

Caitlin: Hey, we're Caitlin and Katie, coming to you from our library living room. We are here not just as children's librarians, but as people who are parenting our own children.

Katie: Each month, we'll bring a new conversation about parenting with helpful resources from our library and beyond. This is Your Family, Your Library, and we are your librarians.

Caitlin: Before we get into this month's topic, we want to remind our listeners that though we're pretty good at finding resources and we have experience parenting our own kids, we are not child development experts. Our choices don't need to be your choices. There is no judgment here. We are all just doing our best with the health and well-being of our families in mind.

Katie: That's right. And this month, as we're nearing the end of summer, we're thinking about going...

Both:: Dun, dun dun!

Katie: Back to school.

Caitlin: Noooo!

Katie: And the myriad feelings that this yearly occurrence can induce.

Caitlin: Because if you ask our kids, this is a very hot topic. We brought in a whole new librarian in to help us break it down. This is Lorrie whom dedicated listeners might remember as the librarian who taught me the power pose a few episodes back. Lorrie would you mind talking a little bit about yourself? Tell us your title and a few of the things that you do in the library and in the community.

Lorrie: I wouldn't mind at all. So I am Lorrie Pomian Fisher. I am a community engagement librarian, and my primary role is to work with the schools that serve our students in kindergarten through eighth grade in Skokie. Some of the things that I do include working on library card campaigns to ensure that teachers in our schools and students in those schools all have library cards. We provide educator resource bags to teachers upon request. I schedule school visits both to the library for visits and at the schools for us to go see them, um and whole bunch of other things.

Caitlin: A whole bunch of other things. One of my favorite things about having you as a coworker, aside from everything, is I love that your role helps us be really responsive because Skokie has many school districts, which is different than other communities, and not all of the school districts are doing the same things at the same time, and they don't necessarily all follow the same curricula. It's really nice

to have you because you have connections with those schools and you're able to sort of put feelers out when necessary. And it helps us do things like sort of loosely level our readers section based on what the schools are doing in their own libraries. And I think that's really cool because it helps us respond to parents who are coming in looking for materials based on their own, what the teachers are recommending at their own schools.

Lorrie: Well, don't think that any of what I said earlier implied that I do all of this work on my own because I certainly don't. You're 100% correct. There are six public school districts in our service area, two of which overlap neighboring suburbs, one Evanston on one side and Morton Grove on the other, and a handful of private schools as well that we work with. So it's a total of 24 schools that serve kindergarten through eighth grade. And yeah, I could not do all of my work by myself. There are librarians in the youth department and the teen department and the community engagement department that also do some of that work with me. Otherwise it would not be possible for me to do all of the things that I do.

Caitlin: I know that you engage with educators in a lot of different ways. I know that you connect with them, and I know that sometimes you host book giveaways. You do. You co-lead it a book discussion at Old Orchard Junior High School. How do you make these connections?

Lorrie: So in terms of my connections at the schools, yes, I have conversations primarily by email because that's the most convenient way with differing schedules to communicate with folks. School librarians are probably my closest colleagues out in the in the community. But I also work with school principals and other administrators and directly with classroom teachers as well. And since my job is essentially to connect the entire school community with the resources at the library, it's not limited just to classroom teachers and school librarians. You know, the other support staff in the schools have access to materials at the library, have the ability to ask questions and request resources that we can curate for them. And I'm always open to listening to new ideas because I can't possibly imagine all of the ways in which we can support all of the different school communities that we serve. So that's one of my favorite parts of my job is actually when somebody will send me an email that says, you know, hey, we were just thinking about this thing that's come up and we're wondering if the library could in some way support us, because those conversations to me can be some of the more interesting ones to help me learn more about why different things work for different school communities, and why there's a need in some spaces for certain things and a need and other spaces for others. And in some cases, like the the book conversation you were talking about was actually extended to all of the schools in Skokie that had students in grades six, seven, and eight. So the most recent school year that just concluded that book discussion only happened at one school, but that

was because of a host of factors and not intentional by any means. So there's a lot of opportunities, I think, and I certainly haven't even begun to scratch the surface of what they could be.

Caitlin: I think that's true, especially because schools evolve and so do we as librarians, based on whatever is happening during whichever year that we're talking about. There's ebbs and flows in pedagogy, and child development information changes. So I think it's it's always something new and always something interesting to learn, which I really like. Is there something that you've done that stands out as being particularly exciting or fun in terms of working with schools or educators?

