



**Kerry Smith**

ALIA president

## Home is the place you go to rediscover yourself

I acknowledge Smith College President Ruth Simmons for her version of the above phrase. In her article, 'Coming Home', in the February 1997 issue of *USAir* magazine, she pondered her life as a member of a close-knit family and her memories as a child in Texas, where she had recently returned. What was I doing reading a copy of *USAir* magazine? Well I was far away from home in February this year as I travelled to North America and France whilst on a busman's holiday with my working husband.

It was a journey of partial rediscovery for both of us. We had spent the first two of our married years in Winnipeg, Canada and Binghamton in upstate New York and we were retracing those roots, as well as visiting a number of other places along the way.

I took the opportunity to meet with a few Canadian colleagues: Brian Campbell at the Vancouver Public Library — his interest was in information policy; the then incoming president of the Canadian Library Association, Paul Whitney at Burnaby Public Library on the outskirts of Vancouver and Karen Adams and staff of the Canadian Library Association, whilst in Ottawa. As well, I met colleagues, one of whom is about to visit us here at Curtin, at the library school at the University of British Columbia. Firm professional friendships begin this way and are augmented during the rare opportunities many of us get to travel.

I have just returned from IFLA in Copenhagen. At the outset I must thank you all for the opportunity to attend this conference on your behalf. I found the experience of being amongst nearly 3000 international professional colleagues, a number of whom had been sponsored by the Danish organisation DANIDA, most invigorating and intellectually stimulating. From the Association's point of view, our executive director Virginia Walsh played an interesting role as chief teller for all of the elections held during the conference, the main one being the election of the new IFLA President, Christine

Deschamps, replacing the popular Bob Wedgeworth who stepped down after four years at the IFLA helm.

Australia is also represented amongst the IFLA machinery with Alex Byrne being elected as chair of the University Libraries and other General Research Libraries Section — one spoke in a very large IFLA wheel. I met many of our association colleagues and many other colleagues I'd never heard of till this conference.

I heard papers on information policy developments in the European Union and on public libraries the world over, I heard the South African Woman of the Year, Ester Sibanyoni give a very simple but inspiring address to the assembled multitudes on why it was she had reached these dizzy heights and the humble ways in which this had happened, and I met her boss, who was as pleased as punch that she had been so recognised and that she had publicly recalled his efforts and those of the State Library in Pretoria in her achievement.

If you thought ALIA was complicated, then try and fathom IFLA. Actually, having made the effort to do just this I can see benefits in the way it operates and was particularly appreciative of the way the topics for the conference papers were woven into the business of this large Association. Attending an international conference like IFLA was a most rewarding experience and I would recommend that if you ever have the chance to do this, then take it! IFLA 1998 will be in Amsterdam and IFLA 1999 in Bangkok — almost next door to us.

There are times when I bemoan the many conferences we as a profession hold, and there are also times when I am glad that we stretch our wings and are a truly international community. Our conference themes are similar so that we can feel reasonably comfortable no matter which country we visit. Our profession provides us with a homely and reassuring base, even though we may be in a strange land. For solace we may

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*Taking a break from the IFLA conference were Kerry Smith, ALIA president; Christina Tovote (Sweden); Alex Byrne, chair of the IFLA University Libraries and General Research Libraries Section; John Willemse (South Africa) and Sue McKnight*

seek the familiar stacks of a local public or state library — though I have to confess that it was awe I experienced when I walked into the Vancouver Public Library.

It could be that like Ruth Simmons, we go home to rediscover ourselves. Yet there

are many opportunities for rediscovery if we make the effort to take advantage of them.

The rewards can be limitless and an international profession like ours paves the way for us to commence such journeys in the relative comfort of professional familiarity. ■

## **SOME LANDMARKS ARE WORTH A CALL. SOME AREN'T. OUR STAND IS ALWAYS A LANDMARK CALL!**



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