

Celebrating Thirty Years of Professional Development

Bound to Stay Bound Scholarship Recipients Look Back

COURTNEY JONES

Since 1985, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and the Bound to Stay Bound (BTSB) books foundation provided eighty-six aspiring children's librarians with the means to pursue their education and professional development. In addition to thirty years awarding scholarships, 2015 will also mark BTSB's 95th year in business.

Bound to Stay Bound (established in 1920 as New Method Book Bindery), a third-generation, family-owned business, pre-binds book covers, making books durable specifically for use in the library or classroom.

The BTSB foundation, created in 1985 by then president Robert E. Sibert and current BTSB president Robert L. Sibert, sought to encourage children's librarianship, in keeping with its mission to "support the informational needs of society," and champion education.

"We looked around and admired the Melcher scholarships," says Robert L. Sibert, "what they were doing seemed like a really good long term way to strengthen the profession of children's librarians, and that's what we wanted to do. Focus on things that would build up over the years."

BTSB reached out to the sponsor of the Frederic G. Melcher scholarship, ALSC, then under the direction of Susan Roman, to form the Bound to Stay Bound Scholarship. In the beginning, there was only one recipient each year.



New Method Book Bindery, 1923

The very first was Megan McDonald, who went on to become the acclaimed author behind the Judy Moody series. "I would not have been able to attend library school at the University of Pittsburgh, where I studied and mentored with such 'greats' as Maggie Kimmel, Blanche Woolls, and Amy Kellman, were it not for the first-ever Bound to Stay Bound scholarship," says McDonald. "I'm still grateful after all these years."

Next year, the thirtieth class of recipients will be awarded \$7,500 each toward their tuition. The ALSC office reached out to other previous BTSB scholarship winners to explore the reasons they pursued librarianship, what they learned as students, and their current careers. The collective response provided a positive, insightful snapshot of children's librarianship. Like McDonald, the recipients reflected on their time in library school, while expressing great enthusiasm for the evolution of their profession, and gratitude for BTSB's support.

Where Are They Now?

The backgrounds and trajectories of recipients vary widely. In 1986, the second-ever BTSB scholarship went to Sadako

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Kashiwagi, a Japanese American internment camp survivor. Kashiwagi recalls watching in horror as her father burned his Japanese language books before the family was relocated to “camp.” Her time in the camp’s donated library eased some of the difficulty.

“When we were incarcerated during World War II, the library really helped,” she recalls. “Books enabled me to be free. They were there. Thank goodness they were there.” After a career working in special education, with encouragement from her brother and husband, both librarians, Kashiwagi worked toward her library degree in her fifties. Now retired and in her eighties, Kashiwagi recalls fondly her time in the San Francisco library system working with preschool-aged children, dressing up as a train conductor in her father’s overalls during storytime, and imparting respect for the written word to children. As she distinctly remembers telling one young patron, “books, they are your friends.”