Lorrie: It's hard to narrow that thing down to just one, Caitlin, seriously, because a lot of the things that I do are fun for me, not because the work itself is fun, but because I know that the impact that that work is going to have is important. So that's where I get a great deal of my, like, job satisfaction comes from those things. I will say one of my favorite little unexpected things that happened just a month or so ago. I got a card in the mail. I mean, I know it. Can you believe people actually send mail? It's totally true. And I don't get mail at the library. Hardly ever. But it was an actual card written by an actual person, not typewritten. And it was signed by a whole bunch of kids.

Katie: Aww that's great.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it was a thank-you for a batch of books that we had sent to one of our school partners. And they used those withdrawn materials in what they call, like a school store. So students earn points and then they spend those points on valuable things like cool books that are in great condition to take home. And once they had used up all of the books that I sent, I guess they were having kids sign the card as they were collecting them. But I have the cool card on my desk now with all these signatures on it.

Caitlin: Love that.

Katie: Oh that's really cool, I love that. So we thought it would be fun to talk a little bit about what our childhood back to school looked like. I know for me personally, it was a time of excitement, but also being fairly anxious about what the new school year would provide and it had in store for me. But I loved like going to the store and getting all the supplies on the list, checking the lists off, figuring out what I was going to wear on the first day. And another good memory I have is my mom was a kindergarten teacher, so I would often help her in the weeks leading up to school, starting, getting her room all set up and prepared. So that was always something I looked forward to and was just a huge memory for me. And I was in the same school as her for a couple of years. So like her classroom

was kind of like an extension of home for me. And I would often visit her during the day too at school. So, Lorrie, do you have any fond memories of going back to school?

Lorrie: I do. I feel like most of my going back to school memories are fond ones. I can only remember one school year in which that wasn't the case, and that was because we had moved to a new area and my older sister and I were going to one school and my younger sister was going to a different one, and it was just weird to not all be together. And I was older, so I remember that in a different way. But almost all of my school memories, like going back to school memories are that same kind of joy that you're talking about. I too loved the school supply list and checking the things off in the fresh box of crayons and what they smelled like. And I don't even know why that stuff was important. I don't remember being super concerned about, like, what I was going to wear on the first day back. And maybe that says something, but I don't know what it says. So, I mean, I always wanted to be a teacher too, so I think and I did. That was my undergraduate degree was in elementary ed. So it was my plan, like ever since I was very small to be in schools all the time. Yeah, a little different. Once I had kids of my own, my, my experience didn't necessarily match, although I do think my kids have, you know, joy associated with going back to school, too. There is a little bit more of what you're talking about in terms of anxiety and some of the things that I don't think I put a whole lot of thought in as a kid, like who my teacher was going to be or who was going to be in the class with me and all of those kinds of things. They felt different as a parent than they did as a kid. But that also could just be because I'm so far away from being a kid at this point that I don't remember it quite accurately. I don't know.

Caitlin: Yeah. It's weird to me that my kids are very interested in brand new school supplies. I don't understand. It doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel like a new beginning.

Lorrie: Right.

Caitlin: And I have tried to manufacture this with my kids. Like I'm going to Target. Look at these brand new markers. They all have lids on them. And my kids are like, yeah.

Lorrie: Have you tried Mr. Sketch? Those smelly markers? Maybe that'll help.

Caitlin: That might work. You know what they don't have that we did have? Trapper Keepers.

Lorrie: Seriously.

Caitlin: Trapper Keepers.

Katie: The best.

Caitlin: I remember. I remember my first Trapper Keeper. It was in fourth grade and it was like you could practically see the light shining out of it when I opened it up. Like, you can practically hear like, the Hallelujah chorus. Like it was such a good, I think it was Lisa Frank, like it was a real good notebook, y'all. And I think, like, there's nothing, there's nothing for my kids that feels like that for them. And that's a real tragedy.

Katie: You say the name Lisa Frank,

Caitlin: Right?

Katie: And I get giddy. I mean, I would spend so much time in the sticker aisle...

Caitlin: Yeah.

Katie: at Target, picking out my Lisa Frank stickers.

Caitlin: Yes. I say the name Lisa Frank and a dolphin jumps out of a cerulean sea with, like, a teddy, no, like a tiger, like a cartoon tiger riding on its back that sparkles, right?

Katie: Totally.

Caitlin: That's the way it feels in my heart. It's a dolphin with a cartoon tiger on its back that sparkles.

Katie: Yeah electric colors.

Caitlin: The electric colors.

Katie: Yeah.

