences.

But during this time where we were able to share space online, it was the most beautiful part of 2020 to me.

Was every month checking in and hearing about all of the good work that was being done in communities across this country.

We also every now and then shared poems and stories.

The oral storytelling tradition is very enmeshed in all that we do in indigenous communities.

There's always a story to tell, there's always something to learn, but the most part is what you're there to share.

And so the community that we were able to be a part of online during that time was just beautiful.

But ALA was founded back in 1979 when the White House had a pre-conference on Indian Library and Information Services on or near reservations.

And so what I always want information professionals to understand is that while you may not serve directly within a reservation community, you are still serving indigenous peoples within the community that you serve.

Because just like me, I'm the only person who ever moved away from my large family and that was to attend school in Kansas.

And in doing so, I bring my community with me because I'm Dakota no matter where I go.

That is who I am, that being Dakota is in my heart.

And so it's not just a part of my identity when I'm back home.

So no matter where I go, I am indigenous.

And I have that lens in which I look at the community around me.

And so there's nothing more welcoming than seeing a library, an archive, a museum, having a display about indigenous peoples, our culture, our ways.

And the thing that I want people to know about ALA is that in the United States, we have a federal recognition of tribes and there's over 500 of them.

Usually, I think it's around 566.

So there are also tribes that are not recognized by the federal system.

And there are also state recognized tribes.

And then there are also descendants and people who maybe they weren't raised in their ways, in their culture, but that doesn't make them any less indigenous.

And so ALA is the home for people to land in a place where they're welcome, where they know they belong.

Anyone can be a member of ALA.

And ALA has this wonderful American Indian Youth Literature Awards that's biannual.

And we have all of the wonderful honor books that we are able to award all of the beauty of those stories and to really help people see the beauty and value of traditional knowledge, as well as celebrating stories within an indigenous context.

If you live and work in the United States of America, you are serving the homelands of the original inhabitants.

And it's so important that we all acknowledge that responsibility.

Oftentimes you will hear people talk about land acknowledgements, but I want to explain it a little bit further.

In indigenous communities, when we gather together, it's in a good way.

And that means it doesn't matter what context the discussion leads towards.

Anything that's going to happen within that discussion is going to be in a good way.

So that means any challenges, any discussion that needs more information, that's what the community is there for at that time.

So when you gather in a good way, you start that by acknowledging your responsibility to the land that we're here to take care of, the land who takes care of us, to our fellow human beings who we're here to make good decisions with and to support in a good way, and of course, all of the animals, the winged ones, the crawling ones, the four-legged, the two-legged.

When you're able to start your meeting off in a good way, that sets that tone and that desire to have a productive meeting.

And really, that is the whole point of a land acknowledgement.

You're acknowledging the responsibility that you have, and you're talking about how you're actively doing that through that meeting.

So, you know, talking about how, you know, you're making decisions with the funding that you have, how you're making decisions to support the people that you're there to serve, and how you're making decisions to incorporate health and wellness into the community.

So I hope that that explains what a land acknowledgement truly is.

It's not just to say a few words and then to awkwardly step aside and get into the rest of the meeting.

Thank you.

That was incredibly helpful.

We also saw that you were an ALA Spectrum Scholar and are the first Spectrum Scholar to be elected president of the ALA.

Could you tell us more about the Spectrum Scholarship Program?

Thank you.

I'm very proud to be elected as the first Spectrum Scholar president of the American Library Association.

ALA had this great vision.

Some key leaders really leaned into what they felt was a plan to help diversify the field, to help recruit scholars into the field and help them have a connection with the profession.

And in recruiting American Indians, Asian Americans, Black, African American, Hispanic, Latino, Middle Eastern, North African, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islanders, this was the initial scope of the Spectrum Scholarship Program was to recruit individuals into the profession to support them with a scholarship as they obtained their Master of Library and Information Science degree at the ALA accredited School of the Choosing.

So through this program, ALA affirmed a commitment at the time to diversity and inclusion by helping to bring in new generations of racially and ethnically diverse librarians to help position ALA to provide that leadership within this transformation of libraries and library services.

So this was really a catalyst for change.

