Sally Gore 0:08
Hi, everyone, this is Sally Gore. I'm the manager of research and scholarly communication services at the Lamar Soutter library, University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, Massachusetts. And my guest today is

Kim MacKenzie 0:22
Hi, I'm Kim Mackenzie, and I'm a research data and scholarly communications librarian at the Lamar Soutter Library at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Sally Gore 0:34
Excellent. Thanks, and welcome, Kim. In our last episode, we heard from Amy Blevins and Hannah Craven at the Ruth Lilly Medical Library at the Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis. And they shared with us how their library established some new programs and initiatives to help and support their patrons during these times of COVID-19. Today, we're going to stay with the COVID theme, but shift towards a bit of a different perspective. So Kim, you finished your library degree this spring, and you officially started your job on March the third. Thinking back now more than seven months, I can remember the usual new job world when you had orientations and meeting new people. I think we got the bagel breakfast maybe do we even get the welcome bigger, you'll get it. And you were attending some ongoing committee and team meetings that you're a part of, and working through a big notebook of things about the department in the library that I gave you. And then just two short weeks later, everything changed. The library closed, and we all shifted to working remotely. And well, this isn't quite how I imagined you thought your new career would begin. I hope it's not Oh, I thought it was gonna begin for us. So are you doing okay?

Kim MacKenzie 1:59
I am, I'm doing okay. It was it was a little bizarre at first, obviously. And I do remember mentioning to a friend a couple of weeks before I started, like, Oh, I'm about to start working at a hospital or at a medical school. There's a, you know, pandemic happening around the world, it could get a little interesting, but I didn't, I didn't expect that we'd go home two weeks later, and that my son would suddenly be at home doing school two weeks later, and everything would shut down. So it was definitely a little bizarre at first, because I didn't I knew people had met people and spoken to people but I didn't really know what anybody's role was, in particular, or who to ask questions other than my immediate group of coworkers.

Sally Gore 2:56
Right.

Kim MacKenzie 2:57
So you guys got a lot of my questions, I think for quite a while.

Sally Gore 3:00
Yeah.

Kim MacKenzie 3:03
And, but I think it was bizarre for everybody, because nobody was used to working from home. So in that way, I was a little bit better off. Because I had spent years working. I had a freelance science writing career. So I've spent years working from home before that, so I already had my computer set up, I knew where I like to sit and where I like to be to focus and what I needed to block out what was going on in the house in order to focus on doing my work during the day. So and that is just sort of old hat.

Sally Gore 3:40

Yeah. Well, that's a great segue into. So this is a new a new career for you in a Health Sciences Library, and Health Science Librarian. And so tell us a little bit, mentioned scientific writing, but give us a little background, How'd you end up being drawn to this new career?

Kim MacKenzie 4:01
It was a long and winding path, to be honest. And actually, when I was in, someone reminded me when I went back to school to do the MLIS, that when I was in grad school the first time, which I'll talk about in a second, they had said when I was struggling in grad school, the first time they had said, You know, I always thought you should work in the library, and that that would be where you were, leave where you would really fit.

But of course at the time, I couldn't hear that and didn't want somebody telling me what I had chosen already was the wrong thing.

Sally Gore 4:39
Right.

Kim MacKenzie 4:40
So at that time I was working, I was working on a PhD in neuroscience which was very stressful, and probably not the right path for me, but I'm glad I did it and I'm glad I spent that time doing that. But after I finished that I did not go on to do a postdoc, and had already figured out running a lab or being that kind of a professor, that kind of an academic was not what I wanted to do. And at the time, my son was young. And we had just moved to a new state, moved to Rhode Island. And so I spent some time with him and figuring out what kind of career I could do flexibly and from home that I would really enjoy. And that I could make use of my, my background, and that was science writing. And so I did science and medical writing for five or six years from home, along with editing and copy editing. And that was, that was a lot of fun. But it wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. And then I saw a job posting at, it was Brown, which is in Providence near where I lived, out for Life Sciences Librarian. I thought, Oh, that's, that's something that I could do something that I could use everything that I had done before an order and that advisor who had said that to me back in grad school basically looked at me and said six years ago, seven years ago, I told you to do that.

Sally Gore 6:22
Yeah, yeah.

