



## Librarian Luncheon Speech

written/given by

**Sherrilyn Kenyon**

delivered July 2010 at RWA's National Convention

---

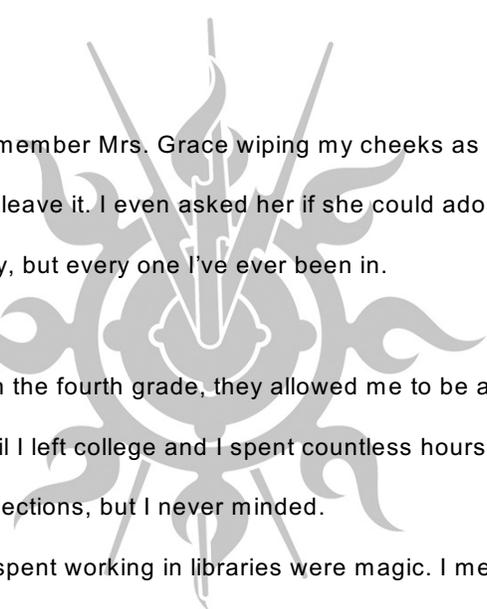
It's so good to see all of you here today. You know, I've been a writer all of my life. My mother was a huge bibliophile herself and she used to tell stories about how even as a toddler, I didn't throw fits in stores like a normal kid for toys... oh no, for me it was always books.

There was just something about them that I somehow intrinsically knew they were special even before I was able to read them. And believe me, it was a struggle to learn to read. I'm horrifyingly dyslexic— so much so that I tried to be a receptionist once. It only lasted about an hour until everyone came back from lunch and realized every number I'd taken down was wrong. They weren't happy and I realized that I must have another calling in life other than frustrating them— I try only to do that to family.

So I moved on to better things... Like working in bookstores.

But long before I did that, I discovered this most magical place on earth. I will never forget that day when I was six years old and my teacher walked my class down this seemingly normal hallway and into this huge, giant room...

Well, okay it was probably not that big, but to me it seemed like I'd died and gone to heaven. There were books everywhere! On all topics. Wall to wall. More than I'd ever seen before.



I actually cried. And I remember Mrs. Grace wiping my cheeks as I told her how happy I was to be there and that I never wanted to leave it. I even asked her if she could adopt me. To this day, I remember every detail of not just that library, but every one I've ever been in.

They are truly Valhalla.

And lucky me, starting in the fourth grade, they allowed me to be a library aid. I volunteered and worked in libraries from then until I left college and I spent countless hours lost in those stacks... well, okay, I was having to clean my sections, but I never minded.

Honestly, those years I spent working in libraries were magic. I mean c'mon, they actually paid me money to do what I love. I could read at work when we had a lull and not get into trouble and best of all, I had access to just about every research material on the planet. If it was in print and we didn't have it, I could recommend we order it and if it wasn't or we didn't have the budget for it, there was the most magical words of all...

Inter-library loan.

And yes, I know it's not a cheap thing to do, but those beautiful librarians indulged me and my passion for learning. I am grateful to them to this day.

You know, I have so many memories of things librarians did that were above and beyond. Things that made a huge impact on my life and made me the woman and writer I am today. Mrs. Grace used to allow me to come into the library during the summer and check out books even though the school was closed. Ms. Turner would let me stay with her in our local library after it closed to wait on my mom to pick me up. I would pay her back by shelving books and helping her process returns. And I learned so many great things. In fact it was in Ms. Turner's branch that I discovered Writer's Digest magazine and the Writer's Market and first did my research on how to become a published author.

Being in the library was the coolest experience... until I realized something. You guys actually make people work when they volunteer. Who knew?

I don't know what I was thinking when I first agreed to being a library aid- I guess I thought magic elves mysteriously entered libraries at night and put the books on the stacks- did the in-take and prepared them for circulation. I had no idea just how hard a job being a librarian was. Contrary to popular belief, it is not all stamping the book and handing it back to the patron and telling loud people to be quiet. There's a

whole other side to that job that people just don't get and it's a lot of work and I do mean a lot.

