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'Right here, right now – it's a devil of a time in libraries'
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**eRebel with a Cause: My Journey from
Library Technician Student to eServices Specialist**

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It certainly is a devil of a time in libraries! Over the last three decades the rapid advancement of Internet Communication Technologies (ICT) has radically transformed the way we live, work, play, communicate, think and learn. These changes have impacted greatly on libraries, threatening the traditional concept of the library. Libraries face a myriad of challenges in an ongoing quest to meet the incessantly changing learning and social needs of their communities.

In order to remain relevant in today's fast-paced, information driven world, of which people are time-poor and source instant gratification, library and information services need to engage library users in both physical and online spaces. How do we 'wow' customers and attract new clients?

In a library career spanning 15 years, passion, dedication and enthusiasm have been my key to achievement and success. My passion for my work and libraries has taken me on an incredible professional journey. This paper shares that journey - the highlights, the challenges and those serendipity moments.

It may be a devil of a time in libraries, however, it is professional passion that drives results in engaging library users, connecting communities and making a difference. Passionate library staff and engaged users is a win-win situation for 21st century libraries.

Introduction

This paper traces my journey from student library technician to eServices Specialist. Serendipity, passionate involvement and willingness to experiment, and to 'rebel' if necessary, have all featured in my career in libraries. Along the way, I have been involved in setting new goals, breaking down hierarchies and making the library more visible through 'play'. Critical analysis of existing services and the willingness to take advantage of many professional development opportunities have been a major personal focus. Let me share some of my journey with you.

A fortunate beginning

I commenced my library studies with a clear vision; my goal was to work in the school library sector. Volunteer work in a Catholic college library had inspired direction and passion. School libraries make a difference in the lives of children and I wanted to be part of that process.

Then the randomness of fate, a 'serendipity' moment presented itself in a 10-week long service leave placement at Lumen Christi College in 2001. They were seeking a library technician student to fill the position and I seized the opportunity to complete my industry placement in the role of Acting Library Technician, working with a team of two, within a teaching and non-teaching team of 80, and approximately 800 students on campus. It was a dream, come true. I was drawn to the ethos of Catholic education and the importance of community, wellbeing and belonging. My energies rallied with relentless passion to pursue a library career in a Catholic school.

In 2002, I was employed as a library technician for a term at St Norbert College. The role expanded my knowledge in the area of audiovisual technologies and across all facets of school library services. I also had the privilege of working with a very talented and zealous teacher librarian. Maureen Smith's role as teacher and information specialist was enriched by her passion for children's literature. I had developed an interest in this genre during my studies and Maureen encouraged my promotion of literature and authors through displays and guiding students in reading choices. She also inspired me to further my studies in the area of children's literature.

Nearing the end of another wonderful term immersed in the joy of working in a school library, good fortune again shone with the employment listing for a library technician at Lumen Christi College, commencing in the new school year. The teacher librarian had resigned and the current library technician Mimma Sardi, was promoted to the role of library manager. I was presented with the opportunity of securing a permanent full time position.

My St Norbert College tenure came to a close in December, signaling the end of the school year with no word from Lumen. My sinking spirits were revitalized on receiving a phone call from the Principal of Lumen Christi College a few days later, offering me the position. I had made an impression in my previous term of employment and the job was mine! My library technician career was to begin in earnest in 2003.

Core business of school libraries

The core business of schools is to meet the educational needs of students, and I believe a library should be at the heart of a school, empowering students to learn. A good school library needs to be well resourced, provide a stimulating and welcoming learning environment and be staffed by skilled library professionals. Under the previous leadership, the Lumen Christi College Library was not impacting on student achievement; it was stagnant and uninspiring, which discouraged staff and students from using the facility.

Breaking down hierarchies and setting goals

In promoting the current library technician to a leadership role and employing a new library technician, the college was breaking down hierarchies to work towards change. The new library team, which included a very knowledgeable and experienced library officer, was tasked with transforming the library into a vibrant learning centre.

It was very important for the new library team to formulate partnerships and work collaboratively across all learning areas, especially English, to determine curriculum requirements and expectations of the library as a learning, social and community space. The space needed to be comfortable, friendly and innovative, providing students with a sense of ownership. Our goal was for the library to become an active learning environment, a focal point to engage students in learning and reading.

