

What is the most memorable speaker or speech you have heard?

The following responses are available on AALLNET only. For the responses published in the February 2010 issue of *AALL Spectrum*, please see the issue in its entirety.

“The keynote speaker for the 1985 New York AALL Annual Meeting, Bill Kunstler, is my memorable speaker. He was inspirational, humorous, and motivational. He was also extremely controversial because of his defense of the New York subway attackers and the Chicago Seven. His speech was autobiographical. He reminisced about his relationship with Hemingway and his experiences in the Spanish Civil war, as well as his more current experiences with civil rights issues. Oh yes, he talked about the importance of a law library and good legal research. AALL members warmly received him. He is the only keynote speaker I know of who received a ten-minute standing ovation, and where a huge number of AALL members surrounded a speaker to talk to him after the speech.”

Jacquelyn Jurkins, director of the law library and law librarian at Multnomah Law Library in Portland

“Over the years of attending AALL and Special Libraries Association meetings, I have benefited from hearing numerous keynote speakers. Four stand out: Lawrence Tribe, Ralph Nader, Vice President Al Gore, and Nina Totenberg.

“To narrow it down to one, I must choose Nina Totenberg of National Public Radio and its program “All Things Considered.” Her speech before AALL was notable for her recounting of breaking new stories about former U.S. Supreme Court nominee Douglas Ginsburg and Watergate appeals before the Supreme Court. Her speech was inspirational and demonstrated to the audience, myself included, why she is an award-winning journalist.”

Margarita Bull, librarian at Coughlin Stoia Geller Rudman & Robbins LLP in San Diego

“When I was an undergraduate, in the mid-1970s at Michigan, Buckminster Fuller spoke at Hill Auditorium and I went to see him. It was a last-minute decision and one I have never regretted.

“The place was packed and the buzz in the air was palpable when I entered the hall. From where I was standing, I had a great view of the several thousand devotees stacked up into the rafters who had come to hear ‘Bucky.’ When Fuller entered the auditorium, the audience exploded but the 80-year-old, white-haired man had the place silent the minute he started talking. This was during the period of his work on synergetics and he talked for hours in a stream of consciousness about the synchronicity of the Universe, knowledge as wealth, the future of the planet—all the big ticket items. He held us all as he walked back and forth, using no lectern and no notes; speaking new words he had invented; turning ‘up and down’ into ‘in and out’; describing the relationship of architecture to nature and the human mind.

“By the time I left, hours later with the auditorium still full and Bucky still talking, I felt like someone had added a room or two to my brain. Later, I read about his work and about him—he was a classic late bloomer and had a difficult young adulthood—but I will always remember the mind-blowing experience of hearing him talk about ‘Universe.’”

Deborah Darin, reference librarian at Loyola University Chicago Law School

member to member

“The most memorable speech I’ve ever heard was delivered in Washington, D.C., by former New York governor Mario Cuomo in either 1998 or 1999 at the Public Trust and Confidence in the Courts Conference. AALL members were chosen to be delegates and tellers, and as I recall, the National Center for State Courts was a sponsor, along with the State Justice Institute.

“The whole of the speech centered on the dignity and honor Cuomo felt in participating in the American justice system. His voice was among the most credible and his message the most articulate I think I can recall.

“Cuomo spoke about his immigrant family background and growing up Italian in New York City. He spoke about his mother’s desire for him to become a judge when he became a lawyer. Becoming a politician in his mother’s eyes, even the governor of the state, did not mean to her what it would have meant if he had become a judge.

“The governor did speak a bit about the nature of the practice of law. But he also spoke of living in a nation ruled by law and governed by the men and women in the room. He thanked every one of us for the service we gave to the system every single day, and was a positive inspiration. He spoke of the role of all of those in a courtroom and in legislative bodies. He was an absolute joy to hear, and to have met him, heard him, and regarded his praise was something I’ve not forgotten.

“Present with me at the same table were Marcia Koslov, Mike Miller, Roberta Shaffer, and Judy Meadows. Others from the Law Librarians Society of Washington, D.C., both in the public and private sectors, did a two-day stint. I don’t remember much about the rest of the conference, except the workload for the librarians, but I do recall with pleasure that talk.

