



V O L U M E 1 N U M B E R 2

::: APRIL 2001 :::

FEATURE – Dale Vidmar

14 Days in Cuba: A Land of People Living In Between

Dale Vidmar recently returned from a 2-week visit to Cuba as part of a tour group of 35 librarians and friends from the U.S. and Canada. We asked him to write a diary of his trip for NewBreed.

INTERVIEW – Jeffrey Zeldman

NewBreed Librarian asked Jeffrey Zeldman to educate the library community on standards... what are they, why are they important, what is the W3C, which browsers are compliant, what are the incentives, and more. These issues are central to the web medium we find ourselves increasingly immersed in. If librarians foresee themselves as key players in future information landscapes, we must begin with standards.

PEOPLE

For this issue, we asked three students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign why they chose to pursue an MLS. Here are their responses.

ASK SUSU

Susu, our sometimes irreverent advice columnist, answers your questions about work, school, the job hunt, and librarianship in general. In this issue, Susu advises on interviewing.

TECH TALK

Colleen just got back from the ACRL conference in Denver, where she had a great time talking to exhibitors. In this TechTalk, she shares with you what she found.

LETTERS

Say What? If you have something to say, we want to hear it. [Send us](#) your letters and we'll post them here. If you're responding to an article or interview, place the headline in the subject of your email.

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F E A T U R E A R T I C L E

::: APRIL 2001 :::

14 Days in Cuba: A Land of People Living In Between

DALE VIDMAR

Dale Vidmar recently returned from a 2-week visit to Cuba as part of a tour group of 35 librarians and friends from the U.S. and Canada. We asked him to write a diary of his trip for NewBreed.

In Cuba, time seems to stand still, but when the country began to stand still is difficult to define. By some accounts, Cuba is not a third world country, it is a fourth world country. Cuba is a country beset by an economic and political situation aggravated by trade sanctions imposed by the United States. Libraries are plagued by conditions that make preservation issues critical. Few books published after 1990 can be found in libraries. Rights of privacy and freedom to access information are simply overshadowed by collections that are underdeveloped. It is a place where necessity drives the soul.

The following account is a log of 14 days traveling through the western portion of Cuba. I will detail some observations and thoughts that emerged as a mosaic of my experiences of a country and a culture. But from the outset, Cuba is a land where questions generally breed new questions. Answers are burdened with complexities. To visit Cuba is to look at one's own reflection and ask the same questions about freedom and access to information. While we may have so much more freedom in this country, we may ask what we have taken for granted. It is my hope that this account will fill you with wonder and keep you asking – another question, and yet another question.

Day One: Monday, February 19

The Night Before and the Long Flight from Vancouver to Varadero

On Sunday afternoon, I left Medford with my partner, Karina, and boarded the flight to Portland on a Horizon DeHaviland Dash8 airplane. After a brief stop in Portland, it was on to Vancouver, B.C. and a four hour layover before the flight to Cuba. We met Gretta Siegel from Portland State University while waiting for our connecting flight in Portland. While waiting at the airport having dinner, I met up with some of the other members of our tour group – Connie Bennett, Library Director from Silver Falls Public Library, and her husband, Richard Leinaweaver. Richard, Karina, and several others were on the tour as friends of libraries. All of these "non-librarians" accompanied the group on most every excursion during the 14 days. None would say they were disappointed. Studying Cuba from the perspective of libraries and information would prove to paint a fascinating portrait of the Cuban people, the culture, the government, and life in general.



Left: *Pastors for Peace bus that transports the group to the hotel in Varadero.*

We met our tour leader, Joyce Holmes, at about 10:00 p.m. She had our tickets, and with those in hand, we checked our bags. At 12:30 a.m. Monday morning, we boarded our Air Transat flight and flew out from Vancouver to Varadero, Cuba. Fifteen hours after I left Medford, we were in Cuba. Going through customs was relatively simple other than the x-ray machine picking up my harmonicas in my camera bag. The guard asked me

about them, and I tried to explain the "Blues" to him. While I would never hear a Cuban group playing Blues music on their own, the Cuban musicians were as intrigued with the Blues as I was with the Cuban salsa, mambo, cha cha, and other music of the island.

Stepping out of the airport terminal, I was immediately struck by the most significant danger to Cuban libraries – humidity. It was warm, not hot, but very sultry. During the two weeks I was there, the pages of my Spanish book would curl like the ruffled skirt of a flamenco dancer. We were transported from the airport on the Pastors for Peace bus to the Hotel Internacional. The Peace bus was an old yellow school bus originally from Canada. The bus made a trip from Vancouver across the United States transporting food and medical supplies to the Cuban people.

After a long day and night of flying, it was time to relax and breathe in the salty air while the waves washed blue on the white sand of the pristine Varadero beach. Soon we were sitting on the veranda sipping mojitos – the customary welcome drink of rum, lime juice, bitters, and sugar poured over a mint leaf. The humidity built to a crescendo with an afternoon downpour that was as intense as it was beautiful. After all, Cuba is a tropical Caribbean island.

Day Two: Tuesday, February 20

Varadero

After breakfast, we met with the entire group – 35 librarians and friends from the United States and Canada. 21 of us were from the United States. There were 13 people from Oregon. Those of us who flew from Vancouver met up with the others that had come from Toronto Monday evening. The people that made up the Cuban Libraries Tour were quite diverse in terms of location, type of library or occupation, and why they had come. For most of us, this was our first trip to Cuba. Over the next 14 days, we would learn much about each other and ourselves.

Perhaps the most important part of traveling to another country is introspection. Looking at another country and its people enable one to see and understand one's own land and culture better. In Cuba, this was exacerbated because of the otherworldliness of the country. Cuba was not like any place I had visited. Probably the closest comparison was a 1996 trip to post-Soviet Lithuania. But what made Cuba even more unique was that so much of the information that I did know was neither entirely objective nor was it always accurate. Like most Americans, my knowledge or lack of knowledge grew from a Cold War composite from forty years ago, and little of that information spoke of the people – Cuba's greatest asset and resource.

Right: *The Cuban Libraries Tour group of 35 librarians and friends from the United States and Canada overlooking the valley of Viñales.*



After the initial group meeting, I walked out to the highway to the road into Varadero with Karina. We stopped to visit the Biblioteca Publica in Varadero, our first Cuban library. Preservation of materials, the major issue affecting Cuban libraries, was soon apparent. The library had open windows with shutters, no screens. Lights were kept off to save resources. The books were old and in various stages of decay. Rare was a book after 1990. The Reference section featured a 1937 edition of *Richard's Topical Encyclopedia* and the 1983 edition of *Lenin Obras Completas* – Lenin's complete works. Books that were newer were donated by visitors. There were works by E.L. Doctorow, Dickens, and Emerson. Most Cuban library collections after 1990 that I observed were built from donations even though most materials including educational books must be hand carried into Cuba because of restrictions and theft at post offices. That said, what I was really struck by in my first encounter was the courtesy and professionalism of the librarians and others who worked in the library. It was something that I could not help but notice in every library.