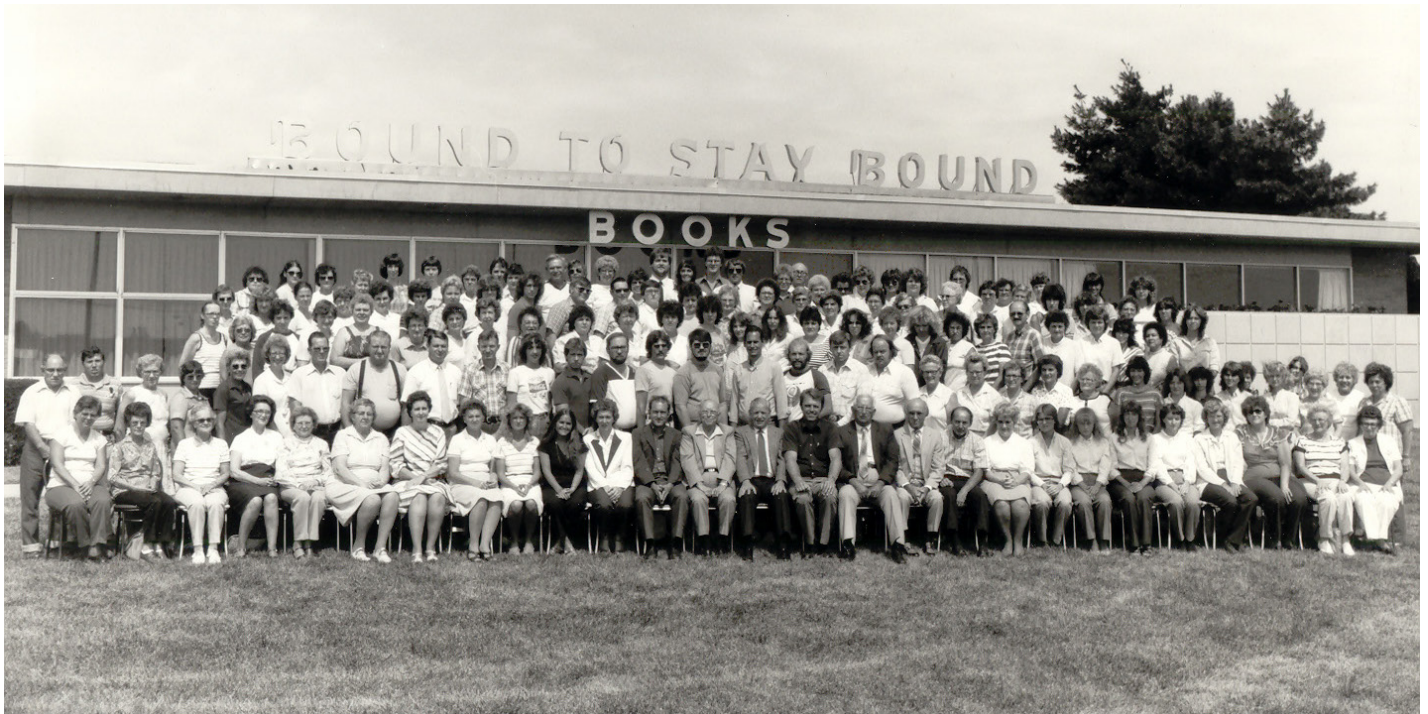
Eventually, the award was expanded to include two recipients in 1990, three recipients in 2000, and as of 2003, four recipients, annually. “Every year we would see the people that were being awarded the scholarship, but we’d also see some of the other people who’d applied who didn’t get the scholarships,” explains Sibert. “There were so many other good candidates out there. That’s one reason we wanted to expand it over the years—to get more people into the field.”

Some previous winners began their library career while in high school, some even younger. For Maggie Bannen (2009 recipient), it was a family affair. “My mother is a librarian. I would earn my allowance by alphabetizing catalogue cards, shelving books, and cleaning her library.” Bannen, currently a youth services librarian with the Johnson County Library system in

Kansas, takes professional pride in the work she does in service to children. “In the wake of *Every Child Ready to Read*, we don’t just settle for putting together a great storytime for children. Now, we’re working on ways to communicate to adults how parents and caregivers can enhance those early literacy skills at home.” Her experience in library school, in addition to former coworkers and library conferences, has provided her with a network of fellow children’s services librarians to continue collaborating. “I have come to believe that children’s librarians are, in point of fact, regular librarians with an extra—and very awesome—skill set. We’re librarians, plus.”

While in school, recipients have found their graduate degree a crucial launching pad for a rewarding, career-long learning curve. Kristin Edstrom (2009 recipient) now works at the University Branch of The Seattle Public Library as a children’s librarian. “The audience I work with is broad. I do storytimes for families, preschoolers, and children on the autism spectrum. My library school education helped me most with an understanding of the guiding principles behind libraries and librarianship: democracy, intellectual freedom, access.” Edstrom’s broad audience includes homeless youth and adult patrons.

“My studies in library school, coupled with hands-on experience, continue to broaden the depth and scope of the services I provide,” says Evan Bush (2008 recipient). “The contacts I made in library school have been invaluable.” Bush now serves as assistant director of children’s services, collection development, and outreach services for the Piedmont Regional Library System in Georgia. “Children’s services are the core of library services and the key to creating future library users. Working with children is extremely creative and satisfying. It provides continuous opportunities to ignite a child’s imagination, to inspire them, making lasting, positive impressions.”



