Mandy Lee has been interested in libraries since she was a child. “I loved my elementary school library, and I actually won a bookmark design contest for my library back in sixth grade, so that was probably the beginning of my interest,” recalls Lee. “It had a globe at the top, and I put the words ‘Explore the World with Books’ on it.” Although she had never considered being a librarian, it was during an orientation of the library while at law school that she mentioned to the director that she might go to library school after law school. After earning her JD from DePaul University, she took a little detour from the legal sector. “I worked as a real estate agent for a bit, but the part I enjoyed the most was helping clients who were new to Chicago or to a particular neighborhood learn about their new areas,” said Lee. “I liked giving them information, so I realized I should probably go to library school.” And that’s exactly what she did.

During her time in library school at the University of Illinois at Chicago, she served as a reference assistant as well as a teaching assistant for faculty in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) graduate library/information science program. After earning her MSLIS, Lee moved west to Nebraska for her first official librarian job as an assistant professor and reference librarian at the University of Nebraska College of Law Library. When talking about her move, Lee noted “I was primarily interested in academic librarianship. I had been in school for so long, and I had worked as a graduate assistant at the University of Illinois Law Library, and it just seemed like the right environment for me.” After a year and feeling homesick, Lee moved back to
If you could meet anyone in the world today, who would you meet?
Maxine Hong Kingston, because *The Woman Warrior* pioneered Asian American literature.

Best book you recently read?
I can’t pick just one, I have three. *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* by Barbara Demick. I got interested in North Korea partly because of the Netflix series *Crash Landing on You*, a Korean romantic drama, which I loved. The next book is *A Woman of No Importance: The Untold Story of the American Spy Who Helped Win World War II* by Sonia Purnell. And the last book is *Eagles of Hart Mountain: A True Story of Football, Incarceration, and Resistance in World War II America*, by Bradford Pearson, which is about Japanese Americans who were incarcerated—one camp formed a football team, so it’s a story about strength and persistence.

What period would you travel to if you were given a time machine?
I would travel to the mid-1960s to meet my aunt. I never got to meet her, and I would like to have known her. I think that she and I would have been kindred spirits.

What is the greatest risk you have ever taken?
In the spring of 2021, drafting, getting feedback on, and seeking allies to sign on to the Asian American Law Librarians Caucus Statement on Anti-Asian Incidents was a great risk. Because when you identify your supporters, you end up finding out, whether directly or indirectly, who the people are who don’t support you. And by making something public, you open yourself up to criticism. But you also get feedback and create dialogue, which can be a positive outcome.

Favorite movie?
I have two for this one: *Roman Holiday* from 1953, and *The King of Masks*, which is a Chinese film from 1996.

Who is your all-time favorite Disney character?
My brother is a total Disney fanatic, so I have three! • Merida from *Brave* • Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* • Meilin Lee from *Turning Red*
from underrepresented groups. We could also educate people, specifically in diverse programs.

At my school, Chicago-Kent has the PLUS (Pre-Law Undergraduate Scholars) program, and its purpose is for historically underrepresented college students to learn about law school. I feel that if law librarianship were a component of that, students would consider choosing a different path than just going to law school. Most students don’t know law librarianship is an option when they graduate. But more generally, I think we need to raise awareness of the profession in students as early as possible. Perhaps we need to work on developing a TV show that features law librarians.

**Have you seen more students from underrepresented populations entering law school, and by extension, the profession?**

I would say that I have seen more diverse people in the profession. Maybe it’s because of the populations that I’m working with. For instance, I’m the vice chair of the George A. Strait Minority Scholarship & Fellowship, and looking at the number of applications we receive tells me there are minority library students and law students who are going into the profession. It’s good to see that there are minority students who are interested in law librarianship.

**How has participation in AALL impacted your career and/or leadership capabilities?**

It’s had a huge and positive impact on my career and leadership capabilities. AALL has given me the opportunity to meet new people from around the country, so I have made friends from everywhere, which is awesome, and it has helped me hone my leadership skills. Participating in AALL through involvement in caucuses, SISs, and committees has given me a lot of leadership experience. It’s been invaluable.

**Has any AALL group had a significant impact on your leadership skills?**

The Asian American Law Librarians Caucus. I was its chair in March 2021 when the spa shootings in Atlanta, Georgia, happened, which was a huge moment for people of Asian descent in the U.S. I initially wanted to address how our members might be feeling, so I started some informal coffee chats over Zoom just to provide a platform for people to feel connected and to vent. From there, I started organizing things like book and movie discussions, and I put together a statement and tried to rally allies. I invited guest speakers to educate not just our own members, but the greater AALL membership about issues affecting Asian Americans.

**What’s the best advice you have ever received?**

When I was a library student and graduate assistant at the University of Illinois, one librarian told me, “It’s not like brain surgery,” when I was stressing out about a reference question, or whatever it might have been. So, I guess that is probably the best advice that comes to mind, because no matter how important the work is, and how stressful it can be, it isn’t actually a matter of life or death. Maybe you can step back and relax a little bit. Gain some perspective and distance, and don’t take everything to heart so much.

**What resources would you recommend to those looking to build and improve their leadership skills?**

I really value learning by doing. So, I would say get involved in AALL through a caucus, SIS, or chapter, or all the above, or even volunteer to serve on a committee or award jury. Get experience through that.

**Participate, work hard, and eventually, run for office, etc. You gain leadership experience by actually being a leader.**

**How do you stay engaged and passionate about your work?**

The thing I enjoy most about my work is interacting with the patrons, primarily the students, but of course, the faculty and staff, as well. So, helping and talking with them daily. By doing so, we kind of become friends, or at least friendly. That interaction every day is what I really enjoy, value, and look forward to.

**What is the value of attending the AALL Annual Meeting, especially as a newer law librarian?**

Definitely the people—meeting colleagues from around the country formally through the programs, but also informally via networking events and receptions. There’s so much you can learn about by attending programs, but for newer law librarians, I would recommend attending the Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL). Eventually you might work on a program proposal with someone you meet or with a speaker on a program you attended, or you might find someone with whom you can co-author an article. Or, you can just learn and have fun—AALL’s Baseball Caucus is planning a tour of Fenway Park during the Annual Meeting this July in Boston. Come join us!

**In your experience, what makes for a productive, happy working environment?**

When people feel valued, respected, and cared about; being recognized for their contributions and listened to. When each member of the team is supporting each other, and everyone communicates. ■