



# FA SHARR: A HERO TO LIVE UP TO

When Anna Hudson decided to nominate for the ALIA FA Sharr Medal late last year, she realised she really didn't know much about the man himself. Anna went on to win the 2010 Medal and is now intent on living up to this hero of Australian librarianship.

Last year I was encouraged to nominate for the FA Sharr medal. I'd seen a few posts doing the rounds on the e-lists about an award. You may be shocked but I had little idea who FA Sharr was, so I found a book, *Recollections: Forty Years of Public Library Service*. I learned Francis Aubie (Ali) Sharr came out to Perth in Western Australia from England to help create the WA Public Library System in 1953. He was the State Librarian of Western Australia until 1976. Sharr was also heavily involved in establishing Western Australian library studies courses.

What struck me when reading about him was, yes; he did a wonderful job in creating the public library system. I also sensed a great dedication to the library profession.

ALIA commemorates FA Sharr's contribution through the FA Sharr Medal, first awarded in 1976 to Jean Ryding. The Medal is "awarded to a Western Australian librarian or library technician in their first year of employment who exhibits the most potential to make a significant contribution to the library profession in Western Australia".

So I applied, agonised over the selection criteria and worried about the right font to use in my resume. Then the phone call to organise an interview came. Then the panic set in – what to talk about for ten minutes? The interview for the award involves a series of questions put by the assessment panel, followed by a presentation on what you consider to be a future issue for the library profession.

"Books are like packets of seeds. When they are opened and their contents are read, new thoughts like seedlings germinate in the mind of the reader." This quotation from FA Sharr struck a chord, and formed a central part of my presentation. I wanted to remind people that although over the years many things have changed, there are some ideas that stay constant. I believe that as library professionals, we have always aimed to connect people to ideas; it is how we achieve this that has changed.

The presentation I gave during the interview and subsequently at the awards evening discussed the issue of the 'digital divide' in the public library field. I wished to highlight the inequalities facing public libraries and raise some initiatives that I felt lead towards the future, including ideas such as business partnerships and communities. I strongly feel that libraries can assist people and even entire communities by connecting them to information; a key factor in successfully achieving this lies in overcoming that digital divide.

I learnt more about Mr Sharr just before and after the joint ALIA West and Library Board of Western Australia awards night. I was able to talk to people who had met Mr Sharr and some that worked with him. He is a clearly a hero in the eyes of Western Australian librarians and I am actually now more nervous after winning the award due to that deep regard people have for Mr Sharr!

There are responsibilities that go with receiving the FA Sharr Medal but they have been fun. I have been an ambassador not only for the Medal but also my profession. My responsibilities also include membership of the ALIA West Committee and promoting this award. Through doing this I have gained a lot of new ideas. I do not yet know how I will fulfill the "recognition of the potential" of the FA Sharr Medal but I hope to continue working in the library world and contributing to the profession, no matter where I end up. In the short term, I am currently completing my Masters in Librarianship at Curtin University and I am about to travel to Vancouver to soak up as much knowledge as I can and bring it back to share.

I encourage all new graduates residing in Western Australia to consider nominating for this award and ask employers, colleagues and friends to consider nominating someone and support and encourage them in the process. Writing the application, being interviewed and giving the presentation are all important and valuable experiences for a new graduate and there is a broader benefit in encouraging thought, development and growth of the profession in its newest members – those with a stake in the future.

I know that so many of my friends who have recently finished their professional studies and those who will finish in the next few years will make worthy recipients of this award. We all have the potential to contribute to ALIA and to our profession.

**Anna Hudson**  
anna.c.hudson@gmail.com

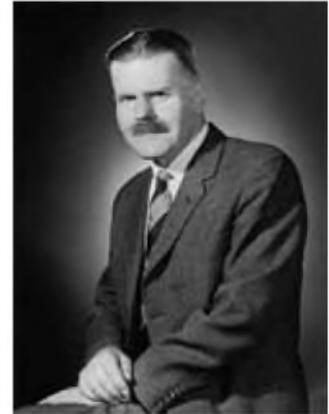


Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia

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