

# Have library degree: will travel



**Geraldine Barkworth**

**Bold Women Big Ideas**



**Kylie Moloney**

### Transformation. Opportunity. Future trends.

...a new series of interviews with library and information professionals rising to the challenges of the modern LIS sector.

Suggestions for interviewees are always welcome. Please contact Geraldine Barkworth via e-mail. ■

**K**ylie Moloney is an Auroran, has multiple degrees and an itch to travel and learn. She takes us on a tour of her adventures and tells Geraldine Barkworth about taking risks and following your heart.

#### What sparked your interest in library work in developing countries?

I wanted to live and work in a different country. I also wanted to help and train people who worked in libraries in developing countries. I strongly believe that when people have access to information, they can make better and more informed decisions about their lives.

#### What were you hired to do in Vanuatu?

I was granted unpaid leave from the National Library of Australia and I went for 12 months as an Australian Youth Ambassador for AusAID to set up the library at the Vanuatu Institute of Technology. Previously it was chaotic and without technology, the staff had no training and it was underused. I had to learn a new language, Bislama (Pidgin English) in order to train the library staff. While I worked really hard setting up and automating the service, I also made plenty of time to go snorkelling after work.

#### How did working at the Vanuatu Institute affect who you are today?

Immensely. I learned much more from my ni-Vanuatu (the indigenous people of Vanuatu) counterpart and friends, than I taught them. Their way of life and joy for living greatly impacted on me and I now feel I have a clearer perspective on what is important in life for me.

#### And what is important for you?

Balance between work and home. In Australia, I feel we work in a culture of 'being busy' and have a preoccupation with the material. I think people get caught up in appearances, competitiveness and kudos. Many people work long hours and seem really busy, but accomplish very few of their real priorities. I think we've forgotten about living and connecting with other human beings.

In Vanuatu, people (including library staff) would sit under trees for hours and stop, sit, talk and listen. Their priorities and choices are very different to ours. And although this is not possible in our Australian work environment, I think we can learn something from the ni-Vanuatu people.

#### What was it like returning to NLA after working overseas?

It was great to get a regular wage and see old friends and colleagues. However, I would be lying if I said it was easy! In Vanuatu I was the only librarian at the Vanuatu Institute of Technology and reasonably autonomous. Back at the National Library, I was one of 300-odd librarians! I did enjoy being back around

stimulating, professional and supportive colleagues and learning about the new technologies and initiatives that had emerged while I was away.

#### Which information management skills do you see as vital in a constantly changing world?

The ability to think outside the square – thinking creatively can often solve problems much more quickly and remembering the big picture is always important.

The ability to educate others and communicate clearly and effectively – passing on your skills is much more useful and productive than keeping them to yourself!

The ability to learn quickly, to adapt to and embrace new technologies.

#### Are LIS professionals actively embracing these vital skills?

We need different types of people in libraries. I think the profession does not tend to attract creative big picture thinkers. I think LIS professionals would benefit from working on their communication, education and promotional skills.

#### Are library professionals inherently altruistic?

Yes, I believe so. One of the roles librarians play in our society is to provide a space for people to feel comfortable, safe and communicate freely. A large part of my role in Vanuatu seemed to be about providing a space for people to come and talk and reflect. Libraries can be places where people come, stop, learn and think for a while. I believe libraries play that role within all institutions, even though it may be unconscious.

I also believe that there's a real respect for the experience and wisdom of older librarians. I feel green and very young in comparison.

#### What are 5 things you'd like us to know about you?

1. Friends say I am an excellent cook and host great dinner parties!
2. I like learning and can see myself still studying when I'm very, very old!
3. One of my favourite things is to snorkel with the fish in Vanuatu – bliss!
4. I'm about to head overseas on a big travel/work adventure with no set return date.
5. I intend to volunteer again one day.

#### No return date...

#### what are you looking for overseas?

Hopefully, to work in libraries or maybe museums in the UK or Europe.

#### For Australian LIS professionals wanting to see the world, how transferable are their skills?

Very. You can do a lot with skills in basic research, presenting information and educating people in information literacy.

**You are currently doing a fourth degree – a Master of Arts in Museums and Collections: how well would librarians transfer to a career in museums?**

I'm not sure. Like any other career transition I suspect they may have to take a pay cut initially. I get the impression that there are lots of opportunities for librarians in cultural institutions to do diverse and creative work.

**If you could have your ideal role in the world, what would it be?**

A researcher or curator working in a museum with cultural heritage collections from Melanesia, preferably with the occasional field trip to the Pacific!

**What are your professional interests?**

In libraries I'm interested in reference and education, and in museums, I'm particularly interested in curating – the telling of stories through objects and indigenous collections.

**Which kinds of library have you worked in?**

Two school libraries – one at Presentation College, Victoria and one in Broome, WA – various roles at the National Library, a vocational education library in Vanuatu and a special government library in Canberra.

**How come you have degrees in music, information management, education and now working towards museums and collections?**

I love learning and education. I'm really attracted to cultural institutions. I play the flute, African drums and sing. I think my interests are reflected in my degree choices.

I'm passionate about learning and actively encourage and support change in people's lives. I feel I have a skill in inspiring and supporting change in others.

**What's your most precious memory related to libraries?**

Teaching a group of 12 ni-Vanuatu people on the island of Pentecost in far north Vanuatu who came to a library workshop. The whole workshop was conducted in Bislama (Pidgin English used in Vanuatu) and they were all so keen to learn anything at all about libraries, it was very inspiring. Most of the libraries they had experienced, or volunteered at, had about 5 sets of World Book Encyclopaedias from the 1970s, no catalogue and no paper or pens. None of the people I taught had ever had formal library training nor were they paid for the work they did in libraries.

**How can the LIS community better support libraries in the developing world?**

Donate books that have been weeded from your collections (or ask colleagues to bring in old books from home), but make sure they are sorted (by subject or age group is generally best). Make sure donations are targeted to the most suitable libraries – for example don't send old editions of parliamentary papers to primary schools as they won't be of use! You'd be surprised how often this happens!

Try to send picture books as well as easy reading fiction books because English literacy levels are often relatively low in developing countries.

Libraries in developing countries also need stationary. They rarely have paper and pens, let alone contact, date due slips and stamps. Think about donating a box of your old stationary to a library in a developing country.

Libraries could also consider running competitions or fundraising activities to make money that could be used to buy new books for a library in a developing country or sponsor someone in a developing country to study librarianship by distance education.

If you'd like to help a library in a developing country, try contacting AusAID, DFAT or Rotary.

**What can Australian librarians be grateful for?**

Fast internet connections, supportive professional colleagues and opportunities for paid work.

**What are you currently reading?**

*The Lonely Planet Guide to Eastern Europe* – I'm heading there in June! *Museum studies: an anthology of contexts*, ed. Bettina Carbonell, *Unfolding the moon: enacting women's kastom in Vanuatu*, Lissant Bolton, and *Home food*, ed. Gordana Trifunovic.

**What are your top 5 priorities for the next 12 months?**

1. Move to the UK and find work in the museum or library sector.
2. Travel to as many European countries as my finances and work will allow!
3. Find out more about Melanesian collections in European museums and decide on a topic for my Masters thesis.
4. Keep in touch with family and friends back in Australia.
5. Learn some new music from indigenous musicians in some remote part of the world.

**Final words of wisdom on following your heart?**

I'd like to encourage librarians to think about their priorities and work towards something in the profession that they enjoy and are passionate about. As librarians, we often forget how varied and useful our skills are – why not share them around?!

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