To quote the late Terry Pratchett:

'The way to get children reading is to leave the library door open and let them read everything they want.'

To achieve both personal and organisational goals involves the support of people. You need to effectively communicate information, ideas and services to engage with stakeholders and make connections, in order to achieve desired outcomes. Our first challenge was to get the students and teachers back into the library. We needed to be seen, and valued as a learning space. Another matter to address was a preconceived notion communicated by a number of staff members that library staff read and stack books all day! A laughable comment had it been delivered in jest.

Making the library visible through ‘play’ and critical thinking

Being a creative person, I was entrusted with coordinating the library displays including the Children’s Book Week program. Most of my library breakthrough successes start out as hair brained ideas, often based on intuition. I am motivated by task and enjoy the challenge of transforming a library space into a visually stimulating display that adds value to the library. Enthusiasm inspires others and it is advantageous to have a partner in creative ‘play.’ Ideas flow, great results are achieved and the task enjoyed. My creative partner was our library officer Robyn Kirkby. We created many wonderful themed displays, displayed student work, and built displays and programs around class assignments. Students love to see their work featured in the library, it is a sure fire way of getting them in the door.

Children’s Book Week had always been a low-key event at Lumen. We were determined for it to become a highlight of the library and college calendar, so I set about creating a bold program of events and displays. Why settle for ordinary when you can have extraordinary! Why target only the English learning area when literacy is part of all curriculum areas.

For *Oceans of Stories* in 2003, the library was transformed into a sea of literature and in 2005 the library was literally rocking for *Reading Rocks!* *Oceans of Stories* featured as an interactive program inviting teachers to book their classes in during Book Week to discover the treasures of the library. Students in Years 8, 9 and 10 from English and the Society and Environment learning areas took part. The *Reading Rocks* program involved participation from six learning areas: English, Society and Environment, Science, Religion, Music-Art-Dance-Drama (The Arts) and Technology and Enterprise. Activities included a balloon launch, geological pet rocks, a rock band performance, impromptu drama, poetry readings, cooking of rock cakes and rocky road for the staff morning tea, a poster competition and the inaugural 'Rock, Paper, Scissors' tournament which attracted both staff and students. Displays included a giant replica of Mt Everest with the message: '*Conquer your Everest! Read your way to the top.*'

The Book Week programs engaged students and teachers in literacy-based activities that were educational and fun. The library was developing an environment that excites, inspires and values reading for enjoyment as much as for achievement.

Professional development and learning opportunities

Ongoing professional learning, and development of professional practices demonstrates commitment. My library studies, experience to date and my passion for libraries served me well, but there was so much more to learn. I value the importance of lifelong learning to help me achieve development and career goals and was committed to advancing my professional learning to ensure delivery of quality customer service and support to students, teachers, administration and parents.

Under the direction of Giovanni Cartoni, the Dean of Curriculum, the library team was encouraged to participate in professional development to support our roles. The Library Manager and I attended industry related training, workshops, school library seminars and conferences to learn new ideas, build knowledge and expand our networks. We defied the norm in managing a school library without a teacher librarian and met with some opposition. We stood strong as a team, demonstrating enthusiasm and initiative in learning and contributing towards the betterment of our library service.

My enthusiasm, lead to being awarded a Western Australian School Library Association grant to attend *Island Journeys, a Quest for Inspiration*: the joint 2003 national conference of the Children's Book Council of Australia and the Australian School Library Association, held in Hobart Tasmania. The College kindly provided additional funding towards travel expenses. I was required to write a report for the grant committee and present my conference experience to college staff. The conference was such an amazing experience! When you are so inspired, the words flow so easily onto paper, into a PowerPoint to present to teaching and library colleagues, and in talking with students about the incredible authors and illustrators. My *Island Journeys'* experience engaged colleagues and students. It also highlighted the professionalism of library staff and the value of libraries. Passion leads to recognition and opens up opportunities. I was making a difference and adding value to the library service and the college was happy to support my continuing professional development. This extended to attendance at national literacy and library technician conferences, expanding my knowledge, networks and career. Further studies were made possible through receiving a number of professional development scholarships from the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia to undertake a course of study at Deakin University to attain my Postgraduate Certificate in Children's Literature.

