



V O L U M E 2   N U M B E R 2

::: APRIL 2002 :::

#### **FEATURE – Wendy Adamson**

##### **Sex in the City - What Happened at the Minneapolis Public Library**

In May 2000, 12 employees of the Minnesota Public Library filed a sexual harassment suit against their employer with the EEOC. They became known as the "Minneapolis 12," and sparked a national debate about public Internet access in libraries. This is their story.

#### **INTERVIEW – Michele McGinnis**

Michele McGinnis is the personal librarian to Kevin Kelly, cofounding editor of *Wired Magazine*. This is her first job post grad. In this interview, she tells us how she lucked into this job, the kind of work that she does, and why she couldn't imagine a better deal.

#### **PEOPLE**

Linda Harris Mehr is director of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Library. In this article, she shares with us an extraordinary evening of the concentrated preparation that takes place every year at her library.

#### **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 discusses paraprofessionals at the reference desk.

#### **TECH TALK**

Travis Ritter is Library Network Manager for the University of Oregon Libraries. He is on a continuous search for the perfect library public workstation. In this issue, he talks about his library's decision to use a terminal server to provide Internet access for the library's patrons.

#### **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 2002 :::

### **Sex in the City - What happened at the Minneapolis Public Library**

**WENDY ADAMSON**

One of the reasons we started NewBreed Librarian was because we wanted to have a forum where all ideas - popular and unpopular - and sentiments - prevailing and singular - could be expressed. A place where MLIS students and working librarians could have a voice, share their experiences and their concerns. We believed, and still do, that independent publishing promotes untrammeled expression. We don't accept or solicit articles simply because they meet with our individual ideologies or collective endorsement. There is no *NewBreed* Stamp of Approval. In fact, sometimes we don't really know how we feel about an issue. What we do look for are those voices that make us ruminate about our way of doing things, that cause us to examine our beliefs and why we have them in the first place. Ultimately, those are the articles that help us grow as a profession.



Having worked in academic, corporate, and legal libraries, Wendy Adamson is now a reference librarian in the History Department of the Minneapolis Public Library. Her favorite activities involve assisting new immigrants to the Twin Cities, helping genealogists do their research, and aiding teens with their History Day projects. She loves to debate issues with her coworkers — an amazing array of eccentrics, artists, radicals, deep thinkers, rebels, and ordinary people. When left to her own devices, you can find her reading about Ireland or putting around in her flower gardens. She can be reached at [wadamson@bitstream.net](mailto:wadamson@bitstream.net)

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The Minnesota staff feel "harassed and intimidated by having to work in a public environment." I'm sure there are many other public library workers who feel they should be able to change something about where they work. Librarians work daily under conditions they would not tolerate in their own homes. Inadequate heat in the winter, abusive patrons, vandalism, unwanted sexual advances, and many more problems have always been present because, by its very nature, a public library is a public building. That is part of how it serves its critical mission. It is therefore also part of our mission to serve those whose tastes we find repulsive. As angry and upset as we may get at the things we see and experience, we shake it off in the staff room (sometimes accompanied by tears) and return to the desk with a smile on our face. That's part of why we are so special...and so important.

"A Librarian's Right to Comfort," *American Libraries*, June 2000  
by Hillary Theyer, a branch librarian at Torrance (CA) Public Library.

The Internet arrived at the Minneapolis Public Library in 1997. By 1999 we had approximately 50 Internet terminals scattered around the two public floors of our building. Our commitment to traditional library principles of free access to all information and our optimism about how the Internet would be used by patrons led us to have a hands-off Internet access policy. On our website we had a three

paragraph standard statement saying that the Internet was an immense global network, and that "the Library does not restrict use of its materials." All uses were acceptable, including email and chat rooms. We had no signup policy, and only instigated an informal 30-minute limit when it became apparent that we could not keep up with demand.