Kim MacKenzie 6:22
So that's when I applied to URI, the University of Rhode Island, and they have a fantastic library science, Librarian Information Studies Department. I can't say enough good things about all of the professors I had there. And all of the support I got there, it's an online program. But because I lived there, or live near there, I also got the opportunity to work in the library at URI which was also an amazing opportunity.

Because I was gonna ask, had you worked in the library before?

I was a page in the children's library when I was in high school, my hometown, but no, I had not been in the library. And I was wondering how am I going to get reference experience? How am I going to get experience working with actual people in a library. And so that was also a great opportunity, and so grateful to everyone at URI for that.

Sally Gore 7:25
Excellent.

Kim MacKenzie 7:26
But I went into the program specifically to become a medical or sciences librarian. That's what my focus was from the very start.

Sally Gore 7:36
Mm hmm. Yeah, I was talking, just actually just last night with Theresa Knott, and I don't know if you know Theresa, haven't had the pleasure of meeting her yet. She's the interim director of libraries down at Virginia Commonwealth, and a former MLA president, we were just chatting and catching up on things. And I am, I was telling her that I was going to do this interview with you today, and just kind of a little bit of your background and how you landed here. Because well, you know, what we do call this the accidental profession because so many people just find their way into it. And I had a very similar experience. And I know lots of, you know, lots of folks come from different paths. And, and it is, yeah go ahead.

Kim MacKenzie 8:24
I was gonna say—through Twitter, which is something that was gonna come up later in our conversation, just because it's been such a great way of learning about what other librarians are doing, but I've connected with more than one person who has a PhD in neuroscience, specifically, who have gone on to do things in the library, which entries are not sure what's happening there. But it's nice that there are other avenues that you can take. Mm hmm. When you're doing that kind of a degree, it's like you have blinders on, it's usually very focused on you will be a PI, you will run a lab, that's what we're treating you for. It can be hard to understand that there are other job paths out there.

Sally Gore 9:13
Right. And we've talked a little bit in your new role with us. And one of the things that I thought, as the manager of this department would be really great of having you on board is that you bring the experience and background of knowing how labs run, and that's our primary patron group that we serve out of our department. And also the writing to have some writing because it's really something that we've seen on our campus is lacking, we don't have a formal writing center, and there are ways that that you bring a skill set that we can help so I think that that's how libraries operate a lot and I think it particularly in in our field, where I think he's just great that we can leverage all those other talents and skills and things that interest that we might have outside of the strict world of answering reference questions and doing systematic reviews and all that which we enjoy doing. But it gives us an opportunity to do some other things. So be coming into something really new like this. And, and for the audience's sake, you did do an internship at the med school, in our library this semester before you started working. So you did have a little bit of a sense of the layout and things, but how have you coming into a new job, I know that a lot of it is about relationship building, and just getting to know people and getting to know the ground, you know, worker lay of the land or whatever. And has that been harder? Or? I know, it's been different being virtual, or being remote, but how have you kind of approach things or done stuff?

Kim MacKenzie 11:05
Um, it's been a challenge, but, whether it's harder or not, I say because I don't have the experience otherwise.

Sally Gore 11:16
Yeah, yeah.

Kim MacKenzie 11:18
It's just the way it was.

And but networking in general has never been my strong suit, let's say. So figuring out how to do that, and how to just randomly interact with people has been a little difficult. But I want to especially thank my coworker Tess Prelak, for being just amazing over the past seven months, because she's basically included me in everything that she possibly could. So that meant we've done a lot of coteaching for different groups, you know, and just doing projects together, giving presentations together. And so she's been amazingly helpful that way. And she gets, she bears the brunt of my questions.

Sally Gore 12:15
That's good.

Kim MacKenzie 12:16
She gets so many emails or just chats over Teams saying, Okay, I have this question, who should I send this person too, or help, I don't know how to do this help. And so it's been really great having that, that kind of point person?

Sally Gore 12:33
Yeah, yeah.

Kim MacKenzie 12:34
Who is sort of a counterpart that can just take me through a lot of what I need to know. And you've also done the same thing, you've included me on a lot of different projects and introduced me to a lot of different people or pushed me towards different projects, or people. like working with different groups in the GSBS, or the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, which have introduced me to a lot of people. I've kind of, I inserted myself into a meeting the postdocs were having, because it was about science communication, and I thought it would be interesting. And so I met a lot of them that way. I spoke with them there.

Sally Gore 13:17
Yeah.

