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When the theme for the December issue of *Alki* was announced as “One-on-One Services” I worried out loud about how I was going to tailor an *Up Front* message to fit that theme. In response *Alki* Editor Bo Kinney told me, “Don’t worry too much about being on-theme.” This didn’t help much—does that mean “Don’t worry too much but worry some?” So I’m still worrying.

But, okay, Bo, I am just going to write about stuff that matters to me. I can report that the WALE Conference was a great and fulfilling experience for me and other attendees. The Davenport was wonderful, and the energy level in that historic venue was off the charts. The sessions were uplifting (Daurice Siller and Brianna Hoffman’s “Take This Job and Shelve It!” especially so) and J. A. Jance was, well, J. A. Jance. WALE Conference 2012 will be at a “traditional” WALE location, Campbell’s Resort on Lake Chelan, exact dates to be announced. While in Spokane for the conference, I did “cross the street” and visit with our colleagues and friends in WLAs reciprocal partner association, WLMA; the WLMA Conference was held in Spokane at the same time as WALE Conference. That was fun.

Speaking of conferences, it is not too early to be thinking about the 2012 WLA Conference. The conference, to be held April 18–20 at the Tulalip Resort, is already shaping up to be an absolutely topnotch event, under the expert lead of Conference Committee Chair, Kristin Piepho. Make plans to attend, and then stick around for other things to do in the “Northwest Corner” (such as shopping at the outlet mall next door to the Resort or coming just up the road to the Skagit Tulip Festival, with tulips in magnificent colorful bloom in mid-April—I’m a local Chamber of Commerce board member and they made me say that).

I spent a good amount of time during my first half-year as President working on a revision of the WLA Institutional Membership dues structure. The WLA Board passed the dues structure revision at its September 20 meeting and I make a direct appeal in *Alki*, as I have in other forums, to all the libraries in Washington to “re-up” if currently an Institutional Member of WLA or to become a member if not. (For most libraries, Institutional Membership dues will be less than they were under the old structure.) WLA does important and crucial work (often in Olympia during legislative session) that benefits all libraries. That work isn’t easy and it doesn’t come cheap. We need to “grow the base” and work together to make sure that WLA stays strong and

libraries in the state stay strong. I deeply appreciate the support of numerous library directors and of the WLA Board in working on building this more sustainable revenue structure for WLA.

I’m going to try again: One-on-one services. Regrettably, I don’t do too much of this anymore. When I talk to patrons at the library and they need help, I very often turn things over to someone on my excellent staff, knowing that the patron will be better served that way. But of course one-on-one service matters. When a staff member goes the extra mile for an individual patron, giving extraordinary customer service and getting exactly the outcome the patron wanted (sometimes when the patron wasn’t even sure what “exactly what I wanted” was)—those are the times that I get the glowing letters or emails or knocks on my door from deeply appreciative patrons.

My staff members, like everyone reading this column, work so hard on these one-on-one efforts to provide great service because it is the right thing to do and it is in their hearts to do this. But every one of these satisfied customers is a potential donor or volunteer or person who will take the podium at public comment period at a city council or county commissioner meeting and say, “I love my library—you must support it.”

I’ll never forget what my esteemed colleague Ray Serebrin, director of the Jefferson County Library District, said to me in reference to getting every last precious “yes” vote in a levy lid lift election: “I would meet one guy in the middle of a forest in the middle of the night to talk about the value of the library.”

One-on-one service matters. It matters to the survival of your library and all libraries. Ray and everyone reading this column—it’s worth it! Thank you for doing it!
“Alki,” a Native American word meaning “bye and bye,” was suggested by Nancy Pryor, Special Collections at Washington State Library, as the title for the Washington Library Association’s journal. “Alki” is also the state motto, signifying a focus on the future.

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Alki’s purpose is to communicate philosophical and substantive analyses of current and enduring issues for and about Washington libraries, personnel, and advocates, and to facilitate the exchange of research, opinion, and information.

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Alki was designed by Tammy Reniche, Director of Publications for Melby Cameron & Anderson.

Cover photo: Rodrigo Heredia provides roving computer assistance at North Seattle Community College Library. See article on page 6.
From the Editor

by Bo Kinney

We all know that journalism is sensational. Events get blown out of proportion, and news reports never seem to reflect our day-to-day lives. This can be exhausting, but in a sense, it is simply the nature of the news. Journalists report on events that are out of the ordinary—that’s what makes them newsworthy. Hence the old saw about a man biting a dog.

The same could be said of Alki. What tend to get reported in these pages are the librarian-bites-dog occurrences: innovative initiatives, successful programs, risky ventures—in a word, the exceptional. As it should be. Readers turn to Alki for ideas about new things to try, for inspiration. And on that score this issue does not disappoint. Elinor Appel and Dan Tarker share their success with an innovative collaboration between North Seattle Community College’s library and writing center to teach students basic computer skills (p. 6). David Wright, once again taking a break from his regular “I’d Rather be Reading” spot, describes the Seattle Public Library’s experiments with form-based readers’ advisory (p. 9). And Julie Miller recommends a novel way of thinking about advocacy (p. 11.)

But the nature of this issue’s theme, one-on-one services, also gives us the opportunity to reflect on the more quotidian aspects of library work. Why? Because one-on-one services are our stock in trade. Anyone who works in public services knows this well: a great storytime or outreach visit may be a key component of our work, but what we do best (or, at least, most) is help people one-on-one: checking out someone’s books, recommending a good read, or helping a patron find the answer to a reference question. And even the behind-the-scenes work that those of us outside the realm of “public services” engage in—acquisitions, cataloguing, shelving, and even building design—is still geared toward the personal, individual interaction between a patron and the collection.

Several of this issue’s authors have approached the theme from this more everyday perspective. Sarah Lynch reflects on dealing with materials challenges (p. 5). Tami Robinson writes about the process of mentoring new librarians (p. 13). And Kirsten Edwards offers some helpful advice for those routine, dog-bites-librarian moments (p. 22).

This issue marks the close of Sue Anderson’s term as chair of the Alki editorial committee. Sue has provided outstanding leadership of the committee for the past two years, and I have greatly enjoyed working with her. I am happy to report that Diane Cowles is stepping up to take the helm. This leaves us with one vacancy on the editorial committee, so if you or someone you know would like to help spread the news about Washington libraries, please contact Diane at diane.cowles@spl.org.

Letter to the Editor:

I read Kate Laughlin’s article “Energizing WILL” with great interest because I was associated with WLFFTA for more than a decade [“The Learning Curve,” July 2011]. I was chagrined that there was no mention of the outstanding contributions to educating Friends, trustees, and advocates by Amory Peck, Athalie Kirschenbaum, Audrey Stupke, and Victoria Parker; nor was there any mention of the Friends’ Forums that we held in alternate years to the WILL conference, let alone the iconic Frog that symbolized our leap into the 21st century. For a few years, we also had a separate interest group, Grassroots, dedicated to cultivating library advocates. Both interest groups published regular newsletters, planned conference programs, and held events to encourage Friends, trustees, and library advocates to share their concerns and news of their activities.

Patience Rogge, Trustee emeritus
Jefferson County Library

[While Kate’s article was not intended to be an in-depth history of WLFFTA or WILL, Alki would welcome submissions on these topics. –Ed.]

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Join WLA

Bo Kinney is a librarian in the Special Collections department of the Seattle Public Library.
Is It “Everybody’s Job to Report Challenges”? Who’s Responsible?

by Sarah Lynch

I recently became aware of a new campaign sponsored by the American Library Association’s Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF), entitled, “It’s Everybody’s Job.”¹

The idea was conceived by librarian Andy Woodworth, who, along with the OIF, is concerned that the underreporting of material challenges greatly deflates their statistics and doesn’t give an accurate representation of how many incidents are actually occurring in our libraries.

Well, this campaign has gotten me thinking about challenges, and how I’ve dealt with them in my profession. I’ve been at this librarian career for about ten years, and I’ve never reported a challenge. Not a single one. And if I do the math, I’ve dealt with a number of these, too many to count. I’m experiencing some librarian guilt on my underreporting, but it’s not too late for change.

Sure, I’ve dealt with many patrons frantic or upset about something they’ve found on our shelves. But what exactly constitutes a challenge? According to the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee, a challenge can fall into several areas: Expression of Concern, Oral Complaint, Written Complaint, Public Attack, and Censorship.²

“My 10-year-old found a comic book with naked people in it right next to Garfield!” “My teenage daughter read a book about oral sex!” “I didn’t know Not-Rated movies could be so violent! Why don’t you put a warning on this?” “Do you know you have this filth in your collection?”

Filth can be very subjective, but yep, I know it’s there. Every library has material that will offend someone. In the majority of my interactions, I’m able to explain our intellectual freedom policies and our purchasing decisions, and encourage objectors to monitor their kids’ behaviors and ask for “cleaner” suggestions.

I’ve prided myself on developing my skills in how I deal with these irate patrons. Now I view these discussions as an educational opportunity for intellectual freedom, rather than feeling personally attacked.

Your library (hopefully) has procedures in place for handling situations that aren’t resolved after these conversations. A chain of command can involve referring to your supervisor or having the patron submit a formal complaint. In some instances, these complaints can go all the way to your principal, library director, or board.

Often patrons will reiterate that they are not trying to censor anything.

Notes


Sarah Lynch is a Teen Services Librarian at the King County Library System.
One-on-one Basic Computer Skills Tutoring: A Partnership between North Seattle Community College Library and Writing Center

by Elinor Appel and Dan Tarker

Make no mistake. The digital divide is alive and well on community college campuses.

Those of us who work directly with the many ESL students and adult learners returning to school after years in the workforce see this divide on a daily basis. While many younger students navigate the internet and other computer applications with complete ease, these other groups of students come into our libraries and computer labs with a tremendous amount of fear and anxiety. They do not know how to format documents. They don’t know how to save and attach files to emails. And some may barely even know how to use a mouse. It’s an issue that poses a significant barrier to student success and retention.