Caitlin: Yeah. I don't, they don't feel that same way. For me, I homeschooled for a long time. I homeschooled until I was almost done with second grade. And then we moved to Bloomington, Indiana, and I started public school there. And I am a very optimistic person. I always feel like if there is a problem, there is a way to fix it, and socializing was a problem that I couldn't really fix. And so that was a little jarring for me because I felt like it should be a seamless transition from being sort of a quirky homeschool kid to like, I have tons of friends, and that is not the way that it played out. But every year, relentlessly, I would hit the end of school and kind of be like, Well, that sucked. And then I would get to August and be like, this is going to be my year. And it would be like, you know, I've got the supplies and I've got, you know, like, I don't know what's going to change, but maybe, maybe I'm going to go buy Caiti this year. Like,

maybe that's what it's going to be. It was not Katie with a K, I was C-A-I-T-I. So that was a big reinvention for myself. It didn't work out the way that I hoped it would, but every year without fail, I felt very optimistic at the beginning. I was focused on what teacher I had and who was in my class because I had a best friend and when she was in my class, everything felt right. And when she wasn't in my class it was hard. But yeah, I always loved the beginning. I love getting on the school bus. Loved the materials. I asked Haven about what she felt about going back to school and if she had any advice, and she said that her advice was to Don't worry, be brave, have a good attitude so that you can make a lot of friends. And I said, What do you think the most important thing about school is? And she said, to make friends. So. So there you have it. Don't worry. Be brave.

Katie: Aww I love that.

Caitlin: That's her. She is that is the number one thing that she's concerned about is will I have friends? How many friends will I have?

Katie: Mhm. Yeah. My, my kids were, are both, Edwin and Orson, starting at a new school this coming year. So for us it's exciting. But I think we're all feeling different things about it. You know, there's all these like meet-and-greets and like social type things which are fun, but also for me can be a lot.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Katie: But one thing that we're happy we're able to do is the school has a camp over the summer that the boys have been able to go to, so they've met some of the teachers who are also working for the camp and have been in the building and kind of getting a sense of where things are. And so it feels good for us that they're able to have that consistency in at least like going into the school year will be different. Being in school and not in camp, but at least there will be some familiarity about it.

Caitlin: I think that's that's very real. We hear at the desk a lot of parents are asking for books and materials about going back to school or going to school for the first time. And we have a lot of lists that we've generated at the library over the years about what it's like going back to school. And, you know, we love a picture book. And one of the things that we have in the Kids room that I think is super great and super useful is we have a picture book category called "School Stories," and it is just about going to school either for your first time or whether you're in the trenches and you're just going back in. We've got a book for it. And to your point about doing the socializing with the parents, and I know that we also see a lot of parents who are worried about school readiness for their kids. We have a parenting collection that addresses some of these issues as well. And we will we will of course, have a book list that you'll find

linked in our show notes. And I don't know, it feels pretty good to have those resources.

Katie: Lorrie, is that ever like a question that you got from the schools, how to help people get ready to come back to school or to provide resources or anything like that?

Lorrie: We do definitely get educator bag requests for back to school type themes in August for in preparation for the new school year.

Caitlin: Wait. What is an educator bag?

Lorrie: An educator resource bag. Yeah, I talk about it like everybody knows what that is, right? So basically anybody with an educator library card, which means that they're one of those 24 hour schools I was mentioning that we partner with, has the ability to request a personalized bag of materials that is curated by me mostly, and they can ask for them by theme or by curriculum topic or by any number of things. They can just send me a little note that says, We're doing this and we will like some books and it typically includes about 30 nonfiction, fiction. Could also include audiovisual materials if they want them on a variety of different topics. So yes, we do get, you know, thematic requests for things like back to school and and other things, but not as much like the readiness. The readiness questions that I hear most are from parents at the desk, or kids at the desk. I think a lot of that boils down to like just not knowing what's coming next, like how to anticipate what the school year is going to be like or what the next thing is going to be like. I remember even though my kids are much older than you are kids, I remember the very first day I took my older daughter, Jessica, to preschool and I was seriously more nervous and she was like by a lot. And I just wasn't sure how she was going to respond. When she was brought to this classroom with other kids. Her age, because she was at that point an only child and hadn't really been around a lot of other kids before except a couple of cousins. So I was nervous already. And when I got there and there were already some kids in the room, I was like, Oh, rookie mistake. I know how she works. It's easier for her if we get there early and then the room fills in around her as opposed to walking into a full room. But here we are. Let's just try it anyway. And there were kids, you know, crying and holding under their parent's legs. And I was like, Oh, this is going to be a disaster. And we walk into the room and she turns and she looks at me. She says, You're not staying, are you? And I was like, Well, I guess I'm not needed here. And then when I walked out, I burst into tears because I was like, Oh my God, she doesn't need me anymore. What is happening? And it wasn't that at all. She was just ready. And I, I didn't know that she was ready because how could I possibly have known until we were in the moment? Right? But you anticipate or I anticipated as optimistic of a person as I am. I anticipated all the what if's like. What if she doesn't make a friend? Or what if nobody talks to her? What if the teacher asks a question

and she doesn't know the answer and she's embarrassed? Because I know how those things affect her in a normal kind of situation.