A serendipitous moment scores for the library

In 2004 I stumbled upon Booked Out, the speakers' agency for Australian writers, artists and thinkers, and in making enquiries I ended up booking Felice Arena, author of the popular *Specky Magee* series co-written with Australian Rules football legend Garry Lyon. The following quotation by Grace Murray Hopper immediately came to mind as I approached the Library Manager with the news:

'It's easier to seek forgiveness than it is to ask permission.'

Mimma took the news of my overzealous enquiry come booking very well. She viewed it as a wonderful opportunity to host a best-selling author suitable for our Year 8s, however no money had been allocated in the budget. The Library Manager presented the idea to the Head of English and the Dean of Curriculum who thought it fantastic, especially for boys reluctant to read. The Student Leadership Team was approached and funding approved for us to host our first ever author! The English Department wanted the entire Year 8 cohort to attend the session, so we had to move the presentation to the College Chapel. The Chapel is a sacred space to gather, in prayer, in times of sorrow, and joy. Arena's high-energy presentation involving students acting out the chapter featuring Specky Magee's first big mark to his enthusiastic narration was a hold-your-breath moment in the annals of Chapel storytelling. Such a 'joyous' ending, the students were totally engaged and no part of the Chapel was harmed in Arena's wonderful presentation! The impact was, in enlightening young minds to the power of words and the magic of storytelling. I was asked to write an article for the college newsletter that featured as a double-page spread; Felice Arena was a hit and serendipity had scored a winning goal for the library.

Expanding role, evolving school library service

Another key area of responsibility of the library technician's position was the management of the audiovisual resources. This included recording and dubbing educational television programs to VHS tape, loaning out television-VHS player combinations, tape and CD players, handheld tape recorders, overhead projectors, educational videos and DVDs, and the use of a 35mm film camera. A very basic and outdated collection that over a short period of time, we were able to grow to a digital media collection inclusive of laptops, digital still and video cameras, digital voice recorders, data projectors, DVD recorder-players, portable sound systems and boom boxes. I was instrumental in the acquisition of the ClickView Digital Library, ClickView Online and in the push for installation of data projectors in all classrooms and learning areas. The library acquired Bookit to manage the booking of library and college resources via the school network. Teaching colleagues were now able to book resources, and library and college spaces, without stepping into,

or ringing the library to pencil it in. The introduction of an online booking system, increased efficiency in having resources issued ready for collection and library spaces equipped for class bookings, eliminated double bookings and clearly showed available and real-time availability of resources.

My technologies skillset and role increased significantly, evolving into a specialist multimedia role which expanded beyond the library in assisting teaching colleagues with technical issues and setting up audiovisual equipment for presentations, masses and guest presenters. A library technician's eye for detail, technical expertise and customer focus were important skills in ensuring presenters were welcomed and ably assisted with equipment requirements. My interest and up skilling in digital photography saw me rise from the official 'toilet graffiti' photographer, to college and presentation evening photographer, and to stepping into the classroom to present digital camera sessions to students. I was also invited to join the College Annual Committee as a photographer and proofreader, and had the privilege of working with and learning from a very talented editor.

Due to the growth of multimedia resources, as required to support the curriculum, this became my main role and occasionally they would let me out to 'play.' In 2009 the College carried out a role review and I was offered the position of Manager Multimedia Resources, working alongside the Library Manager who would continue to manage the print collection, library and services. Additional staff were required to assist in the delivery of quality library and multimedia services. Two dynamic part time library officers were employed for the library, and an experienced library technician joined the multimedia resources team.

Digital devices collaboration project

During this time, I had commenced working on a project with the ICT Manager to secure computers for schools as part of the *Digital Education Revolution*. The college was successful in securing 210 MacBook laptops and we determined for equity of access, the MacBooks would be made available on trolleys in each of the learning centres, including the library. Our ICT technician designed the trolleys specific to our requirements. The MacBooks and trolleys were accessioned and catalogued by Multimedia Resources and I added the 12 computers on wheels (COWs) to Bookit. The 2 library COWs were managed by the library and multimedia, however the learning area trolleys were a challenge, in regards to management and equity of use. Procedures were put in place and training offered in correct usage and care. Teaching colleagues were then allocated MacBooks in 2010 and Multimedia Resources were once again involved in the process. I was also invited to join the ICT Committee to contribute to defining strategies, policies and procedures.