As this problem became more visible last year—perhaps owing to the increasing presence of older, displaced workers on campus—North Seattle Community College Library partnered with the college’s writing center to offer one-on-one tutoring services to students lacking basic computer skills. In addition, we also designed and implemented free basic computer skills workshops on Microsoft Word and PowerPoint modeled after ones offered by the Seattle Public Library. With funds from our college’s Student Success Committee, we ran a pilot of this program to see if there was indeed need for this kind of support and if these types of interventions would produce positive outcomes. We found both to be true. The program was so successful that this year we were able to grow it using funds from Student Leadership and eLearning, essentially doubling our budget for this vital service.

An invisible need

“My jaw is dropping,” a Technical Writing instructor said when we told her about the need for basic computer tutoring on campus. “Coming from a technical background, I find this quite shocking.”

This is an example of one of the most problematic issues surrounding the digital divide: many people who do not work with non-traditional students re-entering college are not aware that this divide still exists. In an age where seemingly everyone is running around with some kind of digital device on their person, be it a laptop, a smart phone, or tablet, it is difficult for those on the technically rich side of the digital divide to imagine there may be people who still do not know how to use a computer.

Yet many librarians and educators are acutely aware of this invisible population, primarily composed of immigrant ESL students who have not been exposed to computers before coming to the United States and of returning workers who did not use computers in their previous jobs and do not own them at home. When given an assignment requiring basic knowledge of Microsoft applications such as Word and PowerPoint, these students face greater challenges than their peers: not only do they need to learn the course content, but they also need to learn the tools to create and turn in their work. Many of these students also do not know how to upload an assignment to email or to Angel, our college’s Learning Management System. Indeed, some students struggle with basic functions such as saving and finding files or right-clicking to highlight or cut and paste their work. We felt that this gap in basic-computer skills was a needless barrier to student success and a relatively easy problem to solve.

Because we both sat on committees related to student preparedness, student success, retention, and technology, we heard the same anecdotes and stories from a variety of sources: under-prepared but enterprising students were finding and receiving help with basic technical problems all over campus. These sources of help included division secretaries, eLearning staff, friendly instructors, IT tutors, and of course librarians and writing tutors. Unfortunately, the level of help these students needed was time-consuming. It was often easier for the helper simply to take the mouse and save, upload, find, or format the file him- or herself. As a result, the students were not learning these skills themselves but rather returning to their helper the next time they needed to accomplish a task. Such a situation is far from copacetic, not only because the helper needed to set aside time to accomplish the task for the student, but also because students were frequently anxious, angry, or ashamed that they could not do the task themselves. As willing as they were to help, campus employees often did not have the training, much less the time, to address the students’ frustration. The library, like other services on campus, was struggling to meet student needs after significant staff shortages. Where could these students go to learn these all-important skills themselves?

As a quick fix, we worked with our eLearning division to create a list of resources for students. These resources were posted on our eLearning’s website and included public library systems, WorkSource, and Goodwill. Unfortunately, none of these resources were designed with our particular student user group in mind. WorkSource workshops were geared toward the job search, and Goodwill required enrollment in a specific pre-college program. Additionally, our students required point-of-need help here in

Elinor Appel is a Reference and Instruction Librarian and Dan Tarker is the Director of the Loft Writing Center at North Seattle Community College.

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Tutor Yai Laohaprasit provides roving computer assistance

our tutoring center and library. When a workshop partnership with the Seattle Public Library fell through owing to lack of funding, we turned to our campus community to fill this need and designed our own workshop and services.

A home-grown program

We decided to offer students two levels of service: free walk-in workshops offered several times over the quarter, along with computer tutors who were screened for their ability to work with all kinds of learners and could be trained to resist the temptation to take the mouse and do the job themselves. After securing funding to pilot our program, we approached an ESL instructor and asked her to modify her keyboarding and computer skills curriculum into two bare-bones two-hour workshops. The first workshop focuses on Word and the second on PowerPoint. Both workshops teach students how to open, format, save, and find their work in that application, as well as attach and send files by email. These workshops are offered twice a quarter, once at the beginning and then again later in the quarter, when larger and more involved assignments are due—and when students realize they need help with these basic tasks. The workshops take place in computer classrooms and are paced slowly enough that students have sufficient time to ask questions, get help from tutors assisting in the workshops, and follow along doing the workshop projects themselves.

Our second and most important level of service is the one-on-one training offered by our computer tutors. These tutors are either students themselves or recent graduates. They are familiar with both the online courseware and general assignments. We have been lucky to find tutors who have the additional benefit of being non-native, fluent English speakers or returning students. These tutors had to learn these same skills themselves and can empathize with those they are helping. The tutors’ job is to provide roving computer assistance in both the library and the tutoring center, located upstairs in the library building. They help students to do simple tasks ranging from printing to double-spacing a document to uploading a file. When time permits, they may help students with specific assignments in business and history classes such as working on Excel documents or formatting footnotes in Word. Our first year we were very lucky to be able to hire two motivated and professional tutors who took on ownership of the project and created a job description for training this year’s tutors as well as a spreadsheet for tutors to log student contacts. One of the tutors even took on the work of training tutors on the spreadsheet, leading the workshops, and updating the workshop content and handouts when our campus upgraded to Windows 7 this year. In fact, a side advantage we didn’t consider when we started this service was the experience and résumé-building work these positions offered our student tutors.

Thriving in a data-driven era

So how did we take a couple thousand dollars in seed funds and grow it to a $22,000 budget in only six months during this era of perpetual budget cutting? Two factors helped us enormously. The first was the recognition by colleagues on campus that this one-on-one tutoring service was indeed an important project that addressed unmet student needs. However, this recognition doesn’t completely answer the question. What helped us even more was our commitment to data collection. Many good programs have floundered and failed because those in charge failed to collect adequate data to demonstrate the needs of the program to administrators. We were determined not to fall into that trap. Therefore, we worked with our computer tutors to design a data collection system on Excel in which they could record each student contact and what type of computer skill they helped with. We are still working out some kinks in the system, but the data does help us make our case for continued funding. For instance, during the month of October 2011 alone, our tutors helped students with 594 questions. The main areas they addressed included Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, printing, Angel, and computer ID issues. In addition, 31 students attended our fall-quarter computer-skills workshops.

Next steps?

While addressing basic computer needs was indeed a relatively easy problem to solve, sustaining our program is not as simple. It requires our continued time and attention in hiring, training, and managing our tutors, advertising our services, and of course applying for funding. We failed to secure funds from several sources last year. We know that the funding process will only become more challenging in the years to come. If this service is to continue to thrive, we will need to link it directly to student success and retention, and not rely on anecdotes and local statistics to tell our story.
“Can You Meet with Me on Friday?”: Personalized Library Instruction by Appointment

by Theresa Kappus, Kelly Jenks, and Adrian Pauw

During library orientation sessions, we emphasize to students the importance of asking for help. There are many ways they can contact the library: phone, email, text, chat, drop-in and by making an appointment with a librarian. Our librarians are happy to receive emails similar to this one:

Do you have time to meet with me either Friday afternoon or Wednesday morning to discuss search terms in a research project I am engaged in? I suspect with your expertise that 30–60 minutes will be adequate.

The one-on-one session works especially well for graduate and doctoral students and for faculty members who consider the one-on-one office visit a safe place to reveal their ignorance of online databases. Undergraduates working on senior history projects and the occasional wide-eyed “lost soul” also benefit from this type of individual instruction and support.

Here are some of our individual observations from our experiences with one-on-one reference appointments:

Theresa Kappus

As the Distance Services Librarian, appointments with “my” students usually take place over the phone, but some seek out the library when they are in town. This past summer, a graduate student from Fargo, ND, asked for an hour of my time during her week-long stay in Spokane. We covered database searching tips, citing sources, using RefWorks, what’s different about a Mac, and how the horrible flooding in North Dakota was affecting our friends (I once lived in Minot, ND). This type of personal connection often occurs in one-on-one sessions, and I believe it contributes to a positive academic experience for an adult student. They generally need the most assistance using the online library and genuinely appreciate any support they receive.

By the way, to distant students struggling with the concept of database searching, I recommend they make an appointment with a local librarian for some face-to-face help. I also suggest they bring an offering of chocolate, but it is my hope that the opportunity to enlighten a life-long learner will be all the incentive necessary for a librarian to pitch in and help.

Kelly Jenks

Most of my individual appointments are with older students, who do seem to need more personal attention. I have had almost every kind of question during appointments: RefWorks assistance, choosing a topic, looking for supporting articles, how to do a literature review, etc.

In staff discussions about a remodel of the reference area, we have talked about moving one-on-one interviews to a more public location. That may help move things along more quickly and also be a bit more professional, but I like students to come to my office, too.

Pros: I like the personal touch and the instruction being completely tailored. Something that helps me do a better job is having a comfortable chair for them, a second monitor for my computer, and a keyboard that swivels for the “how it’s your turn” moments.

Cons: Sometimes these sessions last too long, and sometimes appointments with multiple students feel redundant. Gather the interested and I’ll teach a class!

Adrian Pauw

My typical appointments are “make-up” sessions with students who miss a library instruction session that was required by their professor, or extensions of an involved reference interview. I also mention to my classes the value of making an appointment with a librarian, but have only had a couple of takers—Biology students who had very specific questions on resources and key databases. The upper-division students have enough experience with research to be able to identify and articulate their needs more clearly, and have a better understanding of the rigorous requirements of their field. And they’re freaked out. They’re primed for one-on-one reference services!

Pros:

- Tailored to the individual’s research needs: relevant and timely
- We forge positive long-term relationships with library patrons (great PR!)
- One-on-one sessions can have an impact on collection development. We learn from these in-depth discussions how students go about their research. It can point to gaps in instruction and also provide insight on what additional resources may be needed.