Kim MacKenzie 13:17
Just, now that I've been here for a while I can start to see where, but not where we're allowed to become a part of but where we could where we could ask to join in. Which took that took a long time.

Sally Gore 13:33
Yeah. And I think that that's, you know, just one of the hardest things is just getting to know, you know, I've been at the med school now for 16 years. And so it's, it takes a long time sometimes to just know the people and so you know, who's receptive and more open and where the, where the easier routes are sometimes to go. So. Yeah, and we're very fortunate we have a wonderful working, yeah, collaborative relationship with, with the graduate school biomedical sciences, so that helps us a lot. And this kind of echoes with the previous podcast with Hannah and Amy were talking about, you know, we nobody missed a beat. And I think this is probably true across all of our colleagues and all of our health sciences, librarian, group, MLA, community that all of us when COVID hit, I think everybody shifted really quickly, but everybody kept going in. And I think that says a lot about our skills and experience and, and being able to be flexible and adaptable, which I've felt and I think you've probably felt to just how grateful that people are when we're still available and we can zoom and we do everything that they always have counted on us to do so. I think that's been good.
So I want to change topics a little bit and talk about professional development in professional organizations. So as we know, MLA's annual meeting went virtual, of course, like all other things. And personally, I feel like this was a really big loss for you, when you and I were talking earlier in the week, and just, you know, I feel bad about the situation, I don't feel guilty, cuz it's not my fault. This is happening. But I do feel, you know, just a little bit that you've lost out on some things, I know, I lost, I felt a huge loss of not going to MLA, it's one of my favorite things to do every year to see friends and to network and learn stuff. But we've been able to do a whole bunch of conferences and professional development things because things have gone virtual. That's, that's also been really great. We have the support of our administration in doing that. So I'm just curious what you've, some highlights of that from you. So maybe a highlight from MLA itself or other conferences that you've gone to and, and how you see professional development and professional organizations playing in your career early on.

Kim MacKenzie 16:21
I was also very disappointed that I didn't get to go to conferences in in person, that is something I used to do when I was pursuing the neuroscience. And if it was always something to look forward to, you

could go to a conference in a different state, you're with other people, you're with your— you get to just wander around and see posters and meet people. But so yes, so I was also really disappointed that these conferences started getting canceled in person and moved to virtual just because I do remember how interesting and how much fun it was to go to a conference and meet other people and hear talks or see posters and be able to talk to people one on one about their research. And so that was definitely a little bit harder, doing a conference virtually, I still got the experience of seeing the posters and listening to the talks. And that was great. But those random interactions weren't as easy to come by. And so that's something I'm looking forward to being able to do in the future. Because I think that that's a really important part of the conference experience.

Sally Gore 17:38
Right, right.

Kim MacKenzie 17:38
But what I did really love about going or just listening to these conferences is that there was such a variety of things being talked about. And so it was being new to the field, it was exciting to hear about what other kind of research other people are doing about topics that I'm interested in, but haven't done research on myself yet, or will do research on like open science, which I'm very interested in, very passionate about. Hearing about different bibliometric research was also pretty interesting and just publishing in general.

And so that's part of what I think being part of an organization like that is, is really important for just the ability to meet with other people that are in the organization. Learn more about what the field is doing in general.

Sally Gore 18:37
Yeah. I think it's. Oh, sorry.

Kim MacKenzie 18:41
No go ahead.

Sally Gore 18:43
I think it's kind of this. It's a weird thing. It's sort of a, I don't know, the right metaphor, double edged sword doesn't sound right. But um, but that, you know, on the one hand, we miss out on all of the benefits of conferencing that you just outlined. But then, at the same time, we've been able to attend a bunch of meetings that we wouldn't have been able to attend. Had we had to travel because, well, while we're really fortunate to have some travel funds, we don't, we couldn't go to all those meetings. We all couldn't take off together and go as we were able to do for a few things. So

Kim MacKenzie 19:24
Right.

Sally Gore 19:24
Yeah, there's some pros and cons I guess about it. I miss, I still terribly missing seeing people in person. But hopefully, that will resolve itself sooner than later. Hopefully, hopefully.

