

Voices

Topics in Canadian Librarianship

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Our Stories of Librarianship

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Editorial

BY ROBYN SCHAFFER, CABOT YU

Welcome to the first issue of *Voices: Topics in Canadian Librarianship!*

We are launching this new publication with stories from members of our community about those experiences that were satisfying, gratifying, or grounding to them in a way that made them PROUD to be a library professional.

It is these stories and memories that are so dear that recalling them can elevate our moods and we find ourselves looking back to them from time to time. They are our Library Happy Places when the world around us is dark and gloomy.

We hope these stories will inspire you and provide that reminder of why we do what we do.

If these stories inspire you share your own story, please send them to us (info@librarianship.ca) and we will publish to Librarianship.ca as an extension to this issue.

Robyn Schafer
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From Data Entry To Touching Lives

BY CARRIE-ANN SMITH

Today I am the Chief of Audience Engagement at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, but back in 1998, fresh from the Library and Information Studies program at Dalhousie University, I was one of 10 data entry clerks working to index a million immigration records in time for the opening of Pier 21 on Canada Day, 1999. When you are doing data entry you work in a bit of a bubble, it is nearly impossible to imagine the life that your completed project will take on.

I was very fortunate and was given an opportunity to stay on after the museum opened to work in its small special library. It was just days after we finished our database and opened the museum when a lady came in and asked to look up an immigration record. When I showed her the record she started to cry, she said that her husband had died a few days before and she wanted to know the original spelling of his last name so

that she could use it on his grave marker.

I hadn't seen it coming, I had been staring at these records for a year but I had absolutely no idea what they would eventually mean to people. Over the years that tiny library evolved into the Scotiabank Family History Centre. Staff in the Centre built the museum's collections and education and public programs, interpretation and research grew from that, and today each is a thriving department, but nothing compares with the thrill of showing someone an immigration record. Watching someone's eyes scan the details as they discover that their father arrived in Canada with just \$5.00, that their grandparent was a British Home Child, or that their mother had shaved 10 years off her age when she immigrated. It is magic and every day that I get to do it makes me more proud of my profession and my country than I would have thought possible.

Carrie-Ann Smith is the Chief, Audience Engagement at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax.



More Than a Game

BY MICHELLE GOODRIDGE

I have been exceedingly fortunate in the short time that I have been the Liaison Librarian, Game Design and Development at Wilfrid Laurier University. Never would I have thought that something that I have been passionate about my entire life (gaming) would become one of the major aspects of my career. I have been able to also bring my passion for gaming into the wider Brantford community through game programming in partnership with the Brantford Public Library, the City of Brantford and my forthcoming work with Brant County Library.

Whether it be organizing decks of Magic: The Gathering cards for our intro to Magic night, corresponding with lovely game developers who graciously have sent donations to our library, play testing games created by our students, or helping students (some outside of the program) with their game related research, I have had an incredible time.

One of my fondest memories involves a student in the psychology program. They were doing research on gaming and depression. We spent quite a bit of time together building search strategies and looking for appropriate journals and databases to use. In the end, this student wrote

an exceptional paper, which he forwarded to me after handing it in and he even gave me a “shout out” within it. That really made me stop and think, “wow, I love my job!”

The relationships I’ve developed with students and faculty at this campus have been so organic. I have students who regularly pop into my office just to say hello or to ask if I want a slice of pizza and it truly makes this a welcoming place to be. I am writing this story two weeks before the semester starts and I’ve already had a couple students come into my office to say hello, asking me about my summer and saying that they hope I am going to keep up my gaming committee that invites students to help shape the library. I don’t know many other librarians who develop such close bonds with students in the programs they are supporting, but this has surely been a highlight for me and really illustrates how we, as librarians, truly make a difference for students.

As this is a fairly new program that I am supporting I am looking forward to what happens over the coming years and having the opportunity to watch these young people grow as critical scholars and overall wonderful human beings.

