



Jan Gaebler
ALIA president

Well, my term as President is fast drawing to a close and I meet the milestone with mixed emotions.

High on the meter is a sense of relief that my time is once again going to have some semblance of being my own. It is a demanding role, and it is not easy to volunteer your time and energies to presidential pursuits when you are simultaneously maintaining a separate working life — as any past-president will tell you!

Also prevalent is a feeling of frustration. There is so much to do and so many ways in which it can be done. It is a bit like being a long-distance runner who has just picked up his stride to go the distance and being told the race is over. Some past-presidents have said the term should be longer, and I now understand their rationale; but I'll also be the first to say that one year is all that is humanly possible!

But my greatest emotion is one of pride. At last count, I have attended some eight conferences and numerous other professional gatherings throughout the year. Ours is a wonderful and challenging profession, as you have proven over and over again with your high-calibre papers, intelligent questions, quick-witted enthusiasm, and non-stop ideas and innovations. It is positive proof that we are a force to be reckoned with as we seize the opportunities that are coming our way via new technologies and the so-called 'information revolution'.

For me, the most important conference I attended was the cataloguers' conference held in Sydney in October. I take the view that cataloguing is the flagship of our profession that is saving it from debasement. So often, we get caught up in the techno-hype and sell ourselves as 'navigators' but, when we do, we are selling ourselves oh so short. Our strength is in our organisation skills and how we marry those skills with our retrieval skills. We don't just 'navigate' the information highway; we provide its infrastructure and we continually underpin it.

There were about 240 people at the cataloguers conference and I believe 238 of them were cataloguers. Surprisingly, it was the only conference I attended which did not have any representation from the 'heavies' of our profession among the delegates. Does this mean State librarians, university librarians and chief librarians find cataloguing issues irrelevant to their operations? Or does it mean that they have so much faith in their cataloguers that they have no desire to know what they are up to? Either way, I hope they turn up at the next conference because this one raised lots of issues that can not progress unless they start leading the charge. As well, I hope reference and special librarians take an interest

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next time round because cataloguers need to be talking to the people who are retrieving information so that both groups can maximise the quality of their output. Anyone who thinks cataloguers are passe to this equation must think it's time for us to relinquish our hold on the infrastructure.

I followed the cataloguers conference with a trip to Canberra to experience a key highlight of my year, an opportunity to welcome the IFLA President, Bob Wedgeworth (USA) and IFLA Secretary General, Leo Voogt (Holland) to ALIA house. Bob and Leo had come to Australia for two days of consultation with IFLA Treasurer and Board member, Warren Horton.

We were pleased that in a whirlwind schedule, which included a formal dinner hosted by the Chair of the National Library Council, Sir Anthony Mason, attended by Virginia Walsh and myself, as well as a meeting by Bob and Warren with the Minister for Arts and Communications, Michael Lee, that time was generously allotted for ALIA to host a luncheon.

Bob Wedgeworth addressed our gathering of ALIA members and was clearly impressed by both our knowledge and interest in IFLA activity. We followed the luncheon with a short tour of ALIA House and briefing on national office activities by Virginia Walsh and we were then able to be equally impressed with Bob and Leo's keen interest in what our Association was achieving!

And make no mistake, our Association is achieving great strides as it works towards its vision of excellence in library leadership.

It seems to be the nature of the beast that our libraries and librarians will always have to work twice as hard while treading water, as many have discovered in these times of economic restraint. So, as I sign off and welcome your new President, Helen Tait, I'd like to leave you with an inspirational line I came across in an article about compulsive competitive tendering by Bill Garner, a Melbourne playwright and screen writer.*

'Ignorance is, in the end, far more costly to maintain than is knowledge,' he writes. I would like to see us make that the catchcry of our profession.

As you celebrate the new year, do not forget to toast the knowledge profession. I welcome 1996 with excitement, hope and invigorating challenge for our libraries and librarians. We're on target to being right up there — leading the way for an informed society — where we've always belonged! It is your pride in your profession that will make it happen.

* Garner, Bill. 'Neither a borrower, nor a lender be' in *Eureka Street*, October 1995, pp 12-15.