Katie: And that also ebbs and flows. Yeah, it's like I think about Edwin, my youngest, is going into kindergarten and I think some days for him, like thinking about going to school or, you know, and going to a new school at that is exciting. And he's ready. And then the next day, you know, he'll be more concerned about like, are people going to like me? Am I going to be able to make new friends? Are they are they going to share with me, you know, like all those things that kids often worry about? So it's just interesting how that can change, you know, from day to day.

Lorrie: And there's a fine line, I think for me, there's a fine line between excitement and anxiety. And if I don't if I'm not careful, I'm on the wrong side of it.

Caitlin: Sometimes they really feel the same and you have to, at least I have to ask myself, like, I'm having a good time. And sometimes I am. Sometimes it feels [sound effects] it's a good [sound effect]. Yeah, well, Jessica is done with college now.

Lorrie: She is. She graduated a year ago, a year ago May. So it's been a little over a year.

Caitlin: Did you find that there were years where she needed you more than others, or was she always kind of like, You're not going to stay, are you?

Lorrie: I'd like to think that she still needs me every now and again. But she has been an independent person since I remember. Like she's always been ready for the next thing. And that's not to say that she doesn't have moments of doubt or anxiety or worry or any of those things because she does. But she has this unique ability to just take the next step anyway. More often than not. And once she sets her mind on something, it would take a lot to convince her that she can't do the thing. So, I mean, I certainly am not one to try, but, but I just know, like once she makes up her mind, I don't think that you can stop her. I really don't. So that's I think it's great. Right?

Caitlin: It's super great.

Lorrie: And I do think she still enjoys learning. I know that she still uses her local library, even though it's not this one anymore. So, yeah, I think I mean, she's fully an adult now, but...

Caitlin: Did you have a resource or anything that you used with either of your kids for going back to school? Like a special book that you read to them or a story that you told them or anything like that? I don't, I did not have anything like that. I know that some families



do.

Lorrie: I didn't. Yeah, I didn't. I, I'm actually, this might be a weird confession as a librarian, but I'm one of those people that certain kinds of books create anxiety for me, like the number of people who gave me books and if any of them are listening, I apologize in advance for saying this. But when I was pregnant with Jessica, those "What to Expect When You're Expecting" books were the worst. Like, I just can't. I, I mean, if I have enough problems with the what-ifs in my own head, I certainly don't need somebody else spelling them out for me. And once they're on paper, they seem more real to me somehow. So like the how-to guides and the self-help things don't do that for me at all. So instead it was more like, you know, we just talked about stuff all the time and we still do. So I think that's how we prepared. And also the sleep thing. For me, I'm kind of a scheduled person, not super regimented, but when they were small, there was definitely a need for a regular schedule. If I didn't feed them on time, they really kind of were like gremlins, and if they didn't get the right amount of sleep, it set the morning up in a terrible way. So there's, there's time for flexibility and the summer for us was that. But once you hit August 1st, like if you don't start transitioning them back, it's like, it's kind of terrifying to think about what the first day of school could look like if they don't even want to drag themselves out of bed because they're tired. So for me it was more like just getting back to like some kind of a routine or something closer to the routine so that it wasn't so jarring.

Caitlin: You may have guessed it by now, but we love reading great books to support you and your family. We recently published a list of books to help parents with picky eaters. Find the books in our show notes.

Katie: So as you know, the pandemic kind of shifted a lot of things for all of us. And also in the library, I'm just curious like, how did that change the way that you provide service to the schools, or did it streamline anything for you or...

Lorrie: I mean, it's I will say it's, it's good to be on what feels like the other end of it. Obviously, that was a really rocky time for a lot of businesses and schools and libraries and just individuals. And I was grateful that it provided a few opportunities that we hadn't had before, like having Zoom conversations about, on a monthly basis with school librarians who were eager to connect with other librarians in the community and ask questions and get feedback on things that nobody had experienced previously. So I got to connect with those folks on a more regular basis for a little bit. But in terms of like where we're at now, I feel like we, I have returned to what I would consider like pre-pandemic levels of requests and things. And, you know, I think there's a there's lots of light at the end of the tunnel. And hopefully at some point there will be more opportunity for

more creativity and more conversations about what other things we could be doing to support the schools. And we'll just see how time changes things.

Caitlin: I do think that as sort of horrific and, and challenging as that time was it also pushed us to do some of our best work in terms of creative thinking and problem solving and making things happen in unexpected ways. And I really am grateful for some of those connections and for some of the ways that I learned how to do my job differently. So that's the silver lining, I think, too that sort of anxiety hole that, I always say I'm in a hole, I'm in a lot of holes There's sort of like a it's an anxiety sandwich. An anxiety...

