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Staci B Elliott

White Privilege 101

January 16, 2008

By far the best session I attended at this year's Midwinter Meeting was titled "White Privilege 101." Surprisingly, it was taught by a white man who grew up in a notoriously all-white neighborhood of Chicago. He really had the background and had done the historical and personal research and self-examination to discuss how being white had given him privileges, and will continue to do so. He was also a speaker who made everyone in the room comfortable about speaking their thoughts. This was a true benefit to the learning opportunities in that room.

The meeting was attended by a wonderful mix of people from all backgrounds, all races, and all sorts of libraries. The hotel actually had to bring in three stacks of extra chairs to accommodate everyone who chose to attend. Art Munin, the speaker/facilitator blew me out of the water. I wish I'd taken my own advice, and ignored the employment interview I had scheduled for the last half-hour of this session. I deeply regret my choice not to stay until the end.

I hope that ALA will bring him back to speak on this topic at every Conference and Meeting. I feel that even those of us who chose to attend this year could easily benefit from attending again in the future. White Privilege in our communities and our libraries is an issue that will need continuous action to be adequately addressed in our lifetime.

In both his ability to cut through excuses, listen to all experiences, and connect with all audiences, I would have enjoyed attending any session this person taught... But I also recognize that our libraries are primarily utilized by white families and white students. And that the inequalities of access due to race (and other notable factors) have not gone away simply by being ignored.

Our job as librarians is to provide access for all, and to me this means that it is my duty *and privilege* to take action in my own library community. I want to be accessible, and be KNOWN as accessible to every member, every race and cultural group, of my library community. To that end, I'll be visiting Art Munin's website at www.artmunin.com in hopes of finding the second half of that session. I hope to hear of his appearance at many individual library training events in the future, as well.

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