We also stopped by a field where some boys played baseball or a version of baseball that was not uncommon in Cuba. They were dressed in their school uniforms of red pants, a white shirt, and a red ribbon tie denoting elementary school. High school students wore blue and middle school or junior high students wore gold uniforms. The boys played with a ball about two inches in diameter made from tightly wrapped rags. They had no bat, so they hit the ball with their arms. There was no pitcher, so the batters flipped the ball in the air and put the ball in play by striking it with their arm. Three bases defined the field. Home, first base, and third base. No second base. Volleyball posts were used to mark first and third base. Five players on each side would set up in no particular order defensively in the field. Watching the game, I could only wonder of all the Cubanos who could have played in the Major Leagues if given the opportunity. Like the young boys playing in the field, I let my imagination get the best of me and wondered, "What if?"

Day Three: Wednesday, February 21 **Varadero to Trinidad**

The long bus ride from Varadero to Trinidad was filled with visions of the countryside. A smaller group from our tour walked through town to donate a hardback Spanish/English dictionary at the Biblioteca Gustavo Izquierdo, the public library in Trinidad. The librarians welcomed us and asked us to please look around. They offered to answer any questions we might have. These librarians were as professional as any librarians we might expect to see in a library at home. We chose to split into small groups, examining the collection and the condition of the books. Once again, many of the books needed mending and repair.

After lunch at the Casa Mimbré, a heavy downpour rained down outside. The cobblestone streets of the old Spanish colonial town filled with runoff like a small creeks. Crossing the street was difficult as we made our way back to the bus. From the way people reacted, this was nothing unusual in the humid tropical climate of the area. We spent the night at a resort hotel in Hanabanilla, about an two hours away from Trinidad but near Santa Clara. The resort hotel was a place somewhat frozen in time from about 1960. It was spartan in appearance and in comfort. The view overlooking the lake and the green foothills

of the Sierra de Escambray surrounding the lake made the poor plumbing and other mild discomforts quite tolerable. At night, the musicians who played at dinner and at the upstairs bar provided an atmosphere of music, rhythm, and dance that I will always remember as Cuban.

Day Four: Thursday, February 22

Santa Clara

We spent the entire day in Santa Clara. The day began with a scheduled appointment with UNEAC, the artists and writers union, that was canceled at the last minute. Either we were late or the time was miscommunicated. It is important to learn flexibility when traveling in another country. In Cuba, adapting to change and maintaining grace under pressure is a necessity. We went to the main square in the town to visit the Biblioteca José Martí in Santa Clara. The library was by far the largest library we had seen so far in our tour. We were escorted into a presentation room where we were introduced to some of the staff who would lead us through a complete tour. Perhaps the instruction librarian in me kicked in when we started the tour. I could not hear very well because of the size of our group, so I became a *nonconformista* and began to wander on my own as unobtrusively as possible. In every area of the library, I met or observed librarians who were friendly, approachable, and professional. I asked one librarian in the Reference section about collection development in the library. She responded, "As you can see, our collection is very rich and very poor.... We must depend on outside resources like donations to expand our collection." The librarian also said she was free to purchase any material, but the library had a very limited budget. However, whatever the collection was, I was filled with the sense that this library played an essential role in the community. School children sat at a table with their teacher in the Children's Collection. Their faces were bright, energetic, and filled with curiosity and wonder. I could only contemplate how their lives might be enriched if we could better share our culture with them, and how enriched our lives would be if they could share their culture with us.

Santa Clara, in the Villa Clara province, is a city of 200,000 people that is rich in Cuban history. The city is south of where the four Soviet rocket launchers were constructed in 1962 leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis. But more importantly, Santa Clara was the site of the historic battle that ended the Fulgencio Batista regime. In the late afternoon, we visited the museum site where Ernesto "Ché" Guevara and a small band of 26 soldiers derailed a train filled with over 400 soldiers from the Batista army. They obtained the surrender of the soldiers and all their arms without a shot being fired. Earlier we visited the Monumento Ernesto Ché Guevara. The remains of 17 of the 38 revolutionaries who were killed in Bolivia in 1967, including Ché, were recovered from a secret mass grave and returned to Cuba in 1997. Those remains are enshrined in the museum. Cameras, tote bags, and such were not allowed because of bomb threats to the memorial. As I reflected upon my previous knowledge of Ché, I wondered how my perception was created. It was so very different from that of the Argentinean doctor with asthma who sought the end of colonialism and widespread impoverishment of the people in Latin America.

Day Five: Friday, February 23

Habana

We left Hanabanilla and the Villa Clara province and traveled northwest to Habana. We arrived at the Hotel Colina to discover we had been bumped from our rooms – not exactly uncommon in Cuba. While new arrangements were being made, I sat down to have a *café cubano* – a coffee drink that best resembles espresso that often comes sweetened with sugar. I conversed in a mixture of Spanish and English with a local man and his wife who wanted to sell me some black market Montecristo #4 cigars. The black market is a necessary evil in Cuba because few, if any, people make enough money to live

and eat. Although I said I did not want any cigars, the man left to get them anyway. I spoke with the man's wife for a while, and she explained the difficulties of getting by in Cuba. She did not want to talk to me at first, but gradually opened up. I made her my friend by giving her some soaps and shampoos from our bag of donations. When her husband returned, she chastised him for going for the cigars. She showed him the soaps and thanked me again. We parted amiably.

Right: *Students playing music and talking at the University of Habana.*

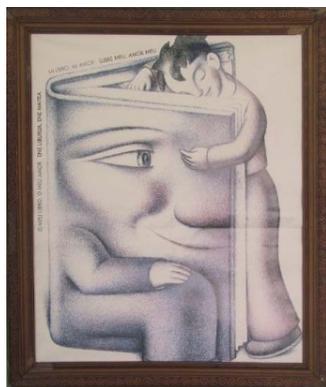


We walked across the street to the University of Habana. I met some students who were talking and playing music together. Finally, we found accommodations at the Hotel Capri. Our stay there would prove to be a blessing. That night at dinner, Karina and I met the musicians playing at the Hotel Capri dining room, Guillermo, Osvaldo, and Jose Luis. I learned the words of the song, Chán Chán, that I first heard in the film, Buena Vista Social Club. After a long conversation about music, I played some Blues with them. First, I played the guitar and showed Guillermo a 12-bar jazzy blues arrangement. He quickly picked it up, Jose Luis joined in with some lead, Osvaldo played the maracas, and I played harmonica. Music in Cuba is everything. It opened a door to some wonderful people.

