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Collaborative Couple: A Salute to Tina & Steven Nabinger

by MariRae Dopke-Wilson

Imagine, always having a trusted colleague by your side to provide important advice and support for your every need. Steve and Tina Nabinger have enjoyed this unique fringe benefit for many years. The Nabinger's rely on one another not only as man and wife, but also in professional life. . . as practicing librarians in Upstate New York. They're librarians in love, who love to collaborate! Together they make up a dynamic duo spawning creative library lessons for their elementary and middle school students in Upstate New York.



"A lot of my best ideas I've gotten from Tina, or she's helped me refine, and I'd like to think that maybe the reverse is true at times." Tina agrees: "Absolutely, it's true, because I always say 'what do you think about this, Steve?' and Steve always has a very unique way of putting things in a different perspective. So it's really great that we can bounce things off each other. Steve is [also] a great writer. He picks up things that I wouldn't see, so he's another set of eyes for me."

How Collaborating Works for Steve and Tina

In addition to discussing daily events at home when the school day is over, Tina and Steve swap lessons and find ways to collaborate during class even while teaching in separate schools and districts. Steve is the middle school librarian at C.S. Driver School in Marcellus, NY. As part of a Fall Harvest celebration at Tina's library, he joined her for a special storytelling session. *"He was the vampire and I was the witch and we had the lights down, we brought in candles and we had Halloween stories. So we were alternating stories together and that was neat."* Steve adds, *"She even got some dry ice and put in it a caldron so we had fog across the floor."*

Enthusiasm for their profession and the joy they share in collaborating exudes from the Nabinger's. The fun they have teaming up on storytelling is easily detected in their voices. On another occasion Steve traveled to Tina's school for St. Patrick's Day to read to students with an Irish brogue. He feels fortunate to have school administration which allows him 'professional development' time to collaborate on special projects outside of his library.

Library 'Curb Appeal'

The Nabinger's take pride in their libraries and are dedicated to making them functional and appealing. They feel it is exceedingly important for a school library to be aesthetically pleasing to the senses. Steve calls it 'curb appeal.' *"You're selling a product ... your services, your program is something that you're selling and you need*

curb appeal as they walk by. Does it look inviting, do you have some music playing, do you have nice decorations, do you have stuffed animals? -- Those will lure people in and make them want to be in your library."

'Curb appeal' is evident in both of the Nabinger's libraries. Built in 1936, Steve's boasts beautiful ornate woodwork and brass chandeliers. *"I'm really proud of that physical space and how my staff and I have worked to clean it up to make the beauty in that space shine."* Now in his third year at the school, he feels fortunate to be a full-time librarian, unlike his predecessor who juggled other school responsibilities.

In Tina's Bridgeport Elementary Library, cute and cuddly character animals complement colorful picture books displayed creatively. Every nook and corner is filled with interesting appeal. Architectural curved windows welcome visitors on even a gloomy day. A brightly colored rug with whimsical drawings suggests relaxing on the floor for story time. It looks more like a setting at Barnes & Noble, than a rural elementary school library. *"I call it my home away from home." It's just a beautiful place to keep organized. We do all our own decorating and I'm very proud of that."*



And Tina has good reason to be proud of her library as she was instrumental in designing its form and function. *"I said to my Superintendent, 'this is what I see...' At the time a lot of the staff was big on drama, every grade level did a play, it was amazing. OK, I would love to have track lighting with the dimmers, the story sets for*



the kids, I want windows because we have a beautiful courtyard. I want a teaching area. I want the non-fiction area with computers so the kids can come in (and work)."

Tina sat in on actual meetings with architects and her design recommendations were based on being able to host 3 – 4 classes at one time with separate work areas so she could supervise while being able to accomplish other work simultaneously. Steve remembers a situation during the library's development that illustrates the importance of having a librarian involved in the design of their facility. *"When her circ desk was delivered it was an adult size circulation desk and Tina had to say to the architect, I've got kindergarteners coming in, they won't be able to reach over the desk, so they had to send that one back and get a new one."*

She also took care to insure the facility could be fully enjoyed by even the smallest children. Young students were measured and furnishings were selected carefully to insure chairs would be light enough to be pushed and pulled into place by small children. Alternatively, the same furniture needed to be sturdy enough to serve older students & adults. *"They did everything I wanted and it worked out very well."*

As coincidence would have it, the opening of Tina's new library was celebrated on the same day Steve's company held a special launch. *"When this library opened ten years ago I was working at Gaylord Brothers and we happened to have a big celebration there with a product roll-out. We had several cakes that said 'Congratulations' on them. So we had our big party and one of the cakes had been untouched. I said to my supervisor, 'Mind if I take this?', blew across town as fast as I could and came in with a big cake that said congratulations on it, and everybody was here."* Steve remembers standing next to the superintendent who dropped a pencil on the floor during the celebration. He quickly picked it up commenting he'd best be swift in his recovery before a most resourceful head librarian could justify its' use.

