

# Reflecting on a year of change



**John Shipp**

ALIA president

**A**t last, the end of what has been an eventful, sometimes traumatic, but always interesting year. This is my last *Frontline* as president and for that I am grateful. Deciding what to write has been a monthly challenge that I gladly surrender to Craig Anderson.

As would be expected, I have been musing over the events of the past year and thinking what I could have done differently. Once the event is over, of course, it is too late but I always hope that I will learn for the next time. Having castigated myself on some issues, I decided that the year had passed reasonably well. The hairshirt has been consigned to mothballs for a while longer.

One of the great pleasures of the year has been the opportunity to meet and work with so many members of the Association. I am particularly grateful to the members of General Council and the Board of Education for their contributions and support. I am grateful also for the work done by so many members who contribute year after year through branches, committees and other activities.

I think it was Napoleon who said that an army marches on its stomach. In many ways, the National Office is like an army's quartermaster, it is responsible for ensuring that members are supported to achieve the objectives of the Association. Much of what the Office does goes unrecognised but it is vital to the efficiency of ALIA and is essential to the provision of services to members. My role as president would have been impossible without assistance from Virginia Walsh and the great team at the National Office.

A highlight of my year was the Biennial Conference in Adelaide. It was a great success and a credit to the organisers as well as to ALIA. Conferences of this size have long gestations characterised by periods of elation as well as absolute despair. What is constant

is the hard work and the need to attend to details ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous. Being a member of an organising committee requires patience, imagination and an

unlimited supply of stamina. It also requires a great deal of team effort.

The Adelaide conference team was driven by Di Booker with Anne Hazell in the sidecar. They provided us with non-stop sessions and a hedonistic whirl of social engagements which tested even the most ardent conference-goers. Particularly successful was the Fringe Program which energised all of its participants. For the students who attended, it was a wonderful introduction to the profession.

Hardened conference goers and technogroupies should not miss *Information Online and On Disc 99*. This will be the ninth conference organised by the very capable members of the ALIA Information Science Section. From 19 to 21 January 1999, the Sydney Convention Centre will pulsate with the latest on *Strategies for the Next Millennium*. Check the ALIA web page for details of this conference and other organised by ALIA sections.

When I first nominated for the presidency, I had hoped to visit most of the branches and regional groups of the Association. My move to the University of Sydney added sufficient complexity to my life to prevent me fulfilling that aim. I did manage to visit a few centres and to those I missed, I apologise.

Quite a lot of my energy was devoted to the development of a new peak body based on ACLIS and ALIA. While there was general support for the principle among the membership, finalising the details impeded progress for a while. Fortunately, we are back on track. The hard work of reassessing what the Association does, how objectives are achieved and how activities are supported is about to begin.

In the end, we will have an organisation more capable of representing the interests of individuals and institutions in the library and information industry. In the process of reform, we will need to recognise that our social, political and technological environments are changing constantly. To be effective, we need an association structure which is not unduly bound by rules and regulations, and which can cater for the different needs of members.

I urge all members to contribute to the development of the new organisation. Throughout the year, there will be discussion sessions held by branches, regional committees, divisions and special interests groups. Contribute to the future by participating. Keep up to date with the progress by reading

Anne Hertz and Dr Basil Hertz, Lieutenant Governor of South Australia with John Shipp after Adelaide98 conference opening



Photo: Déjà vu photography

inCite and by checking ALIANet (<http://www.alia.org.au>).

We are not the only library association which is re-positioning for the future. Throughout the world, a great deal of attention is being given to how libraries and librarians can prepare for a future which may not include the traditional type of library services. At the same time, there is a great deal of emphasis on the importance of access to information, and the ability to use it, to all aspects of society.

The library profession is best placed to provide the necessary services and skills but we will have to fight for our place. Already we are seeing other information-related groups seeking to carve out territory. This often involves re-inventing the past and endless discussion of issues which librarians have solved already.

In some countries, libraries and librarians face challenges which are complicated by national economic and political circumstances. Our colleagues in Indonesia are trying to revitalise their library association at a time when the economy is in turmoil and millions are facing starvation. Convincing the government that libraries deserve more resources is a formidable task.

In addition to revitalising our own association we need to keep in touch with other organisations and with groups which have related interests. Through its membership of

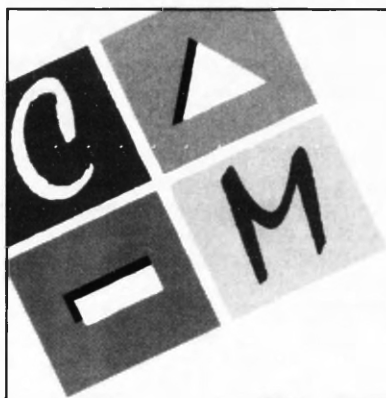
IFLA, ALIA maintains links with associations internationally. At the IFLA conference in Bangkok next year, ALIA will be part of a workshop on the development of library associations, aimed particularly at associations in countries such as Indonesia which are facing mammoth obstacles.

Links with kindred groups in the information sector are of strategic importance. They were identified by the Leadership Committee, and by members of both ACLIS and ALIA, as essential in the future. A lot of effort has been devoted already to fostering these links and will continue as we move toward a new peak body.

Hogmanay or New Year's Day was the most important day in my grandmother's calendar. She celebrated it in true Scots tradition — her year could only be good if the first person to enter her house was a dark haired person bearing food, fuel and drink. The year was irredeemable if the First Foot was not right.

1999 may be one of the most challenging that ALIA has yet faced. Issues such as copyright reform, GST and changes to the telecommunications infrastructure will require constant monitoring and lobbying. At the same time we will be reforming the Association and continuing to provide a wide range of services and activities. As Craig Anderson first foots us into the new year and a new future, I wish you the very best for 1999 and thank you for your support in 1998. ■

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