Michelle Goodridge is the Liaison Librarian, Game Design and Development at Wilfrid Laurier University.



Freshly Minted

BY ALLISON WIBER



Why do I do what I do? It's a question I get a lot as a fresh MLIS graduate.

Other questions include, "why would you want to be a librarian?", and, "do libraries even still exist?" They do, in fact; still exist. I know they do because I see them every day.

I see the people who they serve. I see people who don't have the luxury of at-home internet connection – or at-home anything, as they have no home at all. I see kids interacting with their peers and engaging their minds and I see parents putting down their phones to play with them. To read with them. I see older patrons learning how to adapt to this technological age to better communicate with their families. I see teens learning about the resources available for them to succeed. I see newcomers to our countries learning our customs and our languages without fear of judgment or ridicule. I see spaces being made for not just reading, but real, practical skill building and passion chasing. I see people creating.

I see all of that, and all of that is why I do what I do – why I want to do what I do.

Over the holidays, I was asked another question from an inebriated acquaintance of mine in our local bar – "what does a librarian even do, anyway?" She said it tossing her head back with a laugh which came off quite smug, although I'm not sure if she meant it that way. I wasn't sure how to answer her.

I thought about how I have always, from a very young age, knew that I wanted to help people. I thought I would be a doctor for quite a while, but it turns out you have to be fairly good at science to do that. It's not until you get a little older that you understand there are other, less obvious ways to help people. I started my undergraduate degree in social work, sure that this was the path for me. It wasn't, as it turns out. It was not until the end of my BA in history that I understood where I was going – where the choices I

had made were leading me. Librarianship. Of course.

There has long been an image of the librarian as a gatekeeper – the gatekeeper of knowledge, if you will. I don't buy it. I'm not a gatekeeper – I'm here to show you how to help yourself. I'm here to give you the skills. I'm here for you – not to keep you from information and act as a barrier but to provide it for you and leave you with its lasting impression. We take for granted how important information and access is, and how easy it is for so many of us to take advantage of it.

What does a librarian do? A librarian evens the playing field of information. A librarian closes that ever-expanding gap between the haves and the have-nots. A librarian is a champion of the people – and not just a certain type or group of people, all people. I want to be the champion of the people's privacy, of their rights, and of their right to information and intellectual stimulation. I want to be the advocate for what's right and what's deserved. I want to help. I want to do these things, and I can; because that is what a librarian does.

I did not say all of this to her that night, but I should have. I will not hold my tongue in the future when anyone asks me this because if I want to be an advocate for the library and the library community I have to start now, even in these small ways. Many do not understand what it is that the library actually does for its people, and it is now my job to inform them.

I am 25 years old, and just starting out in this field. I have little experience and little influence. I have yet to collect my ah-ha moments of why I am here and why I chose this for myself. But I have big ideas, and I have passion driving me. I have a deep understanding and love for what this profession represents.

I know why I do what I do.

Allison Wiber is the Branch Librarian at the Masonville Branch of London Public Library.

A Love Letter to Librarians

BY ROBIN BERGART

Some of my best friends are librarians.

In 1995 I was finishing a degree in Religious Studies and unsure of the next step. For reasons I don't recall, I made an appointment with the Chief Librarian at my university to ask him about a career in librarianship. He warned me off, said it was a dying profession and I'd never be happy. At the same time, I visited a career counselor who, through a battery of personality tests, determined I was best suited to a career as a speech pathologist, lumberjack, or librarian. It wasn't just the work itself that matched my skills and aptitudes, he'd said, but these were the kind of colleagues I would get along with best.

I put off the decision another four years, then, finally, I made my move towards librarianship. Joyfully, in library school, I met like-minded people who had also been told they would make good speech pathologists and lumberjacks. Today I am surrounded by colleagues at my own

workplace and more broadly in the profession whom I like and respect and some of whom have become close friends. They are bright, loyal, rebellious, and adventurous. We have schemed, camped, dragon-boated, attended a Christmas party dressed as the Wright Brothers (can't remember why), supported each other, pretended, strolled, mused on strange and wonderful subjects, signed up for community language classes and bailed after one night, dined, biked, laughed at ourselves, navel-gazed, mourned, got depressed, hated ourselves, cheered each other up, ate a lot of baked goods, and travelled together in search of more librarians.