Cons:

- Can be time consuming
- In the case of “make-up” classes for students: a one-on-one session is really not an equivalent replacement, because much of the work in a library instruction session is done in collaboration with classmates. A one-on-one session is certainly beneficial, but it will not replace that group classroom experience.

It can be time consuming, but there are many advantages to meeting patrons one-on-one. You can cover one topic in depth or answer a lot of questions all at once. Best of all, you can easily tell if a student “gets it”: whether that student is a freshman or a tenured faculty member.

Theresa Kappus is the Distance Services Librarian, Kelly Jenks is the Instruction Coordinator, and Adrian Pauw is an Instruction Librarian at Gonzaga University’s Foley Center Library.
Your Next Five Books: What Form-Based Readers’ Advisory Can Do for You

by David Wright

If you’re looking for ways to offer more and better readers’ advisory (RA) for your patrons, consider taking it online. The Seattle Public Library recently launched our second foray into virtual RA, and it has been a very positive experience for us and our patrons. Here’s what we’ve done, and why we did it.

There are a maddening number of reasons that libraries do a bad job of readers’ advisory, or do no job of it at all. In his 2006 article “Improving the Model for Interactive Readers’ Advisory Service” Neil Hollands makes the case for online, form-based readers’ advisory by enumerating many of what he calls the “faulty assumptions” underlying traditional “live” readers’ advisory, such as that patrons will approach us, that they will approach the right person to help them, that we will get enough information from the reader, and that we can do RA well given the time constraints of live service. While this doesn’t for a minute make me question the value or primacy of talking face-to-face with readers about books, Hollands raises some good points.

Even if your library provides consistently excellent readers’ advisory—and few of us do—there is still the issue of getting word to our patrons that we do this. Almost none of them expect readers’ advisory. Quite a few of our staff don’t expect to provide it either. Offering online advisory markets this service to the public while making it explicit to staff just what readers’ advisory is and what it entails. Virtual RA might even help bridge any schisms between your “book people” and your “tech people.”

The gist of form-based readers’ advisory is simple. Patrons fill out a form designed to get them to share the kinds of things they enjoy about reading. This form then goes to designated staff, who respond to the patron—generally in writing—with suggestions for further reading. The medium for this exchange can be anything from a no-frills email-based service to elaborate, multi-stage online forms. You can even make printed forms available to staff and patrons in your libraries. As for the form, there are many varied examples out there on the web to help guide you in creating your own, from the wonderful custom-designed form at Edmonton Library to a simple open-field form such as ours, to the granddaddy of them all at Williamsburg Regional Library. A web search for “Personalized Reading List” will bring up scores of other libraries offering this service.

So primed, we set out to provide our own online personalized reading list service in the summer of 2008. We created a form, put it up on our website, and waited to see if anyone would take the bait. We didn’t have to wait long, as the forms began pouring in, and within a few short months we’d had more submissions than the folks at Williamsburg had received in years. Our practice was to create a list of 8–12 items (a range we established after some of us went rather overboard, sending mega-lists of 30 or 40 titles to particularly avid readers), all wrapped in a personal message with snippets of reviews to help describe the books.

We used an impromptu wiki as our working space, which allowed us to collaborate on lists, suggesting titles to each other. This turned out to be one of the greatest side-benefits of form-based advisory, as interactions that previously had been private and ephemeral suddenly had a concrete and tangible form that could be shared, mulled over, and assessed. This created a readers’ advisory laboratory of sorts, prompting us to be more thoughtful about our reading suggestions, and helping us all to have a more open-minded discourse about our work. Working across a few different platforms did decrease our efficiency, however.

Soon the library love began to flow in from our patrons. Not just thanks, but raves. Patrons were over the moon about the lists they’d gotten. Many were amazed that an actual librarian had taken the time to assist them in this way: this was a so much better than the automated responses they got...
from Amazon. One message read “Really, this is the best gift I have ever gotten.” Another gushed “I love you and everyone who helped out with this list!” Exclamation points and all caps were the norm. Best of all, this zealous praise in support of readers’ advisory was written down in a form we could share with our library board, which of course we did. Then, after five months of unqualified success, we shut the service down.

Why? We simply couldn’t keep up with the demand. With a small number of librarians working on the project and no way of controlling the number of questions that were coming in (largely through word-of-mouth advertising), the service was starting to encroach upon all our other duties. The lists were hand-crafted for each reader, which our patrons loved, but which made the lists labor-intensive. Regretfully, we closed up shop at the start of 2009, with a muttered vow to return some day.

In 2011 the library secured a grant from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation in support of promoting readers’ advisory and services across our system, and we got our second chance. With funding that helped us to set aside some space and time, we vowed to learn from our mistakes and create an online readers’ advisory service that would preserve the human, personal touch that patrons so valued about the service, but that could be sustainable over the long term in a city filled with readers. In addition, we wanted to incorporate our teen librarians’ successful online RA services as to their reading tastes, but in a way that would allow varying levels of engagement and not be off-putting to younger readers. As expected, the number of questions that were coming in (largely through word-of-mouth advertising), the service was starting to encroach upon all our other duties. The lists were hand-crafted for each reader, which our patrons loved, but which made the lists labor-intensive. Regretfully, we closed up shop at the start of 2009, with a muttered vow to return some day.

So far, our current setup has worked well. We have been conservative in publicizing the service and forms continue to trickle in at a manageable rate, but we have been able to weather some spikes in traffic (after an article in the local newspaper we received about 200 requests in two days) without capsizing. In addition to reaching patrons well beyond our libraries’ walls, the form provides a convenient way for staff around our system to collaborate with our Central Library’s Reader Services department. Down the road we look forward to setting up an anonymous peer review process, as a team-training tool for staff and a way to help establish and ensure best practices.

Oh yes, and the praise keeps on coming in, stashed away in our handy “kudos file.” Here’s a sampling from this month’s thanks: “This is the best email I’ve ever received!” “It really is great to see the library’s staff in action: all of the librarians and library assistants consistently provide timely and excellent customer service.” “Your email reminded me why I must never forget to make a donation to the Friends of SPL. Blown away by your level of thoughtfulness…” “I know we aren’t friends and that you are just doing your job…but this is the best present anyone has ever given me!...Thank you a million times!”

Consider implementing forms-based readers’ advisory at your library, either online or via printed forms. If you’re an individual practitioner in a library that isn’t offering this service, you can still add personalized reading lists to your own practice. When you have a readers’ advisory conversation, in addition to whatever suggestions you provide the patron at the time offer to follow up by sending them a list of other suggestions. This buys you time to contemplate their interests, do a little research, or confer with your colleagues. It also lets your patrons know how seriously you take their reading needs, building service relationships and establishing conversations that can last for years.

Notes

Thinking Beyond the Desk

by Julie Miller

We knew each other in graduate school twenty years ago, when she was an aspiring visual artist and I was an aspiring poet. Now, we have reconnected via Facebook. Naturally, we exchanged our current reading lists. I mentioned reading the new biography of Lee Krasner, the abstract expressionist painter. “Oh!” wrote my friend, “I want to read that. I’m going to add it to my Amazon wish list.”

My knee-jerk response (unsurprisingly) was to suggest checking out the Krasner bio from her local library. But my friend pooh-poohed the library as a viable alternative to Amazon. “I live in a really small town,” she said. “And, anyway, it’s inconvenient for Dad to load my wheelchair into the car and take me.”

The more I thought about my friend, the more I wondered about her public library and the difference it could make in her life. So I Googled her library and discovered it has a bookmobile service for the home-bound—they will deliver library resources to her door! I e-mailed her the contact information and got a response right away: “Oh, thank you! I did not even know they had such a service. Yay for Julie the librarian! I will definitely use this.”

Thinking beyond the desk is powerful—yet often unexpected. How wonderful that my friend’s local library supports this bookmobile service, continuing the tradition of delivering one-to-one library services at point of need since Mary Titcomb introduced her Library Wagon in Washington County, Maryland in 1905. Now, technology enables library users to transcend barriers of time and place to read journal articles, download audiobooks, get research assistance, and request books. Amazing!

Yet my tech-savvy friend—a regular user of Facebook and Amazon—didn’t use the library for her information needs because it was difficult to get to the library building.

This exchange had as much impact on me, I think, as it did on my friend. Sometimes it takes personal contact outside of the context of the library—such as a message from a long-lost friend sitting at her home computer two thousand miles away—to give good library service at point of need.

Many people need services that are readily available through their library, yet they never use the library, for whatever reason: inconvenience, misconceptions, even fear or intimidation. Sometimes, serving the under-served (or un-served) requires thinking beyond the desk, beyond the walls of the library, even beyond the library Web site. The following questions may help to spark some ideas for developing one-to-one services beyond the desk at your library:

Do we have a service gap?

Think about your library’s mission and the community of users you serve. Then look around. Do a mental inventory of the library users with whom you interact (physically or virtually). Are all of the user groups represented? Who’s missing?

The mission statement of the American Library Association’s Office for Literacy and Outreach Services lists user groups that are traditionally underserved: “new and non-readers, people geographically isolated, people with disabilities, rural and urban poor people, and people generally discriminated against based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, language and social class.” Your library has a unique constituency, and it’s worth taking the time to compare the demographics of the community the library intends to serve to the one it actually serves.

Sometimes the service gap defies conventional wisdom, and the people you’d expect to use the library don’t. Academic libraries, for example, may experience trends in faculty use by discipline, e.g., faculty in the sciences using Public Library of Science, PubMed, or other open access resources instead of the library’s subscription to Web of Science. Even those who

Julie Miller is a free-range librarian, writer, and editor who lives and works in Spokane.

Continued on page 12
use the library’s online resources may not realize they are using the library because, if they search from an office on campus, the login to the subscription database is automatic.

How can I “meet them where they are”? Educators often speak of meeting students “where they are” in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities. This strategy is relevant for those of us who work in libraries as well—we are sensitive to the fact that some folks have never used a mouse, not to mention a smartphone. As library resources and services become more varied and in some cases more complex, we offer library users both one-to-one and class assistance in how to navigate the changing information terrain.

