

An Australian librarian in the court of ALA

In June this year I attended the American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference with two other Aussies, Andrew Spencer and Fiona Bradley. The three of us were involved in running the ALIA New Librarians Symposium 2006, and were heading north to speak about what we learnt as part of the ALA New Members' Round Table (NMRT) President's Program. I am now calm and collected, but I assure you that the prospect of presenting a paper at such a massive event had me awfully excited for many months prior!

While the presentation itself went well, it doesn't make for very interesting reading. What is fascinating is the ALA conference itself. I knew that Annual was a big conference, but I was not at all prepared for the scale of the event. Annual took over Anaheim. It felt that everywhere I looked there were librarians. This wasn't like the time I went to the Gold Coast for ALIA Biennial.

The most challenging part of the experience was pouring over the awfully thick programme booklet and trying to figure out what to attend. It wasn't just which sessions to choose when there were ten different things on offer, but it was also how to get between sessions – Annual was spread out, and hosted in many different hotels. Getting from one session to another could mean a half hour walk in the blazing Californian sun, so choices were dependent as much on interest level as a wish to avoid skin cancer.

Delegates were wonderfully welcoming. I suspect that being a foreigner made me an attractive seat mate, and I found it quite easy to strike up conversations with people that I was sitting next to. Delegates were eager to talk about commonalities and differences in libraries and cultures. And politics. They were very eager to talk politics. We caught up with ex ALIA Executive Director Jennefer Nicholson (who is now the IFLA Secretary General in The Hague) at the International Librarians' Reception. This event was well attended, and I was impressed by the number of local (i.e. American) delegates that purchased tickets in order to meet their international colleagues.

The trade exhibition was, well, nuts. It was huge. It was so big that there were three stalls dedicated to selling insoles to alleviate foot pain, possibly caused by walking through the whole trade exhibition! It was wonderful to see the variety of material on offer, with sections devoted to graphic novels, alternative presses, disability access services and

new technologies. It brought home to me the variety that can come with scale, but also that this material is accessible to us as well – we are not as cut off from the rest of the world as we sometimes believe.

According to my better-informed travelling companion, the session not to miss is Top Tech Trends, where a panel of technophiles discuss what they see as the upcoming trends. It didn't disappoint. Packed to the rafters, at least a quarter of the audience were tapping away on laptops – I felt like a luddite with my notepad and pen. The panel on stage were flanked by two huge screens: one contained a live video feed of two more panellists, and the second showed a live meebo chat with the panellists, audience and absent friends discussing the session as it went on. It was a little distracting, but fun nonetheless, and great to see some experimentation.

The ProQuest Scholarship Bash was held on the first official day of the conference to raise money for the scholarship. It involved purchasing a ticket to Disneyland, a vital part of my conference attendance and professional development. We researched Space Mountain, Splash Mountain and the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, and I can confidently say that each would be a valuable addition to my library.

I am really pleased I went to ALA Annual. It opened my eyes to the variety of the work we do, and the scale of the industry in America. I would encourage new grads to take a chance on something like this. While my employer encouraged me to attend, the trip was entirely self-funded – registration for ALA conferences is very cheap, so if you are planning a trip to the US it may be worth seeing if you can take in a conference while you're there. It may open up some doors for you!

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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 co-ordinator Naomi Doessel, naomi.doessel@au.ey.com

Grab a bag!

In 2007, The Loftus Centre Library in Vincent, WA introduced eco-friendly red carry bags. The bags have been a hit with members of the Library and at **only \$1.00** they are great value for money for those looking to shun flimsy plastic bags in favour of the sturdy, longer-handled eco-bags.

As part of a Statewide initiative the red 'Resonate' bags have become a widely distributed eco-product throughout the library network in WA.

The vibrant red bags are part of the Resonate with Public Libraries project – promoting the objectives of inspiring, connecting, discovering and enriching which epitomises the concept of lifestyle libraries.



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Clockwise: Oliver Lyons Hartman (12), Lisa Baxter (7), Anya Lyons Hartman (8), Anna Baxter (12), Bani Ahluwalia (6), Cale Charmers (11) & Chloe Charmers (10).

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