



# ALAN and YA Lit—Growing Up Together

In 1967, *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton was published along with *Mr. and Mrs. Bo-Jo Jones* by Ann Head and *The Contender* by Robert Lipsyte. *The Pigman* by Paul Zindel followed shortly after, and the new age of Young Adult Literature took root. Teens could finally read about characters who looked like, dressed like, sounded like, and had problems just like they did.

“During those years, NCTE created a new structure to encourage development of assemblies, each with a special focus. In 1973, 25 people signed up and paid one dollar to begin the process of forming the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English, which came to be known as ALAN. Marguerite Archer took the first presidency. In New Orleans the next year, with its own constitution, ALAN became official” (Nilsen, 1999, p. 330). M. Jerry Weiss, who is still active in the assembly today, followed Archer as president. Jerry remembers those early days, and his continuing involvement has helped ALAN grow:

There is no doubt ALAN has promoted the use of YA books mainly in middle schools and has helped remedial

reading teachers find interesting materials they could use with students. I convinced IRA and NCTE to have Featured Author Strands because if teachers couldn't stay for the workshops, they still ought to be able to hear and meet YA authors. Publishers loved that idea. Once I was a part of getting ALAN really going, I worked on anti-censorship programs. In any way I could, I worked to get authors involved with teachers. (M. J. Weiss, personal communication, September 5, 2011).

After the first convention in 1973, ALAN President Marguerite Archer sent out a two-page summary of events, which she followed with a four-page *News from ALAN*, Vol.1, No. 1 in August of the same year; this brief newsletter was the beginning of *The ALAN Review*, or *TAR*, as we know it today. Alleen Pace Nilsen then convinced Ken Donelson to coedit this new publication. Alleen's husband Don later became ALAN Humor Editor. Soon Alleen, Don, Ken and his wife began a tradition of writing, copying, organizing, creating mailing lists, sorting by zip code, and sending off 200 copies of the then *ALAN Newsletter* (from “The Beginnings of *The ALAN Review* by Alleen Pace Nilsen, which appeared in

*Two Decades of The ALAN Review*, NCTE, p. 330). “Clip and File” reviews were included in these early newsletters.

*TAR* has continued to grow in influence and volume. Jim Blasingame, ALAN President 2009, coedited *TAR* with Lori Goodson during 2003–2009. Jim shares some of the ways that *TAR* has advanced. He says:

During our years we expanded *TAR*'s page count and added a square binding [perfect binding]. We attempted to explore new topics and young adult literature that blazed new trails, including indigenous peoples, disabled characters, and transgendered protagonists. We also saw the advent of technology and the rise of books with social media, blogs, smart phones and video games that were a normal part of the teenage experience but provided new issues from cyberbullying to online match-making and their dangers. We loved the annual cover design process in which we attempted to choose nine covers that reflected what had been the big hits of the previous year—not an easy reduction to make! (J. Blasingame, personal communication, August 24, 2011)

ALAN has also grown in its online presence. In 2000, President Teri Lesesne asked David Gill to “give ALAN a home,” and the

## Voices from ALAN's History

We were at an NCTE convention and Marguerite Archer asked me if I'd like to be on the Board of this new ALAN group. I was happy to do so. At that point, we were a small and supportive group. Some more literary types seemed to feel that YA was an inferior genre. But how it has blossomed! A YA novel is the basis for "War Horse" at Lincoln Center, which is one of the greatest theatrical productions I have ever seen. And who would ever have dreamed about the billions to be made from the YA series Harry Potter?

We were lucky to be there at the beginning and now to see the kind of YA development in Marcus Zuzak's *The Book Thief*. (S. Schwartz, ALAN President 1977, personal communication, August 25, 2011)

My most vivid memory is of one morning in cold, cold Chicago before it was even close to daylight, I was out on the loading dock at the convention center with two other wonderful helpers breaking open the bundles of books, dividing each one in half, and stapling that half into a different bag because twice as many people were going to show than had been expected when NCTE made arrangements for the book giveaway. (A. Pace Nilsen, ALAN President 1978, personal communication, September 1, 2011)

I met Ken Donelson at my first ALAN workshop; I was awed and impressed, but Ken was warm and welcoming. The next week he sent me a packet of articles for my dissertation research. He's an example of the kind of supportive atmosphere that has always been the spirit of ALAN.