Day Six: Saturday, February 24 **La Habana Vieja – Old Havana**

On Saturday morning, we visited the Centro de Informacion y Analisis Instituto Cubano del Libro, the Cuban Book Institute, and met Marta Terry, president of ASCUBI – the union for librarians in Cuba. Marta was an intense, articulate individual who had much to say about the profession of librarianship and information science. Marta was a former vice-president of IFLA. She described the profession of librarianship in Cuba. A person who wants to be a librarian first finishes high school, then gets a two-year technical degree. The person then works at a library for at least two years, before attending the university for additional training to become a professional librarian. In the libraries we visited, particularly the smaller provincial and school libraries, most of the library staff had only the technical degree. Assistants often did not have any additional education beyond high school. However, in every library, there was a professionalism and an overall respect for the institution and the role libraries play in safeguarding the cultural works of Cuba and its people.

What is important to note is that the Cuban libraries are planning more and better access to the Internet. The Internet is the future for Cuba like it is for so many other countries. As to the kinds of information that would become available as a result of broadening access to the Internet, Marta said there is only one type of filter that works – conscience. People must be responsible for what they are doing. They need to respect the tool that the library is providing. What they do at home is their own business. After reading a recent survey published by CNN that stated 69% of American people surveyed want libraries to filter the Internet, I could only reflect upon Marta's words and hope they could be heard in the U.S. before another piece of our freedom and democracy is usurped.



Left: *Poster promoting reading found in most Cuban libraries. This one was found at the Biblioteca Publica in Varadero.*

When asked about censorship, Marta replied, "The Blockade is everything." It was very difficult to get materials that were essential for the education of the people. Why would Cuban libraries have books by George Orwell or some other author and ignore books that could help the people? Clearly, books are needed in Cuban libraries, but there are obstacles to obtaining them. First, money to buy books is scarce. Second, the Blockade makes it difficult to buy books even if libraries had the money. Marta's reaction to the question of censorship echoed a reality. There were few books in any library published after 1990. There was little question about the relative importance of a current book on teaching reading or mathematics versus the works of Orwell. The issue of censorship was overshadowed by necessity.

At night, our group split up. Some went to dinner at the Casa de la Amistad with music and dancing to follow. I went with a group of about 12 to a Cuban baseball game – the Habana Industriales versus Villa Clara. While the others in the group sat on the Villa Clara side of the stadium, I went over to the third base side of the stadium to sit with the fans of the Habana team. I sat by myself amidst the Cubans from Habana as the stands slowly filled around me enveloping me in the game and the people. Baseball in Cuba was different – no beer, no hot dogs, no seventh inning stretch, no "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Police patrolled the stands to "write up" anyone caught partaking in alcoholic beverages. A couple vendors sold cheese sandwiches or café cubano served in small homemade cups fashioned from a piece of paper. But beyond all the differences, the most significant part of Cuban baseball was the sheer passion of the fans. It was an incredible event. Whether they cheered for their team or shouted their differing views of the game, the Cubans expressed themselves vehemently. Later we met up with other members of our group at the Casa de la Amistad where I quickly joined in the fun of the music and dance. I sipped a mojito and was soon dancing to salsa with Joyce, our tour leader, to the sounds of a nine-piece band playing under the stars.

Day Seven: Sunday, February 25 **La Habana Vieja and a New Friend**

Sunday was a day of rest for most of Cuba and for the Cuban Libraries Tour group. Karina and I took the opportunity to walk down the Malecón to La Habana Vieja to the home of Orestes, a friend of a student at the university in Ashland who has spent about four months in Cuba. Orestes taught English in the medical school at the University. We met Orestes because I had agreed to deliver a letter from the student after he visited me in my office. I later found out that the letter introduced me to Orestes, but also contained a caveat that would allow him to excuse himself if he felt uncomfortable at any time. Much to my pleasure and the delight of the student who gave me the letter, Karina and I spent almost three hours talking with Orestes. We were also invited to come to his class on Tuesday to observe and help teach English to his students.

Right: *Dale Vidmar helping teach English to students at the Medical School in the University of Habana.*

Orestes spoke openly about so much in Cuba. I should note that we spoke only in Spanish for the first twenty minutes I was at his house before he told me he taught English. Karina and I had been studying Spanish for only four months, so speaking Spanish or more to the point, Cubano, was difficult. Orestes smiled and acknowledged our difficulty, but said, "You must force yourself to speak the language to better understand Cuba as well as yourself." He was absolutely correct. I continue to remind myself of his words.



What impressed me about Orestes was his kindness. He took Karina and me into his house without a second thought. In light of the fact that I was an American, and perhaps indirectly responsible for some of the conditions that led to a professor at the university having a monthly income of less than \$30 per month, I found his graciousness extremely admirable. Orestes, like other Cuban people who we met, treated us with the courtesy reserved for friends. We were not Americans. We were people. When traveling to another country, one could not ask for anything better.

Day Eight: Monday, February 26

Biblioteca Nacional José Martí: The Cuban National Library

We were greeted at the Cuban National Library by the entire staff and Eliades Acosta Matos, the Cuban National Library Director. While the library was an impressive facility and in the best condition of any library we would visit, preservation issues remained at the heart of even this institution. Eliades extended a very warm welcome and hoped that this was the beginning of a meaningful exchange between our libraries and our culture. Eliades spoke of preservation as the most important issue concerning Cuban libraries. He also spoke of access to the Internet and plans to bring the Internet to Cuban libraries. It was rare to see a computer at a library outside the National Library or the university libraries. It was his hope that over the next five years that would change and the Internet would become more available to everyone.

Eliades spoke of the literacy rate in Cuba – highest among Latin American countries. There are 338 public and provincial libraries in Cuba not counting school libraries. These libraries are suffering because of the economic crisis of 1991 caused by the withdrawal of Soviet support and because of the continuing U.S. trade embargo. He asserted the Revolution in Cuba is not about destroying the Cuban culture. He encouraged us to not rely upon his information, but suggested we talk to the people. Talk to everyone. Ask them the questions you want to ask. After I returned home, I thought long and hard about this. I believe Eliades was very sincere when he encouraged us to talk with the people. But when you asked questions in Cuba, answers were not very simple. Questions generally produce additional questions.

I asked Eliades if Cuban libraries had any written standard such as the American Library Association Bill of Rights or Code of Ethics that protected the rights of people to access information. Eliades was admittedly defensive at first, saying that it is important to understand that Cuba is an "open culture." The perception that Cuba is about restricting the rights of its people is no more accurate than the perception that *Rambo* is an accurate representation of the United States. The problem that confronts Cuban collections is the lack of money to purchase materials beyond what is needed for the cultural priorities of the country. It is also impossible to have everything. But when reminded that he was speaking with a group of librarians who are trying to understand libraries in Cuba, Eliades answered the question saying that they were working on standards or a declaration of principles approved by IFLA. These principles would protect the right of librarians to choose materials. He stated that people's rights are necessary for an educated public. For example, special collections contain materials that are protected not for political reasons, but because of their historical value. The policies that they are developing are based on standards from other libraries around the world.



