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Rhode Island Library Association Bulletin

Volume No. 63 No. 9

ISSN:0146-8685

SEPTEMBER 1990

"A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN TONIGHT"
OR
ALA CONFERENCE REPORT FROM CHICAGO
by Cheryl A. McHenry

When I accepted the position of Interim ALA Councilor, I was excited about going to Chicago and representing RILA at the annual Conference. Although I attended RILA's Executive Board sessions, discussed significant issues, read American Libraries as well as documents and reports sent by the ALA office, nothing prepared me for the hectic schedule and overwhelming paperwork that was waiting in Chicago.

In addition to membership meetings on Monday evening 8-11:30 p.m., and Wednesday 9-11 a.m., I attended Council sessions on Sunday 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Tuesday 9:00-12:00 noon, and Wednesday 2:00-4:00 p.m. Needless to say, preparing a daily schedule in advance is essential to plan shuttle trips to and from McCormick Place where exhibits and most programs were located, to the Chicago Hilton where all meetings took place. A sharp eye on the clock and a carefully chosen schedule were mandatory.

I must confess that I was a neophyte at conference scheduling, but I learned quickly. At busy times it could take as long as an hour just to shuttle back and forth between meetings. I was fortunate to share a room with Carol DiPrete, RILA President and former ALA Councilor who initiated me into the ALA Council Sessions. I quickly learned who were the "movers and shakers" at ALA, as well as the logistics for obtaining daily reports and documents needed for each Council meeting.

Fortunately for us, we stayed at the Chicago Hilton which allowed easy access to ALA Executive Offices and meeting rooms.

Anyone who has ever attended ALA conferences in Chicago or flown into or out of O'Hare Airport can gauge his visits based on either the weather or flight problems which are usually related to the weather. Approaching Chicago's O'Hare Airport on Friday, June 22, 1990, the sky was dark and cloudy, the runway wet. As the weather heated up from sixty-two degrees on Friday to ninety-two degrees on Tuesday, so did the issues.

MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Although many reports and documents were generated, read, and discussed at both membership meetings and Council meetings, the results were not always the same. The membership passed the following four resolutions and sent them to Council for consideration: (A concise summary of the significant issue for each document is given in parenthesis after the title of the resolution.)

#1. Poor People's Services Policy Resolution (Promotes equity in funding library services for poor people and recommends removing barriers such as fees and fines which hinder library services to the poor.)

#2. Columbus Quincentennial Resolution (Urges libraries to provide Columbus Quincentennial programs from an authentic Native American perspective.)

#3. Closing of Schools of Library and Information Science Resolution (Creates a Special Commission to investigate the issues in Columbia's Provost's report that led to eliminating Columbia University Library School and other library school closings as well as assess the impact.)

#4. Guidelines for Librarians Interacting with South Africa (Recommends that libraries and librarians isolate the South African Government and institutions which inhibit the free flow of information. Further, librarians should only travel to South Africa at the invitation of anti-apartheid groups, a plan essentially designed to keep the sanctions on the South African government while assisting those groups struggling to abolish apartheid.)

A unique feature of the Monday evening membership's meeting this year was the town meeting format with a discussion of issues which effect the future of ALA. Although the meeting was conducted by panel members who raised good questions and members who responded, the lateness of the hour, 11:00 p.m., on Monday evening, was not ideal. It is hoped in the future that if town meetings continue, a more appropriate time will be chosen.

COUNCIL MEETINGS

Although the membership approved all four of the Membership Documents, the Council defeated resolution #4, Guidelines for Librarians Interacting with South Africa, on a close vote and referred the document to a joint study by three committees: Social Responsibilities, Ethics, and Intellectual Freedom. The discussion on the Guidelines for Librarians Interacting with South Africa provided an emotional debate at Council. By defeating this resolution, Council chose not to support the unanimous vote of its membership, and not to listen to the voice of Nelson Mandela who, visiting America at the same time as the ALA conference, urged Americans not to lift economic and cultural sanctions on the government of South Africa until apartheid is abolished, and all people have the right to vote. (This Councilor voted for approval of the Guidelines.)