Sharing titles, hearing authors at the beginning of their careers as well as those whose names I had known for a long time, discussing teaching strategies, and mostly catching up with old friends was always a joy for me. I have such fond memories of getting rejuvenated each year at the ALAN workshop. (B. Samuels, ALAN President 1988, personal communication, August 28, 2011)

ALAN website was born, eventually securing its own URL—www .alan-ya.org. When David became ALAN president in 2007, Matt Skillen became webmaster until 2011, when David returned to take ALAN to another level.

The site has grown exponentially over the past 10 years, and with the advent of social media, the site will become more of an online community than a static site. The next year [2012] will bring an even larger community and more features—none of which were imaginable way back at the turn of the century. (D. Gill, personal communication, August 24, 2011)

As more authors and more teens discovered each other, it wasn't long before awards were created for this growing field. Listed below are just a few of the national awards and the first title each honored:

- Coretta Scott King Book Award went to Lillie Patterson in 1970 for her book, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Man of Peace*. <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/emiert/ckbookawards>
- In 1974, the first ALAN Award was given to Stephen Judy (now Tchudi) and G. Robert Carlsen at the ALAN Breakfast. The ALAN Executive Board had created the ALAN Award to recognize an individual who had impacted the ALAN community as an author, publisher, librarian, teacher, or officer of the ALAN organization. <http://www.alan-ya.org/awards/>
- The Margaret A. Edwards Award was established in 1988 and was given to S. E. Hinton for her body of work, which began with *The Outsiders*. [http://www.ala.org/template.cfm?template = /](http://www.ala.org/template.cfm?template=)

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- In 1996, the National Book Award's first YA winner was given to *Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida* by Victor Martinez. <http://www.nationalbook.org/nba/winners>
- In 2000, The American Library Association (ALA), presented the first Michael L. Printz Award, named for a Topeka, Kansas, librarian, to Walter Dean Myers for his innovative book, *Monster*. <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/booklistsawards/printzaward>
- ALAN's Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award was first awarded in 2009 to Steven Kluger for his novel, *My Most Excellent Year: A Novel of Love, Mary Poppins, & Fenway Park*. <http://www.alan-ya.org/amelia-elizabeth-walden-award/>
- In 2010, for his inspiring and seemingly limitedness body of work, Walter Dean Myers became the first recipient of the Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement. <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/emiert/ckbookawards/>

The ALAN Workshop also continued to increase the number of presenting authors. In 1980, President Hugh Agee featured six speakers during his workshop, including authors Sue Ellen Bridgers and Ouida Sebestyen. ALAN President Don Gallo had ten authors on his 1987 Los Angeles program. In 1991, ALAN President Joan Kaywell presented 26 authors in her workshop. ALAN President Connie Zitlow featured 29 authors in 2000. And President Wendy Glenn invited

48 authors to her 2011 Chicago workshop. Every year, publishers, teacher-educators, and high school and junior high/middle school teachers also presented.

ALAN has been growing in part because the number of young adult books has also been growing. In the late 1960s, the number of YA titles published each year only reached single digits. *Bowker Books in Print* (online and in print by subscription at <http://www.bowker.com/index>) reports higher numbers in this millennium: 4,787 YA titles in 2004; 5,300 in 2005; 5,059 in 2006; 5,933 in 2007; and 5,028 in 2008. YA books in all genres are expanding in libraries and book stores.

Nancy Garden has helped nurture the growth of books containing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning characters (LGBTQ).

Since 1982 when my novel *Annie on My Mind* was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, our trickle of an LGBTQ YA sub-genre has become a steady stream.

We've gone from not having gay or lesbian (or bisexual or transgender) main characters to having them regularly, plus a suddenly growing, albeit small, number of transgender protagonists, and—still rarely—an occasional bisexual one.

We've gone from almost all White protagonists to a growing number of African American and Hispanic ones, and a handful of main characters from other ethnic groups.

We've gone from telling primarily coming-out stories—which I think will always be important in our books—to stories also focusing on other aspects of LGBTQ kids' lives and touching on more universal themes.

We've gone from very solemn stories to those sprinkled with welcome humor.

## Voices from ALAN's History

I began my doctoral work in 1973 straight from a canon-driven education and teaching background. Robert Small, my advisor, soon changed that by introducing me to adolescent literature, and in clichéd terms, my life was forever changed. He also encouraged me to join ALAN, in its infancy at that time. I became happily involved in ALAN, serving as secretary before we had Ted Hipple to help run the organization, then as president, and later as coeditor of *The ALAN Review*. My career as an English Education professor grew up with that of adolescent literature.