Left: Dale Vidmar with Eliades Acosta Matos, the Director of the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí in Habana.

Concerning the confidentiality of circulation records, Eliades said there is no attempt to violate the confidentiality between the librarian and the people borrowing books despite the lack of a written policy to that effect. It would be a moral outrage to purchase controversial material in an attempt to find out who is reading that material. Cuban libraries accept all donations and recently accepted a donation of 5000 books from Massachusetts libraries. They even accept materials from Miami – material that is generally opposed to the Cuban government. Eliades said what was really important in the development of relations between our countries is that the Cuban culture is expressed within our institutions. In one of the best years after the Revolution, Cuba published more than 60 million copies of books. Eliades wondered why so few Cuban publications are available in U.S. libraries considering the acquisition budgets our libraries have. How can any balanced position exist when Cuban literature is not available? This was an excellent question to take away from our interview with Eliades, a question that may explain my limited and somewhat inaccurate knowledge of Cuba.

Much could be said of el Bloqueo – the U.S. sanction that prohibits any trade with Cuba or use of any Cuban goods by anyone in the U.S. or any country who trades with the U.S. The Bloqueo also limits travel to Cuba and spending by any American citizen. The sanctions began in the early 1960s and have persisted for almost forty years despite the fact that the United Nations has overwhelmingly supported a resolution to end the U.S. trade embargo for ten years in a row – a resolution that the U.S. government continues to defy. Last year, only the United States, Israel, and the Marshall Islands voted against the U.N. Resolution – 173 other countries voted for the resolution asking that the U.S. remove all trade limitations against Cuba.

It is difficult to look past the effect of the Bloqueo on Cuban libraries and upon the freedom of information. Getting materials into Cuba is more problematic because of the U.S. sanctions than due to any form of censorship in Cuba. There is no need to censor when it is so difficult to purchase books for libraries. So the question persists, "Why is our government continuing restrictions on foreign trade and travel by U.S. citizens?" The Bloqueo is a policy that primarily affects the everyday lives of the Cuban people. It has little effect upon the Cuban government. It may have an economic effect, but el Bloqueo has little political or ideological impact. Establishing normal relations with Cuba is long overdue especially in light of normalization of U.S. relations with China, Viet Nam, and other countries. However, during my time in Cuba, I understood that ending el Bloqueo is a very complex matter. When it ends, it is likely to cause far greater problems to the Cuban people.

Day Nine: Tuesday, February 27

The Dulce María Loynaz Biblioteca Independiente and Teaching English

After breakfast, we planned to visit the Dulce María Loynaz Biblioteca Independiente, an independent library in Habana. The issue of independent libraries was at the center of the Cuban Libraries Tour. There are approximately 70 independent libraries in Cuba. 22 of those libraries are in Habana. The independent libraries have been discussed in listservs and have been investigated by International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and the American Library Association (ALA). *American Libraries* recently published an article about them. Independent libraries are collections of materials that are generally not found in other public libraries.

When I left for Cuba, I had a pretty good sense of what I would find there. I even believed that the visit would only confirm what I knew already – independent libraries were small collections of books in people's houses. They consisted of a few hundred books and circulation records probably did not exist. The collections were made up of donations from organizations in the United States. The people who maintained the collection were funded from outside Cuba and were not "professional librarians."

Eight of us from our large group walked to the Dulce María Loynaz Biblioteca Independiente in Habana. I knocked on the door and a man looked out from a second story balcony. I told him that we were a group of librarians from the United States and Canada. We were told that there was an independent library here. After a couple minutes, the man came down and let us into his house. As I expected, the collection was a small collection of about 300 books on some shelves in a bedroom. The circulation record showed that only seven books had been checked out since January 1. This was not a "library" by any standard. It was a private collection of books. But it was true that the collection had been raided on several occasions, and that people were encouraged not to go there.

Right: *The collection at the Dulce María Loynaz Biblioteca Independencia, an independent library in Habana.*



I had expected to hear and see this. But what I did not expect to find was the sincerity and dedication of the woman who maintained the collection. She may not have been trained as a librarian, but she was educated. Her intent was not to leave the country, but to maintain a collection of books that could help women. The collection of books did not look like the kind of materials that would be found in the national or public libraries. Most of this material was published in Miami. It was material that more than likely would be replaced if confiscated. Both the woman and the man who let us into their house were somewhat nervous at first, but were also extremely open and kind. He served all eight of us café cubanos. I believed they had a cause and their intentions were very honorable. My major concern upon leaving was that these individuals may have been unaware of the intentions of people outside their country. People with an agenda that does not provide the entire story when they publish information about the arrests of "librarians" and the removal of materials. The entire story is that these are not libraries in a conventional sense. The word "libraries" is being used liberally in reference to the so-called "independent libraries" in Cuba. Unfortunately, it is likely that the well-meaning Cuban people who maintain these collections are caught between the Cuban government and outside forces that oppose the Cuban government. These people may be regarded by those outside groups as pawns to play out agendas that go well beyond the scope of the "independent collections." What is truly unforgivable is that the curators of independent collections are often people trying to serve their community and they deserve better than being treated as pawns for an outside group's political agenda.

We left the Dulce María Loynaz Biblioteca Independiente and walked to the University of Habana to attend a class that Orestes taught at the Medical School. The students in Orestes' class were learning to speak English and learn medical terminology in the language, a necessity for medical students. He had asked Karina and I to attend his class to help his students with their English. Never had my classes in linguistics come in so handy as I explained how to pronounce different sounds such as the "v" in very or the "j" in jaundice. I explained the difference in pronouncing "watched" as "watcht" and not "watch-ed." The students were confused because the word "divided" was pronounced with the "ed" ending, but they realized that it was something that would come with time. I wanted to repeat the words that Orestes had told me on Sunday, "You must force yourself to think in the language." My time in the classroom with these students was perhaps one of the more enriching educational experiences of my life. There is so much to learn in any walk of life, but to have to learn in a second language is extremely difficult. I had the utmost respect for these students.

At the same time, I began to discover something about Cuba that was much more perplexing – the commitment required of these students now and throughout their future. Cuba has changed in recent years. Through the 1980s, sugar was the major industry. Now, tourism is quickly becoming the major industry. It is a necessary boost to the economy. But tourism presents a quandary. These students who would one day become doctors may only earn \$40 or \$50 per month, if that, in a country where at least \$100 is typically needed to survive. They will have to repay the cost of their free education with years of service in their field. But that is not the issue. The issue is the effect of tourism upon young people trying to decide their future and, in turn, the future of the country. Why would they choose to enter the university and study to be doctors or professors when they could earn as much as twenty times more as waiters in restaurants or as tour guides or maids in hotels? This question becomes even more significant if travel restrictions for U.S. citizens are removed. Anyone who can speak English and serve as a guide would become a valuable asset to the tourism industry. The tourism industry could attract many people with the lure of better pay at the expense of better education.

