

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

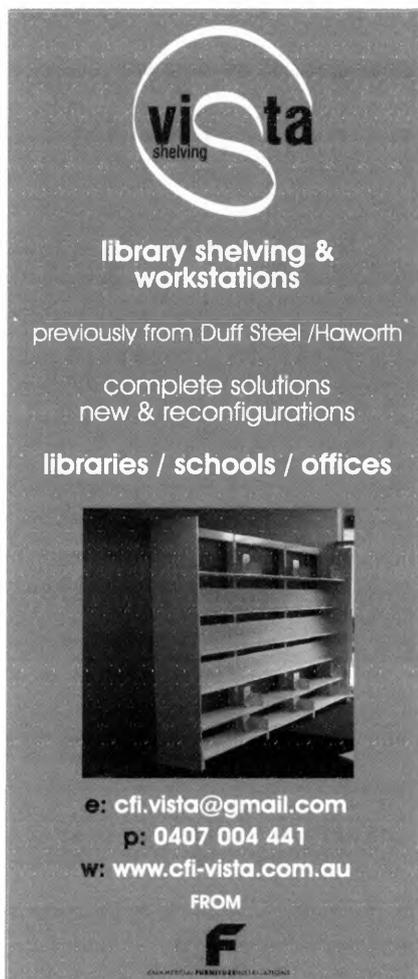
Convergence: rural libraries lead the way

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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mass, program synergies, and operational cost savings. There are usually longer opening hours, and increased membership (combined sites entice the non-user), loans, and in-house item usage, such as newspaper reading. There is greater awareness and status of the library, and relationships are formed and expanded. The isolation felt by the often sole rural librarian is overcome, and, if staff are to conduct some of the other services too, then training and practice boost their skills.

The rural community gains improved access to new and existing services, and residents achieve savings in time and fuel by not having to go to other towns for their requirements. This means an economic benefit to the district from tourist and local expenditure, and subsequently industry develops and jobs are created. Lifestyle is enhanced, and ethnicities and demographics are bridged by the shared site enabling diverse people to come together (Hallett & Whitworth, 2006; Itoi, 2006).

The Australian library sector's experience of convergence forms a valuable body of knowledge, and potentially makes it a world leader in the delivery of integrated services. Therefore rural librarians shouldn't be shy: encourage those contemplating convergence, make suggestions, warn of pitfalls, speak at event, and write articles – country know-how can mean city success!

Merged rural libraries are likely to go on, as the nation still faces uncertain financial times, and remains coast-focused in terms of settlement. Their importance cannot be understated because, as Monley (2006) wrote, in small communities co-located facilities represent hopes for growth, development, and a prosperous future.

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On the road with Lance Earney

If you thought being in a library presented challenges for a working career, then consider the often unpredictable times for your library supplier: motel bookings that go astray, floodwaters, road drama, and kangaroos are just some of the challenges that make life more interesting for library supplier Lance Earney. He selects books for libraries from around 34 publishers selling new titles up to three months in advance and travels to metropolitan and regional libraries to do it.

When you do 50 000 kilometres a year, there's bound to be adventure on the road somewhere and for Lance a couple of incidents quickly spring to mind.

"Twice I've had a tyre blow out when going to Condo [Condobolin] on a partly unsealed road. I blew out the front right tyre. I had to take out all the boxes to get the spare tyre, it was just on dark. In the 40 minutes that it took, not another vehicle came past. It is not a common thing now to blow a tyre, but it gave me a fright when it happened."

"Three of us were driving down the Hume Highway to Canberra side by side on three lanes. There were some stones thrown up in front and my windscreen smashed, I was in the middle lane; it

completely crazed the window, chipped a hole. I turned on my indicators and slowly inched across the lanes - I couldn't see anything."

Nature can also play a part in life's adventures. Lance recalls being "caught by floodwaters that came over floorboards at Bathurst, when the river broke its banks, I was the last car through when the police closed the road. I thought I'd be sent back, but I got through just on dark."

Another test of his driving skills is coping with icy roads with a fully loaded vehicle or losing traction. "I now use a 4WD. Some of the staff have vans, but this is convenient to use. When fully loaded, it holds 22 boxes of books and DVDs." Lance's tip is "a good driver is a defensive driver."

Despite these little hiccoughs, Lance says it is a wonderful journey developing lots of personal friendships as he works the job throughout metropolitan and country NSW.

"I enjoy it very much, the people that I work with in libraries – we have a very good working relationship. I've learned a tremendous lot about library management systems and it makes a lot of sense when downloading marc records into their servers in understanding their requests."

"The other thing is that librarians also ring to ask if you are okay if you are running late – and that's nice."

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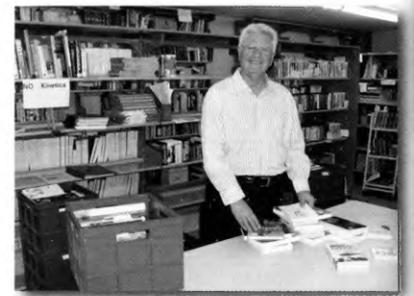
Tyranny v technology: challenges and opportunities for regional public libraries

As the world's largest island and sixth largest country, with area enough to encase Europe, and outback farms larger than some countries, it is fair to say there is a lot of space in Australia. There are rainforests, deserts, and ski fields, and people who call all these places home. Country public libraries embrace both the challenges and opportunities that come with geographical distance in order to benefit these communities.

Many librarians agree that part of the challenge is engaging a widespread community. However, Rosalind Dorsman – Technical Services Librarian at Central West Libraries in NSW – suggests that distance is relative. To Gen Y and Gen Z, even a library 'just around the corner' is too far away. Central West Libraries have adapted by developing the library, and now sees more than 60% of students use the library's online schoolwork help from within their homes.

Interestingly, this doesn't show a regional trend as much as a trend for today's students everywhere. Modern online resources that regional libraries offer are on par with young people's preferences and expectations – making public libraries one of the few key resources in regional areas that puts students – city or country – on the same playing field.

In large part due to the proliferation of internet access across the country in the past decade, country libraries are increasingly offering something for everyone and becoming a hub of learning, social occasion, and interaction that reflects the needs of the



Library Supplier Lance Earney presents books for sale during a visit to Central West Libraries in regional NSW