Extra-curricular activities

While I was working on this project, I was also responsible for leading a team of 15 library and informational professionals in achieving the delivery of an awesome ALIA National Library and Information Technicians Conference, *'Back to Basics' - Perth 2011*. This journey began at the Adelaide Conference in 2009, presenting an invitation to 2011. It was an extremely busy two years, but a very rewarding experience working with a dynamic team and in partnership with ALIA. (Courtland, 2011, p.5)

Career setback and moving forward

In late 2011, the college was successful in acquiring approximately 850 laptops for students as part of the 1:1 laptop program. This was a huge project, with the MacBooks not arriving until the end of the year and the expectation to roll them out for the start of the 2012 school year.

Not enough staff and a huge workload in data entry and manual handling, including the distribution of the laptops to students, resulted in injuries. Unfortunately I required surgery on my hands in 2012. It was a low point in my career, seeing a project through to fruition and then being sidelined. It got even lower when told my rehabilitation and return to work process would not take place at Lumen Christi College, I was devastated. I asked my case manager to find me a placement in another library. To quote poet John Milton and American author Grace Spere respectively:

'Every cloud has a silver lining' and 'for every negative there is a positive.'

I was offered a return to work placement at Kalamunda Library, a public library! I was dubious for all of five minutes. I thought it a great opportunity to check out the public library sector on route to returning to Lumen Christi College for the start of the 2013 school year. The return to work process was a gradual buildup of hours per day and then days per week to the required 37.5 hours, which I achieved in the weeks leading up to Christmas. By the time I had completed my placement at Kalamunda Library, my perception of public libraries had completely changed; they too make a difference! I had been accepted into a wonderful team, shared skills and knowledge, learned new work practices, enjoyed the opportunity of working with a varied clientele and made a positive contribution on many levels.

I returned to Lumen Christi College in January 2013 and was welcomed by the new Principal and my colleagues. It was good to be back, however my stay was to be short-lived. It was time for a new challenge and when the role of eServices Specialist at the Shire of Kalamunda Libraries was advertised, I applied for the position and was successful. With a heavy heart I submitted my letter

of resignation to the Principal. Saying farewell to colleagues was not easy, but it was lovely to reminisce the wonderful times, achievements and friendships made in my 11 years at Lumen, and to be acknowledged for making a valuable contribution to the College, in the areas of library and multimedia services, and as a respected member of the community. I had clearly made a difference.

Transitioning to public libraries

I returned to the Shire of Kalamunda employed in a specialist role, based at Kalamunda Library, but working across the four networked branch libraries: Kalamunda, Forrestfield, High Wycombe and Lesmurdie, a shared high school and community library. The position is also a leadership role. As a member of the Library Leadership Team I work with the Library Services Team Leader and the four Branch Librarians in contributing to the future planning of library services; valuable team learning which has aided my transition from a school to a community service environment.

eServices Specialist role

Public libraries, like school libraries, are valued for more than the physical materials. They are important learning, social and community meeting spaces, for people of all ages. The eServices Specialist position has two distinct roles; one managing a conventional library system, which provides the infrastructure for traditional library services. I am responsible for the effective administration of the AMLIB library management system, which involves maintenance and software updates, maintaining data integrity, ensuring database accuracy, troubleshooting, training colleagues to become proficient users, providing support services to the network of libraries accessing the database, extracting information and compiling statistical and other reports.

The second component of the role provides opportunities to existing customers and potential clients to be members of the wider library community in connecting them to digital library services.

The eServices Specialist position was developed to integrate social media technologies with current services to increase the digital presence of the library service. The new role included development of social media platforms to reach current and potential clients through promotion and marketing of library services, engaging with them in a connected and participatory digital environment.

Transferable skills

Looking back at the change from the school library to a public library, I realise how many of the skills I developed after my graduation were still necessary and even central to my new position. Some of the most important of those skills were the ability to plan and use existing systems and visualise the ways in which these technologies could be better used. I have applied these skills to improve work practices in managing AMLIB and extracting information from the database. My knowledge and skills in creating PowerPoint presentations was used to coordinate and create the Kalamunda Libraries presentation to the Community Development Team in 2013. Each of the leadership team members presented, speaking to the slides. Ultimately, it was an enlightening and professional presentation.