Day 10: Wednesday, February 28 **A Birthday in Cuba**

Who would have ever thought I would spend my 46th birthday in Cuba. It was a much needed day of rest as we left Habana and traveled to the beautiful village of Soroa. I spent much of the afternoon relaxing by the pool of our hotel. I used the time to decompress and reflect upon the first nine days. I felt as though I had been in Cuba much longer than that. Perhaps it was because our days were so full. Generally, we woke up at 6:30 and had breakfast at 7:00. By 8:30, we were on the bus ready to embark on the day's adventure that ended around 6:00 p.m. with a group get-together before dinner. Today was no different except that after dinner we had a birthday celebration for another member of the group, Jacquelyn Cenacviera, and me. A trio of musicians and two of the hotel employees created a small fiesta for our group with games and dancing – and, of course, cake and candles. But it was an early night for all as we had to wake up at about 6:30 to eat breakfast and board the bus by 8:30. Tomorrow, we would be off to Pinar del Rio and Viñales.

Day 11: Thursday, March 1 **Travel to Viñales**

We left Soroa and headed for the agricultural region of Pinar del Rio and Viñales. We stopped to tour a rum factory in Pinar del Rio on our way to Viñales, the agricultural region in western Cuba. It was a day in which we did not go to libraries. Instead we visited the area. We went to a cigar factory. We toured the cave at Viñales and a co-op farm. We began to feel the difference between the agricultural province and the city of Habana. I understood that my visit to Cuba would only afford a partial understanding of the country. I was touring less than half of the island. Judging by the difference between the agricultural area and other areas such as Habana and Trinidad, the difference between these areas and the regions around the Sierra Maestra mountains and Santiago del Cuba is immense. I knew then that I would need to return some day to see the eastern part of the island.

Day 12: Friday, March 2
Viñales and Pinar del Rio



Left: *Preservation is the major issue for libraries in Cuba. This shelf at a school library in Viñales is typical of the conditions for a library collection.*

We began another busy day by traveling into the town of Viñales to visit a school library. The collection was described as a concentration of books in the sciences and technology. But the only computer book I found was from 1986. The shelves in the library were made of particle board and bowed with the weight of books. The pages of the books were brittle and bindings were tattered and falling apart. There were no computers in the library, but the librarian assured us that she had access to two computers in the Cultural Center down the street. When asked if she ever used them, she admitted she did not really know how to use a computer. I wondered if anyone would ever ask for a computer if they never used one and did not know what computers were capable of doing. I think back to when I was considering buying my first computer. It took many years before it became a priority. How long would it take for computers to become a priority for libraries in more remote or rural regions in Cuba?

We drove into Pinar del Rio to visit the provincial library. The librarians sat with us answering questions and talking with us about their library and their profession. We again pursued the question of privacy and circulation records. A librarian said that circulation records were kept on her desk in an open catalog drawer. Although they did not generally share this information, it seemed fairly easy to see on the desk. But the real issue of protecting someone who was looking at controversial materials was a moot point. The library did not have any material that was controversial. Like other libraries, the provincial library did not have the luxury to purchase anything but much needed materials to help provide basic educational books and reference sources.

Right: *The collection at Reyes Magos Biblioteca Independencia, an independent library in Pinar del Rio.*

After the provincial library, we visited the Reyes Magos Biblioteca Independiente, an independent library that was across the street from the address that we were given. Some people we spoke with said the library was not open to the public. The collection provided access to books and other materials that are not available elsewhere such as the public libraries. The collection was last raided on January 8, 2000. The people who maintained the collection were very responsive to our group wanted to make sure we knew about their mission. The collection contained books primarily published by a Catholic book publisher in Pinar del Rio. Like the other independent collection, the Reyes Magos Biblioteca Independiente did not have a professional librarian. The collection was maintained by individuals who were educated and were generally trying to collect materials that were not found in the public libraries. These collections did not attempt to be objective. They were made up of donated materials.



Day 13: Saturday, March 3

Return to Varadero

We left our hotel in Viñales in the morning and began the long drive to Varadero. The countryside passed slowly as I began to understand that my voyage to Cuba was nearing an end. I was not ready for the end. I knew I needed more. Lost in thought, I closed my eyes and was gently rocked to sleep by the movement of the bus. A thirty minute nap helped break up the trip to Varadero. We had a planned stop in Matanzas, but we had missed our appointment to visit the pedagogical institute. We quickly adjusted our schedule and unanimously decided to return to Varadero to get out of the bus. We checked into the Hotel Internacional late in the afternoon. The sea of the Straits of Florida was particularly calm and inviting after eight hours on the bus. So we said good-bye to our guide, Lilly, and to Juan, the driver of our *gua gua* – the Cuban word for bus. They both helped to make our visit to Cuba and to the libraries an enriching cultural experience.

After saying good-bye, there was no better way to feel rejuvenated after a long day in the bus than to do a bit of snorkeling. Thirteen days in Cuba, and this was the first opportunity to go in the water with my snorkel. Although Varadero beach is just about all sand and not known as a good place to snorkel, swimming with a pair of sting rays made it excellent. This was just another reminder that in Cuba much could be discovered in both the ordinary and the exotic. Take nothing for granted and keep an open mind. Words to live by here.

Day 14: Sunday, March 4

Final Day in Cuba

Today was the last full day in Cuba. Karina and I rented mopeds and rode them to La Cueva Ambrosia. The cave has almost 50 native Indian drawings. The concentric circles in the drawings illustrated a solar calendar. The cave was also a refuge for escaped slaves. An attendant was there and spent about two hours walking us through the cave. It was an incredible experience especially when an occasional bat flew by to check us out. We spent most of the day touring the area of Varadero. After a going away meeting with the group in which we thanked Joyce for helping to create our rich experience in Cuba, we rode the moped to the end of the Península de Hicacos stopping to watch the night sky that was filled with lightning and thunder but no rain. It was beautiful riding in the night along the 20 kilometers of the peninsula and back to town. In Varadero, the streets were filled with people and music. Another Sunday – a day of rest in which most Cubans do not work, but stop to enjoy life.