So how do we meet library non-users “where they are”? Since they’re not in the library (physically or virtually), it often means literally stepping away from the desk and walking out the door. Nadean Meyer, a colleague who was a school librarian for many years, makes it a priority to connect to at least one potential library user outside of her library every working day. When I expressed awe at her ability to make these connections, Nadean insisted it wasn’t rocket science—just a strategy I can, and should, learn. As she goes about the business of her day—attending committee meetings, teaching classes, having lunch—she simply listens to the people around her. Almost inevitably, someone during the course of the day expresses a need for an information resource or service the library provides. And Nadean offers to help. Simple!

Try this strategy the next time you go to a PTA meeting, church fellowship gathering, or poker night—or the next time you log onto Facebook. The results will surprise and gratify you.

Do I understand their information needs? One of the best jobs I ever had was working as a solo librarian for a small consulting firm in Massachusetts that studied transportation noise and vibration. I learned a great deal about DIALOG searches, journal holdings at MIT libraries, aeronautical maneuvers to minimize noise impacts, and—to my great surprise—customer service. As a small business, this company worked very hard to exceed its clients’ expectations. “I want to know what keeps my clients awake at night,” one of the founders of the company told me. “If we can solve the problem that causes their insomnia, then we’ve provided quality customer service.”

The impressive thing was, the engineers at this company did not assume they knew the clients’ needs nor presume to have all of the answers right off the bat. They asked questions. They listened. They approached each project as the start of a long-term relationship. They built trust through understanding, which led to mutual success.

In a recent article in Education Leadership, teacher Jennifer Tovbin describes a similar process in working with her students, moving beyond “diagnosing their skills” to “discovering who they were and what was important to them.” Understanding and trust build a foundation for success.

In your inventory of library users, are formal or informal decision-makers (e.g., elected officials, board members, administrators, local business owners, and soccer moms) among the missing? If so, consider the impact their absence may have on your library during the next bond initiative or budget cycle. Has the library taken their support for granted and lost sight of their information needs, leaving them to find fulfillment with Google, Amazon, and Barnes & Noble? It may be time to rebuild your relationship!

Who are potential partners for serving our non-users? Even my friend Nadean recognizes the need to be strategic in making connections with library non-users. Building one-to-one relationships beyond the desk takes time and energy. Once you understand the information needs of the non-user community, a partner—especially one that has already built a relationship with the community of non-users—may help your library to reach a broader segment of the community.

Fortunately, better minds than mine, in libraries of all types from all around the country, have documented their outreach partnerships. Consider the following chapter titles from Librarians as Community Partners: An Outreach Handbook, edited by Carol Smallwood:

- “Has Your Public Librarian Been to Prison? Participation in Shared Grant Projects”
- “Dinner with the Presidents: Teaming Up with the Yours Truly Restaurant Chain”
- “A Friend in Need: Partnering with an Employment Center”
- “Laptop Literacy: Language and Computer Literacy Services to Refugees in Burlington, Vermont”
- “Reading Matters in Mentor: Library Services at the Pools and Beaches on Ohio’s North Coast”

Libraries are partnering with all sorts of organizations to provide better service to their constituencies. The key to a successful partnership is finding the intersection of purpose—the sweet spot where the missions of the partnership organizations align. Whether your partner is a restaurant or a prison, a shared purpose makes the partnership a win-win proposition.

Meanwhile, I am regularly following my friend’s wall posts about current art exhibits and funny YouTube videos. I haven’t asked if she has gotten the Krasner biography or had a visit from the bookmobile. I don’t want to push. If she is building a relationship with her library—well, these things take time.

Notes
Mentoring Aspiring New Librarians: One-on-One Relationships That Matter

by Tami Echavarria Robinson

Mentoring seems to come naturally to some of us. We teach, we guide, we encourage. In some libraries where I have worked during my 25-year career, there were few of us with that inclination. In other libraries, such as Whitworth University Library, our staff includes several willing mentors. We are satisfied with our own career choice and glad to share it with others who might be interested. Some of us mentor students on an ongoing basis, year after year, from the various cohorts of students who make up our undergraduate population. Sometimes some of these students are intrigued with what we do, or intrigued with the library environment, and we are able to help them see a possible career path in librarianship. When they graduate, they go on to earn their MLIS degrees. Sometimes we hear from them afterwards and learn they have secured a first job in a library and are beginning their careers as librarians. That is gratifying and keeps us committed to mentoring even more students.

Mentoring always seems to evolve from an initial contact in which the librarian and the student strike up a conversation and something seems to connect between us. As we meet again and again, the mentoring relationship develops. The relationship is a one-on-one service in which the librarian takes a genuine interest in the life of the student. Sometimes it takes the course of just encouraging students in their present careers as students. Other times it goes further into career directions after graduation. Sometimes the conversation continues long beyond that point, when students return to talk to their mentors about further career moves. One just never knows, when a student becomes a colleague, how long the friendship will last.

Years ago, as I made the decision to become a librarian, and during my studies in library school, there were several librarians who took their time to mentor me. I did not realize at that time that they were passing on their wisdom about the profession to me. I only realized then that they were willing to help and guide me. They were all generous with their time and wisdom and each made significant impact on my choices. Perhaps I learned from their example that this is something that matters. I have always mentored students toward careers in librarianship, even when I was the only librarian in a large library willing to take the time to do so. Mentorship has always mattered to those students; many of them became librarians. They became my colleagues.

As the years passed I have always thought of them as colleagues even if we have never worked together in the same library. We have met time and again at conferences, emailed or talked on the telephone occasionally, even visited one another once in a while. It is always gratifying to catch a glimpse of how they are succeeding in their careers and that they are satisfied with their career choice. Some of these colleagues, née students, now mentor students of their own following the example I provided them. And so the cycle of librarians mentoring prospective librarians goes on.

Sometimes we have the privilege of mentoring library school interns. In our library we are currently working with an MLIS student who is interested particularly in reference and public service. Since he is still at an early stage of his degree program, he is not yet interested in specific job opportunities or career guidance. He has never worked in a library, so giving him the hands-on experience and exposure to our decision-making processes and priorities meets his immediate needs. We are allowing him to try out reference, some collection development, and other projects to help him choose his own focus while we instruct, guide, and serve as role models. It wouldn’t surprise me if he comes back to ask our further advice in due time when he begins to look beyond the attainment of his degree toward job opportunities. The mentoring relationship leaves the door open for this.

“Mentorship has always mattered to those students; many of them became librarians. They became my colleagues.”

Tami Echavarria Robinson is Coordinator of Instructional Services at Whitworth University Library.
We have had a stable staff at Whitworth University library for a long time. As the most recent hire, I was the “new kid on the block” for over ten years. But about a year and a half ago our library began a series of changes that I didn’t quite anticipate. I had to experience how the changes came one after another in order to understand their impact. One of my colleagues, the one who had been in our library the longest, retired. When we hired his replacement, we chose a younger librarian coming to us from her first job after library school. She spent her first year learning her new job and the culture of our campus community. During that year we also hired a part-time librarian, a younger librarian still working on her dissertation in library and information science. The dynamics in our library suddenly shifted, and I found myself as one of the senior librarians, not the newest anymore.

That year, those of us who had been at our library longer began guiding the younger librarians as they became familiar with our university, our library, and us. It seemed that suddenly I was mentoring younger librarians as well as students. I think our library director had deliberately thought it through before I even realized what was happening. We were training the next librarians in our library to take over when it would be their turn to become the senior librarians.

When another colleague left recently on sabbatical, we hired a temporary librarian. He has worked in a support staff position at a nearby university and was given considerable responsibility in that role. He has just completed his MLIS, so our temporary job is his first professional position. Because his position is temporary as a sabbatical replacement, mentoring him is different from the two young librarians we’d hired before him. What he learns from us will give him additional professional skills and experience to move him along to his next job opportunity. In the present job market, he has considerable anxiety about where the next opportunity will be and when it will present itself to him. That has become part of the one-on-one encouragement of this mentoring relationship, and plays an important part in keeping him optimistic about the profession and his role in it. We may play only a brief role in his career development, but what we do and how we do it matters. Fore me, in the one-on-one relationship with this new librarian it is important to be a role model, to encourage him, and most significantly to let him know that his success as a librarian matters to me. He is my colleague, he is a good librarian, and I sincerely believe that someone at some library will do well to hire him.

Sometimes the dynamics change when I’m not even paying attention. It is when my role changes that I become aware that the dynamics around me have changed significantly and are impacting me. Now I am one of the senior librarians in our library, and this summer a significant decade birthday seemed to shift my attention to the years I have left in my career. I realize this is probably my last decade as a librarian, something I have never considered before. I want libraries to continue beyond the time that I will retire. I realize that younger librarians will take over my role and it is time to think seriously about passing on the knowledge I have gained from this profession to these younger librarians. It seems that suddenly mentoring has taken on an additional new meaning and importance. It is time to pass on what I know and let others build on it.

Just as older librarians retired and my cohort took over years ago, so now younger librarians are coming in behind us. It matters how we accept them into the profession. They are the librarians who are the future of libraries and information science. It is an exciting vision to peek into the future and see the younger librarians whom we will cede the profession. These are my younger colleagues to whom I entrust a profession that means a lot to me. It is gratifying to glimpse into the future and have hope that all will be well with libraries.
As I sit in my cubicle on a dreary October afternoon, I long for April—not only for the promise of spring, but for the arrival of the 2012 WLA Conference, One Tribe: Bringing Washington’s Libraries Together. Each year I eagerly anticipate the opportunity to network with and learn from you, my colleagues throughout the state.

While I still don’t have full details (the conference is still six months away, for goodness’ sake), let me see if I can entice you into joining us in Tulalip on April 18-20.