Serendipity strikes again!

Just after I commenced working at Kalamunda Library, I attended the 2013 National Library and Information Technicians' Symposium in Canberra, where I was honoured with the Library Technician of the Year Award for 2013. It was a complete surprise, and an extraordinary career moment to be acknowledged by my peers, and to receive my award at the National Library of Australia. This was a personal award, but its receipt was celebrated by my library colleagues and team, and the entire Kalamunda Shire Council. This was a serendipitous moment, providing an opportunity to promote the Library Service to Councillors. (Courtland, 2013, p.28)

Engaging patrons in a connected world

We cannot wait for people to come into our libraries; we need to be proactive in reaching out to our community to promote and market our services, programs, collections and spaces. We need to be stepping into the online spaces inhabited by patrons and potential library users. The refreshing of the libraries' webpage and establishment of a Facebook presence has been making a positive impact. By using online media to focus on digital resources and events, more people have been drawn to using library services. This increase is indicated by the growing number of website hits and eBorrowings.

A notably successful campaign was based upon commemorating the 100th anniversary of the ANZAC landings at Gallipoli. The libraries' webpage and Facebook page invited members of the community to contribute to the poppy walls on display at each of our branches. The displays featured a photograph of the Kalamunda War Memorial and red paper poppies were available for people to write on messages of commemoration and then pin onto the wall. Implicit to the

campaign was the wish to build community engagement with the libraries. Achievement of this objective was fostered through the use of digital and social media and, ultimately, printed media.

An eRebel

I love working in the library and information industry and strive to make a difference, build connections and engage patrons in library services. I am highly creative and driven by passion, thus the rebellious trait. I liken myself to an 'eRebel with a cause' in daring to challenge traditional library conventions in order to provide innovative services to meet the needs of 21st Century library users. Let me share one of my successes. Perhaps the most enjoyable was the Kalamunda Library's revamped approach to the 2014 National Simultaneous Storytime event, modeled on ideas I gained through participation in the *Grow the Love* online library marketing training course, offered by Sydney TAFE through ALIA training. With the program written and checklist in place, we proceeded to fill the Family Reading Centre with too many colourful cut out elephants in readiness for 'Elephant Rhymetime'. However, the Assistant Librarian identified the story was not gripping the attention of the toddlers in a practice reading session. We determined that props were required for tactile learning and a cardboard box construction of Eric's house from Ursula Dubosarsky's *Too Many Elephants in This House*, was built and filled with toy elephants. With mums, toddlers and special guests in place, the Assistant Librarian began the reading of the story, ably assisted by an enthusiastic Library Clerk in charge of a house full of toy elephants to hand out as the story unfolded. Unfortunately, or fortunately, a curious toddler spotted an elephant trunk peeking out of one of the windows and made a beeline for it. Out came the toy elephant and in came the rest of the toddlers to grab the remainder of the toys from a house, which was soon, no longer too full of elephants! The Library Clerk looked bemused, but the Assistant Librarian did not miss a beat. Everyone was engaged. (Courtland, 2014, p.31)

No longer static but dynamic

There are more achievements than there is time to tell. My journey has been filled with fun, fulfillment, successes, challenges, inspiration and joy. Membership of ALIA and the ALIA Western Australian Library Technicians Group have been instrumental in reaching my professional goals. I acknowledge the contributions of a much-valued professional learning network of friends, teaching colleagues and industry colleagues, too many to name individually.

I dedicate this paper to the memory of Giovanni Cartoni.

'So many people come into our lives and leave the way they came. But there are those precious few who touch our hearts so deeply, we will never be the same.' Mary Englebreit.

Only a book stacker, no! Can stack books, yes! Even eBooks! In the most imaginative, innovative and engaging ways! It may be a devil of a time in libraries, but libraries are changing and our LIS roles are evolving. ALIA no longer uses the term paraprofessional; library technicians are library and information professionals. This paper has shared some of the ways in which I work as a professional: setting new goals, breaking down hierarchies and critical analysis of strategies and services. The central objective is to remember, always, that our core service is connecting people with ideas, to resources, and to people. In doing so, we help them to bridge the digital divide and to gain equitable access to information, in globally connected digital landscapes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I share with you, my take on serendipity:

'Good things may happen by chance, however, passion increases the probability. Serendipity works!'

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