

Editorial

Reflective Conversation

For some, no trip to Baltimore would be complete without a side trip to Washington. My side trip lasted three days. It ended on the bus to Baltimore and the conference after a major derailment between the two cities halted rail traffic.

The ACRL Fourth National Conference was a success. The papers rewarded the listener, and the host city was a delight. The real surprises of the conference, however, were two superb theme papers delivered by Alan C. Kay (sometimes referred to as the Father of the Personal Computer and now with Apple Computers) and Maya Angelou (author, playwright, stage and screen performer, and singer). These papers helped to make the conference something special.

Their content dealt mainly with abstractions. Angelou spoke of librarians not as custodians but rather as transformers of our yesterdays so we can have ecstatic tomorrows. Kay spoke of images and symbols.

Before personal computers can become effective human tools, according to Kay, we must understand how people think. We were shown evidence of how our logic systems can be fooled by shifts in the type of sensory input we receive. We saw how sound can be used to influence intuitive reflexes in order to bypass our logic (rational) systems, thus improving learning. As an example, we were shown a 1940s film clip in which a large, nonathletic fifty-year-old woman in a muumuu learned the basics of tennis in thirty minutes, much to the chagrin of Harry Truman, who had been trying to learn tennis for years.

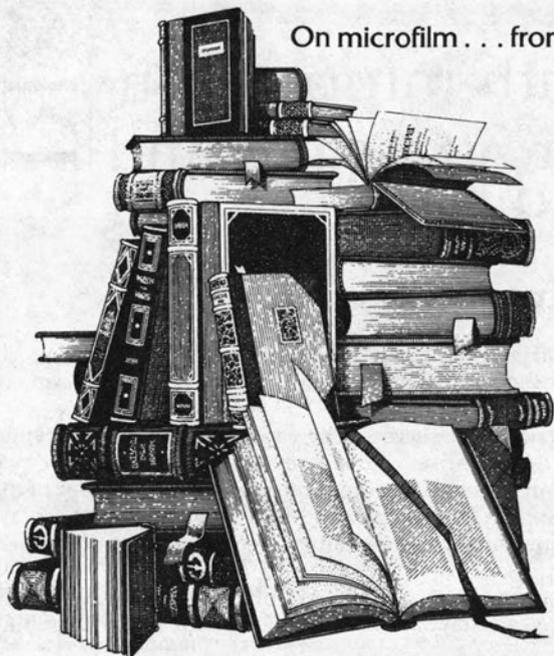
Angelou spoke about the role of libraries in transforming lives. She spoke about her childhood and how books, often from libraries, had helped to transform her life. In the process she transported us into another realm beyond the logic to which we are accustomed at work or at conferences.

She told us a story about a thief whose major problem was not how to steal the chief's bugle but where to blow it. Afterward I felt like bugling her message to everyone. Others may have felt the same way. The applause was literally thunderous.

These theme papers, in which the cadence, rhythm, and dramatic rendering of the spoken word were connected with the nonverbal understandings of the human mind, brought me back to Washington and a short trip down a narrow walkway as fifty thousand names on black granite hovered silently above me. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial says nothing, but reaches deeply. So the silent words in our books reach beyond the logic that we as librarians impose on our charges.

CHARLES MARTELL

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