

Spotlight On Books 2010
April 23-24, Grand Rapids, MN

This was my third year to attend Spotlight and I felt it was the most informative session yet. The Friday afternoon session started with Doug Johnson, a speaker and consultant on technology and library issues. He spoke about facing our challenges in positive ways, touching on increased use of technology in libraries and how librarians need to adapt to changes. We can no longer say "I'm a book person" or "I'm a technology person", but we all have to be both book and technology persons. He brought an I-Pad which he passed around the room and we all had a chance to try it. He then led the group in a discussion of the pros and cons of this new technology and implications for libraries and classrooms. This led to a discussion among the group about the cost to individuals and schools or libraries, and whether that cost will be prohibitive to many of our patrons. He also said that technology is changing how and why people use the library. He compared the "old" model of the library to the grocery store, you go there to get what you need. Now, the "new" model of the library is the kitchen, a place to go to make or do things. He also did an excellent job of explaining about filters, intellectual freedom and librarians being the copyright counselor instead of the copyright policeman.

This year's Spotlight featured several area authors with plenty of opportunity for us to visit with them and hear about their books. The Center for children's and Young Adult Books from Mankato State University also brought a very large display of books. It was nice to be able to actually page through some of the books I was considering ordering and seeing what they were about.

Saturday there were three speakers. Doras Dokas from Minneapolis spoke about writing children's books. She told about how when she writes a child's picture book, the publisher finds an illustrator, who is given the story on a typed sheet of paper and allowed to illustrate how they want. She actually had no contact with the illustrator but was very pleased with how the book turned out and the fact that the illustrator added so much to the story without using words. The next speaker was author/illustrator of children's books Henry Cole who talked about the writing process as well as what it is like to illustrate a book written by another author.

The featured speaker on Saturday was Ben Mikaelson, author of Spirit Bear, Ghost of Spirit Bear and Petey, among other Young Adult books. His life story is truly inspirational and had much of the audience in tears several times as he told his experiences going from a young child in a foreign country with no education and no family support to the successful author he is today. His story revolved around three people who had made a difference in his life, a teacher, a librarian and another person who he remembers as the first adult to talk to him and not tell him he was in trouble.

Spotlight has always been a good way for me to get book ideas and learn about libraries and what we as librarians need to do, but I really felt that this year's conference was the best I have attended so far.

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