LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA
009-577NPO

Office of the LIASA President
P O Box 1598
Pretoria, 0001
Tel: 021 650 5857
e-mail: president@liasa.org.za

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Dear LIASA Colleagues

This time of living in a global pandemic gives us pause for reflection on many things and in this newsletter, I would like to share with you, my colleagues and peers, my personal professional reflections.

This past week 6 of national lockdown saw the 37th anniversary of my working in the LIS sector. Like many of my peers, I was a first-generation holder of a Matric certificate. There was no money to attend university and I needed a job. Because my English marks were good and I liked reading, it was thought that working in libraries would be a good fit (Lesson 1). I started working at the then Cape Town City Libraries (CTCL) in May 1983 in the Processing department based in the Old Drill Hall in Cape Town, now the site of the Carnegie Corporation funded Central Library. Daily I pasted book pockets and date sheets into new books. I did not stay around long enough to be trusted with working the spine label machine or sticking labels on the spines of books or other tasks skillfully executed by others in the department. I was advised to apply for a bursary from the City to study librarianship as it was called and left for UCT (Lesson 2). While studying for my 4-year B.Bibl. degree, I returned each university vacation to work at whichever branch the powers that were assigned me so I temped at many branches in the CTCL chain including a stint on the mobile libraries. (Lesson 3). After graduation, I worked out the conditions of my bursary in various sections so was a Children's librarian and, subsequently, got to open a brand-new branch library before leaving the public libraries sector (Lesson 4).

It's now 25 years later and I have gained much expertise and further formal education and CPD along the way. There were times when I debated leaving the profession but I have seen the practices that I wanted to be part of taken up into this dynamic profession. Besides, librarians are a fascinating mix of diverse people but somehow have that something that identifies them as a fellow practitioner (Lesson 5). The LIS sector plays out a great responsibility in society and I am privileged to be in a position to influence this (Lesson 6).

I have added to certain statements above a 'Lesson' marker. Adaptability becomes more pronounced as one learns from experiences so I'll share my observations. Lesson 1 points to the ongoing stereotyping of librarians and to offset this and for further professionalization of the sector, formalizing sectoral competencies are underway. LIASA continues to advocate and to market the role and purpose of the LIS sector tying this up with the development

Executive Committee Members:
Ms N Crowster (President), Mr N Hardy (President-Elect),
Ms S Welman, Ms R Senyolo, Mr S Mokhabukhi, Mr T Morajane,
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agendas and, the promotion of reading and reading development. Recently we came out in support of the call for all books to be available for trade in alert level 4 of the national lockdown. Lesson 2: education will provide opportunities. Take advantage of bursaries and other support structures to advance oneself. The LIASA Academy will be launched later this year and at present, the need for Continuous Professional Development continues notwithstanding the lockdown. Lessons 3 and 4: work hard (be smart about it) and be flexible to experiences as one gains knowledge that is never lost. Lesson 5: LIASA has played a seminal role in the LIS sector in this country for 22 years. It was formed from sacrifice, negotiation, and a deep desire to ensure equality for all based on democratic principles. We have been lucky to have been exposed to the giants of the sector, academics and practitioners, who have cast the foundations on which LIASA was built and who continue to make a mark in the profession. Likewise, I see great potential in our sector and am heartened that there is a pool of future leaders.

I'd like to conclude with an overall Lesson that permeated the above narrative: mentorship. I have been guided and mentored and supported to bring me to this point of my career and I still call on peers for advice. We need to support each other; look for the potential in others and help where we can. Many of my jobs started off with someone alerting me to an advertisement that they thought would suit me. Let us share our knowledge generously – a candle does not lose its light by lighting another. And let us be grateful for those who have helped us to this place by 'paying forward' and passing on that goodwill.

Till next time, with my very best wishes for you and your loved ones to be safe and well and to practice virus avoidance protocols.

Nikki Crowster

LIASA President
Cell: +27 (0) 82 822 2120
E-mail: president@liasa.org.za
Web: www.liasa.org.za

"Libraries advancing development through collaboration, partnership and innovation"

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