



Libraries change lives!

On 28 May a draw was held to determine the winners of the Libraries change lives! success stories competition. Two lucky winners, Sally Reagan and Elspeth Douglas, will each receive \$250 thanks to the generous sponsorship of Southern Scene and divine. Excerpts of the winning stories follow.

The Libraries change lives! database will remain live and you are welcome to continue to submit stories. It is hoped that stories submitted to the database will be used to help promote libraries and information services. To see the stories so far, visit <http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy/stories/>.

A long-term partnership

We live in an information-rich society. Students need instruction on how to find information and use it appropriately and they need to be provided with a learning environment in which to practice this regularly. The introduction of problem-based learning (PBL) at the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Western Australia allows students to learn and practice skills in information retrieval and application. As PBL tutors however, we do not have the capacity or expertise to cover all the information skills the students require. To achieve this we need help. The staff at the Medical and Dental Library have stepped in, and a wonderful partnership has developed.

The library staff have been intimately involved in the development and implementation of the new medical curriculum. Their expertise ranges from developing the latest resource list for each of the PBL problems to providing workshops for the students on skills we have identified as important adjuncts to tutorial instruction. Computer laboratory sessions on 'searching the web', 'validity of websites' and 'searching skills in a library catalogue' are now permanent fixtures in the timetable. The important aspect of these sessions is that they are not delivered in isolation, but rather integrated in the curriculum at times when the students identified they need the skills. As the students progress through the curriculum, the library staff provide lectures or workshops on new and more sophisticated areas of information retrieval. These are often done in small group sessions and always linked to projects that form a major part of the course. The students can identify the relevance of the skills and appreciate the time and the effort provided by the library staff.

The courses I have been involved in have been particularly successful and the success has been recognised on a variety of levels. Part of the success has been in providing an integrated course for the students where the relevance of the learning is so obvious that the students have enjoyed the learning and actively sought more information. This could not be achieved without the support and involvement of a number of dedicated people. I include my colleagues from the library in this group. The library staff have been involved in curriculum development at the grass roots level (at the committee level), the teaching level and also the assessment level.

I thoroughly enjoy working with the staff from the Medical and Dental Library at UWA. I respect their knowledge and constantly seek their expertise. I feel they have enjoyed the increased contact they have with students and the opportunity to help the students learn about information. The positive feedback we receive from the students thoroughly supports our interactive approach. This process of developing integrated information skills in the undergraduate medical curriculum is vital and has been overwhelmingly successful.

**Sally Reagan, University of Western Australia
Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry**

The first library I ever knew belonged to my grandfather...

The first library I ever knew belonged to my grandfather. It was a large dark room, with three large dark bookcases, all filled with books. On top were some large ornaments including stuffed parrots in a glass case given to my grandfather by one of his patients. In the middle of the room there was a long table covered in dark green felt. We were never allowed to play in this room, but sometimes our grandfather took us in to show us some of the books. I remember two large folios, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* with its pictures of the martyrs burning bravely for their faith, and the other, more enjoyable, *La Fontaine's Fables*, which had large steel engravings. In spite of the gloom we were never afraid of grandfather's library. It was there we learned that libraries were serious places, that books were to be respected and contained information which adults used for their own mysterious purposes. In any case, we had free rein over the books my father and his brothers and sisters had as children. These did not live in a library, only in a bookcase!

Since those early days in Ipswich, I have lived in different parts of Australia as well as in three foreign countries. When I counted it up, I found that I had used for work or pleasure, or often both, thirty libraries, including school, university, state and national, specialist and subscription libraries.

Some of these libraries were very grand indeed, and some of them were very humble. Some had enormous collections of rare and special books, others had books people's grannies donated, or a small bit of fundraising provided. As for all the modern machinery, which has opened up new worlds for everyone, it was unheard of not so long ago, but large or small, rich or poor, old fashioned or modern, in all the libraries that I have used it has been the people who work in the libraries, generously sharing their knowledge and their skills, inspiring their readers to try new fields and creating a congenial social environment, which makes visiting a library such a pleasurable and instructive experience. Perhaps it's not libraries that change lives, it's librarians that do it, though a grandfather with some big bookcases can help!

Elspeth Douglas