This was to help individuals see their fit in libraries and help them elevate their careers.

But what's so important about the Spectrum Scholarship Program is that it's not just a scholarship in name, that we are a spectrum throughout the field.

That library professionals, directors, board of trustees, that they understand the value of hiring diverse perspectives and welcoming them into their systems.

Because it's one thing to hire someone and say, oh, well, look, we finally hired a person of color.

You know, I guess we can check that box.

Well, that's not action with an intended consequence.

That's just saying we did the bare minimum.

What we need to do as a field is to create welcoming spaces for the spectrum scholars to be able to thrive, to grow, to succeed, and to never ever tokenize any of our colleagues.

You know, being a spectrum scholar is something that's near and dear to my heart.

It's where I found my fit in this community.

I feel that my spectrum family is where I'm at home.

That is a wonderful experience.

Irregardless of the label of the spectrum scholarship, it needs to become a part of the culture of this field, and that needs to go through all library types, public, academic, special, school, tribal libraries.

We need to make sure that we are truly creating inclusive spaces where we are going to retain these scholars and not just have a flash in the pan press release and say, hey, we're good.

We've all come down, they're here.

You actually need to do the work.

And I say that in a good way.

I say that with the hope that someone will hear this and recognize how they can also contribute to that field where everyone really does have an equal opportunity.

Well, I can tell how passionate you are about all of these issues, which may answer the next question, but why did you decide then to run for president of the ALA?

And what do you hope to accomplish during your tenure?

Well, it was interesting.

I was contacted by the nominating committee that I was being extended an opportunity to interview and perhaps run for president.

Well, I had to ask for my employer's support, and they did not feel that that was something that I needed to pursue at that time.

So I let the nominating committee know that I appreciated being contacted, but that I wasn't able to move forward with that nomination.

So the very next year, I was contacted again by the next nominating committee.

And so again, I went to my director at the time, and I said, well, you know, it appears that lightning has indeed struck twice.

And I am once again presenting this opportunity to you to see what you would like me to do.

Because, you know, all my work in this field has been on behalf of my employers.

I've worked for two public library systems so far.

And while I may be nominated for the leadership that I bring and that I share within the space, I needed the support of my employer because when you're ALA president, you need a lot of help.

It's, you know, you may be the primary spokesperson, but no one person can do this work alone.

And so I was very grateful that the second time the nomination came around, that I did have that support and that I was able to proceed with accepting the nomination and moving through that process.

So I am very grateful to my colleagues for their support in this candidacy, for this nomination, for this election.

And I do hope that each and every day during my year, I will be able to service in the best way possible and that I will always take into consideration all of the collective good that we do so that I can be that representative of what it means to be a librarian.

I just, I hear so much humility in that explanation, Cindy, and it just moves me as an ALA member myself.

So thank you for that and thank you for representing our organization so beautifully.

We know that ALA is hosting its 2024 annual conference and exhibition in San Diego, California, coming up from June 27th through July 2nd.

Would you please tell our listeners a little bit more about what some of the highlights are at the annual conference?

Sure.

Well, I absolutely love the ALA annual conference.

I find it as an opportunity for me to fill my cup.

I really get energized by seeing colleagues that I haven't seen since the last conference, by attending all of the wonderful programs that we have.

You know, we have over 200 different educational programs that are offered.

And as a lifelong learner, it's something where I feel there's something for everyone.

And when you look at all the different topics that are available, sometimes it's actually hard to pick and choose because you want to go to several at the same time slot.

So really, you're only limited by the amount of sleep that you need and the best walking shoes you can find because you'll need both to be successful.

But, you know, I'm so grateful that we are going to San Diego, this beautiful space where we're going to be able to all convene together and help each other grow within this profession, support one another in our work, uplift the voices of those that we have yet to hear from, and always celebrate what it means to be an information professional in these times.

You will often hear me say there has never been a better time to be a librarian.

And some people hold their head when I say that.

I don't mean to cause confusion by saying that.

I am well aware that there are challenges within this field, and I certainly remain cognizant of those challenges.

But at the end of the day, if we can't take stock into the beauty of our work in this noble profession where we are the trust institution of our communities, then we need to go back to the drawing board on what it means to be a librarian.

