

# Energise>>Enthuse>>Inspire

## The long and winding road

An apology to The Beatles, but my career in libraries has resembled the song as I've taken a few twists and turns along the way so far. From my first job as a checkout chick to completing an Arts/Education degree at Monash University and teaching in a government secondary school, I have developed skills that have held me in good stead as a librarian.

During secondary school, like many people my age, I had a part-time job at the local supermarket. For the first few years, this job was a means to earn money and gain independence, but when I started taking on more responsibility and the supervision of staff, I realised that I was gaining skills in customer service and learning how to manage people. As a supervisor, I dealt with customer complaints which ranged from the weird to the wonderful and, as anyone who has ever worked in retail would know, these situations help develop conflict resolution strategies.

The goal at the beginning of my Arts/Education course was to finish my degree while earning some money working part-time and be able to maintain a social life. I already held a paid teaching internship at a private school in Melbourne and also began working part-time at a public library. Working in a public library was more enjoyable than I could have imagined: I got along well with my colleagues and enjoyed interacting with library users. As a keen reader, I couldn't believe there was a job where I was able to chat to people about books they were reading and make recommendations! Not only did this win me over, but the perk of having unlimited library holds also facilitated spending more time reading than studying.

During this time, I connected with the community liaison librarian who became my unofficial mentor and she really encouraged me to get involved in community projects run by the library. She made me feel that my skills as a soon-to-be teacher were valuable in a different context and that working in a library wasn't just about loaning books at the circulation desk. I became involved in young adult programs, co-judged a teenage creative writing competition, helped organise book talks, and enjoyed every minute of it. At one point I remember asking my mentor what I would have to do to become a librarian but then I got caught up in graduating and finding the all-important first teaching position. The possibility of continuing to work at the library never occurred to me as I put all my energies into surviving my first year teaching and after that, looked further afield for opportunities when I headed off to London on a working holiday.

I intended to find a teaching position in London and started working as an emergency teacher for the first few months in order to find my feet before deciding where to work. I worked in some schools for a few days, others a month or two but soon the transience of my existence and the challenging behaviour wore me down enough to start thinking about other options. I applied for and started work at a public library in the well-to-do area of Chelsea and although the work was not challenging, I finally started feeling better about myself and began thinking about libraries as a career path. I travelled around Europe extensively and did all the things that young Australians in London get up to, gaining some life experience along the way. Before finally leaving London, I worked at a museum where I soaked up everything I could about Victorian art and at a vocational college in Westminster which was the equivalent of TAFE in Australia. I worked as a learning co-ordinator and delivered information literacy sessions to students. Again I found this combination of working in a library and teaching to be something I really enjoyed

and something that I was good at. I can impart some sage wisdom regarding my time in London; firstly if you have the chance to work or volunteer overseas, do it! Secondly, don't think too much about whether an opportunity will be good for your career. There are so many rich experiences that contribute to the journey of 'lifelong learning' that you would be crazy to pass any of them up!



Jessica Morgan and Naomi Doessel

Fast forward to today and I'm working as a Library Technician at Australian Catholic University and two subjects away from completing the Graduate Diploma of Information Management at RMIT. I've been enjoying working and studying as every day I'm faced with practical examples of the theory that I've been learning about in class. This also works in reverse where I'm learning about new technologies and ideas that get me thinking about my current practice. I've been fortunate to have a supportive workplace that allows me to take study time but also encourages attending conferences and workshops which has contributed to my becoming a library professional. I had a fantastic time meeting other new graduates and those new to the profession at the New Librarians' Symposium last year and encourage others to attend these events.

Some people ask me if I miss teaching and while there are some aspects that I fondly look back on, I can answer that question with the response that I've never stopped teaching. Sure, I don't have a Year 8 class to control or write on a whiteboard or conduct parent-teacher interviews. However I do establish relationships with students, I do explain concepts in many different ways, and I do see those 'light-bulb' moments that all teachers would agree makes the hard work worthwhile. At this stage in my career, working in an academic library suits me, but for anyone with an education degree and those highly-regarded transferable skills, the future looks bright.

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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, [naomidoessel@gmail.com](mailto:naomidoessel@gmail.com)

## Aurora Leadership Institute February 2010

Applications are now open for the  
**Aurora Leadership Institute**  
to be held at Thredbo from  
Thursday 18th – Monday 23rd February 2010.

Applications close at 5pm AET on  
**20th October 2009.**

For more information, intending applicants should consult  
the application guidelines at  
<http://www.aurorafoundation.org.au/>

If you have any queries regarding the Aurora  
Leadership Institute 2010, please contact

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