Katie: Cyclone.

Caitlin: Cyclone! Anxiety cyclone, of like, you know, how do I juggle my job and my kids' schooling and all of those things? I do think that there were some real positive things that came out of that.

Katie: One of my favorite events that I attended was one that you put together on Zoom with some homeschool educators, which was really enlightening and introduced me to a lot of things that, you know, I had been curious about or I hadn't known about. And I'm someone who was always kind of interested in that idea of homeschooling. And I actually, as some listeners might know, like did that with my oldest son, Orson, last year. But I really appreciated that conversation and the fact that you were able to put that together for people, and I'm sure I'm not the only one that benefited from it.

Lorrie: I'm glad to hear that some of the folks that participated in that conversation are library patrons that I've encountered at the Kids desk. And I agree with you that there was a lot of useful information that we were able to share at that moment.

Caitlin: When we were talking last week at our meeting, we were talking a little bit about like the small changes that have come about post-pandemic. And of course, like we don't have hard data in front of us, but we have our own experiences and anecdotes. And one of the things that we talked about is that it seems like, and I can confirm that this is true in my house, that socially things have changed a little bit. The way that we comport ourselves has changed a little bit. And we see in the library a little bit more activity that we didn't necessarily see before. So kids are having to relearn how to use public spaces in a way that is appropriate.

Katie: A lot more like redirecting.

Caitlin: Yes. Just behavior that I think pre-pandemic people were really used to sort of bringing their kids everywhere. And then for a lot of years, you know, for two and a half, three years, people were

not bringing their kids out in public as frequently. And I think that's been sort of an interesting re learning process. I know for my family and I think for some of the families that come in the library, too.

Katie: One thing, Lorrie, that you told me that I thought was really interesting but makes a lot of sense is that a lot of schools reached out to you to schedule visits, kind of using the library as like a, are we able to do field trips and other spaces, and I love that through your relationship to the schools and the teachers, and I think also from what they get from the library in general, that they feel like our space is safe and open for them to be able to ask that and to come here and and try things out. But I just kind of curious, just if you wanted to talk a little bit about it.

Lorrie: Sure, I can. I mean, so the way that school visits work here is we identify sort of a priority group of like grade levels that we can offer visits to based on a number of factors, including staff time and the availability of spaces to host those kinds of things during the school day. So last year we identified third grade as the grade that we wanted to prioritize for a whole number of reasons, one of which was that, historically we had provided those tours for students in grades kindergarten through second grade, and those kids missed that opportunity because they were at home during the pandemic, during those those school years. But what I found when the schools accepted the invite and came to visit was that we did hear from many of the people that were visiting that it was the student's first opportunity to take a field trip. And yes, there was a school partner who said, you know, these kids have never been on a field trip before, and we have a bigger field trip to a different kind of venue later in the school year. And we would love to have the opportunity to sort of did this as a trial run. And you're right, it's inside, it's safe, it's, you know, more contained, perhaps more structured in certain ways, but also a little bit flexible. While we do have behavioral expectations, they're not nearly as strict as the ones where when I was a kid. But it does provide the teachers an opportunity to also feel comfortable in their attempt to try these things for the first time.

Caitlin: It's, it's a good lesson in how do we behave in public and in these spaces are are for them. They are ostensibly the kids spaces, but there is still a baseline expectation of, of what acceptable behavior is within those spaces. And it's really nice that not every kid who is on those tours has been to our library before. It's a great opportunity for not only for us to show off our spaces, but for them to see what it's like to exist in those spaces.

Lorrie: Yeah, and in my opinion, it also gives us the opportunity to learn how these types of conversations happen in the school buildings because, you know, they have vocabulary that they use. They frame things in a certain way, like we use a level zero voice while this is

taking place, or whatever the, you know, the directive is. And when we hear the teachers visiting speak to their students in certain kind of ways and we understand, we can also reinforce those things when kids are here without their classes.

Caitlin: Yep, that's just another way that we can be responsive, I think. And also like learn from what they're doing, which I think is great. I mean, some of the behavior that that we've seen modeled from teachers and from students like, for example, calling all of the people that are in your class "friends" rather than "boys and girls," or something like that, that is that is a model that we have picked up and adapted here at the library. And I think it's a really good one. It's a small thing, but that language that you're talking about, I think, is useful for us and for our practices as well.

Katie: Mm hmm. Yeah, I agree.