But that's okay. Because I learned so much as a volunteer I should have been paying for the privilege. I mean, I knew going into it that books were one of the most sacred treasures on this earth— that in times of sorrow they're there to make it better. That they can give the reader laughter and comfort, or even a cold chill or moment of suspense— that they are the source of virtually all knowledge.

What I didn't know was the special bond that exists between librarian and patron. I always took for granted that Ms. Turner seemed to intuitively know whenever a new author came out that it would be someone I was going to love. She was like a magic doorway to me and through her I discovered such incredible talents as Barbara Cartland, Terry Brooks, Catherine Coulter, Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov and countless others.

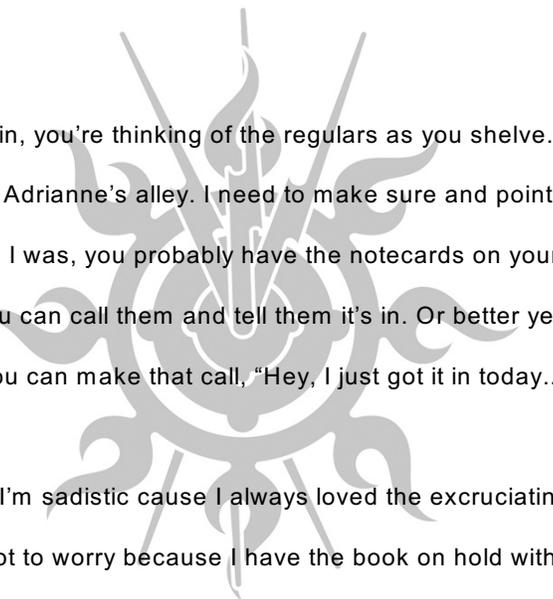
And I remember well the patrons who used to come into the libraries where I worked. And you know that look. You have basically three kinds of patrons. Those in for a specific paper they're forced to write or some other research topic and they'd rather have their eyes gouged out than do it— they always come up and seek you out to basically do the research for them. Then there are those who are in all the time and know exactly what they want and can't be bothered with suggestions or even to say hi. They're in and out so fast they leave a vapor trail in the doorway.

And then there are those others. That third category. The ones who have that book look. You know what I mean, where they come in ready for the discovery and they're open to new things. They take their time and browse book to book and carefully select what their next adventure will be.

As a librarian they're the ones you focus on. Face it, some staff members even stalk them. You watch what sections they go to and when they pick up a book, you note the author and then do the old, "ah, I see you read Anne Rice. Do you like vampire novels?"

They'll nod their head and then you know you've got them. "Cool. Have you seen the new so-and-so book? Oh my God, we can't even get it from cart to shelf. There's a waiting list, but I can add you to it and let you know when it comes in. I've read every one of them and I think they're great." And the next thing you both know, the reader has gone off with ten books instead of one. And as soon as they finish that pile, they're back, asking who else you recommend.

Because somehow as a librarian you have a sixth sense as to what the patron wants. And every



time you get a new shipment in, you're thinking of the regulars as you shelve. You'll see a new author and go, "you know, this is right up Adrienne's alley. I need to make sure and point this out when she comes in."

Or if you're as bad as I was, you probably have the notecards on your desk with the numbers for the regular patrons so that you can call them and tell them it's in. Or better yet, if it's something you know they've been dying to read, you can make that call, "Hey, I just got it in today... but we won't have it processed until Friday."

I don't know, I guess I'm sadistic cause I always loved the excruciating sound they'd make and then I'd laugh and tell them not to worry because I have the book on hold with their name already on it so that they can get it as soon as it's checked into the system.