The best part of being a librarian is keeping company with such wonderful people. Perhaps I would have connected just as well to colleagues in speech clinics or in forests, but I'm glad I didn't take the advice of that Chief Librarian over twenty years ago.

Robin Bergart is a User Experience Librarian at the University of Guelph. Her job is to learn about user behaviour in order to improve and enhance the user's experience.

There's no dark magic in these Reserves

BY SHAWNA MANCHAKOWSKY

At Rutherford Library, at the University of Alberta, we have what we call a "Reserve" area. This is a small room of assorted books that professors have deemed necessary for their students.

With only one or two copies in the whole library system, the book is "on reserve" for their class. Students come to the library to check out their textbook for two hours at a time, thus providing access for all. (Yes -- this is just one of the many reasons that libraries are so awesome.)

It is with this in mind, I received my favourite library question this term. I had to keep a straight face when a student asked, "Excuse me; where is the Restricted Section?"

I explained that we, unlike Harry Potter, did not have a restricted section -- all of our books were for anyone to take out. This was met with a blank stare, so I stopped giving her a hard time and directed her to the right.

Shawna Manchakowsky is a Public Service Assistant at the University of Alberta Libraries.

Did I Change Someone's Life?

BY NICOLE EVA

The moment I realized I was meant to be a librarian, and how rewarding this career could be, was during my co-op placement while I was doing my MLIS degree.

I was working at Queen's Lederman Law Library for the 2006/2007 academic year and during one of my first reference consultations there, I recall the student I helped being so absolutely grateful for my help and thanking me so profusely, as if I'd just changed their life. It was remarkable to me that something so simple as helping them find the legal resource they needed could be met with such gratitude, but of course now as a practicing librarian I encounter that on a regular basis.

Students are often so amazed, and so grateful, that we can help them with what they think is an insurmountable query. It was a far cry from my 'previous life' as an account executive in an advertising agency, where most of the time

when you heard from a client it was a complaint or an emergency – when things went right, all was quiet. So to feel like I was actually helping someone, instead of just helping someone sell something – I knew, in that moment, that I'd found the career I was meant to have. And I still get that feeling, every time a student is genuinely appreciative of the time I've taken to help them.

Nicole Eva has been a librarian at the University of Lethbridge since receiving her MLIS in August, 2008. She is subject liaison to the Faculty of Management and the departments of Economics, Political Science, Agricultural Studies, and Liberal Education.



Setting the Stage

BY NANCY E. BLACK, PhD



when a student's face glowed with relief when she

When I reflect on my past and very diverse library career to date, I am reminded and struck by how many, many happy – and yes, joyous – memories that are part of my “Library Happy Place”.

Those times during library instruction sessions when I just knew the students experienced a tremendous “ah-ha” moment in understanding information seeking strategies; that time

said “oh thank you, you've just saved my life”; the child who had an animated conversation with the puppet I was using during a story time and later her parent said “that's the first time I've seen her really open up and talk and we're really quite concerned, you've given me hope”; when I successfully defended my PhD dissertation and wore my robes for the first time; or the various times over the years when staff members and colleagues have said: “I've learned so much from you”.

I have indeed been fortunate that my career of providing service has been so rich, rewarding and fulfilling; so no wonder it is difficult for me to highlight one experience in particular, but here it is. During the time I was a YA librarian with Saskatoon Public Library, I created a wide variety of programs: library tours for high school classes, poetry writing contests, job-hunting sessions, babysitting classes, art displays, film nights, science nights, booktalks, and

the list goes on and on. Of all of these, my very favourite and probably most successful program was called: Summer Stock Theatre Project, which ran for four summers in a row (but I have recently learned that since leaving SPL, the program has continued in some form). My inspiration was drawn from a similar project with which I was involved as an undergraduate student along with a group of like-minded drama students/friends; the leader of this group drew his inspiration from an older television program called “Storybook Theatre”.

