



Why I'm not scared of librarians

ALIA 2004 — *Challenging ideas*

Am I scared of librarians? Not any more!

I was lucky enough to attend the ALIA 2004 Biennial Conference on the Gold Coast. As a new graduate, there were so many firsts for me: my first visit to the Gold Coast, my first work-subsidised trip (this is a joy all of its own), my first time meeting an IFLA president, and the biggest first of all — my first-ever conference. How scary.

What's so scary? As Kate Watson pointed out in her presentation, people with confidence and experience are intimidating to those of us that do not yet have either. When I arrived at the Convention Centre on Tuesday morning I was very nervous. But by the end of a day touring Brisbane libraries and meeting people from Adelaide to Prague, I was so distracted by all the libraries and the people and the stories that I forgot to be scared.

Cherside and North Lakes libraries were inspiring. They represent a fundamental shift in the way libraries interact with their community of users, and certainly challenge the traditional image of a library — these are bright, vibrant and active places, where users are just as likely to be seen playing Xbox, practicing their PowerPoint skills, having a cup of coffee or even reading a book.

The garden library that is the Ipswich campus of the University of Queensland was an extraordinary space. The light pours through the 'membrane' roof and hits the leaves and stream running through the middle of the library, while students on either side are using a wide range of technologies to access an ever-wider range of information.

It was the O'Donovan collection in the Parliamentary Library that made me feel most at home. The timber shelving and leather bindings were reminiscent of my own library, and the collection is beautifully-housed as to inspire awe in even the most devout techno-junkie. There is a beauty in libraries, and collections like this will never let us forget it.

The conference proper began on Wednesday morning. Suddenly there were sessions to attend. 'Is this where conference death sets in?' I wondered. Nope — nothing scary here. The sessions were challenging and interesting. I found the discussion of the access gates installed at UTS Library, and the confronting of our attitudes towards censorship to be particularly relevant, and it was good to hear some discussion about the meaning of one of the most basic library tenets: freedom of access to information.

The New Graduates Group challenge session on Wednesday afternoon was a huge success. Bernadette Rosbrook coined the

'phrase of the week', and the audience was more than willing to give opinions on the questions and challenges put to them. In addition, new graduates walked away with a set of challenges all of our own — be a bit more realistic and flexible when looking for that first job, try approaching a group of scary-looking librarians, and my favourite part: the image of librarians? Get over it already!

That theme was carried over into other sessions. The focus was on the quality of the work we do. As Kate Burnham put it, 'changing our name won't increase our pay'. The presentation from Helen Partridge and Gill Hallam on the qualities of an information professional, followed by Peter Macauley's discussion of the professional doctorate, highlighted the excellent work we have been doing and what we can do to make it even better.

Even Kay Raseroka wasn't scary. The IFLA president was the guest speaker at the New Graduates Group dinner held on Wednesday night at Jupiters. Kay spoke to us of what being the first Southern Hemisphere president of an international federation means, and of the challenges that she faced as a woman developing the profession in Africa. I took the opportunity to put faces to the names I see all the time on the New Graduates e-list — it was great to meet you guys!

Disturbingly, even the Bengal tigers weren't scary, and they probably should have been! The conference dinner at Dreamworld was great fun, and I must salute those brave souls that took their drinks with them on the Raptor ride — and did not spill a drop.

I apologise that I can not report on all of the sessions, but that would be unrealistic. This was my conference experience, and from a newbie's point of view, I felt welcomed and valued — there was a new graduate presence everywhere I looked — when a new graduate wasn't speaking, they were being quoted. Much literature has been written claiming that the profession has to start valuing its new generation, and I could see it happening there in the Gold Coast.

Congratulations to the organisers for a fantastic week. Hopefully I will be there again in 2006, if only to see how Kerry Smith can top her Friday afternoon performance... meanwhile I hope to see many of you in Adelaide in December for what is shaping up to be a fantastic New Librarians Symposium! ■

Alyson Dalby

History of Medicine
Library, Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

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...gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column coordinator, Kate Watson, k.watson@cqu.edu.au.