Left: *Young boy reading at the Centro de Informacion y Analisis Instituto Cubano del Libro.*

Day 15: Monday, March 5

Epilogue: The Return Home

We woke up at 6:00 a.m. and ate a quick breakfast before boarding the Pastors of Peace Bus that took us back to the airport for the long flight home. It was hard to believe the trip was coming to an end. It was more like a beginning. All the questions I had when I arrived on this island had become much more complex over the many days, conversations, and wanderings through the libraries of Cuba. These were the storehouses of a culture rich with history that I felt I had not really known until now. But I knew as I boarded the bus, that I had merely tasted for only a moment, a small essence of what went so much



deeper. As our airplane climbed into the sky, the island grew smaller in my vision but much greater in my heart. I felt the yearning to return, to explore deeper into the land, the people, and the culture that had been denied. I only hoped that I would one day see the end to the political turmoil that denies the people of Cuba the life and liberty they all desire. When I look at a young Cuban boy reading a book, I see only a young boy wanting nothing more than what anyone else wants. It begs the question, should our country help deny that boy or anyone else the freedom to live life? One more question that, despite the complexities, needs an answer.

Dale Vidmar

Library Instruction Coordinator
Southern Oregon University Library

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BIO: Jeffrey Zeldman is one of the original web-authoring gurus and has been designing efficient, informative, and creative sites for years and years. He's a master maven at balancing personal and professional projects which leads us to wonder where he finds the time to sleep. Besides leading **The Web Standards Project**, Zeldman publishes **A List Apart**, a weekly magazine "For People Who Make Websites," and runs the web design and consulting firm in New York, **Happy Cog**. Zeldman even gets around to writing columns for Adobe Web Center, **PDN-Pix Magazine**, and Crain's Creativity Magazine. His forthcoming book, **Taking Your Talent to the Web** (New Riders; ISBN: 0735710732) is due out this month. How he found the time to interview here is beyond us and testifies to his passion about The Standards initiative and his work. We're thrilled to have him here.

NewBreed Librarian asked Jeffrey Zeldman to educate the library community on standards... what are they, why are they important, what is the W3C, which browsers are compliant, what are the incentives, and more. These issues are central to the web medium we find ourselves increasingly immersed in. If librarians foresee themselves as key players in future information landscapes, we must begin with standards.

NewBreed Librarian: What exactly is the Web Standards Project?

Jeffrey Zeldman: The **Web Standards Project (WaSP)** is a grassroots coalition of web designers, developers, and users fighting for common technological standards on the web. Every industry and every medium has common technological standards: the film industry, the recording industry, and so on. The Web does too, at least in theory: these are the recommendations hammered out by the **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)** and its members, as well as other standards bodies like **ECMA**.

In any other industry, the members of a standards body, having contributed to the formation of the standards, would go ahead and follow those standards in the development of their products. But on the Web, competition between browser makers led to a situation where the standards were being ignored or only partially supported. The WaSP formed in 1998 to advocate that browser makers fully comply with W3C recommendations, thereby ensuring simple, affordable access to Web technologies for all.

After a shaky initial response, browser makers have come around, and today's browsers (<http://www.webstandards.org/upgrade/>) are much more standards-compliant. The WaSP is now focusing its efforts on developer education and on increased support for W3C standards in tools like Macromedia Dreamweaver and Adobe GoLive – tools many folks use to build websites.

NBL: Why are standards important? Who benefits?

JZ: Web users benefit: when browsers support common standards, sites work as they should. Otherwise, millions of web users can get locked out of one site or another, because its features have been optimized for a different browser than the one they're using.

Folks with disabilities benefit: standards like HTML 4.01, XHTML 1, and CSS enable developers to provide accessibility features that let anyone experience the content and most functions of a website, even if they're using a non-graphical browser, an audio browser, a Braille reader, etc.

Business people using emerging Internet devices, Web-enabled cell phones, and so on benefit. Developers benefit because they can spend more time focusing on content and design, and waste less time creating multiple, incompatible versions of every site. And clients (website owners) benefit, because they don't have to waste their money on incompatible, browser-specific versions of the site.

NBL: Does anyone actually listen to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)? What kind of power do they have and who sits at their table?

JZ: W3C consists of companies like Netscape, Microsoft, Apple, Sun, IBM, and many others, as well as academics and invited experts. It's kind of a "United Nations" of web technology. Members participate in the shaping of W3C recommendations ("standards"). WaSP asked that members who helped shape these standards abide by them.

If W3C had "police" power – power to enforce its recommendations – then the WaSP would not have been needed. But W3C does not have such power. Enforcement is not part of its charter. Practically speaking, W3C probably could not have brought competitive, secretive companies to the table if it had said that membership included forced submission to group decisions. Because W3C does not threaten its members, they are able to cooperate and forge common standards. The only problem was, having done so, they were not under any obligation to abide by the standards they helped to create. Hence, WaSP.

I would say that W3C is powerful and its recommendations are the best hope for a Web that makes sense. I'd also say that more of its members are following its recommendations these days than they used to.

NBL: You've said that "IN SIX MONTHS, a year, or two years at most, all websites will be designed with standards that separate style from content. (Or they will be built with Flash 7). We can watch our skills grow obsolete, or start learning standards-based techniques now."

Given the web's mercurial nature, how can you predict something like this with any certainty?

JZ: Baseline W3C recommendations are somewhat in advance of what browsers can deliver at this moment, and we know that browser makers are working to finish supporting these recommendations. The W3C has moved on (CSS-2, CSS-3, XHTML 1.1, XSLT, XML, etc.) and we know that browser makers intend to support these standards as well (and some are partially supporting bits and pieces of them already).

This gives us a road map, where standards are concerned. We know how CSS-1 is supposed to work, we know how it works in current browsers, and we know what some browsers need to do to finish

supporting it. We know how CSS-2 is supposed to work, we know about XML, so essentially we know what browsers will be supporting over the next few years.

As to Flash 7, that's pretty easy to predict as well. Flash is huge, Flash is widespread, and the current version is 5.0. It's pretty easy to "predict" that browsers will finish supporting baseline standards and will move on to later W3C recommendations. It's pretty easy to "predict" that Macromedia will continue to evolve Flash, one of the most successful plug-ins and design environments ever brought to the Web. What, you think Macromedia will stop at version 5? Of course they won't.

So there was no crystal ball at work here: it was just common sense based on what's already happening, and based on the W3C road map.

NBL: A Two-Parter: Librarians often license databases from vendors. If we want to encourage this initiative, how can we determine if their products/websites are compliant? And further, are there any real incentives for companies to comply?

JZ: One incentive for companies to comply is that they can save money by developing standards-based sites instead of multiple versions of sites based on incompatible browser technology.

Another is that standards-based sites will continue to work; they won't become obsolete. If you'd based your advanced site functionality on Netscape 4 layers, for example, your site would now be obsolete. If your functionality is based on the W3C DOM, it won't become obsolete.

Another incentive is that the standards we're talking about support accessibility; browser-based sites are inaccessible by their very nature. Accessibility is now U.S. law (<http://www.alistapart.com/stories/politics/>), so site owners are going to have to look very closely at the tools they choose. If those tools produce non-compliant sites, the library (or other site owner) could be in violation of U.S. law. Not a good place to be.

Similarly, if vendors want to keep selling product to libraries and other institutions (and to companies who work for clients to whom U.S. law pertains), then those vendors have a mighty strong incentive to change the way their products work.