The formula/model was beautifully simple and simply beautiful. In my iteration, I applied for a summer student grant and hired two university drama students to direct teens to perform a series of plays for audiences of children at all the library branches. In effect, this provided work for the university students, an exciting program for teens filled with a variety of experiences, and programming for the children’s department. I worked with the drama students to select a variety of children’s picture books (The Paperback Princess, Where the Wild Things Are, The Queen Who Stole the Sky, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good Very Bad Day....you get the idea), the students then scripted those stories into plays. Meanwhile, I promoted the program to teens and invited them to audition at the appointed audition days and times. Once auditions were held, the directors selected twenty teens, 10 for the month of July, the other 10 for the month of August. (A teen could only ever be involved once – I wanted to avoid a situation of the program becoming an exclusive club and I wanted to ensure that the opportunity would be open to as many teens as possible.) The directors and I met with each participant to explain the details of the commitment – which was four weeks, Monday-Friday, 9am -4pm – so the expectation was high and we wanted to make sure that each teen understand that. They were given a form with all the details highlighted and asked to check with their parents and return with the form and the teen signature. (I note that this would never fly these days; there would be quite a different process and set of requirements.)

Once the teens were selected and confirmed there were no obstacles for the commitment, the work began. Fortunately, SPL had a large room that I was able to use for the entire summer for the project and fortunately, I had a programming budget to cover costs for supplies, materials and various other activities. The first three weeks of each month were taken up with rehearsals; but those first three weeks were

not just about rehearsals, many other activities were also organized. The set, props and costumes were minimalist (i.e. low cost), but some things were needed; our set comprised of three three-sided screens (commissioned/made by the university drama department) that could be folded up for storage and transportation; props were made by the teens from various items that could easily found, recycled and repurposed (cardboard was heavily used); costumes were borrowed or made by me (yes, I sewed the costumes). I was quite involved with the local theatre community and hired local professional actors to give workshops: voice, mask-making, movement, improvisation. My programming budget was sufficient to pay for theatre tickets for each participant to attend a show performed at the annual “Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan” summer festival.

Performances took place in the fourth week and were held in all the branches (I believe it was five branches) with two shows a day (morning and afternoon). The shows were about an hour in length and usually included four plays with audience participation songs in between each play. I confess that my heart swelled with pride and joy with every one of those performances. I am still in touch with some of the directors with whom I worked and most of those individuals are still involved in some capacity with the performing arts. I have lost touch with the teens who participated in the program. However, several years ago, I did run into one of the participants at a CLA conference, she had become a teacher-librarian and she told me how much she enjoyed being involved with the Summer Stock Theatre Project and that she had integrated many of the ideas and components into something similar with her grade four students. I cannot take credit for this, nor can I take credit for the fact that some of those university drama students are working in the arts, but I think I can say: “we did this, we created this wonderful experience that has clearly resonated with so many and continues to do so in ways that we could not have anticipated or imagined”. Yes, this is indeed, my “Library Happy Place”.

Nancy E. Black, PhD is the Executive Director, Library Services for the Harris Learning Library, serving Nipissing University and Canadore College in North Bay, Ontario.

Making Connections

BY TONY HORAVA

I'd like to thank Karen Daniels Nanni of Ottawa for her generosity in helping me with my uncertain memory, for enriching my understanding of this special story, and agreeing that I tell this story with real names.

This happened to me many years ago, when I was a young reference librarian. I know that everyone who has ever worked at a reference desk has a story of some kind to tell, but this one is quite special and I'm happy to share it with our community. I haven't shared this story with any of my colleagues as it's difficult to find the right time and place to tell such a personal and true story - it's wonderful to be able to share it through this new book on memories, anecdotes, and stories that make us proud of what we do.

