

of Athens. Here she was able to explore a new world; a different world. It is here that thousands of Canadians, young and old, learn to explore and search beyond their present life, into another realm.

"In a profound way, our libraries represent the best that is Canada – our generosity and compassion, our understanding and support for the public good, and our readiness to face the future with confidence and imagination." This was the common theme, threaded throughout her discussion of literacy, libraries, school libraries and the magic of books. Mme. Clarkson's concern for the less fortunate in our society was clear as she relayed personal anecdotes that connected us to her humanity, and to our own.



OLA President Liz Hoffman, the last President of OLA's first 100 years, gave a replica of OLA's Silver Birch Award to Her Excellency: How inspired!

One of the most compelling stories she shared with us took place in Moncton with some grade 3 and 4 children, with whom she shared the story of *Anne of Green Gables*. She explained to the children that Anne was an orphan, without family and unwanted. The children immediately opened up to explain their own situations – one child sharing thoughts on his parents and relating his experience to Anne's. Thus the magical power of books, their ability to touch our lives, and their ability to help us understand our own lives becomes evident.

Equally touching was Mme. Clarkson's description of the Carnegie Centre in Vancouver, located on the edge of Chinatown, close to an Aboriginal community, near soup kitchens and church halls, within the vicinity of an active drug culture. Here, she described the centre as a place of "...incredible hope because it is still a library." With stained glass windows, celebrating Shakespeare; with Chinese books, meeting the needs of the local society; with opportunities for people to meet, study, write, and draw - this centre has changed and altered its' services to reflect the needs of a changing society.

"In that kind of community you can sense what the real mission of a library or any kind of centre can be. Which is to bring people together in an atmosphere in which they can learn what truth and freedom are really all about. It is not about being on a certain side or having the same views. It is about access, about everybody being able to be part of the same thing. And in the Carnegie Centre we really sense that. That to me makes it a great place."

Wow – makes you want to stand up and be counted. And that's exactly what we need to do. Providing opportunities for all citizens in Ontario to freely access information is akin to handing them the keys to the Golden Palace. Information is the road to knowledge and knowledge is power. We empower children, teenagers, adults and senior citizens of every race, gender, and socio-economic background to follow their dreams; to turn their passion into action, embraced with information and knowledge.

The importance of school libraries and their link to literacy was also clearly made by Mme. Clarkson.