

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2024

Welcome to everyone joining us this evening for the 2024 PAL Annual General Meeting. We are delighted that so many of you are able to join the meeting via Zoom from wherever you happen to be. While many of us have enjoyed being together in person each year, this kind of gathering has meant that many more participants are now able to join us from across Toronto and even further afield. With all the viruses now circulating at this time each year, I think we are all a bit safer and healthier this way. In the years to come, we may revisit how the AGM is held, but for now, it is a great pleasure to have all of us here in our virtual gathering space.

If what I am about to report sounds familiar to you, it is because, as our fearless leader Derek Simunovic says, "PAL is a well-oiled machine." For their part in ensuring PAL's smooth sailing as well as in its many accomplishments, I would like to thank our staff people, Derek Simunovic and Mark Fielding. Our two staff members continue to ensure that PAL records your text materials. They then clean up the recordings, making them sound better than the readers themselves expected, and then get those recordings out to you, our clients, in a timely manner. As a volunteer reader myself, I really enjoy coming into the office to record the texts (well, most of them!) that our eclectic clients have brought us. I have learned a great deal over the years by recording books and other written texts that I would not have known to seek out. For this I want to thank our wonderful clients. Many thanks to you all for giving the PAL volunteers an opportunity to grow and expand our knowledge and our fields of interest.

Speaking of volunteers and clients, I am happy to report that this past year has seen a small increase in new clients as well as in volunteers returning to PAL after COVID kept so many of us at home. As before, word of mouth has been the most successful way for PAL to increase its outreach. To those of you who have told your friends and family

about our work, I send special thanks. It is always wonderful when PAL can make life just a bit more interesting for a growing number of clients and volunteer readers.

On that topic, PAL staff and board members have been interested in finding out in a more systematic fashion about the experiences and preferences of PAL's clients. To that end, we have been working on a questionnaire that will go out to our clients. We want to know your preferences regarding recorded formats, as well as what you like and what improvements you might suggest to what PAL does. For example, in a casual survey, we have found that, when it comes to recorded materials, the greatest majority of people who are blind or who have other text-challenges strongly prefer a human voice to a computer-generated voice. However, computer-generated voices have improved a great deal since the first screen-readers. Is this still a strong preference? We will be contacting our clients to find out the answer to this question and many more. Stay tuned for more information – and thanks in advance for helping PAL stay relevant.

I would like to close by thanking Vice-President TJ Lloyd; Secretary Anne Musgrave; Treasurer, Marguerite Wallace; and board members Susan Loube, Ramya Amuthan, Terry Bray, Debbie Gillespie, and Vangelis Nikias for all of their contributions to the smooth governance of PAL and for their enormously helpful input.

But most of all, I want to thank all of the volunteers and clients for continuing to make PAL the vibrant and excellent organization that it has been for so many years.

As an addicted reader myself, I truly appreciate writers who write about the books they themselves have read. On a rainy day when you are stuck at home, remember what author Jhumpa Lahiri tells us:

"That's the thing about books. They let you travel without moving your feet."

– Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*