Five Reasons to Attend the 2012 WLA Conference

1. **Keynote speakers**: Nancy Pearl and Dan Savage. What a dynamic set of speakers! Both consistently get rave reviews and are audience favorites across the country, and we’re fortunate enough to have them both in our own backyard.

2. **Performer showcase**: In these tight times, how do you ensure that each programming dollar is money well-spent? We’ll be organizing children’s, teen, and adult performers on our preconference day to give you a chance to try before you buy.

3. **Collaborative art project**: One of the pieces of feedback we received after last year’s conference was how difficult it is for first-timers to meet new people. What better way to address this than through a shared goal, whether or not you think you’re artistic?

4. **Excellent programs**: This year, we received over 60 proposals to fill up 30-some slots with high-quality programs. We hope to have something for everyone—old favorites along with new and innovative ideas.

5. **Location, location, location**: Tulips, outlet malls, and a resort, oh my—all conveniently located on I-5. If you can’t attend the entire conference, stop by for just a day and visit one of your friendly neighborhood Sno-Isle Libraries on the way.

I’m still interested in getting input from all of you! If you have any suggestions or ideas, please feel free to contact me at kpiepho@sno-isle.org.

Kristin Piepho is the Children’s Services Coordinator at Sno-Isle Libraries and is the 2012 WLA Conference Chair.
Several years ago, the last time Gail Willis and I met for lunch, we were brainstorming the nominations process for upcoming elections. I was new to the job as Nominations Chairperson, so who else to call for help but Gail Willis? As with many other times and needs, Gail held my hand from the start, and the committee eventually produced a slate of candidates that included two people for every slot.

WLA’s longtime executive director until her retirement in 2008, Gail has been a member of WLA since 1973 and has always been active in the association. She was hired in 1994 as a part-time “Corresponding Secretary.” This was probably never intended to be a long-term position, she says, but “the job just grew and grew over the years. Some of that was because members working in libraries were allowed less and less time for ‘professional involvement’ and partly I think because good customer service is one of my passions. I tried very hard to be a coordinator—someone who helped each member connect to the association in a way that was enriching for them, and I think to a large extent I was successful in that.” One of her proudest accomplishments was working with Kristy Coomes to create a vastly edited and organized archive of WLA materials that had accumulated since the 1930s and were in no particular order.

This time around Gail and I met just for a leisurely lunch, which we had had to artfully maneuver around her busy “retired” life. Gail and her husband, Don, may just embody the observation by Abe Lemons: “The trouble with retirement is that you never get a day off.” She had just returned from a trip abroad with her daughter and niece, tasting the cultural, historical, and culinary pleasures of Rome, Florence, and Venice. She and Don are eager to travel more, wherever their fancy takes them—visits to their daughters in Texas or the east coast, visits with good friends in the Bay Area, or more trips abroad and around the Pacific Northwest. She is now a member of the Women’s University Club, not surprisingly a member of its booklist committee, while also enjoying the myriad of cultural and education offerings of the club. She and Don host a long-standing book group in their home, citing their latest selection, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, as having generated great discussion about the ethics of medical research. Gail and Don are active in their church, with Don leading the efforts with SHARE/WHEEL, which oversees the homeless who sleep on church property. Of course, they are never far from the library—now as regular patrons at the Wallingford, Greenlake, or University branches of Seattle Public.

As many in WLA remember, Gail’s retirement corresponded with the rapidly failing health of both her parents. Shortly thereafter, when her parents died, Gail recalls having to sit quietly staring at four walls for long periods of time, trying to recoup from those two big life-changing events. Soon though, fun things began to happen with short trips to visit friends and family, and with the big extended “family” here, consisting of friends, neighbors, and family that span ages, interests, and affiliations. Since Gail grew up in Seattle, the connections are long and varied and feed into her beliefs about good customer service. She says that the Seattle she knew back then highly valued civility and consideration of others. Being helpful to others makes everything else so easy. In other words, if you’re approachable, people are as open to you and equally give back consideration and respect.

No one was better than Gail at one-to-one services as the sole employee of WLA. Everyone who called or needed help was a friend, which means she probably has more friends than anyone around! A rich life indeed. She reassures us that she is well, happy, and busy in her new retired life. Again by example, she continues to inspire us towards contentment.
Locavoric Librarianship: Terroir, Carnal Knowledge, and the Feral Librarian

by Tony Wilson

Like, I presume, many of my colleagues, I have sympathy or more for the locavore and slow food movements. Imagine a meal of fresh, locally grown food where, among other aspects of locality, someone at the table was stung by one of the bees that made the honey in the salad dressing. With regard to the honey, we have a level of carnal knowledge that we would miss in ordinary Safeway honey. Not only does the bee-sting anecdote make the dressing more interesting and important intellectually, but also many would hold that, as a local product imbued with local allergens and sunshine, it will be healthier. The terroir of the honey is keyed to its regionally distinctive life-sustaining properties.

When I started out as a librarian, libraries had, by default, a certain amount of terroir. Collection development had a strong lococentric aspect. We archived the local newspapers, local government documents, and selected materials by local authors. While the lococentric push wasn’t the main thing we did, we did do it. Presumably we even cataloged with local users in mind.

Much of recent librarianship, however, has been about tearing away the limits of geography, time, language, and now format. As we remove the barriers imposed by time, space, language, and medium, we force the content of what we deliver more and more into a realm that is purely cerebral. Physical artifacts are becoming less relevant all the time. Someone recently pointed out that we hardly need the latest nonfiction book except as a pointer to an online website, the germinal article, and a few reviews.

Is there a way to put or retain place in library service in a way that parallels what is good about a locavoric meal? We still collect local history and honor local authors but pretty much as a sideline. We don’t do much with intellectual geography, even though Seattle poetry has a different flavor than that of San Francisco or London. Alki, in December 1999, was themed around “The Library as Place.” Cameron Johnson’s piece on the library as commons still rings true and seems relevant. My own, maybe not so much.

I wanted, in that piece, to view the library as ritual space: enter the library up those Carnegie steps, touch the drawers of the card catalog, write down call numbers with a golf pencil, and so on, through taking notes on cards. I’m still nostalgic for those rituals, but I’m still intellectually active, and the rituals I’m so fond of don’t even apply to me. Sometimes I browse the stacks, but mostly I’m only in the library for meetings or to pick up something. Google, Wikipedia, Amazon, and the online library catalog are where my work gets done, and I do it all from home, or from Starbucks. My rituals have changed.

In the physical safety and quiet of the traditional library I’ve liked to think of its content as highly dangerous and the librarian as a potentially Charonic figure helping people launch themselves into new versions of themselves with no guarantees of survival or return. Now, I hardly ever find a need to seek the librarian. Google, Wikipedia, Amazon, and the occasional library database suffice. I do go to the library for book club meetings and enjoy the other...
attendees a lot; the substance is so far rather Oprahesque. Never-
theless, the space, the faces, and bad acoustics provide some ritual
satisfaction.

Interested in exploring the locavore analogy, I was pleased to ac-
ought to put place back into library, shouldn't it? Well, it does have
maps, albeit they are all mind maps. The book has no index itself,
but it has a 35” x 26” folded mind map in a pocket that serves as
sort of an outline. It also has an extensive web site (http://www.
newlibrarianship.org) with lectures and videos, and an iPad app.

Lankes's push is to separate the thrust of librarianship away from
the curation of artifacts and toward the creation of knowledge
through conversation. I have argued elsewhere about what we
should call the people we serve. Patron, customer, client all seem
to imply a relationship appropriate for different levels of interac-
tion. In my existential isolation, viewing the user as a client is
my preferred term. Lankes insists on "member." And he sees the
librarian as another member, one who could practice the profession
from the trunk of a car, independent of the particular artifacts the
library may have collected.

Knowledge, in Lankes's view, is not so much a thing as an activity,
a conversation between members. While I cannot claim to have
gotten around very much of Lankes's *Atlas* so far, I can delight in
much of his constructivist view of knowledge and the postmodern
decimation of authority. Accepting Lankes's view may require a
revision of my Charonic view on the librarian's service to include
not only providing the launch, but helping to row.

Back on dry land and free of their collected artifacts, librarians
could easily go feral, snarling and snapping from the bushes with
their iPads and Kindle Fires, but, in the evening, curl happily and
warmly in a temporary nest with other members of the discussion.
That nest will meet the criteria of a locavoric experience. Eventually
we may be able to do it in the library building.

Notes

1. I did a quick search for locavore pathfinders and found only
one, from Mukwonago Community Library, in southern Wauke-
sha County, Wisconsin. (http://mukcomlibrary.blogspot.
com/2011/05/pathfinder-locavorewhat.html). Once I got to food
anthropology, however, I came to a lovely site picturing relevant
book jackets, all linked to appropriate author sites and Wikipedia
entries (http://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/troufs/anthfood/in-
dex.html). It is a guide to resources for the course Anthropology of
Food, at the University of Minnesota Duluth.

PNLA’s 2011 Annual Conference theme, “Navigating the River of Change,” could be the life story in a nutshell of any of the many job seekers we serve daily in libraries across the region. A panel discussion hosted by Carolyn Peterson of the Washington State Library zeroed in on the plight of the displaced worker and shell-shocked job seeker. This is the story of how libraries in Washington geared up to help, using grant money administered by the state library. Presentations ranged from Ellensburg Public Library’s successful mobile laptop learning lab to Spokane Community College Library’s enhanced website and databases, which among other things provided more testing and certification credentials to give to prospective employers.

One particular program delineated by Whitman County Library’s Erica Willson, recognized the inherent need for one-on-one help. It’s called WORC (pronounced “work”) and stands for Whitman County Rural Library District Occupational Resource Center. A glossy brochure with a referral card on the back gives prospective patrons an opportunity to check off any help they might desire: Individual assistance, skill-building help sessions, career information and resources, help using the library’s computers, accessing links to partnering agencies and online information, and books about economic trends. Then, they simply leave their name and phone number on the form and Erica will contact them within one week.