“The history of the moment was that we had just finished with the O.J. Simpson trial and the courts were at an all-time low confidence level in the eyes of the American people. Looking back, I think law libraries can take a bow. We were there in the forefront of establishing confidence and credibility in the system, and law librarians were visible.”

Pamela Gregory, retired

“When I read this question I immediately thought of Bob Berring at the 1978 or 1979 Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL). I was a relative newbie to the profession and attending my first or second conference. Berring, then associate librarian at Harvard, was on a CONELL panel. Berring was no doubt memorable partly because of the humor he always instills in his presentations, and partly because I ‘knew his name’ and reputation in AALL and was in awe that I was listening to Bob Berring. But mostly, Berring was memorable because of what he said.

“Did he implant lofty ideals in us? Maybe. Were his words visionary? Perhaps. So what made his talk so memorable that years later his presentation immediately comes to mind? He told us to always wear our badges on the right side so that when you shook hands with a colleague they could easily see your name and avoid the what’s-his-name search for your badge. He also strongly admonished us to always remove our badge when we left the conference center. Big deal, you say. Common sense. Maybe not. To this day I still hear Berring saying ‘right side’ when I put on a badge (I still prefer clip-on badges over the lanyards that put your name at waist level) and hear his warning to remove badges. The problem is people look at me oddly when I pass on his words. Guess it was all in his delivery.”

Merle Slyhoff, collection development and resource sharing librarian at the University of Pennsylvania Biddle Law Library in Philadelphia

“The most memorable speakers for me are: James Earl Jones as Paul Robeson on Broadway in the late 70s; Justice William O. Douglas at a presentation in Dallas (accompanied by my conservative father); Barbara Jordan addressing constitutional values on a judiciary committee during the Nixon impeachment; Madalyn Murray O’Hair on ‘Christian bigotry,’ among other topics related to religious intolerance and the separation of church and state; and Molly Ivins on George Bush and other Texas politicians (live and in print).”

David Gay, international and comparative government information services law librarian at the University of Tulsa School of Law Mabee Legal Information Center in Oklahoma

“I am going to date myself, but when I was a senior in high school I was able to attend a speech by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. He focused on his time on the court and, since he was quite a rebel, it was quite an interesting speech.

“More recently, I was able to hear Justice Antonin Scalia speak when he came to Wyoming. He also gave his perspective of life on the court and presented some of his ideas about recent cases the court had decided.

“Not everyone has an opportunity to hear a U.S. Supreme Court justice speak about life on the court—I have been lucky enough to hear two.”

Kathy Carlson, state law librarian at the Wyoming State Law Library in Cheyenne

“I had the privilege of seeing and hearing Elie Wiesel speak when I was in undergrad. A question from the audience asked what the greatest threat to society was. His answer was indifference. He encouraged decision making. He told the audience to choose a side—it did not matter which side was chosen, what mattered was that you make a decision for what you believe. This further inspired me to gather as much information as possible on an issue so I could make a choice and help others do the same.”

Ryan Saltz, circulation librarian at the Florida Coastal School of Law Library and Technology Center in Jacksonville

“Soon after the Clinton administration left office, I had the privilege to hear Janet Reno speak at my law school. She was powerful, passionate, and, at times, very funny. She spoke of the importance of improving our educational system as a way to reduce crime overall. She spoke critically of some of our culture’s priorities, e.g., why are professional football players paid millions while our school teachers struggle to make ends meet? She was forceful and forthright, empowered by the strength of her convictions about the law and society. It was a speech I will never forget.”

Jim Kelly, access services research librarian at Vanderbilt University’s Alyne Queener Massey Law Library in Nashville

“Dean Acheson made the most memorable speech I have heard at an AALL Annual Meeting. I believe it was in Washington, D.C. The previous speaker mentioned that librarians had the key to knowledge. And Acheson spent ten minutes profoundly, satirically, and majestically looking for this key. It has been many years since I heard the speech and I recommend that you look it up.”

Ed Bander

member to member