I find inspiration at the conference.

I truly do.

We have the different sessions that are available on research and innovations.

You know, they're little bite-sized sessions where you can go in here about something cool that's happening.

And of course, I look forward to the President's program.

So I look forward to planning my own program next year in Philadelphia.

And I do hope that, you know, we will be able to continue to have attendees join us and extend their love of libraries.

That's wonderful.

Do you want to tell us any more about a couple parts of the conference that you're most excited about?

Well, I am always excited for the marketplace.

You know, meeting with the vendors and thanking them, showing them appreciation for what they do for our field.

You know, that's something that's important to me.

I always want to make sure that I'm hearing about their products and services, you know, learning more about the recent technologies and updates that are available, because that helps us do our jobs better.

I always want to attend the live stages to hear the authors.

I get in line for some of my favorite authors when they're also there.

It's always interesting to see even podcasts that are being recorded there at the conference.

But, you know, there's films and documentaries that are often a part of the program.

And I encourage everyone to go to the website to look at what we have offered.

You know, please make a plan to join us.

There's still plenty of time to register and get your schedule planned out.

That's always a fun part of going to the conference as well, is looking to see what your schedule allows and what educational session is going to really help you in your work.

Have you guys heard of some of the major speakers this year?

We have not.

Could you tell us a little bit more?

Sure.

So this sounds like a lot of fun.

We have an award-winning actor, producer, author and mental health advocate, Taraji P.

Henson.

And I'm very interested to hear her new book.

You Can Be a Good Friend, No Matter What.

And so that's going to debut here in June.

So looking forward to hearing that discussion.

We also have Ali Velsky, who is, of course, an MSNBC host and a reporter of global events, including conflicts worldwide.

Of course, the Velsky Band Book Club is something that I have been following.

And he also has an upcoming book, Small Acts of Courage.

And so as a social justice warrior myself, of course, I look forward to reading that.

I believe that we all have an opportunity to impact others in a good way.

And so I look forward to hearing more about all of his work.

And then, you know, we also have Max Greenfield coming.

And he also has an upcoming book, Good Night Thoughts.

And so, you know, any kind of heartwarming bedtime story that addresses anxiety with humor and mindfulness, something that appeals to both children and adults alike.

So I always look forward to the illustrations of his books as well.

And I'm just so looking forward to spending time with my colleagues in San Diego.

I will note that my inauguration is on Tuesday, July 2nd at 1130 a.m.

right after the closing session.

So I do hope that those who are able to attend will look forward to spending a wonderful annual conference in San Diego.

Wonderful.

Thank you.

We noted that you were the treasurer and are a trustee on the executive board of the Freedom to Read Foundation.

How did you get involved with Freedom to Read?

And could you please tell our listeners more about this organization and its work?

Yes, thank you.

I absolutely love the Freedom to Read Foundation.

It is an organization that is near and dear to my heart because my values are definitely in alignment.

When I was a student at Wayne State University, my advisor, I would have different discussions with her, and I wanted to tell her why librarianship was important to me and why I felt that Indigenous scholars had a role here.

So I will share that there was a time in this country when our people, the Dakota, we were not allowed to speak our language.

We could not read our language, sing, write.

It was outlawed.

And this isn't a time way back.

This isn't generations past.

We were finally able to sing and pray in our language in 1978.

So that was a long period of time when our voices were silenced.

And that's wrong.

That should never be.

You don't uphold humanity by oppressing anyone's voice.

And so I will always uplift mine to represent our people, to be the voice of my ancestors who were silenced, to think about my own grandparents, who were removed from their homes at five years old to go to residential boarding school, where they were told that they were not allowed to speak anything but English.

To oppress someone in their humanness should never be an option.

It should be the right of no man.

Yet it happens.

And when we continue to see these oppressive storylines happen, we need to stand up.

If you are not able to relate to that, I'm not entirely sure what world you live in.

But the one that I live in is one where human beings are equal and that everyone is respected and that there is great value to our voices and that we celebrate the humanity among us.

And in order to do that, sometimes we need help from entities such as the trusted Freedom to Read Foundation where a slogan, free people, read freely, really should be a way of life.