How can you determine if vendor offerings comply with W3C standards? Well, unfortunately, there's no W3C seal of approval (though that idea has been discussed). You can test the resulting sites at <http://validator.w3.org/>. You can test for accessibility at <http://www.cast.org/bobby/>. If the sites fail, the developers have more work to do. If vendor products cause the failure, you can tell the vendors about it.

Institutions can also upgrade their browsers to more compliant ones. At the moment, many institutions have settled on 4.0 browsers that rely on proprietary code and that do not support accessibility features. These same institutions are now charged with creating accessible sites. You see the problem. These institutions are reluctant to upgrade their browsers, but they really have no choice if they wish to comply with U.S. laws about accessibility.

Tools:

- [WaSP](#)
- [Compliant Browsers](#)
- [W3C HTML Validator](#)

- [W3C CSS Validator](#)
- [Test for Accessibility](#)

NBL: How can we revise or create standard compliant websites? Is there a template, or is it as simple as viewing it in a compliant browser?

JZ: First, don't panic. Test your site at the W3C Validator and Bobby (mentioned in the previous answer). If it complies, you're in great shape. If it doesn't (and it probably won't), still don't panic.

Work with developers who understand these issues. Make standards compliance part of your RFP. If developers respond to your RFP without mentioning standards compliance, pick a different developer. Not every shop knows all they should about these issues.

Definitely upgrade your installed browser to Mozilla or IE5+ or Opera 5 or the others mentioned on the [WaSP upgrade page](#). This is not about bells and whistles, as some think. It's about standards compliance and accessibility. If you've got 10,000 employees using Netscape 4, and you tell your developer to comply with standards, you may have trouble seeing your own site as optimally as you should.

If you're doing the work yourself, use the available online resources to learn about these standards and upgrade your design and development methods. Do NOT rely on tools like Front Page if you're trying to build a standards-compliant site.

NBL: Besides validating our pages, what else can we do?

JZ: You can check your referrer logs to see how many folks are still using broken, non-compliant browsers. When the number goes below 15% (or whatever number you're comfortable with), consider separating style from content (design from data, presentation from structure), using valid HTML or XHTML as a purely structural language, and keeping all your presentational elements in CSS. If the resulting site does not look great in 4.0 and older browsers, find a way to encourage your visitors to upgrade. In the WaSP Browser Upgrade campaign, we've tried to provide help and [tips](#) for doing so, but each site and each audience are different, and you'll want to fine-tune these ideas to work best for your audience and their needs.

NBL: Last question... What are you doing with the New York Public Library? How do libraries – or this project specifically – inspire you?

JZ: Our first project for the NYPL is to redesign and restructure the part of their site dealing with their efforts to narrow the digital divide by providing free computer and Internet access and training to those who need it most.

The project is called "Click On @ The Library," and it's a wonderful program that has already helped many New Yorkers participate in the digital information age. These are folks who might have gotten left behind if not for the Library's efforts. It's an incredible privilege to work with the Library on this project. Here's the library's [existing Click On site](#), which we're about to redesign and restructure.

If you believe the Web is for everyone, then efforts like the Library's – bringing it to the people – are essential. What the Library is doing is fairly activist, and it dovetails with other efforts to make the Web

more available to all (such as the ongoing effort to make websites more accessible to the widest possible number of people, and to make it available to wireless and other non-traditional Internet devices).

My first early understanding of the Web (an incorrect one) was that it was somehow going to be "the world's library." That was before the Web became commercial, and it's closer to Xanadu than the actual Web. The Web actually turned out to be the world's self-publishing system and disparate community forum, with much good information available, but no hierarchical overarching organizational principle behind that information – which makes it quite different from a library, where the information is complete and lives within a central nervous system organized by librarians over hundreds of years.

Libraries are attractive to me on many levels. And I think what they do is somewhat analogous to what independent, non-commercial websites do. I don't care how organized and bureaucratic some large libraries may be; essentially they are labors of love.

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P E O P L E

::: APRIL 2001 :::

For this issue, we asked three students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign why they chose to pursue an MLS. Here are their responses.



James Jacobs

It all started 20 years ago when I became the assistant librarian to a truly wonderful woman – the town historian as well as the keeper of the books in a small public library in upstate New York. It being a one-horse town (almost literally!) we got to do everything in the library from circulation to building maintenance. Our collection development meetings consisted of looking over the NY times book reviews and circling the most interesting ones. From there, I've relocated to many places – 2 1/2 years in Japan, a year in NYC, a summer in Boston, a winter in Colorado, and most recently 4 years in Eugene, Oregon – and done quite an array of jobs – including beekeeping! I always seem to come back to libraries.

Somewhere along the line, the light bulb flickered on with the realization that I LIKE libraries and should maybe go to grad school and become a REAL librarian – after all, beekeeping is fun, but it certainly doesn't pay well. Library patrons may be surly sometimes, but at least they don't sting! So here I am in Middle America training for what Ms. Baldwin probably knew I'd become before I had even an inkling!



Connie Replinger

When I was in high school, I had to volunteer somewhere to get credit for the National Honor Society. The public library seemed to be the "easy" place to go, since I loved books and it was close by. I loved doing my volunteer work, which was working in the Children's Department. This prompted me to find a job at the university library when I entered college. I worked in the Technical Services area for about 4 years, plus I did an internship at a public library. It was here that I decided that I'd like to pursue my MLS. I'm not sure what initially struck me about librarianship, but I do know that I love to help people, especially children. I like to know that somehow, I can touch the lives of people, and make a positive difference in their lives.



John Replinger

Connie and I looked at a few universities and decided on the University of Illinois so that we could both attend grad school. I was originally going to continue on to grad school in the geography field, my 4 year degree. Unfortunately, I received news shortly before moving to Illinois that funding for a new geography professor fell through. In short, my would-be advisor wouldn't be until another year! Connie and I decided that we would still move to the Midwest so she could accomplish her goal of becoming a children's librarian. I found a job and worked for a few months as a warehouse manager. During this time, I would "help" (more like watch) Connie with her homework. I thought that several of the projects sounded fun, especially the

course work dealing with computers. I wished that I could take the classes she was taking, but thought that library school wasn't my thing. I also didn't have a background in this field.

My interest was sparked one day when Connie told me that a good portion of the students don't have any background in library science. In addition, I also found out that it isn't just for librarians. The graduate's program incorporated both library AND information science (LIS). I performed a little research and discovered a whole slew of computer courses offered year round. The masters degree actually compliments my specialty: geographical information systems (GIS). Informations systems seemed to be a key phrase that hit home. Within a few weeks, I applied to the GSLIS program and was accepted. Today I am a full time graduate working in the ACES (Ag, Consumer, & Econ. Sciences) Library as a half-time GA. This is my first semester and I am loving it (apart from the rough moments). Although, I plan to focus on the "tech" side of the LIS, I am keeping my options open. Who knows, I might just end up working along side my wife as a librarian someday.