In this largely farming community, which spans 2,000 square miles, with a population of 16,000, the critical need for high-speed internet connections was acute. Branch managers were proactive in handing out these brochures to patrons they knew, word of mouth spread about this new effort, the library was a presence with a booth at the county fair, posters were hung at laundromats and grocery stores, and fliers were stuffed at checkout in books and DVDs.

Without a doubt, the prospect of having someone individually help you out has been the shining hallmark of the program. Erica says that she meets individually with patrons in the library, explains the confidentiality of the transactions, gets their permission to view and edit their personal information, and files their résumé on an online career portfolio program called “Bridges,” a paid subscription website funded by the grant. Also, thanks to the grant, Erica can be the point person as the individual tutor, coach, or friend to patrons at a critical time in their lives. As we talked over the details of this article over the phone, Erica shared the news of another recent bank failure in Whitman County, which will trigger unimaginable grief for so many as they face unemployment and job searching. For these new job seekers, Erica and WORC are the anchors in a sea of uncertainty. They can point to some proven success stories and pass on this comment from a satisfied patron: “The Library well served my job search and other correspondence needs. I now know how truly valuable public libraries can be.”

These and many other grants were part of “Renew Washington,” a project of the Washington State Library, which offered LSTA funded competitive grants from the Institute of Museum and Libraries, which were matched by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Diane Cowles is a children’s librarian at the Beacon Hill Branch of the Seattle Public Library.
When we said *Roaring Twenties*, we really meant it! Approximately 150 conference attendees *Shared the Experience* as we celebrated WALE’s 20th Anniversary on October 13 and 14. This year’s conference was held at the historic Davenport Hotel in Spokane, Washington—a perfect and memorable setting with really good food!

Attendees were provided with twenty engaging and educational breakout sessions, three motivating pre-conference workshops and four networking general sessions with a variety of entertaining presentations.

Thursday evening’s dessert reception, *Washington: A Past with a Presence!* was a celebration of Washington’s history through photos and tales of yesteryear. The evening offered a multimedia presentation, music, merriment, and memories spanning our state’s spectacular history. Colorful yarns were read by storyteller and librarian, David Wright, while we networked with old and new friends. This event was co-hosted by collectionHQ and Washington Rural Heritage.

The WALE banquet on Friday was an unbelievable evening with keynote speaker J.A. Jance, the *New York Times* bestselling author. Jance shared personal stories from her journey as a writer and then closed with Janis Ian’s iconic classic *At Seventeen*—a cappella and in its entirety. Goosebumps and a standing ovation displayed our appreciation. A huge thank-you to the many Friends that helped sponsor this unforgettable event: Friends of Mount Vernon Library, Friends of Spokane Public Library, Friends of Whitman County Library, PNNL Technical Library, Richland Public Library, along with Airway Heights Friends of the Library, Friends of Argonne Library, Friends of Deer Park Library, Friends of East Region Library, Friends of Moran Prairie Library, Friends of the Valley Library—all FOL groups from Spokane County Library District.

A Gumshoe Walk, with clues to solve, guided walkers through downtown Spokane to our famous Auntie’s Bookstore, the extraordinary 1909 Looff Carousel, and the impressive Northwest Room at Spokane Public Library. We ended with some spooky late-night fun as David Wright shared ghost stories revealing a bit of the hotel’s haunted history, as we listened in our jammies and drank hot chocolate.

Our 2011 WALE Conference Committee would like to express a roaring thank you to the excellent speakers, vendors, exhibitors, and attendees for a truly memorable conference. Be sure to keep an eye out for 2012 WALE Conference details, when we come of age and return to Campbell’s Resort in Chelan!

(WALE is one of dozen interest groups within the Washington Library Association’s organization. WALE approved a slight revision of its acronym to WAshington Library Employees, previously known as the Washington Association of Library Employees.)

Cindy Wigen is a library associate, Support Services at Spokane Public Library and was the 2011 WALE Conference Co-Chair.

Danielle Marcy, of Spokane County Library District, assisted with local arrangements, organized our Gumshoe Walk, and looked simply marvelous in her very red flapper dress and accessories!

Eric Slyter, Director of the Knights of Veritas in Moses Lake, offers programs all year long and was an exciting hands-on vendor at the 2011 WALE Conference.

The 2011 WALE Conference Committee celebrates the Roaring Twenties & WALE’s 20th Anniversary with plenty of boas and feathers in the Marie Antoinette Room at the Davenport Hotel. Pictured from left to right, front row: Lynne King, Highline Community College; Cindy Wigen, Spokane Public Library; Kate Laughlin, WLA Staff; Daurice Stiller, Richland Public Library; Peggy Bryan, Whitman County Library; and Annette Eberlein, Spokane County Library District. Back row: Brianna Hoffman, Richland Public Library; Theresa Barnaby, Richland Public Library; Lisa Adams, Richland Public Library; Georgette Rogers, Liberty Lake Municipal Library; Danielle Marcy, Spokane County Library District; and Genie Ventura, Highline Community College. Not shown: WLA Exec. Director Dana Murphy-Love and Karen Keenan, WLA Exec. Assistant.
Notes from a First-Time WALE Attendee

by Shawna Graham

This year’s WAshington Library Employee (WALE) Conference was held at the historic Davenport Hotel in Spokane on October 13 and 14 as this interest group celebrated 20 years—with the theme “Roaring Twenties/Share the Experience.” As a first-time attendee, I was very excited to be given the opportunity to attend this fabulous conference thanks to a WLA/WALE scholarship and the Friends of the Roslyn Library. First, I want to say that the venue was amazing, and the theme was perfect for the occasion. It seemed that all the workshops were tailor-fit to what is happening not only around the state but in my small town of Roslyn.

I began my conference experience on Thursday with the pre-conference workshop “Shedding Light on E-books and E-readers.” This training included the evolution of the Washington State Library’s consortia with Ebsco and Overdrive, as well as an interactive visit from Best Buy’s Geek Squad. I really enjoyed having the help of technical experts to answer all my questions, while we explored the newest devices on the market.

On Friday, we kicked off the day with a general welcome session from Spokane Public Library Director Pat Partovi and Spokane County Library District Director Mike Wirt. In addition, Spokane Mayor Mary Verner spoke at our luncheon. My first training session was “You Can Judge a Book By Its Cover,” which was one of the most entertaining workshops I attended. In this workshop, we explored the different fiction covers we all see everyday, and discovered important clues to the content and vintage of the book.

My next breakout session was titled, “Programming with a Boom,” which was about creating programs for baby boomers (but don’t tell them I called them that). In this breakout session, I learned a lot about the boomer generation and how to tailor our programs to their needs. I also learned about a great website where I can watch archived trainings from the Transforming Life After 50 program (http://www.transforminglifeafter50.org). Then, I attended the Washington State Library’s “Cooperative Projects Update” workshop in the afternoon. This session was an informative and pleasant way to touch base with the many resources and projects made available to us by the Washington State Library.

I believe my favorite workshop was “Rooting Out Your Family Tree,” with Becky Menzel. As a library in a small town with a big history, we receive many inquiries that sound something like this, “My family is from here, their name was something-ovich, what can you tell me about them?” While we have a fabulous local history section, these patrons tend not to want to look through the books; they expect us just to know their family. I can now enjoy the ability to put them on one of our in-house computers and point them in the direction of their family histories. Best of all, I left that workshop wanting to get on the computer and find out more about my family.

I greatly enjoyed all of our meals and the presentations that accompanied them. J.A. Jance speaks as well as she writes, and I found myself quite moved by the stories she told. While many conferences only offer one opportunity to hear a great speaker, this conference had three. At one of our meals, Seattle Public librarian & storyteller David Wright gave us a preview of his “Ghost Stories at the Davenport” presentation, which I really enjoyed. (Just a side-note—he does podcasts.)

With all of that said, I think my favorite part of the conference, and the main reason I keep going back, is the networking. Where else do you have the opportunity to meet with Washington State Library staff, big-city librarians, and rural librarians and staff all at one time? I had the pleasure of privately eating lunch with Debby DeSoer of the Ellensburg Library and Martha Shinners and Jennifer Fenton of the Washington State Library. Jennifer was the person who helped with my enrollment in the Library Support Staff Certification program! I also shared conference meals and conversation with a wide array of librarians and library staff ranging from just hired to retired. I had the rare experience of brainstorming with a new library employee on issues she is facing, such as how to handle petty cash and interlibrary loans when she doesn’t have any policies or procedures yet. All in all, this has been one of my favorite training experiences to date. I look forward to next year’s conference, and am even flirting with the idea of submitting a workshop proposal. Hope to see you there!

Shawna Graham works at Roslyn Public Library, is enrolled in the Library Support Staff Certification program, and is a new member of WALE.

2011 WALE Conference Scholarship recipients: David Johnson, reference and technical services librarian at Highline Community College Library, and Shawna Graham, library assistant at Roslyn Public Library.
Several years ago, Miss Manners was asked to arbitrate a question of library etiquette. To wit: patrons who snap fingers, yell “hey you,” or just whistle, rather than courteously requesting assistance at the reference desk. Miss Manners opined that such library rudesbies need to learn the difference between a public servant and a personal slave.

Unfortunately, what Miss Manners doesn’t realize is that in today’s high-demand world of free! free! free! library internet access, the patrons circle the library computers like wolves around a limping caribou. It’s as much as his computer time is worth for the patron to leave his workstation to go ask a question at the desk.

Since Miss Manners wasn’t equipped to resolve the patron’s dilemma, and nature abhors a vacuum, enter Ms. Dewey:

Dear Ms. Dewey,

Our library is located near seismically active volcanoes. After the last quake, several patrons complained about the mess. We were really doing our best. What could I have said?

Gentle Librarian,

You could always try to sell them on your cutting-edge experimental model: the “Richter” system of classification.

Dear Ms. Dewey,

Patrons say to me all the time, “I don’t suppose you could help me, but I’m looking for a kid’s book. It’s about [holds out fingers] this thick and this high.” Honestly, I’d like to help, but I’m at a loss.