The term adolescent literature has given way to young adult literature. Novels, though tame by high school hallway standards, address a wide range of youth problems in far more realistic ways. Young adult literature is more multicultural and diverse than in its earlier years; it looks like and talks like its readers. (P. Kelly, ALAN President 1989, personal communication, August 27, 2011)

In 1992, Robert Cormier was my breakfast speaker and Ted Hipple was my keynote for the workshop. I believe we had 13 or so other authors. Boy, has ALAN grown since then! (K. (Bushman) Haas, ALAN President 1991, personal communication, August 29, 2011.)

One of my fondest memories of my ALAN presidency is having Ouida Sebestyen as keynote speaker at the ALAN breakfast, where I presented her with the newly published Twayne book, *Presenting Ouida Sebestyen*. This was the only time Ouida spoke at ALAN, and her speech was so tender and inspiring. She was truly a remarkable, talented writer who kept too low a profile in the publishing world. (G. Monseau, ALAN President 1993, personal communication, September 1, 2011.)

A dominant thought when I think about ALAN is how inspiring it is to be one of hundreds of participants at the workshop. Being with others who love books and young people and who care deeply about bringing them together—the middle school and high school teachers, the librarians, publishers, and teacher educators—is a unique and wonderful experience. We all go home with new ideas and titles, lots of YA books, memories of meeting the authors, and an excitement that is contagious.

At my workshop in 2000, there were 29 featured authors. I have such a vivid memory of leading the tribute to Robert Cormier during the time he would have spoken. We were all so sad. (C. Zitlow, ALAN President 1999, personal communication, August 29, 2011.)

What I most admire about ALAN, and why it has remained a healthy organization in this time of dropping memberships elsewhere, is that it has managed to “marry” many different literacy organizations together. We have members from NCTE, of course, but also from ALA and from IRA. This cross-pollination means our members are involved in literacy on many different levels and in many different classrooms and schools. (T. Lesesne, ALAN President 2000, Executive Secretary 2011, personal communication, August 30, 2011)

## Voices from ALAN's History

ALAN has been a wonderfully friendly, comfortable professional home for me, and the annual workshop has become a blend of professional work and reunion each year. I've always felt lucky to have had the chance to hear from and meet some terrific YA authors and many of the movers and shakers in the YAL business. It's a pleasure and a blessing to know these ALAN folks as colleagues and as friends. (C. Crowe, ALAN President 2002, personal communication, August 29, 2011)

I believe it is in large part thanks to ALAN's tireless efforts that young adult literature has increasingly been finding a home in classrooms all across America, helping young people find themselves in good books that also meet their emotional, psychological, and developmental needs. Accolades to ALAN for its history of supporting the best in young adult literature, for supporting those who teach YA literature, and for supporting the life needs of America's young adults. (M. Cart, ALAN President 2003, personal communication, September 2, 2011)

ALAN has grown so much from its birth in the '70s when Alleen mimeographed the *ALAN Newsletter* and "problem novels" were flourishing. As ALAN has grown, so too has YA literature—and ALAN membership! I love the diversity of ALAN membership representing every facet of interest in YA lit. Introducing new people to ALAN is a joy. For example, I connected an English department head from a local middle school, a library school practicum student, and another library school student in North Carolina to ALAN through *TAR* and the website. ([www.alan-ya.org](http://www.alan-ya.org)). (D. Tuccillo, ALAN President 2005, personal communication, September 1, 2011)

ALAN was YA lit's first social network. ALAN was Facebook and twitter before the Internet was invented. (D. Gill, ALAN President 2007, personal communication, August 24, 2011)

ALAN has always felt like *home* in academia. The people who populate the field *welcome* conversations about the books, authors, topics, and themes. We really do tend to be *open*-minded thinkers. The one area that I continue to despair about is that, while authors offer so *many* books on people who contribute to our understanding from myriad races and ethnicities, our membership continues to be more white than speckled. (P. Carroll, ALAN President 2008, personal communication, August 27, 2011)

Be Well.

(Ted Hipple, ALAN President 1976, ALAN Executive Secretary 1977–2000, and hug-able guy)

The mainstream press still produces the majority of LGBTQ YA books. But recently, an increasing number of authors of our books are self-publishing, and gay presses—notably Alyson Publications—occasionally do a YA title, and just recently Victoria Brownworth has started a new LGBT YA house, Tiny Satchel Press.

