

## **Librarians in the Workforce: the Big Picture and the Personal Panel Presentation for CRIG 11 May 2007**

**Introduction** Good afternoon. Thank you to the CRIG Committee for inviting me today. In the time allocated I will present a reflection of my career to date. It has not been a “brilliant career” but it has been an interesting and satisfying one. I do not have a Power Point presentation but I would like to illustrate my presentation with the following image which epitomises my philosophy of librarianship. This comes from a web page I am building for my Learning and Teaching Portfolio, evidence for assessment in the Graduate Certificate of Learning and Teaching that I am currently undertaking at Swinburne University of Technology. Here I am holding the world of information in my hands.

In tailoring my content to 10 minutes, in true reference librarian fashion, I searched to find a formula for how many words per minute a speaker could deliver. On the web site of the Leisure Studies Association I found the average speaker can deliver about 2,000 words in 15 minutes. I have written about 1600 words so I should make the time limit!

Librarians starting their careers today may find it difficult to get their first professional role. Thirty years ago it was easy to get work and during my career I have been able to change sectors. I have been fortunate in working in every sector of librarianship. My roles have included Branch Librarian in local government, Division Librarian in CSIRO, Liaison Librarian in higher education & TAFE, Information Manager at Boral Plasterboard, Regional Information Services Librarian and part of the senior management team in local government.

Do I have a preference for one sector? I am a cup half full person and have always found enjoyable aspects in all my roles. If pushed, I would have to say that the most satisfying has been special libraries where trust and rapport is built up over a long period of time with clients.

In terms of professional support, I have worked on a continuum from well supported collegiate environments in local government, CSIRO and academic libraries to a sole practice special librarian where I built a network outside of work for professional support. I have also faced the daunting challenge of my role being made redundant.

Despite being a strong social networker, I do not have a virtual life and my dabblings in virtual communities are at the crawling stage. While I have a strong curiosity about Second Life and can see that it has enormous potential to be a powerful social networking tool, most people in Second Life are there for recreation. I have not yet been tempted to create an avatar. My only life is in the here and now, where I am pursuing, the so called, “work/life balance”. I am balancing employment, recreation, family, friends, exercise, rest, nutrition and my dressmaking customers.

**What drew me to the profession?** As a science undergraduate in the early 70s, I was passionate about Chemistry. I was heading toward doing a PhD in physical chemistry. My aspirations took a radical turn when chronic dermatitis prevented me from spending long hours in the laboratory. Doing Honours was no longer an option; I needed a career that would combine my love of the scientific method, with working people. Secondary school teaching was out, so librarianship it was!

Politically I was and still am passionately committed to the people’s right to know. At a personal level I am driven by service excellence to my customers, expanding the reach of my role, exploring all aspects in a process of continuous improvement and stretching my mind.

**Why have I stayed?** I did not stay continuously in the profession for the last 30 years. I had 6 months out when my daughter was born in 1984, returning to work one day a week when she was 5 months old. I then spent 5 years as a part time librarian in local government.

The turning point came when my role at Boral Plasterboard was made redundant in 2003. This came as a complete shock to me. Outsourcing businesses will tell you that it is your role and not you who is made redundant but this is not how you feel. It was me who was made redundant and it led to a period of 3 years out of the profession. Looking back I can see that I simply did not speak the language of private enterprise. My manager had been encouraging me for about a year – “Make sure your statistics are good”. In my mind this did not translate into – watch out your job is on the line. If I had known the situation my ethical standards would have precluded me from fudging my usage statistics.

The loss of personal confidence resulting from having your role made redundant cannot be underestimated. After re-examining where I was headed, I deliberately turned my back on the profession and landed a role administering undergraduate psychology at the University of Melbourne. The students were a delight but after two years, the scope for improving the processes within the

role was exhausted. I was not being stretched enough, so I began looking for another role.