Gentle Librarian,

You have two options really. Lead the patron to the children’s section. Point out: “It’s not a picture book, or a beginning reader, as they’re too skinny. That just leaves these for you to browse through,” as you gesture to the entire remaining children’s collection. “Have fun!”

Alternatively, you could turn your monitor to the patron and pull up some title record entries, indicating the author and title links. Point out that the dimension descriptions are not only unlinked, but in some cases left blank. Explain that the reason you can look up books by who wrote them (author), their title, and what they’re about (subject) is that very expensive cataloging is done for these “access points” and, further, that indexing computer programs (costly!) have been devised to allow librarians to take advantage of the data. Explain how much you’d love to look up by dimension, if only your library had the umpteen-thousand dollars required to make this dream a reality. Then hand the patron copies of your latest bond initiative flyers.

Dear Ms. Dewey,

Recently a patron walked up to me at the information center, and I saw that he was carrying the laminated “Out of Order” sign I’d taped over one of the computers 10 minutes ago. He asked me what it meant. I told her that it meant the computer was broken. Next thing I know, he’s back at the broken computer trying to use it and waving me over to help him. Ms. Dewey, if I place the out of order signs over the screen, the patrons just flip them out of the way. I tried taping the sign down, but you read what happened. What’s a poor librarian to do?

Gentle Librarian,

Have you considered removing the keyboard, too?

Dear Ms. Dewey,

Recently, I was at the library working on a genealogy project. I had waited 45 minutes for a free internet computer, so when Ancestry.com went down, I didn’t want to lose my spot! I whistled, snapped my fingers and waved to get the attention of the librarian. When she came over she told me that “only service dogs are allowed in the library.” I think that was kind of rude, but I get that she didn’t like being whistled at. How can I go get the librarian’s attention at the desk without losing my hard-won computer time?

Gentle Reader,

Have you considered removing the keyboard?
The Puyallup Public Library is a finalist for the 2011 ParentMap Golden Teddy Award.

Puyallup supporters went online to say Puyallup Public Library is a favorite for Kids and Families! ParentMap, an award-winning monthly magazine and website, surveyed its readers about Puget Sound’s best businesses and resources for kids and families. Puyallup Public Library was one of seven storyline finalists for the award.

The Fife Pierce County Library rolled into the City of Fife the week of Oct. 3–7.

The contractor for the modular library building, Modern Building Systems, shipped the modular buildings from its manufacturing site in Aumsville, Oregon, up I–5, and onto the site of the new library at 6622 20th St. E. Semi truck drivers drove modular components into the city and placed them on the foundation. Fife residents voted to annex to the Pierce County Library System in 2009. The 6,000 square foot library will be the 18th Pierce County Library. The Fife Pierce County Library Grand Opening is scheduled for December 3, 2011.

This past summer, the Puyallup Public Library’s teen summer reading program included a parkour workshop. Led by Parkour Visions of Seattle/Tacoma, the program taught the basics of parkour, a growing sport about overcoming obstacles quickly and efficiently using only your body. Teens learned stretching, jumping, and climbing techniques, soft landing, and balance. Another emphasis of the workshop was awareness of your surroundings and being respectful of your community. The workshop was conducted outside the library, in Pioneer Park, and used park and library structures for training.

On Monday, Oct. 10, the Curriculum Center on the second floor of Gonzaga University’s Foley Center Library was filled with the sounds of children. Foley Library, in conjunction with the Spokane Chapter of the Gonzaga Alumni Association, hosted the first annual Story Time with Spike event. Gonzaga’s mascot Spike the Bulldog made an appearance and mingled with kids and parents as four children’s books were read. Following the event, the children and parents had a chance to explore the library and sign up for library cards.

Pierce County Library System worked with researchers from the University of Washington and Florida State University to conduct Our Children are Ready for Reading, a study with in-home childcare providers. The Library provided childcares in the treatment group with an array of early learning tools, training, and skill development. These children gained a 60% increase in pre-literacy skills.

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People and Places

On September 10, Seattle welcomed Marcellus Turner as new city librarian. Mayor Mike McGinn was among the speakers at the event. Turner, former executive director of the Jefferson County Public Library in Lakewood, Colorado, was selected for Seattle’s top library post after a nationwide search. Susan Hildreth, the previous city librarian, left to head the Institute of Museum and Library Services in Washington, D.C. In his new post, Turner oversees Seattle’s 27 public libraries, including the world-renowned Central Library, a budget of approximately $50 million, and 640 staff members.

Spokane Public Library has been awarded $30,000 from the Fred Meyer Fund for science-based library programming and outreach. With the grant the Library will expand summer reading programs specifically for working families that cannot participate during regular program times. The Library will also purchase Family Science Kits that can be checked out to do at-home science projects and will take summer reading on the road to a local community center and to the daycares and preschools served through the Library’s youth outreach program.

Stephen Hussman began his tenure on September 1, 2011, as Chair of Library Services and University Archivist in the Brooks Library at Central Washington University. Prior to joining CWU, Mr. Hussman was Head of Archives and Special Collections in the New Mexico State University Library, and has held previous academic positions as an Associate Archivist at Arizona State University and Head of Archives and Special Collections at the New Mexico State University.
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Chaz Hillyard demonstrates fire juggling at Jefferson County Library’s Boffer Tournament.

From October 27 to December 15, 2011, Eastern Washington University’s John F. Kennedy Library is going wild for the national traveling exhibition “In a Nutshell: The Worlds of Maurice Sendak.” This exhibit explores the influence of the Old and New Worlds on the work of renowned illustrator Maurice Sendak, best known for illustrating more than 100 picture books, including Where the Wild Things Are and In the Night Kitchen. There are four separate events surrounding the eight-panel exhibit, which are free and open to the public during the Library’s regular hours of operation. Each of the four separate EWU events exploring the ideas of the exhibit are supported by the EWU Board of Trustees’ Diversity Initiative.

Trumpets blared at the library on October 7 to call in the competitors at Jefferson County Library’s First Annual Boffer Tournament. Boffer play and round-robin competitions were the highlight of the event, which also included a costume contest, musical entertainment, snacks, and a demonstration of Poi (fire) juggling. This event was the culmination of almost a year of monthly Boffer Club meetings at the library, located in Port Hadlock. Boffer sword play is a physical sport with light contact, similar in intensity to soccer and a pillow fight combined. Boffers, constructed of foam-wrapped PVC, duct tape, and some imagination, are used in live-action role-playing games and mock combat. Boffering is enjoyed for a number of different reasons: not only can it be great exercise and a perfect way to let out positive aggressive energy, but it can also promote teamwork, allow people to reenact historical battles (without danger), and allow the participants to practice a martial art in a safe way.

Mercer Island Library Receives Grant for Early Learning Nature Garden

There has been a buzz of activity outside the Mercer Island Library this past summer as a new early learning nature discovery garden...
People and Places

has been installed. The library was one of four places chosen to receive a “Gathering Places” project grant, thanks to the collaborative partnership of Tully’s Coffee and the Pomegranate Center, a nonprofit organization aimed at creating unique outdoor gathering places for communities. The goal of the project was to help enhance the early learning experiences of children beyond the library’s doors by creating a special space where they could experience and interact with nature. A discovery path was created on two sides of the library, complete with native plants of various textures, colors and smells. Alphabet tiles and banners representing birds, flowers, and animals found on Mercer Island were made, and creative posts, intimate reading spaces, and a larger gathering place for storytelling and programs were constructed.

Whitman County Library Auction raises money for children’s programs and honors library VIPs

A capacity crowd of 100 people packed the Colfax Library on Sunday, October 24 to raise money for children’s programs across Whitman County. Butch Booker served as auctioneer, raising more than $28,000 during the live auction and open bidding finale. Besides raising money, the event, called Sequel in the Stacks, honored a number of people whose lives have had a lasting impact upon the library and the community.

First to be honored was John Aune who leaves the Whitman County Library Board of Trustees with nearly 15 years under his belt. During John’s time on the board, the library saw huge gains in usage, major upgrades to public computing, and five towns voting to annex to the library district, including Malden, which built a new library. St. John also built a library, and Colfax completed a major ADA renovation. John and his wife Jane are also generous library supporters, even buying windows during the Colfax renovation when cost overruns eliminated them from the project. Next to be honored were Jack and Ginny Pittman, long-time friends of the library who both died unexpectedly in 2011. Ginny served as Friends president from 2001 until March of this year and was honored with the Washington Library Association’s Friends and Foundation Award in 2010. Under Ginny’s direction, and with Jack working by her side, Friends membership grew by 250%, they raised over $130,000 for the Colfax Library renovation, the group actively campaigned in six successful library elections, and the Friends oversaw two cookbook projects and other activities that contributed thousands of dollars to library projects and programs countywide.

Washington State Library develops eBook best practices

In October, some 19 Washington State libraries received Nooks, Ipad2s, or Kindles as part of a pilot project being conducted by the Washington State Library. The goal of the pilot program is twofold. The first goal is to develop “best practices” around the training of staff so that library staff can become comfortable with eBook readers and the steps necessary to download materials onto them. The second goal is to experiment with the circulation of eBook readers preloaded with content. Out of their experiences will come “best practices” which the State Library will compile and share with everyone via web pages.

Middle and high school libraries, public libraries both big (Sno-Isle libraries) and small (Ocean Shores), and community colleges are participating in this pilot project. The next Elluminate sessions at which they will share their experiences will be during the week of January 30th through February 3rd.