In addition to aesthetics, the Nabinger's have worked hard refining their respective literature collections. Tina is particularly proud. *"One of my expertise as a school librarian is more choice of literature. I spend a lot of time on my book orders. I just got in 196 fiction books a few weeks ago. So I'm very lucky to have a very supportive district in that area".*



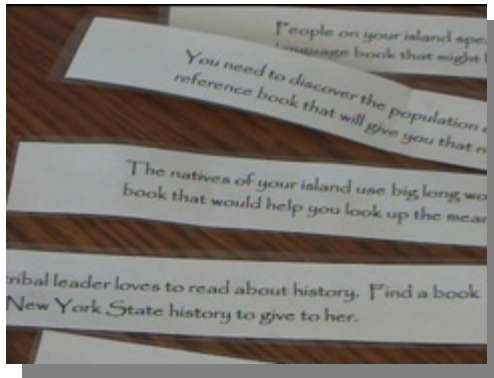
Favorite IL Topics & Motivation

Teaching students how to locate and access library resources is Steve's favorite IL topic. He remembers his first visit to the college library well when he didn't know how to find the books he needed. *"I knew vaguely how a card catalog was used. And this was 1981 so they just had OPACs and I didn't know how to use them, so I was really lost. And I was afraid to ask the librarian. I couldn't find librarians to ask. I tell my kids this all the time. Kids assume that all librarians loved going to the library when they were young and many of us did, and many of us were just terrified. We had old school librarians and when we couldn't find books they were always shushing. So my favorite IL topic is how do you find things in my library? Not every library is laid out like mine is. Do you know the Dewey Decimal System, can you use my OPAC, can you browse on the shelf? I find kids who can't browse. Those are the topics that I drill over and over again. I've got to say that my motivation strategies are using the essential question. It ties the whole lesson together. I know technically it's not a motivational strategy, but that's what I use to tie the lessons together. Why do we want to learn this? Why is this important?"*

Tina agrees that this very basic principle works in every situation. *"When we used the essential question the things they come up with, especially the little ones, it's just amazing. You can hear the wheels turning. It's a motivator to get them talking. And as a teacher you need to ask yourself all the time, 'why am I doing this? Is it relevant to their world? And can they relate and connect?'"*

Continued . . .

A favorite information literacy lesson entitled "Library Survivor" is one fun way Steve tests and reinforces the basic 'locate & access' skills. It's a lesson that Tina read about and adapted from *Library Media Activities Monthly* magazine. In the game students are divided into tribes from separate islands (see photo at right). They then receive challenges (see photo below) that require them to do tasks as simple as finding a bookmark or as specific as looking up the population of their island in a reference



book. *"I think it's motivating for the kids because it's a kinesthetic exercise. They get to get up and move around. So many times we get into the library and even if we're hearing a great book talk or a great talk about an author, they're sitting and they're listening. And, of course, having the chocolate as the sort of reward challenge at the end of the exercise is exciting and motivating for the kids."* Steve's 'Library Survivor' lesson plan and a video

depicting the game play in-action can be found on the S.O.S. for Information Literacy database.

Simply reading aloud is a winning activity both Nabinger's believe is of interest to students no matter their age. Tina says she's confident people are always going to want to read books. "They're beautiful. They are wonderful things to have in your hands to read. It's like a comfort zone. It's important to bring everything full circle, to teach kids to use the technology to find what they need, but still have the love of books . . . being able to read, to look at books and love books their whole life, because that's what it's all about."

Love of Literature Brought Them Together

Tina and Steve Nabinger exude a passion for teaching and love of literature that make them unique partners in life, and in the information literacy profession. And when they met, Steve quips, the odds of them getting together were clearly against them. The fateful meeting was in a Syracuse University library reference class 15 years ago where they debated vehemently, never having an inkling a great collaborative team was in the making! Finally, after class, on a snowy and cold Syracuse day, he offered to give Tina a ride to her car in hopes he could discreetly ask her out on a date. To his delight, she accepted, and then called back to the female classmates he was trying to evade, "Hey girls, come on, Steve is going to give us all a ride to our cars!" Needless to say, Steve Nabinger is a determined man who accomplishes what he sets out to achieve!

Hats off to Steve and Tina for taking time out to share with us. For a written lesson plan for "Library Survivor" and others Steve has contributed, access the database at www.informationliteracy.org. You can also access the video of Steve "in action" by searching on Library Survivor under Teaching Ideas.

About the Author

MariRae Dopke-Wilson is a veteran media producer. She is the feature story writer for the Educators' Spotlight Digest and producer of many video clips for the *S.O.S. for Information Literacy* project. In the past several years, she has interviewed dozens of library media specialists and captured their stories in both print and video.