When we talk about people being free and that you should be able to read freely and you should be able to speak freely and you should be able to listen freely, that is what the First Amendment right is for.

And that's for everyone, from children to adult and those in between.

So the Freedom to Read Foundation is a non-profit legal and educational organization, and they are an affiliate of the American Library Association.

FTRF warriors protect and defend the First Amendment to the Constitution and they support the right of libraries to collect and individuals to access information.

To me, that is a mission that I can get around all day long.

So when you look at FTRF, their purpose, that they're guaranteeing the rights of individuals to express their ideas without governmental interference and to read and listen to ideas of others, I don't know how anyone wouldn't join FTRF.

Who doesn't believe that everyone has that equal right?

They've been around since 1969.

They work closely with PEN America, the National Coalition Against Censorship, the Office of Intellectual Freedom with ALA, and we have recently brought together the Unite Against Book Bans group so that everyone can join, everyone can raise their voice in their community, represent the mission and values of their organization, and hopefully stand up for equality across America.

You just brought tears to my eyes, Cindy.

Beautifully put, and we're so grateful for the work that Freedom to Read and the other organizations have been doing.

We wanted to talk a little bit more about recent data that the ALA released.

When ALA releases data on book challenges from 2023 this past April, we saw that 4,240 unique book titles were targeted for censorship, which was a 65% increase over the numbers from 2022.

Additionally, the number of titles challenged at public libraries increased 92% over the previous year, making up almost half of all book challenges in 2023.

We have a couple of questions about this information.

The first one is, does ALA know how many of these challenge titles were removed from the shelves?

Well, while ALA compiles that data, sometimes when you go through the book challenge process, the titles are returned.

ALA does not have the exact number that stood.

When you look at the library and their collection development process and their materials reconsideration policy, that's where you can find the local information in your community to see what decisions were made regarding the title and if that title is accessible in the community.

Great, thank you.

So our second question on that is that do you guys have any new theories as to why there was such a large increase in book challenges at public libraries?

Do the same individuals tend to target both school and public libraries?

Yes, well, that appears to be the direct correlation was that the original challenges showed up in school libraries, and that was where we saw this activity start to rise up again.

As we know, book challenges are not new, and while this continues to grow, it's because there are more public libraries than there are school libraries.

And so just moving the target over, it's still the same community that's being pressed.

And so when we look at how we can support libraries of all types, we always throw out the data that there are more libraries than Starbucks, there are more libraries than McDonald's, and sometimes that's new information for people.

And when they think about it, they're like, wow, really?

Oh yeah, I guess that's right.

Okay, so if libraries don't have that kind of recognition that we are a part of the fabric of the community, that should be a key indicator that this is a trusted community resource.

This is something that we rely on and that we just depend upon so greatly that it is a part of who we are as a people.

That's my takeaway from that.

When I hear that comparison and I see that people are hearing that for the first time, I encourage them to lean into that.

Why is that?

It is because the library is the information hub of your community.

Libraries have that power and reach to help everyone access the information that they need.

That's why it's so important that we continue to allow everyone equal access to the library so that they too can access the story that will help them wherever they're at on their journey.

Oh, definitely.

We were just wondering if you have a favorite book that has shown up specifically on ALA's list of most frequently challenged books from 2023, and if so, why?

You know, when I'm looking at those lists, I immediately look at the synopsis.

And I see the story that someone wishes to oppress.

I see the voice that someone wants to silence.

And I immediately put myself in those shoes.

I think of what it's like to have maybe experienced that and how alone and isolated you must feel.

And that's not OK.

When you look at a title and you hear that someone's saying, no one should read these words, this story is not an accurate depiction of who we are as human beings.

I respectfully disagree because unfortunately, we hear these stories happen in the media on a regular basis.

You hear about harm and trauma and violence.

You hear about people who need help.

You hear about a lack of health and wellness resources in communities.

You see it through food drives.

You see it through clothing drives.

You see it through school supply drives.

Those are unmet needs in a community.

We should not let information become another unmet need in any community.

Well said.

Thank you.

Earlier, you mentioned the Unite Against Book Bans Campaign.