If you have specific questions about either training staff to help customers or students with eBook devices, or with circulating eBook devices, please contact project manager Carolyn Petersen at carolyn.petersen@sos.wa.gov.
Does your library’s outreach department mysteriously disappear each Halloween, only to rise again the next day full of energy and new ideas? Blame the OWWLS. The Outreach in Western Washington Library Systems group has an annual meeting of library staff who serve patrons outside of the traditional library setting. Hunting the unsuspecting prey in their homes, on the bookmobile, and at their schools, every day these masters of one-on-one service swoop down and ensure that some of the most isolated people in our communities are connected to the world of information and ideas through their library system. Graciously hosted by Sno-Isle Libraries, this year’s gathering of OWWLS focused on personal safety and assisting patrons with accessing digital collections.
In the summer of 2011, the two of us led a joint initiative of WSL and WLA to conduct a statewide Continuing Education Needs Assessment (CENA), an in-depth measure of CE needs in Washington's libraries. Participation from library staff, trustees, and advocates in all forms of libraries was encouraged.

In looking at this sizable project, it is important to acknowledge some essential groundwork that had already been laid in years prior. In 2007, WSL partnered with WLA and its former CE Coordinator, Mary Ross, to conduct a CENA with the help of a University of Washington student intern. WSL was instrumental in getting the CENA out to the broader library world, and at that time, 871 responses were collected. We used this impressive survey as a template for the 2011 CENA, which drew 418 responses. In considering potential reasons for why this year’s survey drew only half the responses, we suspected that a combination of the survey’s length, the late summer timing, and the statewide reduction in library staffing, combined with increased workloads over the last four years, were likely to blame. There were other remarkable differences of note. When the 2007 CENA was conducted, online learning was still relatively new and intimidating. Many libraries and staff felt unprepared to implement or participate in online trainings due to connection issues, firewalls, and other technical reasons. Institutional readiness and support were inconsistent. Four years later, online learning now accounts for the majority of library CE opportunities, much of it free or very inexpensive. With each passing year, library staff become more comfortable accessing this learning format. While the majority of survey respondents still prefer a half-day, face-to-face format (about 80% of respondents in both years), the number who are open to the online format has made an impressive leap from 50% to 72%.

Multiple portions of the CENA survey evoked responses that indicate a change in how we view "technology." For example, respondents were asked to rate desired CE topics in order of priority, and the results suggest we are becoming more specific with our technology-related learning needs. In 2007, "emerging technologies for library services" was the most requested topic, whereas in 2011, "eReaders/eBooks" was pointedly number one. This may be reflective of how technology has pervaded libraries to the point that it is an aspect of the work we do.

Reassuringly, some library priorities haven’t changed a bit. You need look no further than the second most requested CE topic for both years’ surveys. “Community outreach and promotion of library services” is regarded as being as essential as ever. It was joined near the top of the list by such topics as “readers’ advisory,” “marketing our libraries,” and “library advocacy,” further indicators that we are working to stay relevant in these swiftly evolving informational times.

In 2007, 78% of the survey responses were from public libraries, so one important goal this year was to increase CENA participation by non-public libraries. We were pleased, therefore, to see that 66% of the responses this year were from public libraries, with the remaining responses being from academic, school, and special libraries, as well as from trustees, advocates and others who work in support of libraries. And lest anyone should doubt that the CENA represents libraries and staff well beyond the halls of WLA, in both years’ surveys, only about 30% of respondents were WLA members.

How are WLA and WSL responding? The CENA results serve as a guide to prioritizing the CE activity of both organizations, and
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help to direct our CE resources and focus. They have assisted in delineating how that focus may best be addressed and those resources allocated within the confines of funding, staffing, and other practical considerations each organization faces. For example, WSL is limited in what CE it may directly offer Washington libraries due to various governmental restrictions, such as those set by the Federal LSTA (Library Services and Technology Act) guidelines and both state and federal funding cuts. Meanwhile, WLA is restricted in other ways, such as being an almost entirely volunteer organization, having very limited staffing, and not having access to the same funding and support resources. Knowing these differences allows our two organizations to work strategically to make the most of what each brings to the CE table.

On an individual basis, WLA has responded by ensuring that our conference sessions reflect the diversity of interests that the CENA revealed, and that our preconference workshops target top priorities requested by survey respondents. For instance, one of WLA’s interest groups, WA Library Trainers (WALT), sponsored a successful Preconference at the October 2011 WALE Conference called “Shedding Light on eBooks and eReaders.” It should come as no surprise that it was a well-attended workshop when you consider the support services focus of the WA Library Employees (WALE) interest group, and that 42% of this year’s CENA respondents work in circulation services (compared with 31% in 2007). It was also presented in a half-day, face-to-face format.

WLA will use the CENA results in many other ways. CENA will guide interest groups in selecting future programs to propose for conferences or as stand-alone workshops. It provides the assurance that Washington’s libraries and staff are much more receptive and ready for online learning opportunities. The CENA results will even help dictate the direction the WLA CE Committee takes with an upcoming overhaul of the WLA CE webpages. It bears mention that a subcommittee of the CE Committee assisted with developing the 2011 CENA, and with assessing its results.

WSL has been responsive with an eReader/eBook pilot project that gets eReaders into the hands of library staff and customers. Since there are already many CE opportunities out there, WSL also assists libraries and staff in finding the CE they need. For example, PLA offers an online version of its popular outreach/advocacy program, Turning the Page 2.0 (http://www.ala.org/pla/education/turningthepage), that is available to all library staff. A monthly list of free CE opportunities is widely distributed by WSL. Additionally, the WSL training calendar is a rich resource of training events available in Washington and online (http://www.sos.wa.gov/library/libraries/training/trainingCalendar.aspx). Online webinars and face-to-face trainings sponsored by WSL are responsive to the CENA.

WLA and WSL have committed to making the joint CENA survey a biannual event from now on, and it will undoubtedly continue to reveal to us new interests, approaches, and attitudes toward continuing education in Washington’s libraries. Overall, the process has made for a stronger collaborative partnership between WLA and WSL, and we’re both excited by what’s to come!
This spring my colleague, David Wright, and I booktalked at a Volunteer Appreciation event. Our theme was “Treasures of the Library,” those books old and new that we love to introduce to readers. I’d like to share some of my favorite hidden gems, starting with three short, sweet reads:

Whenever someone is looking for an uplifting, funny book or something short for their book group, I often grab Alan Bennett’s *The Uncommon Reader*. It is a confection of a book—it’s thoroughly entertaining while being really smart. Basically it’s about the magic of reading—a bookmobile arrives at the royal palace in London; the Queen stumbles across it with her corgis and checks out a book; and her life is forever changed. It’s about how reading can transform our lives and make us see ourselves and other people differently.

Another favorite smart, funny book is Laurie Colwin’s *Happy All The Time*, recently reprinted with a pretty cover by Vintage Contemporaries. Colwin, who died in 1992, excelled at writing witty novels about young New Yorkers and her books feel both current and timeless. She also wrote for *Gourmet*, and her cooking essays, *Home Cooking* and *More Home Cooking* are fantastically funny and full of great recipes!

Stewart O’Nan’s *Last Night at the Lobster* is short and sweet but also sad. I think of the word “dignity” when I think about O’Nan’s books. Every book I have read by him has a dignity, both in the story he tells and the characters he reveals. *Last Night at the Lobster* is a novel about one night in the lives of the workers at a Red Lobster restaurant in Connecticut during a snowstorm. It was written before our recession really hit, so it reads a little sadder now because so many of us are feeling the pinch he describes. O’Nan’s latest book, *Emily, Alone*, is also full of dignity and heart as he focuses on the inner life of a widow reflecting on life and family.

I also dearly enjoy telling people about some of my other favorite authors.

I have a hard time explaining why I love William Maxwell so much, John Updike once described Maxwell’s writing voice as “one of the wisest and kindest in American fiction.” And I guess that’s it—I love his insight, his kindness and compassion, and the spare elegance of his writing. Maxwell was the fiction editor for the *New Yorker* for 40 years, and he influenced countless authors. A good place to start would be *They Came Like Swallows*, a semi-autobiographical novel that also features one of the most memorable child’s perspectives of anything I have read.

A couple of contemporary British writers that I think are fantastic are Maggie O’Farrell and Jane Gardam. If you like literary fiction with strong female characters who ask compelling questions try Maggie O’Farrell’s *The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox* and *The Hand That First Held Mine*. Both books are great for book group discussion, but are also thought-provoking, entertaining reads. I love to tell book groups and literary fiction readers about Jane Gardam. Her oddly titled *Old Filth* is psychologically complex with a wholly realized, memorable main character.

For a young, hip, and funny American writer, try Jonathan Tropper’s oversexed tragi-comedies. *The Book of Joe* and *This is Where I Leave You* are my favorites.

I also love discovering older books via reprint. One of my favorite publishers these days is a reprint house out of England called Persephone Books. They are reprinting some wonderful titles, which are slowly getting published in the United States. Here are a few:

*Someone at a Distance* by Dorothy Whipple was my introduction to this publisher, and remains my favorite. Whipple was very popular in her day and several films were made from her books, but this 1953 novel was overlooked even though she is, in the words of Persephone Books founder Nicola Beauman, “a superb...
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“... This is a truly nuanced and engrossing look at marriage and the tiny misunderstandings that can undo us.

Then there’s *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day* by Winifred Watson, which is even more frothy and fun than the movie. It’s a Cinderella wish-fulfillment novel that still feels bold and daring, even though it came out in 1938.

I also love *Little Boy Lost* by Marghanita Laski, which I often suggest as a short book group book, and *Saplings* by Noel Streatfeild, a novel about a post-war family in Britain by an author most famous for her children’s books, like the enduring classic, *Ballet Shoes*.

Now, just a few more books that remind me of older books:

*Indiscretion* by Jude Morgan: *Pride and Prejudice* all over again, without being a total rip-off.

*The Lost Art of Keeping Secrets* by Eva Rice: Winsome coming-of-age tale that can be compared to Dodie Smith’s classic, *I Capture the Castle*.

*The Forgotten Garden* by Kate Morton: Just the kind of Gothic page-turner filled with family secrets that will satisfy a book group as well as a trip to the beach.

Those are some of my “treasures.” What are some of yours? 📚
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