Other issues, too many to mention here,

emerged from resolutions, Committee reports, and Annual Reports to the Council. The following topics, however, were chosen by this Councilor as major issues:

1. South Africa
2. Personnel Resources
3. Election Process
4. Editorial Policy
5. Intellectual Freedom
6. White House Conference on Library and Information Services (WHCLIS)
7. National Research and Education Network (NREN)

A brief summary of these issues follows based on programs attended, reports read, and discussions held at Council sessions. All of these issues are ongoing topics and will, most likely, continue to be discussed, debated and implemented in some phase within the next year. RILA members are urged to take a stand on these issues.

1. South Africa

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Working Group on South Africa issued a report calling for the adoption of policy statements in 1991 to condemn apartheid in South Africa. IFLA further recommended revoking membership to IFLA of its South African Institutional Members in 1991, but allowing Personal Affiliation by all persons laboring to provide library service to all South African citizens. IFLA also urged the establishment of an international scholarship program to increase the number of black librarians in South Africa.

The ALA International Relations Committee and the ALA Executive Board endorsed Concil Document #97 Resolution on The Starvation of Young Black Minds: The Effects of Book Boycotts in South Africa by reaffirming the ALA's current policies on South Africa to uphold the boycott and reject the American Association of Publishers' report.

Dr. Dennis Brutus, poet, literary scholar, and banned person from South Africa, quoted Nelson Mandela who reminds all that "the struggle continues." Although some incremental changes have occurred, the boycott should continue until all citizens of South Africa have the right to vote. He also announced that a coalition of library and information workers in South Africa has

formed a non-racial unit called Democratic Librarians in South Africa working to provide library service to all and will petition IFLA at Stockholm, Sweden in August 1990 for acceptance.

2. Personnel Resources

Rhode Island's own Bruce Daniels, Chair of the Planning Committee, reported on the Planning Committee's recommendation that the ALA establish a Library Personnel Resources Strategic Plan by convening a Special Committee. After some discussion and an amendment about the composition of the Committee, the report was approved.

3. Election Process

The Special Committee on the Election Process offered several recommendations for changes to the ALA election process. The following changes were recommended: the timing adjusted for the nominations and elections; guidelines provided for forums; photographs of candidates included in the official ballot; participation of members increased in the nomination process by requiring two hundred signatures for petition candidates for President-elect or Treasurer; the nominating committee enlarged; and perhaps, the most controversial issue of all was the recommendation to limit the terms of ALA Councilor to no more than two full consecutive terms.

4. Editorial Policy Resolution

It was recommended that the Committees on Ethics, Intellectual Freedom, and Publishing address the editorial policies as delineated in document #10.1 referring to American Libraries and extend them to apply to all journals published by the Association and its units. The Committee's recommendation, however, rejected the specific American Libraries' editorial policy as not necessarily pertaining to all publications, but each major publication specify its purpose and scope, format, and audience. All publications must apply the principles of freedom of the press to their publications. Editors shall be responsible for determining the content and style.

5. Intellectual Freedom

The Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) reaffirmed its support for Confidentiality of Library Users and continued to oppose the FBI Library Awareness Program. The IFC presented a revised interpretation of the

Library Bill of Rights including opposition to labeling of materials.

At the Intellectual Freedom Issues Program, Judith Krug of the Office of Intellectual Freedom, reminded all that Intellectual Freedom is the guiding light of librarianship and the foundation for all it does. She also reminded librarians that actions do make a difference in the fight against censorship.

The Council approved the Resolution on the re-authorization and re-appropriation of funds for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities without restrictive clauses. To demonstrate its support for NEA and NEH, the ALA held a protest demonstration in Grant Park by reading aloud excerpts from Pulitzer Prize winning plays from the past ten years. This Councilor attended this event.

6. Second White House Conference on Library and Information Services (WHCLIS II) July 9th-13th, 1991 in Washington, D.C.

The purpose of WHCLIS is to address and recommend improvements in library and information services nationally and their use by the public. Conference delegates will represent all phases of library services, including professionals, trustees, friends, government officials, and the general public. It is the responsibility of the states to hold pre-conferences to identify significant issues to be addressed at the national level. RILA members are urged to become involved in the state pre-conference. Involvement is essential for WHCLIS to succeed.

7. National Research and Education Network (NREN)

The ALA endorsed the concept of a National Research and Education Network and recommended legislation and other proposals to increase opportunities for all types of library participation and leadership in, and contributions to the NREN.