Caitlin: So we were talking about how we hear, I hear maybe more than I hear from kids, anxiety from parents about school readiness, and especially it seems that preschool-to-kindergarten jump is like this sort of leap across this chasm of unknown. You know, like Lorrie, you were talking about how, like, you just weren't quite sure what to expect when you dropped off your kid in the classroom. And I think that's really true for parents who are dropping their kids off at kindergarten for the first time, and I think especially post-pandemic some, some interesting things that happened during the pandemic, when we were home, were getting some real-life insight about how classrooms were being run and what expectations were within those classrooms at home. So I felt like for me, it was like pulling the curtain back a little bit. For the first time. I got to see like how the homework that was coming home was being implemented in the classroom. But I do think a lot of parents come in feeling a sense of anxiety about, you know, is my kid ready for kindergarten, or my kid is experiencing X problem at school and I don't know how to address it. And how do you address that when you're working at the desk? What are some of the resources that you point families to?

Katie: I actually had a question from a parent who had older kids who was looking for like math help, and I was with, Maria is our supervisor, with Maria's as help, I was able to kind of guide them through the Tutor.com which I actually learned quite a bit more about it. And it's really a robust resource that we have. But sometimes it does feel like a really hard question to answer on the fly because you know how heavy that question is. And like all of the emotion and feelings that are part of asking that question, that sometimes it doesn't feel, it feels to me like I'm not providing enough in the moment.

Caitlin: I think at least that, my kids school, and I'm honestly I'm assuming that most, if not all schools are this way. They want to

partner with me as a parent like they want me to be involved in my kid's education. And I feel empowered and I feel like I have permission to reach out to my child's teacher, either of them, or even the people that work in the front office and ask them for advice, their point person too, and they usually know where to direct me if I have a question or if I'm concerned about something that's happening in the classroom. For me, it feels like a wonderful partnership and I appreciate that. So I have I have asked families before when they come in and they're worried about what it's going to look like, if they have reached out to their schools and made a connection with somebody in the office, yet.

Katie: One thing that was hard about, about the pandemic, and I'm talking like in the 2021-22 school year when kids were going back, they were still masked at the beginning of the year, most of the year at least where Orson went when he was in first grade. And I think what was really hard for me is at that time we weren't able to go into the school at all. So like that connection that you would normally have with the teacher and like getting to know the other students in the class or the opportunities you would have to be inside the school and like feel a part more, a part of the community weren't there and obviously for good reason. But, I like, personally was so involved with Orson's preschool that it felt very weird to me to not have that connection whatsoever. And for us, we had just moved to this neighborhood. It was a new school, so I think that impacted that even more. So I'm excited, with all that said, since we're starting a new school this year, I'm really looking forward to being able to start out being a part of this community and like finding ways where we can feel that connection more or have more dialog with the teachers and with the other parents and students because I feel like that makes, like especially when you're having points, when things are feeling really hard or you're not sure, like if doing the right thing for your kid or if your kid's in the right place, that having that community to go to to ask questions or just to talk with is so important.

Caitlin: For sure. I think this is a hard moment too. I know that when my kids were in preschool, like you said, we really knew what was going on. I mean, there were really regular conversation lines with teachers at pick-up and drop-off. And also a lot of times they would communicate through school apps with us, you know, like we had photographs of what they were doing throughout the day so once they started, you know, quote unquote, real school, you know, you're just sort of leaping off that cliff and you don't know what's underneath you. You hope it's going to be good. You hope that there is, you know, a bridge, but you don't know. And I think think that's what I meant by saying during that 2020 and 2021 year where we had the classrooms in our living room, you know, really getting to see what it's like inside of those classrooms in a way that, you know, I don't know about your kids, but my kids are not the most reliable narrators when it comes to, you know, what's happening at school or even like what, what did

you do today? I don't know.

Lorrie: That's a hard questions. I mean, that's yeah, that's one thing that. Sometimes there's not a one size fits all answer obviously because kids are different and kids communicate in different ways. But I will agree with you that asking a question like that, that's even a hard question for me. Like how was my day?

Katie: It's a loaded question.

Lorrie: Well, it could be. But also and also sometimes it's just there were so many pieces of it like which part of you talking about? So breaking it down a little bit may be helpful. You know, like if you know what's going on in Math or if you know what they're studying in Social Studies or whatever the book they're reading for Reading, like those kinds of more specific questions might get you a little more info. But, you know, as your kids get older too, some of those things just become things that are supposed to also be independent, you know? And that's hard from a parenting perspective until you see the very end of it. Like when your kids graduate from high school or from college or from whatever's next.

