



## ALAN Anniversary—My Take

I am one of the few remaining active members of ALAN who were part of the organizational gathering in Philadelphia in 1973, I was merely an attendee at that meeting, not an organizer. But I was as enthusiastic as anybody else at that time and have remained so throughout my career. Being enthusiastic about young adult literature and about ALAN has been easy, because the literature has been so engaging and the growth of the field so amazing.

As part of a PhD program at Syracuse University in the late 1960s, I was actively seeking new reading experiences for teenagers at the very time that *The Outsiders* and *The Contender* were published (1967). Most of my former junior high school students had been avid readers, but I knew that the least-able and least-motivated students needed something more appealing than the curriculum included at that time. Moreover, the bestselling YA novels of those early years—Hinton's *The Outsiders*, Lipsyte's *The Contender*, Zindel's *The Pigman*, and later Cormier's *The Chocolate War*—were the kinds of stories that appealed to me and not just to teens; I think that was, at least in part, because they were the kinds of novels I might have read as a teenager who found books either boring or over my head. When I left my first university position at the University of Colorado and took a job at Central Connecticut State College in 1973, I decided to focus my career on young adult literature. Needless to say, that first meeting in Philadelphia was perfectly timed for me.

Over the years, my most cherished colleagues and some of my closest friends have been members and leaders of ALAN. We appreciate the same qualities in the literature; we fight the same battles for acceptance

of the kinds of books we know are valuable for teen readers; we value and celebrate the authors who write these books; and we enjoy each other's company. At the top of the list was Ted Hipple, whose leadership has been hard to replicate. But Gary Salvner kept the organization moving along, and most recently Teri Lesesne has helped us make giant strides into social media and improved communications. ALAN continues to grow.

In the beginning, ALAN was dominated by college and university educators. Not a bad thing, since I was one of them. But the gradual involvement of influential YA librarians such as Patty Campbell and Michael Cart, and more recently Diane Tuccillo, Mary Arnold, and Walter Mayes, has broadened and strengthened the organization. And while it is more difficult for classroom teachers than for university professors to find time to be actively involved in ALAN, I am pleased to see an increase in leadership from middle school and high school teachers in recent years, among them Daria Plumb, Shannon Collins, Ricki Ginsberg, Jeff Harr, Lori Atkins Goodson, *ALAN Newsletter* editor Anne McLeod, and the 2012 president (and my wife) cj Bott.

Being part of ALAN has given me the opportunities to meet and interact with numerous authors whose writings have made them famous among teen readers, teachers, and librarians. I've been more fortunate than most other colleagues in being able to interview dozens of those authors for the website Authors4Teens as well as edit short stories, plays, and essays that I have invited many of them to write over the years. I've even been invited to the homes of some of them—among them Richard Peck, Virginia

Euwer Wolff, Carolyn Meyer, David Klass, Caroline B. Cooney, and Will Hobbs—and have shared meals in my home and in restaurants with Paula Danziger, Robert Lipsyte, Gloria D. Miklowitz, David Lubar, William Sleator, Chris Crutcher, Norma Fox Mazer, Robert Cormier, Lensey Namioka, Walter Dean Myers, Ben Mikaelson, Graham Salisbury, Tamora Pierce, Will Weaver, and many others.

In the early 1980s, it became apparent to me that although every literature anthology and most secondary school English curriculums contained a unit on short stories, almost none of those stories were about teenagers and their concerns. Several editors had assembled short story anthologies aimed at teenagers, but all of those stories had been previously published in magazines such as *The New Yorker* for sophisticated adult readers. And while a handful of YA authors (e.g., Norma Fox Mazer and Robert Cormier) had recently published collections of their own short stories, there were no anthologies of stories for teenagers written by a variety of authors who had become known for their novels about teens.

Realizing the need, and because of my contacts with authors and with then-editor-in-chief of Viking, George Nicholson (recipient of the 2012 ALAN Award), I became the first person to compile and edit anthologies of original short stories for teenagers, starting with *Sixteen* in 1984, thereby adding a new dimension to the field of YA books. (To date, I have published 13 short story anthologies, and dozens of other editors have followed suit.) And because ALAN has been so important in my professional growth, a portion of the royalties of each of my anthologies published by Random House has, since 1984, been donated to the ALAN Foundation, which was established initially (with prompting from George Nicholson) for

the purpose of sponsoring research in young adult literature.

More recently, in order to involve more young classroom English teachers in ALAN, I started the Gallo Grants program that helps pay the expenses of two beginning teachers to attend the annual ALAN Workshop; over the past nine years, the program has sponsored 18 teachers from a dozen different states.

More than anything else, I love to read YA lit and recommend books to friends and colleagues; I have done so at many NCTE conferences, as editor of a column in the *English Journal* for five years, in numerous articles and several books (especially with Sarah Herz in *From Hinton to Hamlet*, 2005), in emails with colleagues, and as a member of a YA book discussion group that meets monthly at our home. It's a never-ending joy. Being able to lie on a couch and read books is the most enjoyable kind of job anyone can have. And seeing ALAN reach the age of 40 in such excellent health is extremely satisfying.

Happy anniversary to us!

*A former junior high school English teacher and reading specialist, and Professor Emeritus from Central Connecticut State University, Don Gallo was president of ALAN in 1986, received the ALAN Award in 1992, and was the first recipient after Ted Hipple of the Ted Hipple Service Award in 2001 for exemplary service and dedication to ALAN.*

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