What is NREN (pronounced en-ren)? To put it simply, it is an interstate telecommunications network which would expand and interconnect the existing scientific research networks. EDUCOM, a coalition of several hundred colleges and universities promotes the use of information technology in higher education and describes the goal of NREN as "to enhance national competitiveness and

productivity through a high speed, high quality network infrastructure..."

Legislation to establish NREN was first introduced in the house as HR 4329 and was approved by the Judiciary Committee on June 12, 1990. More will come on this topic in the future.

8. Committee on Organization Report (COO)

Perhaps, the most substantive issue affecting the future of ALA was presented to the Council by the Committee on Organization (COO). COO asked Council to debate the future organizational structure for ALA. COO asked whether Council wants to streamline ALA by defining units to make a more efficient or cost-effective organization; or whether Council wants to support diversity and allow members to form units as are necessary to meet their needs? It appears that COO was asking the wrong question. A balance needs to be struck between control and diversity.

Moreover, it is the opinion of this Councilor that COO should be asking another question: how can the ALA allow for diversity while remaining unified? This issue will continue to plague the ALA, and thus members should let their councilors know how they feel about the future growth and development of their organization. ALA needs to be unified to face the challenges ahead while encouraging unity through cooperation, communication, and coordination among units.

BRIEF NEWS NOTES FROM THE 109th ALA ANNUAL CONFERENCE:

WHO'S WHO IN CHICAGO 1990

In her opening remarks PATRICIA WILSON BERGER, outgoing ALA President, stressed the theme of the conference, "Information Access - Back to the Basics" by highlighting both literacy and preservation efforts of her administration.

CHARLES REID, recently appointed chair of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, NCLIS, delivered greetings from NCLIS and the staff of the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Science (WHCLIS) and commented that the library community has both the opportunity and responsibility to set the agenda for the second upcoming conference.

BARBARA BUSH received an honorary lifetime membership to ALA in recognition for her work with the Literacy Volunteers of America and the establishment of the Foundation for Family Literacy. Unable to attend, she sent a videotaped acceptance.

TOM WOLFE gave the keynote address at the opening session of the Annual Meeting commenting on the intellectual life in America as the end of the twentieth century approaches. He states that the "Marxist Mist" which has shrouded American intellectual life has now ended. Thus the United States has won the battle of communism versus liberal democracy.

CONCLUSION

Although these were the major issues discussed at Council Meetings, for a first-time Councilor and Conference attendee, it was the schedule and size of the Conference Program and meetings which seemed at times overwhelming. The logistics of shuttling to and from O'Hare Airport, as well as to various conference sites required pre-planning.

One should always have contingency flight plans when flying in or out of O'Hare. Not only is Route 94, Kennedy Expressway, unpredictable, so too are flight departures. I learned this ALA fact of life by racing out of Council meeting III for an early flight home only to find myself with a delayed flight home. Due to a thunderstorm, O'Hare was closed down for two hours. Thus I sat on the runway for three hours, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., waiting for take-off.

While sitting in a long traffic jam of airplanes waiting for the word "take-off," I reflected on my experiences at ALA's 109th Annual Conference 1990. My short term as Interim Councilor is over, but the experience was both exhilarating and professionally rewarding. By adopting a flexible and receptive attitude, I not only appreciated the experience, but thoroughly enjoyed ALA Conference 1990. Thank you for the opportunity to represent RILA.

Cheryl McHenry, ALA Interim Councilor, is Librarian at the Primrose School, Barrington, and an adjunct professor at the GSLIS at URI. She recently completed a doctorate at Simmons College Graduate

School of Library and Information Science, where she completed a thesis on the FBI's Library Awareness Program and Foreign Counterintelligence Visits to Libraries. She is also Vice President of RIEMA.

**THE JOHN BARTLETT SOCIETY:
AN INVITATION TO INTERESTED LIBRARIANS**

The John Russell Bartlett Society, named for the first bibliographer of books printed in Rhode Island, was founded in 1983 to stimulate interest in book collecting and to bring together people who share a common interest in the physical aspects of books such as printing, binding and illustration. The Society holds monthly meetings from September to April with talks on a wide variety of subjects relating to books and book collecting.