And I also learned the signs of when you've been working in a library too long. I no longer have shelves in my home. I have four sets of stacks. And they're not books on my stacks... they're holdings which are all arranged by call number and each one properly catalogued with my own personal OPAC system for our intranet. We don't have our important documents in a file cabinet. Not in my house. They're in archives and backed to microfiche. My children can't just randomly pull a book off the shelf to read. Oh no. They must pass through the circulation desk and show their ID. And woe to my children and hubby if they ever try to sneak one out!

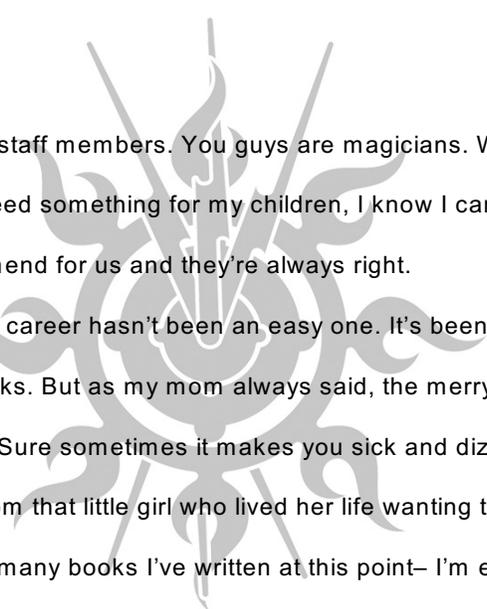
We're talking major fines.

One of the things I think I loved best working in a library was helping to create programs and displays. Every season we'd come up with something really cool.

God, how I miss those library days. Some of the best years of my life were spent sitting behind that circulation desk, flipping through reference materials, making copies, getting lost in the stacks and chatting with the staff and regulars.

And I still hear from some of the old patrons all these years later who will email me from time to time to tell me how strange it is that they once read the books I recommended to them, and now they read me... and by the way, who else can I recommend to them.

You can take a library aid out of the library, but you can't take the habits out. I still religiously straighten stacks any time I'm in the library, and put the books in the right order and I still recommend other writers to those readers I see in the sections where I'm browsing for a new book.



I love libraries and their staff members. You guys are magicians. Whenever I want to try something new or whenever I need something for my children, I know I can go to my wonderful librarians and ask them what they recommend for us and they're always right.

I'll be honest, my writing career hasn't been an easy one. It's been a lot of hard work and many years of setbacks and heartbreaks. But as my mom always said, the merry go round gets boring—it's why people prefer the roller coaster. Sure sometimes it makes you sick and dizzy, but man what a rush.

I've come a long way from that little girl who lived her life wanting to see something she wrote in print. I honestly don't know how many books I've written at this point— I'm extremely superstitious about counting them and I figure we'll know once I've gone on to that huge book depository in the sky. In the meantime, I'm looking ahead at the books yet to be written. The journeys yet to be taken.

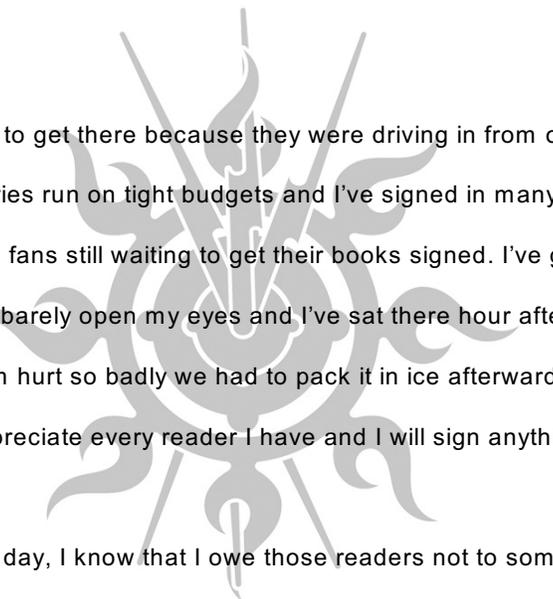
But the one thing that has never gotten old in my life is that thrill I get whenever I go into a library. That thrill of finding a new writer to take me into their world and hold me there for a few hours or finding a new research source.