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A S K S U S U

::: APRIL 2001 :::

Susu, our sometimes irreverent advice columnist, answers your questions about work, school, the job hunt, and librarianship in general. In this issue, Susu advises on interviewing.

Dear Susu, I am a LIS student at Wayne State University in Detroit, MI and work as a substitute librarian at the Toledo Lucas County Public Library. I would like to know what kinds of questions would be asked in a public library interview. I hope to have some upcoming interviews and want to be prepared.

Can you help me?

Dear LIS Student,

"Do not quote library school professors. Even though you may be going right from a library school classroom to the interview, try to deprogram yourself from library-school bull. The kind of practicing librarians that you will be interviewing with will not be impressed with how some library-school professor who has not worked the reference desk in 20 years sees the world. Think about the life of the average professor. You have job security for life, you have quasidictatorial powers, and day in and day out everyone in your class writes down everything you say. It's a perfect formula for losing touch with reality." -Will Manley in *American Libraries*, v28(2), p136

First, head over to Lisjobs.com and check out their links to 9 websites that provide **excellent preparation for interviewing**, including one that focuses on **public library interviewing**. If you go through these sites, practice selected questions with a friend, determine how you feel about various library issues and why, you'll be well equipped at the interview.

Equally important to remember is that you're also interviewing them. Is this a place that will inspire you and nourish what you learned in library school? Will you be given responsibilities that help you develop important skills to advance there or somewhere else if you choose? Do you fit in with these people? Do you like them? 40+ hours a week is a lot of time to spend at a place – make sure you want to be there.

Finally: be yourself. They want to know who you are, not who your interview persona is. This isn't a first date – it's your job. If you just don't mesh with the organizational culture at this library, it's best that you find out before it's too late. The only way to do that is by being the one and only you.

Good luck, and knock 'em dead.

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Colleen just got back from the ACRL conference in Denver, where she had a great time talking to exhibitors. In this TechTalk, she shares with you what she found.

Tools

- **First place** in the Cool Tools category goes to [Ex Libris](#) for two innovative products. Picture this: Erica heads to the library late on a Sunday evening looking for some articles for a paper. She has no clue which database to choose, but fortunately her library has [MetaLib](#), a meta-search engine for remote and local databases. She types her keywords in the box and gets a list of citations from all of the relevant databases her library has access to. From here, she can link to the full-text articles, find out if her library has the item, perform related searches, or even search the web using [SFX](#)'s context-sensitive reference linking.
- **Second place** is awarded to [Paratext](#) for their forthcoming **Reference Universe**, a web database that highlights appropriate print reference tools in your library's collection. Expected release date is June 2001, right before ALA.

Trends

- **Digital libraries:** digitization, data conversion services, mass storage facilities, and managing access to digital collections - [Image](#) and [Apex](#) will do this and more.
- **Pay-per-view:** free to search, but you pay for what you take. [SciBase](#), for example, allows you to search over 20,000 scientific journals, but viewing the full-text will cost you. [ebrary](#) adds an interesting twist by allowing you to search for and view full-text, but you pay to download or print a portion.
- **E-Journal aggregator aggregators:** [TDNet](#), [SerialsSolutions](#) and [JournalList](#) want to help you organize and manage your e-journals regardless of where you get them from.
- **Plagiarism detectors:** probably more useful for academic libraries, but [Turnitin.com](#) is one of a number of services turning up that allows instructors to check student papers for plagiarism.

Treats

- **eGems:** this software allows you to build a personal library of digital gems, complete with information about the source.

- Four collections of **primary source documents** from [Alexander Street Press](#):
 - North American Women's Letters and Diaries, Colonial-1950
 - The American Civil War: Letters and Diaries
 - Exploration Narratives: Encounters with the New World
 - American Film Scripts Online

I saw the women's letters and diaries demo'd, and these folks have put a lot of thought into the design of the interface.

- [GrantsNet](#): free, searchable database of grants, fellowships, training opportunities, education programs and more in the biomedical sciences and undergraduate science education.
- [Merriam-Webster](#) lets you add a button to your browser toolbar to give you direct access to their dictionary on the web. Just highlight a word on any web page, then click on the Dictionary link to look it up. Slick!
- [National Women's Health Information Center](#): an excellent, reliable resource for women's health information. A project of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health.

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L E T T E R S

::: APRIL 2001 :::

16 MAY 01 :: **"There is an opportunity for people in library schools and in library professions to see the value that we bring to the world of designing better information access tools and methods."**

Hey. I love your site. A fresh look at the world of librarians.

Have you all ever thought of doing an article on the emergin field of Information Architecture? When I was in library school at Rutgers SCILS, I knew I wanted to go into a field where the work depended on understanding users and organizing the information they use. I thought I was going to be an art librarian or visual resources librarian. Low and behold, I got a job at an art museum library doing reference via the web and email and designing the libraries Web site. I became hooked and took a job out of library school working for a corporate library organization working on organizing information and designing navigation for information portals. A few years later and a field called information architecture began to emerge outside of libraries in the world of Web Design and Consulting.

A few years back I left ASIS only to discover that in the year that I left, Information Architecture became a hot topic and librarians and non-librarians alike were taking an interest in the field. SIG-IA, the IA list of ASIS is now a very hot discussion list that draws as many if not more non-library people. There is an opportunity for people in library schools and in library professions to see the value that we bring to the world of designing better information access tools and methods (in the form of interfaces and taxonomies) to the Internet by bringing attention to this quickly growing field.

P.S. I have been trying to do so by posting news for Information Architects with a librarian's perspective on my personal weblog <http://www.iaslash.org/>. I haven't seen many library sites talk about this field, so was just wondering if you all would give it a thought.

Best
Michael Angeles

regards,

12 APR 01 :: **"In which other field besides children's librarianship can you make your interviewers bark like dogs and oink like pigs?"**

i would like to praise your website in general before i respond to the latest "ask susu" column. newbreed librarian beautifully combines a hip, attractive format w/ such useful information! i guess i should say that as an mlis student (at univ. of pittsburgh) i am thrilled to see you reaching out to new librarians and library students. not only is it a great idea, but it feels great on this end to be receiving support and information!

here's in response to ask susu:

your column came at a great time for me, having just experienced my first public library interview for a professional position! i read through the links you'd pointed to, which were helpful. even though the old phrase "be yourself" seems trite sometimes, i believe that repeating it serves us well. at my interview i decided to go all out with being myself, and i carried pots-n-pans along with me for a storytime on "noise." it worked well! (i ask you, in which other field besides children's librarianship can you make your interviewers bark like dogs and oink like pigs?)

thanks again,

Marjorie Schreiber

<http://www.pitt.edu/~mas108/>

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