Most of the meetings are held at Brown University's John Carter Brown Library, but usually at least one meeting is held at another location. This season there will be talks on Brown University's Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, on book conservation, on the historic John Stevens Shop in Newport, on the recently established Culinary Archives and Museum at Johnson and Wales University, and on a local private press. When the dates are firm, a schedule of meetings will be sent to all members.

The Society also sponsors an annual student book collecting prize which is open to any college student in Rhode Island as well as an occasional small press/fine printing book fair.

The Society's dues are a modest \$7.50 a year, and anyone interested in joining should send a check in that amount made out to "The John Russell Bartlett Society" to the Society, c/o The John Carter Brown Library, Box 1894, Providence, RI 02912. Be sure to include a mailing address. Further information about the Society may be obtained by writing to the same address or by calling the undersigned at (401) 455-8021.

Information on the Bartlett Society provided by Philip J. Weimerskirch, Special Collections Librarian, Providence Public Library, Acting President, The John Russell Bartlett Society.

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- The HELIN (Higher Education Library Information Network) Consortium has received a Higher Education Act Title II-D (College Library Technology and Cooperation) grant of \$200,000 to support the development of its shared online catalog. HELIN's members are Rhode Island College, the University of Rhode Island, Roger Williams College, and the Community College of Rhode Island.

- The Night of a Thousand Stars is on its way to becoming an annual event - a celebration of the power and pleasure of reading - to be held each year during National Library Week and School Library Media Month in April.

"This was our most exciting National Library Week ever," said Barbara Newmark-Kruger, chair of the National Library Week Committee of the American Library Association (ALA). "We want to keep the momentum going, and so do lots of others based on the reports we've received."

Newmark-Kruger described the event as a "Great American Read Aloud," with special guests reading aloud from their favorite books at libraries across the country. She said this year's event was successful both in generating support from major celebrities and in generating media publicity at the national and local levels.

The ALA Council voted at the Annual Conference in June to sponsor the event again and urge that all types of libraries - school, public, academic, military and special - participate.

The first Night of a Thousand Stars held April 25 of this year more than met its goal of 1,000 libraries participating and is believed to be the biggest pro-literacy event ever.

- The American Library Association's Grolier Foundation Award Jury is seeking nominations for the 1991 award. This award of a plaque and \$1,000 is presented each year at the ALA Inaugural Banquet to the librarian who has made "unusual contributions to the stimulation and guidance of reading by children and young people." The application deadline is DECEMBER 1, 1990.

For an application form please write or call:

Elain Wingate
Grolier Foundation Award Jury
American Library Association
50 E. Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611
1-800-545-2433

- Each year NELA awards a conference grant to one person from each of the six New England states. The purposes of these scholarships are: to support continuing education for NELA members and to make conference attendance possible. Scholarship funds will pay for conference registration, conference meals, and double-occupancy lodging.

Applicants must be NELA members who have never attended a NELA Annual Conference. Recipients will be asked to attend the Annual Business Meeting and to volunteer two hours assistance during the conference. Each winner will also submit a two hundred word statement to the NELA Newsletter in order to share her/his conference experience and impressions.

If you would like to apply, please return the form below to the New England Library Association, P.O. Box 421, Wakefield, MA 01880. Your application should be postmarked by Thursday, September 6, 1990.

NAME: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

- I am currently a NELA member.
- I would like to become a member.

Have you previously attended a NELA Conference? Yes No

people

CHARLENE DUNN has been appointed Director of the Clark Memorial Library in Richmond.

SALLY WILSON, Special Collections Librarian at Rhode Island College, recently retired. She had been Special Collections Librarian at RIC since 1977 and was a member of the RIC staff since 1965.

RICHARD A. OLSEN, Director of the Library at Rhode Island College, has been elected to a three-year term as a member of the Board of Directors of NELINET, Inc., effective July 1, 1990. He has also been re-appointed by the ALA Executive Board to another three-year term as an ALA Endowment Trustee.

NORMAN DESMARAIS will present a paper on "Marketing CD-ROM" at the Computers in Libraries Canada Conference in Toronto at the end of September. He has also had a paper accepted for The New Information Technologies Conference to be held in Guadalajara, Mexico at the end of November. The conference will be held in conjunction with the Guadalajara International Book Fair.