Kim MacKenzie 19:42
And it is that the, I hate the word networking, but that's what it is. And if that's something that is difficult for a person, like myself, being in a social hour with a lot of other people kind of forces you to do that, or just going up to a poster and talking to a person about it, that can bring up either new ideas or just a new connection, someone that you can, you know, just exchange emails with or say, let's talk about this again in the future. And so that's the way collaborations get built and new ideas come into a library or into any profession, really. And so that, but having said that, being virtual and being able to, if I was listening to a talk and thought, Oh, wait, I want to hear that again. So that I can think about that a little bit more, you know, being able to look at a video after the fact was really nice.

Sally Gore 20:47
Yeah.

Kim MacKenzie 20:49
Having the slides usually available to look at again, it's really nice. And so there were definite advantages to do that.

Sally Gore 20:59
Yeah.

Kim MacKenzie 21:01
And there were a few talks that I would go back and relisten to a few parts, because I said, I think I missed something there. I don't understand where this went.

Sally Gore 21:07
Right. Yeah, yeah, definitely. I also wonder, I heard this brought up yesterday in a different conference of wondering, seeing the collaborative nature of just biomedical research around COVID. And the, you know, this international thing that's happened, which has kind of been brewing in certain sciences, of course, all always. It's always been there. But I did get to think wondering about how we've come to see each other, virtually across places and how easy it is to see other people and do other people. I think it might be interesting, just within our own profession and Health Sciences libraries, if we start to build some collaborations across different campuses, and like, I remember just being with some just friends having a social call, you probably had this experience, too, I think lots of people have, and just zooming you know, with friends who I've known for years, and it used to be we just thought, well, we get together once a year. And now we run we run a zoom call early on in this COVID. And everyone said, you know, we could have been doing this all along. It's not like zoom is that new technology. It's little barrier we all had. So I think it might be interesting to see if some if some collaborative efforts pop up across different campuses. Kind of tracking.

Kim MacKenzie 22:43
I mean, it's true in the sciences, labs of different schools would collaborate all the time. I don't know when zoom got started, we used to use Skype to talk to people elsewhere.

Sally Gore 22:56
Yeah, yeah.

Kim MacKenzie 22:59
But that's a big part of it. And so I think it would be great if in libraries, it was the same way, because no other medical libraries are doing similar things to help their people. And yeah, it's a good way to get ideas.

Sally Gore 23:17
Mm hmm. Absolutely. So I know that it's early in your career and your experiences have all been a little different. But can you, what can you say about being a member of MLA? Why do you think membership and professional organizations is important? Any other like last punch

Kim MacKenzie 23:40
Punch list things? Well, I definitely think it's connecting with other people in the same or similar fields is a really important part of being in a professional organization. But education also, when I was in grad school, or doing the MLIS and looking at what kind of skills I wanted to build, I looked at the MLA competencies and kind of focused on that and use those as a way of deciding what classes I might take or extra things that I wanted to learn. Because I already knew that I wanted to go to a Medical Library. I know, I knew I didn't want to be a public librarian. I knew I didn't want to be a school librarian, though. I had a goal.

Sally Gore 24:12
Yeah, yeah.

Kim MacKenzie 24:32
And we were also incredibly lucky that our library was able to do the continuing education passport, which has been amazing. I've just been really taking advantage of that and listening to the different the different CE opportunities that MLA had, so I'm really glad those are there.

Sally Gore 24:58
Yeah.

Kim MacKenzie 25:00
Then kind of hoping sometime in the future, be able to teach something like that for the MLA. That's part of what a professional development or professional organization is for. Showing other people what you already know, what you could help them with.

Sally Gore 25:20
Well I couldn't have said that any better myself.

Excellent.

Well, thank you so much for being with us today, Kim. That was it. I know that when I was thinking of who to interview, and I have a list of people to kind of come down to and I thought, Oh, I might be cheating a little bit to just get someone from my own department. But at the same time, I thought that it was your experience is really a good story for us to all here. And I know, I know, just within our own group. I know a few other people who've started jobs or changed jobs during these times, and it's certainly a different time to be doing it. So thank you for sharing some of your experience with us today.

Kim MacKenzie 26:09
No problem and thank you for inviting me.

Sally Gore 26:11
Certainly, and thanks, everybody, for tuning in. You've been listening to Press, Play, Connect the official podcast of the Medical Library Association. Join us again next month for another episode. Until then, I'm Sally Gore, and I am MLA.

Unknown Speaker 26:12
And I am Kim MacKenzie and I Am MLA.

Sally Gore 26:32
All right. That's a wrap.

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