

New Horizons

Vice President's Informal Report of the Association's 19th Annual Conference in Brisbane, July 2004

by Philip Harvey

At least one member of ANZTLA has a husband in the rental car business, making travel around Brisbane much less stressful. As the Vice President's luggage was carried to the limousine (Queensland white L plate) by his chauffeur, he was met by the mighty sunshine of Brisbane. It all came flooding back: jacarandas, frangipanis, lunch-crashing ibis. He sat in the limousine watching the city go past and began making mental notes for the Veep's Report.

This year saw the longest cataloguing session on record, with very high attendances. One reason for this was shown later in the conference when a young, mentored library student said of his first fieldwork: "I had to figure out how to catalogue the collection." An otherwise happy and informative workshop over two days was only marred by acrimonious differences about the town of Basingstoke and how to present Basingstoke in a bibliographic record. Stressed and disappointed cataloguers were heard to mutter afterwards, "I'm never going back to Basingstoke." We heard from Rhonda Barry about the FRBR future (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) and practised the new verb 'to FRBRise' and the new noun 'FRBRisation'. Opening the Rules to work through shared contradictions was extremely helpful. The open discussion about library issues was of inestimable value in highlighting the nitty gritty of our daily lives. Rumours that the facilitator of the workshop makes up his own headings whenever he feels like it are grossly exaggerated. He did not loudly and publicly advocate invention of headings, he whispered it softly as possibly maybe just okay if no heading was available and the heresy that the book was all about would take ten years to get through to the Library of Congress.

The Queensland State Librarian, Lea Giles-Peters, gave the keynote speech on that Library's huge redevelopment. They haven't lost a book and they haven't lost a person. Everything dreamy changed during preparations though when the Managing Contractor said, "You can't afford it!" This definitely caused a creative rethink. Lea quoted an alarmist article from the Guardian that asks: By 2020 will the public library be a thing of the past? In planning visions a committee went all over the world. They came up with six spheres in building a library: place of access, place of atmosphere, place of transformation, but she talked very quickly and I didn't get the rest. (See her address in this issue.) "What kind of 'knowledge ancestors' do we want to be?", asked a Torres Strait Islander at a recent event. Meaning, both the ancestral knowledge and the knowledge that we give, as ancestors ourselves, to the future. Do we want to be part of the knowledge economy, or part of the knowledge community?

Next morning, Martin Borchert of Griffith University, spoke on digital libraries. Our libraries have become the digital pantries for digital shopaholics, and this can have its disadvantages. We have many different kinds of databases in our library, but are there convenient ways of linking them all? Do we have one library or many libraries with databases? We live in a world in which we must distinguish information savvies from information savemes - an age-old reference situation. Martin insisted that it is the librarians who must specify what is required. An open URL service was the recommended way to start a search service, before trying a federated service. Anthony Aspididis

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took us through Ebsco Host. We learnt that Ebsco abstracts are written by humans, many of them written by humans in the Ebsco office. This is a proud boast of Ebsco, a step beyond the scanning by machine of the first lines of article paragraphs. Later we went on to "function heavy" Ebsco Admin.

No library is exempt from disaster. We heard about different disasters, and solutions, from Grant Collins at the Queensland State Library. Such challenges as the deep-freezing of Queensland newspapers inhabited by tobacco beetles; the results of air-conditioning failures like mould and sprinklers; poor building design; fire, cloudbursts, lightning. We might want to think about a disaster recovery team for control of different disasters. Some were left wondering, is the Queensland State Library more accident prone than most? Do most libraries have this many disasters? Is this why they are planning a new building? It certainly supplied many good examples of recovery and response, e.g. the librarian who goes to water at the sight of flood and the librarian who responds to disaster as a positive challenge. The basic parts of any plan are prevention, preparedness, response, recovery.

Word had it at that evening, at Bean Scene Cafe in St Lucia, that Phil Teece of ALIA reported on the NSW judicial enquiry into pay scales. Four types of employment were studied: librarians, childcare workers, hairdressers, and salmon-canners. Librarianship had been feminised, undervalued and underpaid. This was overturned by the judge, who found in favour of a defeminised librarianship with properly valued and paid librarians. The judge was a former librarian. Later the findings went to Parliament, where they were questioned. A test case was tried and once again librarians won the day and pay rises ensued.

It's moments like these you need mentees, I thought next morning, as Gill Hallam and Chris Gissing led sessions on mentoring. Mentoring is a relationship between individuals who share knowledge, experience and insights. They are willing to benefit from the exchange to develop skills, confidence and abilities to enrich professional life. How do you capture your mentor? In a productive couple of sessions we offered up expectations of a mentoring program, including improved skills in all areas, the sharing of similar interests, and the pursuit of BHAGs ('Big hairy audacious goals'). Problems included ethical issues, confidentiality, and the concern that the mentor doesn't have the answer. Amongst the strategies were clearly stated confidentiality

clauses, ethical agreements, and respect.

Are libraries one of the creative industries? Alice Steiner talked about information literacy at Queensland University of Technology's Creative Industries Faculty. The Teaching and Learning Program, in one of those periodic name changes now called the Learning and Teaching Program, is about learner-centred curriculum, authentic learning, and scaffolded learning. We introduce the resources, provide database principles of searching and evaluating. They learn to analyse information usage and different resources. We design learning opportunities to become familiar with industry information sources. Learning is designed to integrate learning, support information skills, and provide opportunities for application of knowledge and skills.

Beth Cawter of the Australian Catholic University talked about library design which, we were told, is a world of multiple personality disorders. There are too many choices, but which one fits? It has to be an architect's dream for it to work. Are we bribing people into our parlours?, Beth asked. Big space, coffee shops, computer networks. We have to set up communication between ourselves and our customers. Nine different kinds of study space are found at Ipswich Campus, where Beth arrived to set up the library. Signage is always wrong - it arrives a year late after everything has been re-arranged. It needs though to be clear and sparse. The library can be a community meeting-place and needs to be designed to create those places. Librarians have a Big Desk Hangup, she asserted. Do we want a high desk? A low desk? What is our relation to the user? It doesn't matter what you do though, it'll be wrong! Be prepared to have four or five design changes once the library is opened.

Rhonda Barry spoke impromptu about inter-library loan and Christine Brunton led a discussion on ProQuest and Ebsco. We had library profiles from Blan McDonagh, Stephen Morton, Fiona Harland, Joana Waqairatu, Patty Overend, Denise James, and Ian Stoodley, nearly all of them in the process of planning new libraries. Much conference work was done by Patty Overend, Stephen Morton, Fiona Harland, and Deborah Cronau. And thanks in particular went to the members of the Queensland Organising Committee, Ian Stoodley, Annette McGrath, Heather Griffiths, Carolyn Willadsen, and Christine Brunton, most of whom by Sunday afternoon were planning a well-deserved break for the following week.

Philip Harvey