I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.
Jorge Luis Borges

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PROFILE: KAY HEARN
by Charlotte Schoonover

On July 13, 1990, Carolyn "Kay" Hearn retired as Coordinator of the South County Inter-Related Library System. Headquartered at the Westerly Public Library, Kay served the unique interests of a region that reached some of the more rural populations of the state. Talking to her in a recent conversation, it became clear that the twenty years she spent as coordinator, spanned a time of significant growth in the region as well as the state.

Her career as a librarian began during the tumultuous sixties when she was pursuing her graduate library degree at URI in Providence. She was appointed librarian at South Kingstown High School at that time. After two years, she next moved to the Library for the Blind and Handicapped at DSLS for almost three years. And in September 1969, she accepted the position of Regional Coordinator at the Westerly Public Library.

Kay describes the late sixties and early seventies as a difficult time for the nation, but that libraries were "doing terrific things" what with the beginnings of LSCA funding and the growth of DSLS as a viable state agency. Working with librarians who were often quite isolated in their own libraries, Kay strove to get them "out of their little places" and put them in contact with their colleagues around the state. She drove carloads of librarians to Providence Public Library and DSLS for meetings and book review sessions. She encouraged them to share and exchange ideas, and in general, broaden their outlook.

As libraries moved into the pursuit of grants for special funding, Kay initiated numerous projects; of particular note are newspaper indexing of the 19th century Narragansett Times, arts programming which fostered the appreciation of poetry, literature, and theater for adults and children, and humanities programming. Kay served on the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities Board for five years. She also worked hard to involve even the smallest of libraries in the automation revolution.

Finally, she says her aim all along was to help librarians see that they had the ability through their libraries to affect people's lives. She encouraged librarians in the region to see

that their own strengths and skills could be enhanced to improve library service to the local community.

Kay will be living in her native South County to pursue her many interests. Her plans for the future will develop now that she has time to concentrate on them. It is typical of Kay Hearn to approach her retirement as she did her work with such attention and deliberateness. We wish her good fortune.

Charlotte Schoonover is Head, Kingston Free Library. She has worked with Kay Hearn for thirteen years.

NEWS FROM THE LIBRARIES

Greenville

The Greenville Public Library Expansion Project includes a 7,500 square foot addition and renovation of the original building. The expansion is on the back and east side of the original library. The front of the library is being moved to this new east side. Almost all interior spaces are being redesigned for different functions. All services will be on the main level, while meeting rooms will be on the lower level. The new design will include new enlarged stack areas for adult and young adult fiction and non-fiction, a new reference area, increased seating and study areas, a computer room, a typing and audio visual listening room, a staff lounge, and an additional meeting room.

Plans for the addition began in 1986. Actual construction began in May 1990. Estimated completion is expected in November 1990 for the addition and in February 1991 for the renovations. The Town of Smithfield donated \$490,000 to the project, the Board raised \$420,000, and a loan was obtained from FmHA for \$700,000. The Town also loaned the library \$260,000. Fund-raising is still continuing since the total projected cost is \$2 million (the library's endowment is being used to cover the difference during the construction).

During construction, the children's library was moved to a rented office building one quarter mile from the main library, one-half of the non-fiction was put in storage, and the director's office was moved to an

jobline

The Rhode Island Library Association has established a minimum recommended salary of \$23,750 per year, or \$13.00 an hour for a full-time beginning librarian in 1990.

ADULT SERVICES LIBRARIAN: Knight Memorial Library. Responsible for the direct provision of service to the adult users of a large branch library. Primary duties include the provision of reference and readers advisory assistance and the presentation of adult programs. The adult services librarian will be expected to participate in the development of library services at the branch and may participate in community outreach activity, program development, collection development, and clerical supervision. MLS from an ALA accredited library school required. Salary range: \$22,050 - \$27,558. Applications accepted until position is filled. Apply to: Dan Austin, Personnel Manager, Providence Public Library, 225 Washington Street, Providence, RI 02903. Telephone: (401) 455-8061. AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION/EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR: Position open January 1, 1991. MLS and five years administrative experience. Responsible for all phases of library operation. Staff of twelve includes five professionals. Serves town of 30,000. Starting salary \$31,807. Excellent benefits. Send letter of application, resume, names and addresses of three references to Mr. William Fagan, Chairperson, Coventry Public Library Board of Trustees, 1672 Flat River Road, Coventry, RI 02816.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR: Cataloger/Bibliographer. University library. Provide bibliographic identification, bibliographic description, subject analysis and classification of monographs in book and non-book formats, in all LC classification schedules with a concentration in the humanities and social sciences. Record and apply current modifications in the rules governing cataloging and classification practices. Serve as resource person in bibliographic identification, bibliographic description, subject analysis and classification. Participate in the formulation of policies and practices pertaining to the bibliographic control and organization of the public