We saw that this campaign has published resumes with information about frequently challenged books.

For example, each resume includes a synopsis, reviews, awards, and responses to challenges.

And they look very helpful.

How does ALA hope that people will use this information?

Well, as we know, librarians love a good toolkit.

And this was an easy button item where we could say, here's a resume of this book.

And that helps you see what information is contained within that title.

What is the context of the words that are printed there?

And so these are easy to print documents that are designed to help support readers access books that are being targeted by censors.

So if you have a title that you hear is being highlighted by a book club or maybe by a community group, and you want to learn more about it, you can go to the Unite Against Book Bans website and be able to access these resumes.

So for librarians using this tool, when you receive a challenge from the community, you can search to see if that title is in there and be able to pull information from that resume to compile your report when you meet back with your patron.

So the information that's contained in those book resumes is especially important when you're looking at how the title has been successfully retained in other school districts after they had to go through a demand to censor the book.

It's very costly for a library to spend their precious resources and time on validating the existence of a book in their collection.

And again, we have collection development policies that help us make these decisions, and librarians are trusted professionals.

They understand the responsibility, they respect the needs of the community, and they're always here to make positive decisions to help others engage with the materials.

If you don't like the book, you can put the book down and pick up another book.

It is truly that simple.

If you do not want your family members to engage with content, then you have every ability to restrict their access, but you cannot tell a neighbor to do the same.

It is no one's right to tell other people that they should not have access to a book.

That is no individual's authority.

We are here to help everyone live their best lives in libraries.

We want everyone to be able to pursue the lifestyle that they desire.

And when we're talking about inanimate objects sitting on shelves that are causing harm, you know, in any other sector of society, you have burden of proof.

I'm not really seeing that being added to these challenges.

I'm not seeing where we actually have proof that harm has been done.

And so it's very important that people hear this clearly.

Librarians are caregivers, parents, voters, constituents.

Just like everyone else, librarians are human beings.

And for anyone to attack a noble profession, such as a librarian, without just cause, without proof, is really harmful.

That is what's creating harm in libraries and in communities.

And it needs to stop.

We don't attack other professionals, and I'm not suggesting that we do.

I'm hoping that there comes a point when everyone clearly sees what's happening and that we do not allow distractions to keep us from seeking the truth, from understanding information, and from seeking the stories that are important and that are relevant and timely to our individual journeys.

We all have one life to live.

And if you want your neighbor telling you what to eat, what to think, what to read, that's up to you.

And if you have a neighbor willing to do that, that's great.

But for the majority of people, we want to make our own decisions.

And that's one of the many freedoms of being an American, is that we do have access to information equally.

We do.

And from my perspective, it is the parents' right to decide what their minor children can pick up and read.

But that responsibility is on them for their child alone, not for every person.

Absolutely.

I am a parent to three young children myself.

I have many wonderful neighbors.

I'm sure they all have different ways of raising their children.

And that's their right to do so.

At no point in time would I ever dream of knocking on someone's door and telling them, never read this book.

It has a terrible storyline.

I don't feel that this information could help you or your family grow.

You know, empathy is for everyone.

And I believe that as we all gain a higher level of emotional intelligence, we're able to relate to stories and think about what the impact would have been for someone.

We're here to protect our children.

We're here to protect our future generations.

And that's not just an Indigenous lens.

That's for everyone.

And so as we offer that protection, we need to start at home.

And we need to make sure that we have the strength of our community to help individuals make their decisions.

Yeah, we do our part, we hope, by, you know, reading these books and having public discussions about them.

Do you have any other suggestions that we and our listeners can do to fight censorship?

Well, always share what you're reading.

On social media, it's such a powerful medium.

When you see what comes up in your thread, oftentimes it's from your friends and your colleagues and your acquaintances, and they're the people who have the greatest amount of influence in your life.

It's the same for librarianship.

We can entrust our librarians, our educators, our teachers, to help us gain access to literacy of all forms.

We can help each other use our influence in a good way so that we are connecting people to the information that they need to be the best human they can be, to live their best life, and to continue to learn and grow.

You've mentioned a couple times that librarians and educators are trusted professionals.