This happened early in my career- back in 1989. I was a Reference librarian at the Morisset Library of the University of Ottawa. Having worked practically every day on the Reference desk for a couple of years, I was feeling comfortable in my role and thinking about what challenges and opportunities might come my way. I didn't know what was about to happen.

One day in the summer of 1989, a young woman (Karen) approached the desk, looking rather agitated. She explained that she was looking for her father, but from the look on her face and her tone of voice, I immediately sensed that she wasn't looking for him in the conventional sense, i.e. in the library or on the campus. I immediately sensed that there was something very different about this situation. And then she told me her story.

She explained that she had been born in Montreal and given up for adoption when she was very young. She hadn't known her birth parents. Though she lived in a loving foster home, she had thought about her birth parents for many years and wanted to find them. When she was nineteen, she decided that she would start the process of looking for her birth parents in earnest. She applied to the Ville Marie Social Services agency in Montreal. However resources were limited and adoption discovery cases were only handled one day a week. Therefore progress was slow. The birth mother would have to agree to being contacted. The process of identification and contact had



taken about three years, and she had recently received a letter from the birth mother, a nurse named Louise Peel. The letter began with 'Dear Daughter'. From this letter she learned the identity of her father. His name was Richard Halliday.

Richard Halliday was a prominent Canadian artist who was born in Vancouver and receiving his early training at the Vancouver School of Art. He went on to teach several generations of students at the Brandon Allied Art Center (as Director), then the Montreal Museum School of Art and Design (as Dean), and the Alberta College of Art and Design at Calgary (as Instructor and Head) where he spent 25 years. He was known as "a passionate, demanding teacher and a master at this craft." (Calgary Herald, 2016) A memorial [scholarship](#) exists in his name at the Alberta College of Art and Design. His work is represented in diverse collections, such as The Canada Council Art Bank, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Brandon University, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Calgary Allied Art Foundation, Glenbow Museum, the Canadiana Collection, and the National Capital Commission in Ottawa. A [brochure](#) from the Stride Gallery in Calgary in 2000 described his art as coming "... directly out of American Abstract Expressionism and Canadian Automatism where drips, pours, splatters, lines and clusters of coloured pigment on canvas seem to make tangible and visible that which is essentially intangible and invisible. What gives the work of abstract artists like Halliday its potency is the expression of a part of the self that goes beyond the vicissitudes of daily life to encompass something more elemental: a core essence of being that is more than the sum of its

parts.” (Stride Gallery, 2000) The Glenbow Museum in Calgary, curating an [exhibition](#) of his Constellation Series in 2000, explained that, “This tension between chance and purpose, chaos and order, between randomness and design is an integral part of Halliday’s work.” (Glenbow Museum, 2000) When he died in 2011 from pancreatic cancer, there were obituaries published in [The Calgary Herald](#) and [The Globe & Mail](#). He had left an important artistic legacy.

But let’s go back to 1989 - his daughter whom he had never known was looking for him, and she was asking for my help. Well this was a challenge like never before! I remember scouring the ‘N’ section of our print reference collection (much, much larger in those days than today) for anything about Canadian artists and finding a biographical dictionary of Canadian artists. I remember making a couple of calls, to the National Gallery of Canada and maybe elsewhere.

It’s important to keep in mind that this was in the pre-Internet era. No web, no Google, no universe of information always at your fingertips! In those days we used the print reference collection extensively, and we had rolodex files (if you know this word you aren’t a digital native☺). We often made phone calls to libraries or other places that could help us solve questions. We had an online catalogue, running on dumb terminals, but it had very primitive functionality and search options compared to today’s systems. We had a six volume printed listing of serials holdings. We relied on our colleagues and our experience. A totally different landscape from today, where information is abundant and retrievable through many channels and devices. Information was fugitive and scattered, and required library mediation to be ferretted out, in sharp contrast to our wired devices that provides infinitely more access to information, with ease and speed.