So despite the shaky state of print publishing in general, the steady stream of our sub-genre still seems to be growing. I am optimistic about its future, especially since LGBT adults in general have become increasingly conscious of the problems our youth still face—and some of those adults are bound to be writers, editors, and publishers who know how much books can help validate, encourage, and support beleaguered kids. (N. Garden, personal communication, August 20, 2011)

Other genres have grown as well. Though fantasy books have always been part of YA titles, Harry Potter came into our lives in 1997 and changed the world's view of fantasy books forever, and there are still more coming. Steampunk, "a sub-genre of science fiction, fantasy, alternate history, and speculative fiction that came into prominence during the 1980s and early 1990s" is on the rise again ([Wikipedia.org/wiki/steampunk#Origin](http://Wikipedia.org/wiki/steampunk#Origin)).

YA literature is also introducing readers to people and cultures in other parts of the world. *VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)* Review Editor Lisa Kurdyla says, "*VOYA* has seen a marked increase in the number of titles for young adults that include protagonists of many different cultures. Notably, Asian and Hispanic characters have increased significantly. Many of these titles specifically explore their heritages and cultures, and how

the characters ‘fit in’ with life in America” (personal communication, September 5, 2011). I agree. I belong to a YA book group that prepared a bibliography, “The Richness of Many Cultures Represented in YA Books—2005 to 2010,” containing 143 titles, which we presented during an ALAN breakout in 2009 (email bottcj@aol.com for a copy). Diversity in YA Fiction (<http://www.diversityinya.com/>) is another great place to find new and old titles representing a wealth of diversity. Even with this new awareness of the many cultures and ethnicities in our world, many more books are needed to help us understand people around the world, particularly books set in the present.

John Mason, Director of Library and Educational Marketing for Trade Books at Scholastic, and former ALAN Board Member, believes young adult literature has had several effects on the publishing world.

The huge popularity of Harry Potter proved that books for young readers in hardcover could sell in the millions, and that in this age of computer games, social networking, and smartphones, people still like to curl up with a good book. The *Hunger Games* has pushed the envelope for “crossover” young adult books—books that adults will buy and read for themselves—thus blurring the line between “young

adult” and “adult” and giving more visibility to young adult books in our society in general. The Printz Award and the National Book Award have also contributed greatly to bringing more respect and recognition to writing for young adults. So all in all, I think we are in a golden age for young adult books, and more and more people are discovering that some of the best writing anywhere is in books for young adults. (J. Mason, personal communication, August 24, 2011)

There are more YA books now than 10 years ago—a new wealth of books for teens to read, books that do not insult them but include them *all*. The field of YA books, however, is not without its problems, as Robert Lipsyte points out.

Forty-four years after *The Contender*, which was early in the creation of YA, it’s a full-blown genre with heroes and history. And cycles. This one is interesting because the revenue stream is so important to so many publishers and the quality is stunning (M. T. Anderson!), yet most of the books are the equivalent of processed food—well-made, carefully engineered, cynically marketed commodities with little nutrition and possibly long-term negative side-effects on individual health. You can argue, for example, that *Twilight* is really a reworking of *Romeo and Juliet*, but it is also an escape into unreality at a time when kids—particularly with video games, social networking, etc.—need to face the issues that are overwhelming their world. YA should be an extension of teaching, not of mindless entertainment. There’s a

responsibility here that is not being met, particularly by publishers. But I’m confident that the cycle will move on—if the world doesn’t implode first. (R. Lipsyte, personal communication, September 2, 2011)

The theme for the 2012 ALAN workshop is “Reaching Them All, ALAN Has Books for Everyone.” This means books for boys, books for girls, for challenged readers, brilliant readers, LGBTQ teens, teens in other countries, teens from other countries who now live here, Christian kids, Jewish kids, Muslim kids, non-believing kids, kids with problems at home—alcoholism, illnesses, incest, divorce—as well as kids from happy, fun-loving homes, homes with two moms or two dads or one mom or one dad or one of each or grandparents, teens who live in cyberspace, teens who can’t afford a computer—*young adults*, *all young adults*.

I hope to see you in Las Vegas in 2012 for the next ALAN workshop. The acronym officially stands for the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English. Personally, I prefer Adolescent Literature, Always Needed.

## Reference

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