

# Front Line



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**P**LATO BELIEVED THAT children should be taught music before anything else; in learning to pay attention to graceful rhythms and harmonies their whole consciousness would become ordered.

My father agreed. So my childhood was steeped in music. There were no alarm clocks in our house. We were woken by Beethoven or Tchaikovsky or Vivaldi.

He took me to La Scala before I was three, to a performance of *Madam Butterfly*. I have no conscious memory of that performance but *Butterfly* became a pleasant bonding ritual. Wherever we were, however prestigious or humble the company, if *Butterfly* was playing, Dad and I were there.

It was the experience of sharing that was important, so all performances were accepted and enjoyed for what they were, although in a vague and undifferentiated way some felt more right to me than others.

That is, until the year I was nineteen, and we attended a particularly badly sung and overacted performance. In the suicide scene *Butterfly* disappeared behind a screen and all we saw was the gradual disappearance of a white silk scarf that had been draped over it. If you know anything about Japanese suicide rituals, this was a perfectly reasonable staging, but it was followed by the bizarre sight of *Butterfly* staggering from behind the screen, clutching a dagger to herself, the scarf twisted round her neck as if she was trying to strangle herself, singing at the top of her voice.

Ignoring this farce, I whispered to my father, 'She should have been wearing a red kimono.'

'Fancy you remembering that!' was the response.

*Butterfly* had worn red in the La Scala performance.

What I had judged to be appropriate for sixteen years was based on something I could not even remember.

I have seen *Butterfly* many times since, but now I judge every performance on its own merits and not by my own unconscious, and inappropriate, baggage.

While technology and efficiency were major themes of the recent Biennial Conference, the critical ones for the Association are mentoring, lobbying and self-esteem. I believe that underpinning all of these is the need for all members of the Association to recognise that we are carrying, and behaving in accordance with, unconscious and inappropriate beliefs about the relative importance to the Association of the people within it.

Kaycee Hale pointed out to us that self-esteem is almost the critical competency, and certainly, if we are to take advantage of every lobbying opportunity, both formal and informal, then every member of the Association must feel that he or she has something vital to contribute, is empowered to speak on behalf of the profession.

If we had to choose the single word that best describes the Albury conference that word would probably be something like *cosy*. Many people have commented to me that it was an exceptionally friendly conference, and that this was, in part, because of the location.

Yet if we were to ask younger members of the profession, the students or those in their first position, would we be told it was a friendly, *cosy* conference? I think not.

At conferences I tend to gravitate towards the younger attendees, and time and again I have been told that they have wanted to introduce themselves but have felt too nervous because of my 'seniority'.

This always comes as a bit of a shock. I am, after all, plump, middle-aged and female—the archetype motherly figure, who, without careful management, photographs like Mrs Bun the Baker from *Happy Families*. So how aloof must those senior librarians seem who are taller and slimmer than I?

There are, out in the ranks of our profession, many people who run superb library operations, who could teach all of us something about managing with scarce resources and little recognition, yet they see themselves as not yet successful, not empowered to speak up on behalf of the profession. We are wasting our most valuable resource, people.

One of the remarks made on the questionnaire about *inCite* was a plea for no more photographs of senior members of the profession holding glasses of champagne.

As a profession, we have much to celebrate. Any group that has as its charter to empower and inform others, without direct personal gain, is pretty special. But that celebration should be inclusive. The Association is taking the needs of younger members into account, but the Association can only be as committed to this as the individuals who make up its membership. Senior members need to actively make themselves accessible to younger members, and younger members need to take the initiative and approach senior members.

The net result will be photographs in *inCite* that naturally include a cross-section of members with glasses of champagne in their hands, and a much stronger and more confident Association. ■