**Returning to the profession** The closest I have come to having a Second Life was being called by my great grandmother's name Phoebe, during my whole time at the University of Melbourne. This was a psychological crutch that I adopted spontaneously when the Staff Registration form at Melbourne Uni had a section "Known as". Aha I thought - I can be someone else, I can adopt another persona as a shield for a while. As my family call me Janey, it was easy to answer to the name Phoebe. When I had healed myself and rebuilt my self esteem, it was good to have a "Killing Phoebe" party and return to my given name.

In my initial search for a new job I was attracted to research/knowledge management roles. I had hoped that my library skills and Master of Business (Information Technology) would get me short listed. After a few knock backs I decided it was time to return to the profession I was good at and had a strong track record in. The motto "If you can't be good, be good at it" may be used outside the sexuality application. Returning to librarianship was a return to where my strength lay and I am good at it.

**What drives me in the profession?** From my days as a library school student the common themes driving me have been access to information, the thrill of the chase and an insatiable curiosity. Throughout my career I have always worked in the field of Information Provision.

Issues around access to information have taken a turn for the worse during the last 30 years. When I did field work in 1977, paper abstracts were the norm with researchers spending hours physically present in the library. The Hargrave Library at Monash University had a whole room devoted to *Chemical abstracts*. There were large tables where you spread the volumes out and there was a hush over the room as scientists went about their searches. Private researchers and the public could access these resources freely and openly. The move towards the provision of online databases and e-books, with their accompanying licensing arrangements has narrowed access. It is encouraging that the State Library of Victoria has a selection of online databases available for public use within the library and remotely. While the accent of the State Library's selection of databases is not towards the academic, this is a good start in terms of access for the public.

**Challenges.** During my lifetime the range of communication tools has burgeoned. Email, instant messaging, txt, domains like Linked In and My Space are just some of the tools that have changed the way we communicate. I often

prefer email over making a phone call. This can be a trap, we humans can read more in the nuances of a phone call than in the sometimes bluntness of email. I am old fashioned, for really special communication I still believe you cannot go past the hand written letter, in fountain pen on fine paper.

**Factors that may influence me to consider a change of role in the future?**

I mentioned in my introduction that at this stage in my life I am focusing on work/life balance. I am no longer interested in rising/returning to management ranks. I enjoy the fact that I have the time to “smell the roses”. The factors that will make me consider changing my role are the same factors that have always driven such a decision. Have I fully explored my current role? Am I still deriving energy from my role?

The style and level of detail that is required for job applications has grown during my working life. Nowadays at least 3 documents are required - a cover letter, a document giving supporting evidence that addresses the Selection Criteria and a CV. They need to be done extremely well to ensure being short listed.

**Further study/professional development** I am a life long learner, committed to fostering and participating in professional development. In the early stages of my career, while still at library school I joined to LAA. I continued to be involved at Victorian State Council level until the birth of my daughter. In 1997, while working as a Liaison Librarian at RMIT, believing that to keep my promotion options open, I enrolled in the Masters of Business (Information Technology) intending to take four years to finish it. Life got in the way and I completed it in seven years having taken three years Leave of Absence.

Swinburne University of Technology, my current employer, is a strong supporter of professional development. In the 10 months I have been at Swinburne I have attended five local workshops for librarians, a workshop on testing & tagging of cords and leads, the EDUCAUSE 2007 conference, as well as organising the annual refresher at two of the Swinburne campus libraries.

Having taught all my life, I am now fleshing out the pedagogy of education by undertaking the Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching at Swinburne University of Technology. I am thriving in this learning environment and my teaching practice has improved. Completion of this course may well be a spring board for a new direction in my career.

QED

## Links

Jane Wilson image

[[http://blackboard.swinburne.edu.au/webapps/bbcms/portfolio/viewPortfolio.jsp?pid=\\_2465\\_1](http://blackboard.swinburne.edu.au/webapps/bbcms/portfolio/viewPortfolio.jsp?pid=_2465_1) ]

Leisure Studies Association

[<http://www.leisure-studies-association.info/LSAWEB/Guides/Conferences.html> 20070510]