And I wholeheartedly agree in order to become a librarian in this country, traditionally it has required a master's degree at an ALA accredited school, which involves a lot of dedication and money to get that degree, as we know.

So the next question goes into other ways that librarians specifically, and libraries, are under attack right now.

For example, some places, some states specifically, are changing their certification requirements for people who work in public libraries.

So when they're doing that, they're basically saying, well, if we de-professionalize you, then you can no longer argue that librarians have that professional experience to make these decisions, which is another way that libraries are being attacked.

Additionally, I know that some states are trying to pass legislation to make it essentially illegal to discuss diversity, equity and inclusion ideas in any educational institution in the state, including the state's ALA accredited library science programs.

So I know there's a worry that some library schools could possibly lose their ALA accreditation as a result.

So I'm wondering how can ALA support librarians that are losing their certification status?

And what can ALA do to address these issues that are becoming kind of sneaky ways to continue the attack on librarians and the freedom to read?

As a lifelong learner, it is very important to me that everyone has access to information.

And I am fully aware that there are many people in our communities who cannot afford a college degree, that they do not seek that level of education because of several factors, but the one primarily being cost.

We all have different decisions to make for ourselves as individuals, and a lot of times it's taking into account what our family needs are.

I believe that everyone can work in libraries.

I do not believe that you need a degree, a master's degree, to specifically work in Library.

Yes, we have librarians who have credentials and who have gone that route, and they have obtained that level of education.

But when we look at the body as a whole, there are many, many library workers who come to this work for various reasons, and they stay because they are the helpers of society.

They stay because they feel that they belong here, and they want others to see the value of the library.

They want to help people access information in a good way, and they're here to uplift the stories that have touched them in a personal way.

They want to help people gain digital literacy skills.

They want to help people obtain information through classes that are held at the library.

They want to help people connect with others in the community by offering dynamic programs, offering access to materials, instructional and otherwise.

The library has something for everyone, I truly believe that, whether it's for enrichment, engagement or education.

So if anyone in your community is confused about the role of the library, we do have to raise our collective voices, and that means you need to at the individual level.

I understand that some people fear rebuttal.

I understand that some people are concerned about having a target placed on them.

I am cognizant that we can always do better, but it can't just be a couple of voices that are shouldering all of the feedback at this time.

We can't battle misinformation one librarian at a time.

We need to come at this with full force of this profession, and that includes every single library worker in this field, irregardless of title, irregardless of where you went to school or you didn't.

And I believe that the American Library Association stands for library workers of all kinds, that the ALA is here to represent and be that voice for library workers so that we can all find strength and health and wellness in the workplace.

And it's kind of mind-boggling that it's 2024, and we're talking about those terms as if that's some lofty goal.

I would think care and health and wellness would be the bare minimum, that that's always how you start your day with the intention of helping others.

So for those who want to work in libraries, who want to join us, I do hope that they will consider a career path in libraries.

I understand that at this time it may not look as attractive as it has in the past because there's a lot of misinformation out there.

But librarians are fierce.

We want everyone to have equal access to information.

And if that means that we need to be warriors, then I encourage every single person to advocate for their right to work in a library and to advocate for the community to have access to a library.

Because the day that we shutter all libraries is the day that democracy has died.

Thank you, Cindy.

Thank you.

I completely agree with all of that, Cindy, wholeheartedly.

The problem that I see coming out of this, at least in my state, is that by not requiring the credentialing any longer, the pay rate is being dropped and it is meaning that my colleagues, at least, I would say 99% of the colleagues in my library have a second form of income in their family.

And for the very few who are trying to make it on their own with the reduction in pay, it's making it essentially a volunteer job, which is not tenable for people who need to shelter their families and feed and clothe them.

And I think that's the concern that I have about the change in certification requirements.

Yes, there are many challenges, there are many concerns, and they're shared among colleagues throughout this entire field.

I don't believe that any one library is positioned with such authority and strength that they don't share these concerns.

I think that as long as we continue to allow elected officials to make wide sweeping motion within the state, that we are going to have these pockets of misinformation and disinformation that is going to continue to devalue the profession.

And we cannot allow that.