catalogs and authority files. Participate in the formulation and implementation of policies governing the selection and organization of library materials and developing the collection in assigned subject areas. Engage in research and publication. Participate in governance of the University and in faculty and professional activities and as assigned catalog serials and provide instruction in methods of bibliographic research. ALA accredited; MLS plus two years' academic/research library experience required. Knowledge of AACR2 and LCSH and experience with bibliographic utility (OCLC, RLN) required. Modern foreign language and second subject Master's preferred. Tenure track. Submit a letter of application and resume and three references by October 1, 1990 to: Michael Vocino, Search Committee Chair, Assistant Professor (Cataloger/Bibliographer) (141002) Position, The University of Rhode Island, P.O. Box G, Kingston, RI 02881. An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

calendar

SEPTEMBER 22-29: Banned Books Week.

SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 2: New England Library Association Annual Conference, Sturbridge, Massachusetts.

OCTOBER 1: Preservation Conference, Department of Administration Building, One Capitol Hill, 9 AM - 5 PM.

OCTOBER 10 - 19: Soviet Book Exhibit, Providence Public Library.

OCTOBER 19: RHILINET Committee, Cranston Public Library, 2 PM.

OCTOBER 27 - 28: Rhode Island Festival of Children's Books and Authors.

NOVEMBER 12 - 18: National Children's Book Week.



"No home, no card, Metro library says." This headline from the Nashville Tennessean caught my eye on a recent visit to my parents' home.

Carl Smithston, a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University and a resident of Nashville's Union Rescue Mission, was denied a library card at the city's downtown library. Requirements for a card include the applicant's having a permanent address or a friend who does, two telephone numbers where he can be reached, and some form of identification.

Though the Rescue Mission has vouched for its residents at the library in the past, it refused to do so this time. It had been "burned" too many times in the past for fines accumulated by its residents. Richard Kritsch, assistant director of the Mission, says, "Here at the mission we offer schooling, meals, shelter and counseling. I offered him all the mission had to offer. I flat out refuse to take financial responsibility for him. I don't feel that's my responsibility. I don't think it's the mission's responsibility."

Whose responsibility is it to attend to the needs of Carl Smithston? Regardless of his homeless status, is it not part of the library's "mission" to extend the full range of its services to him?

All of us who have worked in urban libraries can attest that the "homeless" often find a "home" in the public library. Each of us has tried to come to grips with the problems they bring us. What is our responsibility to them? What are we supposed to be doing with them and those problems?

I examined my own experience with so-called "problem patrons." I remember Mr. B and his quiet, even mousy, woman friend. He came into the library almost every day, sometimes to try to borrow money, but usually to ask us to read out the locations of AA meetings that night. He was loud-mouthed and obviously capable of verbal and physical abuse, and I was always relieved when he left the reference room. Obviously loaning money is not the library's job, but the bank's. But any "I&R" exponent will verify that informing a patron of available social services is.

As a postscript to Mr. B's story, we heard one

day that his badly battered body had been found outside Bishop McVinney Auditorium; one of his fingers had been bitten off. Weeks later, we learned that he died, never coming out of a coma. I was grateful at least, that at the library he had been treated with dignity and courtesy. Is this not part of our "mission"?

I also remember "J," who arrived as the library doors opened and left when they closed. An elegant looking woman, tastefully made up and often in a black hat and coat, she spent her days bent over Goode's World Atlas, drawing shapes and making illegible notes. Discovering that, horror of horrors, she was writing in a library book, our department head hit on the solution of offering her a "discarded" atlas for her own. That, and the "Celebrity Register" became "her" books. Were we not meeting her needs?

