

REGIONAL AND RURAL LIBRARIES

Adventures with words

My journey with words has taken many twists and turns, starting with my mother teaching me to read when I was four years old. Now in her nineties and suffering from Alzheimer's Disease, she can no longer read and remembers only the distant past. Most of her waking time is spent mentally mustering cattle on long-ago family properties or riding her favourite horses. She lies immobile, barely able to speak – frail and helpless in a nursing home.

For an hour each day I read Banjo Paterson to her and Steele Rudd and Henry Lawson and make up stories about Australian life when she was growing up. How much she understands I do not know, but she becomes calm and smiles. Perhaps it is the rhythm of the reading or maybe she understands enough to make it enjoyable.

Reading has been my lifelong pleasure and words my stock-in-trade. I have written technical and educational material over many years and am now interested in creative writing. By nature a solitary person, I find reading the ultimate solitary pursuit. Sharing the thoughts and ideas of great writers and outstanding thinkers is a privilege. But I am getting ahead of myself – I want to tell you how I became a bookaholic.

I was born in 1940 in outback Australia where I spent the first 25 years of my life. My mother's family had settled there in 1870 on 100 000 acres (40 816 hectares) where they raised cattle, sheep, and thoroughbred horses. All our reading material was imported from England and, with the start of World War II in 1939, our supply was cut off. This meant that the many family members quickly took possession of what books they could and by the time I was born, there remained only one children's book of nursery rhymes.

It had obviously passed through many hands. The few remnants of its cover were defaced with crayons and every page was damaged almost beyond legibility. But I loved and treasured it.

I desperately wanted to learn to read. I could not wait until I was five years old, so after much pestering, my mother decided to teach me to read using this book and labels off tins from the pantry. She would hand-print other labels and put them throughout the house. We played alphabet and word games that she made up herself and I willingly learned to sound out and spell the words as well as read them. Three years later, I was able to read the children's stories in old copies of the English Woman's Weekly.

Books were slowly returning to shops in small country towns by 1949. They were quite expensive, so it was an exciting day when my small school was visited by a man who said he was a librarian and that he would soon be opening a library in a town 50 miles (75 kms) away.

The first time I visited the library, I was amazed. Never before had I seen shelves of books like this.

Over the years he introduced me to his favourite literature, taught me to type on his ancient typewriter, and enthralled me with stories of distant lands that he had visited. But these pleasures were soon to come to an end.

The 1950s were the days of McCarthyism and the communist paranoia. He was denounced as a communist, sacked from his job, and driven from the town. To this day, I do not believe that he was a communist, just a victim of small town mentality. My mother forbade me to contact him and I never saw him again. Just thinking of him now brings tears to my eyes.

Although I was an Anglican, I attended a Catholic School in that same town from when I was eleven years old. It was here that I met another mentor who was to have a big influence on my life. She was a brilliant young nun who regularly loaned me books and through her I learned about philosophy, religion, and botany.

Because words have always fascinated me, I loved reading dictionaries, but the library did not lend them. What I needed was a dictionary of my own.

School ended at Year 10 in my part of the world. I won a scholarship to study in the capital city. To celebrate this achievement, my wonderful mentor presented me with a copy of *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. "You'll need this when you go to university," she said.

I owe my education and successful working life to the great encouragement of my two mentors who shared my love of books and words and whose philosophy was "don't worry about distance and isolation – the path to education can be found in any library."

Diana Nolles
via letter

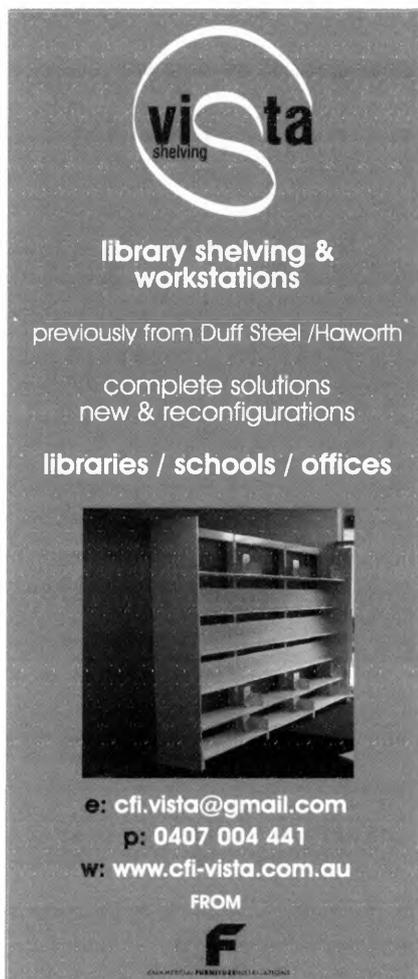
Convergence: rural libraries lead the way

Convergence, in physical and virtual form, is deemed as one of the major issues facing libraries in the 21st century. But rural libraries have a long history of sharing sites, and only now are their city counterparts catching up! The difference is that metropolitan libraries are *choosing* to merge, whereas for rural libraries it has been necessary.

Partnerships occurred to prevent services being lost to the community when economic downturns and the vagaries of weather caused populations to dwindle. Frequently schools (particularly in South Australia), museums, galleries, and cafes joined the rural library's site; other co-tenants included government services such as Medicare (evident in Queensland), telecentres (many in Western Australia), indigenous heritage collections (see the Northern Territory's Library and Knowledge Centres), and tourist information outlets (common to all states).

Convergence reinforces the library's role as a social hub and demonstrates another 21st century phenomenon: That of the library becoming the 'third place', a destination essential to individual well-being, after home and work. In the country, as the ALIA submission to the 2020 forum (2008) noted, "Libraries are often the strongest and most sustainable source of support".

Various studies have proved site sharing benefits all those involved. For the library, new buildings or renovations are likely when convergence happens, and the pooling of resources means more finance, equipment, technology, and outreach programs are available. Winkworth (2005) stated models that link museums into cultural precincts with libraries, galleries, and visitor information centres give critical



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