Caitlin: Whatever's next. I will say I have I got some really good advice from a teacher friend. This year. I was having a hard time with sort of understanding what was happening with Haven and her, some stuff in her report card and some stuff that was happening with classroom management, and I didn't really understand what was happening. And I also was like, I don't I don't want to make this year harder on Haven's teacher, who I adored. So I kind of didn't know what to do. And my teacher friend was like, Just ask, just advocate like, it's okay, you're allowed, you're the parent. And I don't know why that didn't occur to me as a thing that I was able to do, but it really didn't. And when I did reach out to Ms. Sabovic, who is phenomenal, she was not only like super responsive and amazing, but was like happy that I had asked. She was like, This is what I'm here for. And we had an excellent conversation and it made me feel like I was even more connected with what was happening at school. And I think sometimes at least for me, and I'm kind of guessing that this is not unique to me, but I know when I was growing up it was like, you get off that school bus and like whatever happens in the classroom, that is the teacher's deal like that, that belongs to your school and your teacher. And my parents were pretty hands off about like whatever they say goes, you know, And I don't think that's like the ethos anymore. I think now it is meant to be more of a partnership because it's a whole different landscape than it was when I was going to school. It feels very different.

Katie: I was curious, Lorrie, as our school services librarian, if a parent comes up to you asking for resources that can help their child with a certain subject, or if they just have questions in general,

like are there resources on our website that you would link them to or does it just depend?

Lorrie: Yeah, it absolutely depends on what the, what the specific request is, but we do have access to lots of different resources. One of the ones that I know we have in the Kids Room, in addition to online, is materials from Scholastic Teachable. So for folks who used to come to the desk and ask if we have workbooks or worksheets that kids could just practice certain skills, while we don't carry books in the library because people write in them and then nobody else can write in them, we do have this, you know, that great resource, Scholastic Teachables and you can select things from a menu of choices in grade levels and tailor it to what you're looking for. And we can print out those types of sheets for folks who want that type of practice. And I too have referred people to Tutor.com. That resource is great not only for if you need homework help ,and like when your kid is asking you questions that you don't know how to answer or you don't know how to answer them in the same way that their teacher might answer them, Tutor.com offers live Tutor assistance with your library card. You can ask those tutors those questions and get different answers than you would get from us because we're not, you know, math specialists or some of us maybe, but...

Caitlin: Not me.

Lorrie: We all have different skill sets.

Katie: And this is why I'm a librarian.

Caitlin: We know how to get you started.

Lorrie: Yes, we can point you in the direction of what could potentially be helpful for you. But yes, there are definitely resources online and also just, there are lots of books, too. And if we don't have them in our collection, we can get them from interlibrary loan or from the RAILS partners. So we we have a lot of options. It just depends on what folks are asking for, how we answer those questions.

Katie: I was so surprised at Tutor.com that they even offer like S.A.T. class or, you know, prep classes. But like those of courses are so expensive that to have that accessible for people is, I thought that was so cool.

Lorrie: I don't think it did sound like this, but I want to make sure that it doesn't sound like we are the only ones who have online resources for student support, because I know that all of the schools now, like the majority of school stuff is on a Google site from a teacher or whatever, and a lot of the school libraries have online resources that we don't have that the students are encouraged to use

before they use ours. Ours have not been vetted by the school folks.

Caitlin: That's a really good tip because I think and I think it's worth noting that though we do have a plethora of resources through our resource link on our page, schools probably have more.

Lorrie: They have school specific curriculum, specific classroom specific things. And I know most students and parents, but students specifically, especially after a certain age, like know that that stuff is there. but it's a helpful reminder sometimes, you know, at the desk when a parent comes in and they're looking for something and you're like, Oh, that might be on your school's web page. Let's go there. Because the schools do have a lot of.

Caitlin: Yes, that learning to ask is a really valuable life skill and really hard. And it seems like it would be something that's really intuitive, but I saw a study that showed that kids who are in high school and going to college have a really hard time asking reference librarians for help, asking for help anywhere. And so that's been sort of in the front of my brain since I became a kids librarian and is like making myself and the library desk accessible to kids and and making sure that they know that whatever question they're asking, whether it is like an actual resource question or, you know, for something that we have in the library or it's like, I don't know, like, who's your favorite Batman or something like that? Like, I'm happy to answer any of those questions. They are all relevant and important. And also, like when we do school tours, I know we make a, a specific point of saying these are the people here at this desk that are here to answer your questions or also to help you reunite with your lost grown up, if that's a thing or, you know, whatever or whatever the case may be.

Lorrie: And for some kids, it seems like it's a natural thing. They are very comfortable asking all kinds of questions. And we do make a point of telling kids when we do tours, this is the person you can ask literally anything. And if they don't know the answer, they're not going to make something up. We'll tell you that we need to do a little research or we need to think about it. But it's also how we learn from them because they ask us questions and then we ask them questions back like.