None of us who worked at Pawtucket together one summer will forget the young man, shaky and with bloodshot eyes, who asked me for information on unusual killings. Some nameless person (but whose name I would instantly recognize, he said, if he gave it), was responsible for the murder of a family member, and he wanted to retaliate.

Taking his request absolutely seriously, I examined everything I could find in the "crime" books. I even offered to "ILL" some materials, at which suggestion, he became very fearful, not wanting to reveal his name to anyone.

He came to the library several times, once clearly having been drinking. He also always came to me, not to the others. In retrospect, I realize that quite possibly, he was a recovering addict, paranoia often being one of the side-effects of cocaine withdrawal. Nonetheless, he was a library patron whose needs demanded response.

Perhaps it was that same summer that the entire reference staff dealt with "CJ." Perhaps in her early sixties, CJ was someone obviously well-educated and articulate, and had done a good bit of acting in her day. She, too, called the library almost daily, and often dropped in as well.

I grew to dread the sound of her voice on the phone. One call might be a request for available weekend activities in her area. Another time, she would be obviously caught in the grasp of a vindictive, vituperative, ugly mood and proceed to attack anyone and everyone in sight, including myself, who once innocently suggested that she might seek help from a mental health clinic. For this piece of advice, I was rewarded with her threatening to come down to the library and ram her fist down my throat!

That experience caused me to evaluate my role as reference librarian in an urban public library. Obviously her requests for information fell well into our purview. The verbal abuse of any and all of us, however, falls into the hands of a mental health professional. Librarians are not trained to perform that kind of service.

The library's director at the time, interceded on my behalf with CJ. He explained that a library's services are like a pie, with everyone getting an equal share, but no more. No one patron can expect to receive more than his or her share.

I suppose this concept is similar to the law of

utility, which gives most weight to the greatest good for the greatest number. We cannot deprive some patrons of their rights while administering to the overwhelming and varying needs of others. Library services must be clearly defined and adhered to.

So back to Carl Smithston in Nashville. Doesn't he as a patron have needs that a public library is clearly pledged to give, regardless of his mental health history or residence in a local shelter? Could he not be put on "probation" for a set period of time to establish his reliability for returning library materials? How about appointing a "neutral" sponsor for him, someone willing to give him a chance to establish his credentials?

In the long run, isn't it preferable to serve a patron's legitimate library needs, even if it means occasionally losing some books?

(Reference is to the Nashville Tennessean, July 28, 1990.)

It might also be noted that ALA has designated September as "National Library Card Sign-up Month."

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The RILA BULLETIN is published ten times per year by the Rhode Island Library Association. Managing Editor: Judith Paster, 52 Seaview Avenue, Cranston, RI 02905 (467-8898); Co-Feature Editor: Norman Desmarais, Providence College, Phillips Memorial Library, Providence, RI 02918 (865-2241); Co-Feature Editor: Tanya Trinkaus Glass, Coventry Public Library, 1672 Flat River Road, Coventry, RI 02816 (822-9100); News Editor: Frank Iacono, DSLS, 300 Richmond Street, Providence, RI 02903-4222 (277-2726); Technical Editor: Veronica Thomas, East Providence Public Library, 41 Grove Avenue, East Providence, RI 02914 (434-2453); Jobline: Pam Stoddard, Government Documents Department, URI Library, Kingston, RI 02881 (792-2606); Advertising Manager: Linda Walton, Butler Hospital, 345 Blackstone Boulevard, Providence, RI 02906 (456-3869); Subscriptions Manager: John Bucci, William Hall Library, 1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905 (781-2451). A current list of RILA Executive Board members and committee chairs is available in Volume 62, No.12. Subscriptions: free to members; \$12/year in U.S.; \$20/year foreign. Deadlines: 1st of the month for features and 15th of the month for everything else. Advertising: \$130 full page; \$65 half page; \$40 quarter page; \$15 business card size. Change of address: members contact the Membership Committee Chair, Deborah Mongeau, Government Documents Office, URI Library, Kingston, RI 02881 (792-2606). Subscription correspondence: contact Subscriptions Manager. For further information contact the appropriate Editor. Printing by Lewis Graphics, 636 Park Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920 (941-7540). LC 57-26438.

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