Well, I remember telling myself that I wasn’t giving up until I succeeded! And playing detective had an exciting edge to it. After my searches I came to the conclusion that Richard Halliday lived in Calgary. And then I took her over to the shelf where we kept the phone books of Canadian cities - we had quite a few phone books – and looked up the name, and put my finger on it. ‘I think that’s him’, I said. She was very pleased and excited. She told me she would find him. She had found a book of Canadian art that included a painting by him. After getting in touch with him, she went to the Cambrian Rose Gallery on Rideau Street to see his work, as I learned later.

And then some time passed; it was a month or so. One day she appeared at the Reference Desk again and told me that she had actually found her father, based on the information I had given her. She had phoned him and had gone to Toronto (where he was visiting) soon after to meet him for the first time. Everything had worked out, and she looked very happy. My jaw dropped and I was quite amazed. I wanted to ask her about it, but by the time I had recovered my thoughts, she had left.

I thought about her occasionally in the following years, and wondered how she was doing, and hoped she was having a good relationship with her father. However I assumed I would be unlikely to see her again, as she had graduated that year and left the University. I told myself that this wasn’t a movie, with neat and tidy endings, but real life, where things were often messy and unresolved. I was very happy for what I had done for her, and it gave me a real lift when I reflected on this unique experience from time to time.

Time marched on, Zen-like in its steady flow. The years piled on top of each other, slowly but surely. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty years. Many changes, many developments in librarianship, in the world, and certainly in my career. As a young reference librarian I could never have dreamed of the opportunities and changes that would happen in our profession; it was beyond imagining, as if from the opposite side of a vast chasm from a very different world.

Then, one day in 2013, I was coming back to my office after a meeting at the main campus and the message indicator on my phone was flashing. I typed in my password and the message was played back. A woman’s voice said she was looking for me and explained that I had helped find her father many years ago, and that she was moving back to Ottawa, and that she wanted to get in touch with me. I felt rather stunned; I couldn’t believe it. After a few minutes when I had calmed down, I dialed the number. The first few moments were a bit awkward, but then we had a wonderful and rather intense conversation. She explained that she had had a relationship with her father and that two of her daughters had had a grandfather Richard. I learned many things about her life and her harmonious families. She told me that my discovery had helped changed the lives of many people. This was a phone call I’ll never forget. That evening I said to my wife, “You’ll never believe what hap-

pened today at work....”

In contacting Karen again to show her the draft of this story, I learned more remarkable details about what had happened. She told me that that summer of 1989 she had been working at the TD Bank in Ottawa, and that she was one of eighteen people who had shared in a lottery pool and won. With her share of the winnings, she had bought a plane ticket and gone to Penticton BC to meet her birth mother, who was an aboriginal woman from the Coastal Salish tribe. She learned that her mother too had been adopted – history repeats itself. I also learned that Governor-General David Johnson owns a work by Richard Halliday and that when he has given television interviews you can see a work of his in the background.

I’ve had a wonderful career with many accomplishments of which I’m proud, and I’ve been honoured with several professional awards, but nothing has been as important to me as what I did many years ago for Karen. I was given a rare opportunity to do something really special, and certainly it has been the most meaningful thing I’ve done in my career. We all need to feel connected with those who are important in our life; our identity and being are bound up with the people who are most meaningful for us. This is part of the human condition. Our meaning, however we understand it, is always a shared meaning. The ties that bind are timeless as the sun and sky. In the eloquent words of [Victor Frankl](#), “Being human always points, and is directed, to something or someone, other than oneself—be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter.” (GoodReads, 2016)

Libraries have changed radically since those days. Our landscape is buzzing with opportunities of all sorts. Libraries have always been about making connections and building bridges – between people and information, between expertise and those who can benefit from it, between services and those who need them. Libraries and librarians can change people’s lives in many ways; there are lots of stories out there, and this story is now one of them. I look back on this experience and tell myself how wonderful it was to have had the opportunity to create a strong and personal connection for someoneand this always brings a smile to my spirit.

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