Bound to Stay Bound Books employees outside the BTBS facility in 1985.

Making those “lasting, positive impressions” as soon as possible with young patrons has become the ideal for many BTSB scholars. Early childhood literacy is the field of choice for a number of recipients. “My primary focus of the last five to seven years has been early childhood services, working with very young children—babies through preschoolers—and their families, providing literacy-based storytimes, family programs, and parent education,” says Melissa Depper (1993 recipient). “Studying children’s services broadly, preschoolers through teens, gave me a great foundation and solid context for thinking of early childhood as a distinct service population.” Depper’s passion for working with a very young service population lead to her current position with Arapahoe Library District in Colorado as an early literacy specialist. Similarly, Jessica Kerlin (2007 recipient) has made a fulfilling career working with preschool-aged and younger children as branch manager of the Bay Village Branch in the Cuyahoga County Public Library System. “Some of the most rewarding aspects of my work have been helping families understand the principles of early literacy and have fun together through facilitating engaging early childhood storytimes at the library! When toddlers would light up hearing a familiar nursery rhyme they learned in storytime or bring their grown-ups a book to borrow with such joy—it really feels good!”

Changes of Profession and Professional Evolution

Other recipients have gone on to find careers in different fields, or positions that orbit the library world. Still, they draw on their schooling and experience in the library setting. Janice Wall (1993 recipient), a library consultant for the Idaho Commission for Libraries, works mainly with librarians and trustees, however she sometimes finds herself in front of daunting audiences. Thanks to her work with children, it’s not a problem. “Testifying in front of a legislative committee does not intimidate me, because I’ve had two-year-olds as an audience!” As far as how the profession has changed, Wall concluded, “What I see is an outward turning, not trying to sell what the library already has, but trying to assess and meet the needs of the community.”

Though she’s found herself out of librarianship, Barbara Mendoza (1987 recipient) served six years as an academic librarian, and later, a reference librarian, and went on to become an art history professor. Mendoza, who recently enjoyed a children’s literature course and still keeps abreast of the profession, reflects on her time in the library fondly, “I absolutely loved my library assistant job at the children’s desk, and I wanted to continue working and growing professionally in that area.” Unfortunately, landing a youth services position was not in the cards for her.

While many recipients mentioned technological advancements and the impact of the Internet as major agents of change in the library world, Bush cited the decline in resources and fiscal support as an across the board shift over the course of his career. “The most obvious change I have witnessed is the continual decrease in funding,” notes Bush.

As a result, the relationship between patron and librarians has shifted as libraries explore new ways to draw people in, or go to them. “The role is slowly shifting away from the reference desk and more towards programming and outreach,” says Edstrom. “I have also seen a number of interesting innovations in terms of redefining the image of the library by meeting people where they are at with small pop-up libraries and micro libraries pulled by bikes. It also seems like libraries are beginning to collect more user-created content so patrons are being seen as more than just content consumers.” Edstrom is currently hard at work creating sensory storytime programs with her colleagues, and also acts as a rider with Seattle Public Library’s Books on Bikes program.

While new to the field, some of this year’s winners have already observed the progressive, creative nature of the library, and by extension, the expanding role of children’s librarians. “I have yet to live life as an official librarian, but I can say I am noticing a change in children’s librarianship in particular,” says Sylvia Aguiñaga, a 2014 BTSB scholarship recipient, special project volunteer with the Los Angeles Public Library, and program coordinator for DIYgirls.org. “I think it’s at a point of transition. This transition is in our hands. We have a duty to be cultivators of creative minds. We are guides for the next generation of innovators.” Aguiñaga’s fellow 2014 BTSB scholarship winner, Callen Taylor—a teacher librarian at Visitacion Valley Middle School in San Francisco—similarly marked the changes of the library’s function. “Now I see school libraries as the tech center, the place to hang out, the teacher collaboration area, and a safe place for students to be. I take my kids to get books, make terrariums, see bubble magicians, and meet authors. The library is a community.”