We have to raise our voices.

We have to let our elected officials know that we are voters, we are constituents, we are people worth serving.

Thank you so much, Cindy.

You've been so generous with your time.

Is there anything else you'd like to mention about the work of ALA or are there any other books you'd like to recommend before we wrap up?

Well, I thank you for your time.

It's been wonderful being able to chat today.

I know that there's a lot of different challenges that people face in their communities and it's something where we always need to remember that we stand strong together and that here in the United States, First Amendment rights are for everyone.

And while we're looking at, you know, different trends, it's important that there's policy bodies that are there to support libraries.

I look to the great state of Illinois.

I don't always give a shout out to specific authors, individuals or statehoods.

But when you see that there is an elected official who is ensuring that every single constituent within their service area has equal rights to information, that is bravery in the time of uncertainty.

And it's kind of mind boggling that we need to talk about bravery with access to libraries.

I thought that that was always going to be a standard.

That wasn't something that I was able to foresee as being a challenge of the profession.

So as we continue to move forward, we know that this will move along.

Book challenges are not new.

We have experienced this in the past.

What we need to remember is that we need to learn from the past.

Otherwise, it will continue to repeat itself.

And so as we have people who feel that certain books don't belong in any community, we need to remember that we have the right to make our choices for ourselves as individuals.

And for me, I'm going to choose to be a member of the American Library Association, irregardless of what any elected official in a state may have to say about that.

I have the right as an American citizen to be a membership, to pay for my membership as an individual, to help raise my voice in a body that I believe has a similar value set as mine and to make sure that I'm always showing up every day to do the good work together by showing my appreciation to my colleagues.

So I'm very grateful for everyone working in libraries.

We are the unsung heroes.

We don't always receive that recognition and support, but I hope everyone knows that I do see you and you're in this work in a good way and I very much appreciate you.

And I'm grateful for this podcast because you're helping people see that there are many diverse perspectives out there and many voices that need to be raised and we're never going to achieve equality by silencing any voice.

So thank you very much for this invitation.

Thank you.

Thank you.

We're so grateful for what you're doing too.

Absolutely.

Would you like to tell our listeners where they can find you online?

Sure.

So my website is Cindy for Libraries and I'm always being asked to speak in different venues and forums.

So I'm always happy to chat in the chat box if we're streaming online and that's an option as well.

But I'm pretty easy to find if you search for me.

My kids are delighted that there's a Wikipedia page.

They feel that I'm a true celebrity.

I've tried to tell them that librarian celebrity isn't a thing, but here we are.

That is so cute.

Well, Cindy, once again, we are so appreciative of you taking the time out to talk with us and for giving our podcast a shout out.

We've been trying to get more and more listeners and every time someone from ALA speaks with us, we just feel your love.

So thank you.

We hope the annual conference goes extremely well and is well attended.

And we personally wish you the best during your tenure as president.

You are already letting us know how inspirational your message is.

So thank you.

Well, Peter Tonka, that means many thanks.

I'm grateful and I will share that when I received the invite to speak on Rogue Librarians, it was one of those I made it moments.

So I'm very grateful for the invitation.

Thank you.

Does that mean we made it too?

Wow.

We're so grassroots, so we really appreciate that shout out.

Thank you.

We loved having the opportunity to talk with Cindy Hohl.

You can find Cindy's website and a link to the 2024 ALA Annual Conference in the show notes.

You can find more information about the ALA, the Freedom to Read Foundation, the Unite Against Book Bans Campaign, and other resources on our website at theroguelibraries.com/resources.

As always, if you would like to leave us a question or comment, please visit theroguelibraries.com or follow us on Instagram or Facebook at Rogue Librarians Pod.

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And we really need all the help we can get to keep this podcast afloat.

Yes, and if you are a library supporter and a supporter of Reading Freely and Reading Diverse Books, your participation and support matters more now than ever before.

And if you're not able to support us financially, we totally understand, but please let your voice be heard and encourage other people to have their voices be heard.

As always, we want to thank Chris, for creating our fantastic music, to Heather and Lizzie for their assistance, and Dorothy, thank you again for all the work you spend editing all our episodes.

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