Caitlin: Right. You have a really interesting way of showing kids who the people to talk to in the library are. I think it is a way that, like, my brain doesn't work. I'm not a super visual person, but you always call out the silver tags that we wear that have our names on it and identify us as library workers. And I love the way that you do that. You tell the kid that comes in like, here's a person that you can ask. Here are the ways that you can find them. They're either at this desk or this desk or take a look at my silver name tag. Anybody that you see wearing one of these is a person that you can ask a



question at the library. I love the way you do that. I think it's like it's such a way of reinforcing all these different ways of identifying adults who can help,

Katie: Whether it's incarceration, a job, the military, deportation, or another reason for a child missing a loved one while they're away, we've selected books to help normalize the situation and help kids feel seen. Browse the recommended reads in our show notes.

Caitlin: Should we talk about what else is great?

Katie: Let's do it.

Caitlin: What kept you going this month?

Katie: Well, I'll just speak specifically about the last couple of days. My brother Brian and his wife Hillary, came in town from New York and they're not staying with us, but they're staying in a downtown Evanston hotel. So we've had dinner the last couple of nights and I'm going to see them again tonight. They're, they have three boys, who are all 10 and up, and they're at sleep-away camp for the next two weeks. So, yeah, it's just been really nice.

Caitlin: That's fun.

Katie: Yeah.

Caitlin: What is keeping me going? I have two things. One is a couple of episodes ago, we talked about how I am borderline obsessed with pollinator gardens and native plants, and we talked about how I had been gardening in mind and it has finally come to fruition. And my garden is, you guys. It is like Chef's kiss. It is, I have roughly a zillion bees in my garden. I have.

Katie: And you have the Tweety Tweetersons.

Caitlin: Yes, that's my other thing! Yes. So I have to, this morning, this is so dorky. I can't even believe I'm going to say it, but I'm going to say it. There were two yellow House Finches in my Joe-Pye-weed. This morning. It was a real treat, you guys. It was a real tweet and a real treat. And also, my mom made this birdhouse for me and so far it has hosted two bird families. And right now I've gotten to see this one from like soup to nuts, or from egg to gross-little-tweeting-dinosaur-monsters. So like, when they were new, I was I was just walking through my yard and I heard this, like, really faint peeping and I kind of looked in the hole and it was like I was telling Katie about. It's like they're bald and their necks are so, like, long and kind of stringy, but like, their mouths are so big and just screaming for, you know, food. And I learned that they're, they're sparrows and the mom and the dad sparrow both equally contribute to the parenting

of their little nestlings. The three birds that are in the nest, Haven named them: Slinky, Chirpy, and Tweety. So that is their names. And then she got really self-conscious about Slinky, which is my favorite of the three names.

Lorrie: I think I want to be friends with Slinky. I don't even know Slinky; sounds like my kind of bird.

Caitlin: Whenever I see a bird in there, it is Slinky. I don't care which one of them it is. It's Slinky to me.

Katie: A-yo Slink.

Caitlin: Haven's like, No, I want to change the name to Squawky. I'm like, Too late. It's Slinky. It's Slinky forever. But that's been keeping me going. I go out and sit in my backyard like I'm, you know, an 80-year-old person every night and just like, stare at the little hole in the birdhouse, waiting for the next episode of the Tweetersons. I love it.

Lorrie: There's really great, you know, new picture book, well, not new but new-ish picture book about birdwatching. I'll pull it for you when we go downstairs. You're going to want to see it.

Caitlin: I love that for me. How about you, Lorrie?

Lorrie: What's keeping me going?

Caitlin: Anything good?

Lorrie: Yeah, a bunch of good stuff. But, you know, this is going to sound odd, but my colleagues in Community Engagement would tell you it's 100% true that the thing that's keeping me going this week in particular is that I just reorganized my desk, and part of that process was to go through Shutterfly and print some updated pictures of my kiddos. It's been a while since I've updated the pictures on my desk and talking about going back to school and whatnot. The picture of my big kid was from the day I dropped her off at Hofstra, which was like 2018 or something. But yeah, I put a whole bunch of new pictures up and cleaned them off and reorganized things. And now I feel like I sort of have a refreshed view of things from my desktop. It feels like a a different space for me at the moment, and I'm appreciating that a whole lot.

Katie: It's that time of year.

Caitlin: Yeah, that is it for us this month. This is us strapping on our metaphorical backpacks. Mine is Lisa Frank, obviously. Climbing up those absurdly tall school bus steps and waving at you from the window as the school bus pulls away from the curb.

Katie: Remember to keep in touch with us. We'd love to hear from you. Email us at [podcast at Skokie Library. Dot Info](mailto:podcast@skokie.library.info). This has been Katie and Caitlin with Your Family, Your Library, produced by Amber Hayes and Sound engineered by Paul Knutson.

Caitlin: See you next month.

Katie: Bye.