“The evolution of the library has been fast and furious over the last ten years, which makes our jobs even more exciting and hopefully furthers the impact we can ultimately have on our customers,” remarks Kerlin. “We have seen nontraditional users entering the library for the first time, as well as technology playing an increasing role in how we reach and serve our communities through our collection and connected learning. We have seen increased opportunities to collaborate with civic organizations to help see people through a time of great financial need. I am looking forward to being part of the future of libraries, which have become dynamic, thriving community centers—truly places to connect and exchange ideas.”

Bridging the Gap, Nudging the World

Ultimately, the true motivator for children’s librarians is the promise they see in the young people they work with. “I want to cultivate a place where the youth of today will prepare for jobs that don’t even exist yet,” says Lisa Jordan (2012 recipient). “To encourage their passions, help guide them to finding information and books that are relevant to their interests, to help them learn twenty-first-century skills in this ever more globalized world, and most of all to inspire children to reach their full potential.” Such focused passion and interest is a must for librarians working with young patrons, and those with the

Eight Questions with Megan McDonald

Acclaimed writer and former librarian Megan McDonald was the first BTSB scholarship recipient. Here's what she had to say about her time among the stacks, and her career as a children's author.

1. Why did you want to become a librarian?

Before I was a writer, I was a reader. Reading saved my life. I wanted to do that for others. There is nothing more important and gratifying than connecting a child with a good book.

2. Why did you want to work with children?

Children are curious and eager, sharp and observant and honest and sensitive. They are some of the smartest, funniest people I know.

3. How has your past study of children's library services benefitted you as a writer?

Being a children's librarian taught me everything I know about kids and books and storytelling. That's how I found my storyteller's voice. My first book, *Is This a House for Hermit Crab*, grew out of a tale I told aloud at preschool storytime as a librarian.

4. What's the last good children's book you've read?

I just finished *The Paperboy*, by Vince Vawter—a first novel with one of the strongest voices I've known in children's literature. Before that it was *West of the Moon*, by Margie Preus. What a storyteller.

5. What has been the most rewarding part of your career so far?

Even though my work as a librarian was very different from my life as a writer, my hope is the same: to make a child into a reader. As readers, we yearn for connection—to get lost in a story, to see ourselves again for the first time, to be moved. Universally, I think we all feel a need that a good book can fill.

The most rewarding part of being a writer has been young readers' responses to my Judy Moody and Stink



books. A young reader, Max, wrote to me recently and said, "I just read your *Judy Moody Was in a Bad Mood*. I want to live in that book."

What could be better than that?

6. How long were you a librarian, and what populations were you working with?

I've been working in libraries since I was fifteen. I worked professionally as a children's librarian in public libraries for nearly twenty years. Settings included large city libraries from The Carnegie in Pittsburgh to Minneapolis Public Library and small-town communities from Williamsburg, Virginia, to Mr. Rogers's hometown of Latrobe, Pennsylvania. As a children's librarian, I worked in outreach settings from homeless shelters to health clinics to programs for teen mothers.

7. How do you feel about the work librarians do?

They are unsung heroes and heroines, all.

8. What was your favorite book to check out from the library as a kid?

Harriet the Spy (from the public library), and *Virginia Dare, Mystery Girl* (from my school library). I checked the book out so many times my librarian had to ask me to give someone else a chance.

desire should be able to reach their goal. However, the rising cost of higher education makes the dream fiscally unreachable for some. Many are flocking toward reasonable and timely online programs. For the foreseeable future, Sibert sees BTSB continuing to aid deserving applicants, whether or not they attend online or at a brick-and-mortar institution. "There are a lot of people who can't just give up their life for a couple years and go to graduate school. You're seeing a lot of online institutions as options for people," says Sibert. "I imagine changes to the BTSB scholarship will come as we try to make it affordable enough so people can do it." Gaining skills and awareness while

in school opens doors to the wide world of children's librarianship. "My MLS gave me the ethical training to be a full participant in the profession," notes Caitlin Augusta (1999 recipient).

Upon announcement, winners receive a congratulatory phone call directly from Sibert. "The pressure is on!" he jokes. "You are expected to do great things, and go into the field and really make an impact, and be a role model for more people to follow after you." BTSB scholarship winners often go on to become invested leaders in their field. As Depper sees it, "we're nudging the trajectory of the world, one child at a time." 🐼