

# How I Spent My Summer Staycation

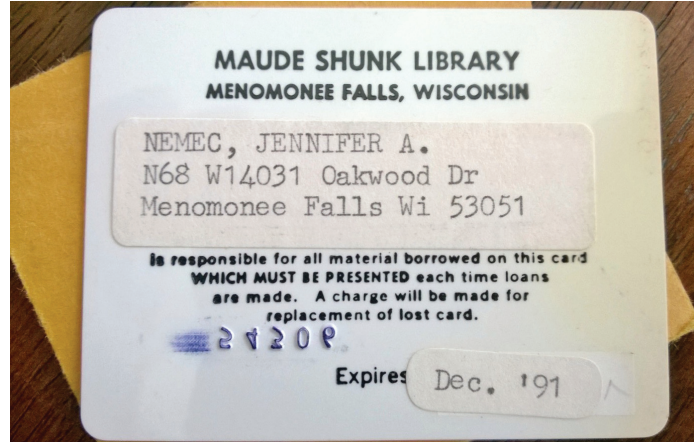
## Crafting Your Library Story from Summer Reading Success

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*Everyday Advocacy empowers ALSC members to embrace their roles as library advocates by focusing on their daily efforts to serve youth and families. Each lighthearted column features easy-to-implement strategies and techniques for asserting the transformative power of libraries both within communities and beyond them. Please contact the ALSC Advocacy and Legislation Committee with comments and ideas for future topics.*

It's the classic and timeless back-to-school essay assignment: "How I Spent My Summer Vacation."

My St. Mary's School classmates moaned, groaned, and gnashed their teeth every September as the teacher wrote the topic on the chalkboard. But me? I rejoiced. My essay would be epic. Tales of derring-do from family trips to Wisconsin's



A library card—key to many childhood memories.

Northwoods? Fascinating. The new puppy my dad brought home from work one morning? Adorable. The dozens of books I checked out from the Maude Shunk Library and devoured in the backyard? Sure to get me an A+ right out of the gate.

Eager to share all the details, I was even more focused on hooking my new teachers and getting them to notice me in the crowd of other kids. What would appeal to Mrs. Laird and Sister Prosper the most? How could I use my stories to interest them, impress them, and set the tone for The Best School Year Ever? (Even my elementary school self understood the importance of knowing my audience.)

I know, I know. You didn't spend your summer luxuriating on some sandy beach, sipping umbrella-donned drinks, and soak-



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ing up the sun. No, your June, July, and August were likely enjoyable but filled with Summer Reading Program (SRP) activities that kept you local and in the thick of it. So maybe you didn't make it to that tropical paradise, but that doesn't mean you didn't lead kids and families on your own brand of summer adventure at the library. (See how awesome you are?)

In my last column, I extolled the virtues of being That Person—the one who talks himself up and shares her latest with anyone who'll listen.<sup>1</sup> Everyday Advocates, it's time to channel That Person and meet your back-to-school assignment: "How I Spent My Summer Staycation."

Here's how to use your SRP as a framework for telling your story and asserting the value of library services to children in your community.

## Crafting Your Library Story

You've got so much great stuff to share from summer 2014 at your library, but how do you go about using it all to tell your library story?

Well, here's the thing—you don't. While I'm sure it hits all the high notes, your full-length SRP report is likely to glaze over all the eyes you're hoping to catch.

It might seem counterintuitive, but sometimes less is more with Everyday Advocacy. Try keeping your story simple with focused messages crafted around six key questions: who, what, where, how, when, and why.

**Who?** Back in the '80s, I was targeting teachers with my stories of summer prowess. Who's the target audience for your library story? Maybe you're trying to reach teachers and other school officials, too. Perhaps it's your alderman, the mayor, and city council members or local business owners and community groups. And how about your library administrator(s) and board of directors?

Each stakeholder has a specific set of interests you'll want to consider, which means you'll probably end up crafting more than one version of your library story. Be flexible and thoughtful in your planning and you'll reap the benefits.

**What?** Once you've determined your audience, it's time to decide what aspects of your story to share. No doubt you've got oodles of SRP statistics, photos, anecdotes, and impact statements at your fingertips. What will pack the biggest punch for each intended audience?

For example, you might dazzle policymakers and funders with SRP numbers and figures, but that impact statement from a local library family is sure to tug at the heartstrings of your local nonprofit partners.

There's no cookie-cutter approach here, so mix and match elements creatively to maximize your impact!

**Where and How?** These are your milk-and-cookies considerations. (Get it? Because they go together perfectly.) Will you present your story at a local school council meeting or via the community newspaper? Are you up for trying social media platforms and photo sharing sites? Print or electronic? Formal or informal? In person or by phone?

With so many possibilities, you'll want to do a little homework before deciding which route to take with your target audience.

**When?** It sounds cliché, but it's definitely true—timing is everything. Get it wrong by even a little, and your story might miss the mark completely. Scared? Don't be. Just do your utmost to capitalize on key pockets of time when your story will be most relevant to your audience.

For instance, September is a hectic settling-in period for most schools, and October is a key month for annual budget negotiations. When's the time to lie low, and when's the time to pounce?

**Why?** Next to knowing your audience, this could be your most important consideration. Why are you sharing your library story with a particular individual or group, and why now?

Whether you're asking for 2015 funding, cultivating a fledgling partnership, or thanking supporters for their investment in your 2014 SRP, be forthcoming about your motivation and timing. Your audience will appreciate your candor and your efforts to get straight to the point.

## You As Storyteller

As children's librarians, we tell stories all the time. It's in our blood, and it's what we do. To keep libraries relevant in our communities, our stories need to do more than delight and entertain. They need to justify and prove the value of what we do every day.

That's where Everyday Advocacy comes in. You're the expert on all the ways your library's programs and services make a daily difference in the lives of the youth and families you serve. No one is better poised than you are to tell that amazing story.

Start small with the "How I Spent My Summer Staycation" project. Where you go from there is anybody's guess, but it's sure to be someplace incredible.

See you in Oakland! ☺

## Reference

1. Jenna Nemec-Loise, "Be That Person: Channeling New Strengths for Everyday Advocacy Success," *Children and Libraries* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 32–33.