The thrill of seeing my book on a shelf and hoping that some reader is going to discover me and love my worlds as much as I do. And I've been really lucky that so many have discovered my worlds.

Writers are always asking me why my readers are willing to drive eight to thirteen hours, or even fly in from other countries to meet me. And what I always tell them that I think it's for one basic reason— I never take my readers for granted. I spent most of my life working jobs that had me on my feet all day. I grew up in poverty and I well understand the value of a dollar. I know exactly how important every single library is. How many people depend on them.

We didn't have money for books. It was a luxury far beyond our means and if not for those incredible places, I shudder at what would have become of me. Many times in college, the only access I had to my text books were the reference copies in the library. And I know I wouldn't have passed half my classes but for those diligent librarians who never hesitated to help me find answers and research materials for papers and projects. Those who didn't shirk at document delivery services and interlibrary loans. God bless each and every one of them.

And I know that readers don't have to read MY books. They could read anyone's. But I am so grateful that they're willing to read mine that I always go out of my way to let them know it. I've waited



hours past a signing for a fan to get there because they were driving in from out of state and got caught in a traffic jam. I know that libraries run on tight budgets and I've signed in many a library parking lot because it had to close and there were fans still waiting to get their books signed. I've gone to signings when I've had migraines so bad I could barely open my eyes and I've sat there hour after hour autographing until my hand was swollen and my arm hurt so badly we had to pack it in ice afterward and I never let my smile falter. Because I love and appreciate every reader I have and I will sign anything they bring me that isn't a check.

And at the end of the day, I know that I owe those readers not to some intangible talent I might have. I owe it to my publishers who work so hard to make every book the best it can be. To the sales people who can remember so many titles and plots and writers, month after month.

And most of all I owe it to you, the librarians. You're the ones who put my books on those stacks and keep them there. You're the ones who make sure they're right where they need to be and that they make it back into circulation. You build those waiting lists and you do the icky job of calling people when they're late returning them, and replacing them when they're lost or damaged. And most of all you're the ones who, when that reader comes in, browsing. You walk over and say, "you like vampire novels... have you tried Sherrilyn Kenyon's Dark-Hunters? You like science fiction, have you tried Kenyon's League books?"

I get more letters from fans who tell me the names of the librarians who have turned them on to my books and how they would never have discovered me had it not been for their library. How they wouldn't be literate or have a book if not for their local branch. I know I wouldn't have had anything as a kid, but for my libraries. My branch gave me the greatest gift of all. Adventure, romance, thrills, and most important of all... knowledge and literacy.

And I am grateful from the bottom of my heart that you guys are in those branches unseen and unheard, doing such an important job every single day whether it's the lecture series, a reading program or challenge or just the day to day business of running such a vital resource. For me and for all the other patrons out there.

And it is a hard job you do. Cataloging, rotating holdings, replenishment, going through the stacks every night, dealing with ever shrinking budgets and new technologies and formats, helping patrons and

answering more questions than the lifeline on who wants to be a millionaire and don't get me started on what should be a four letter word...INVENTORY control. You guys amaze me.

You know, I could stand up here and give you my bio. I could tell you how many times I've been on the New York Times, but I don't expect any of you to remember that. I mean let's face it, you'll probably only remember one of two things. Either you'll think, "Wow that was the most boring speech I've ever heard—couldn't someone have found a hook and pulled her off?" or you'll think, "that was the strangest woman with a southern accent. How did she ever get a job working at a library?"

But in the end, what I hope you'll take away from this is the knowledge that though we may not say it often enough, we do appreciate the tremendous job you do. Each and every one of you. You're dream makers. You help readers find what they need and you make the dreams of writers the world over come true. You bring us an audience and you help us research. You bring the world to your patrons and you make sure that no one is ever left behind. That our knowledge is kept safe and available to anyone who wants to seek it.

Thank you so much for absolutely everything you do. God bless and thanks for listening.