We were totally unprepared for reality. Our naïve expectation was that people would use the Internet to study history, learn about medical conditions, track stock quotes, do research for college papers, and read their hometown newspapers. Kids would be working on school projects. Voters would seek candidate records to prepare for the next election.

But, when the word got out on the street that there were 50 Internet terminals in our PUBLIC library, and that there were no restrictions on their use, we were flooded with individuals who came to the Library to view sexually explicit materials. They came alone and in groups. In one case, a middle-aged man regularly brought young boys in to show them sites. In another case, a six-year-old boy brought to the library by his uncaring parents regularly surfed sex.com. His parents were doing the same.

Not only did patrons view and display sexual activities, but they often sought attention of the staff, in order to heighten their enjoyment. It seemed to be a thrill to feign trouble with the printer, so one of us would have to go over and be faced with sexual images. They asked for help in logging into sites such as hardon.com. They printed out sexual images, and placed the prints on tables, bookshelves and counters around the building where they would be seen by others. Terminals were intentionally left on such sites, so that the next unsuspecting Internet user was faced with them.

There was a core group of about three dozen people engaging in this activity. Many of them spent hours every day at it. In some cases they came in at 9 in the morning, and were still in the building at 9 at night when we closed. On Monday mornings, after we had been closed on Sunday, they would literally run to the terminals when we opened our doors. The demographics were perplexing, and to this day no one knows why such a large number of sexual surfers congregated in this midwestern city.

What were the images like? Warning - this may offend some readers. We saw lots of women with a penis in their mouth, in their vagina, or in their rectum. We saw horses and dogs mounting women. We saw men mounting animals. We saw women tied upside down, their legs spread-eagled, and men pushing various instruments into their vaginas. We saw children astride men, or with erect penises stuffed into their mouths. We saw torture scenes. (My most memorable was one in which two men held a woman's legs apart while a third inserted a curling iron into her vagina. Her face was contorted in pain.) We saw numerous same sex activities - men giving other men blow jobs, women licking women's vulvas or anuses, or inserting dildos. Most disturbing, of course, was seeing children being raped or otherwise abused.

It was staff's job to enforce limits - but only time limits. If we approached patrons to point out that their 30-minute time limit was up, they often (not occasionally, but often) called us words like "bitch" and "cunt" and used such choice expressions as "fuck you" or "shove it up your ass." We had many masturbators, some subtle and some not.

We became sex central. Our limited security staff could not keep up with these behaviors. By the time they arrived after such an event was reported, the person would be gone - to another department where they would resume their Internet viewing. It seemed that our viewers were in a constant state of sexual arousal, and we were simply getting in their way.

Anyone who is familiar with privacy screens knows that they are misnamed, and it was easy to inadvertently glimpse a scene of anal sex or fellatio as you walked by on your way to the bookshelf or the Children's Room. Staff had a full view of some terminals from our reference desks. Patrons began complaining to staff, and then to our Administration, where they were repeatedly told that the Library supported unfettered access to information. Many of our regular users abandoned the library for this reason, outraged that they had been repeatedly faced with such unwanted and apparently staff-sanctioned images. Staff members complained to supervisors and the Administration as well. The response was always the same - the Minneapolis Public Library supported unfettered access to information. If we were "good librarians" we would agree with this policy.

We all went to library school, took the course in censorship, were prepared to fight to the death to keep Judy Blume or Robert Mapplethorpe in our collections. But we were not prepared for this. It was an assault. It was the ivory tower collapsing in the back alley. It was the worst-case scenario and we were caught in the middle. It went on all day, every day, for almost three years. There was no end in sight. Staff was demoralized, depressed, and angry.

In February 2000, 47 staff members signed a letter to the local newspaper, describing the situation in the library, and asking for help from the City Council and the public in finding solutions. This letter drew a published response from the Board, reiterating the responsibility of the Library to offer unfettered access, and offering more general statements about making wise choices when using the Internet.

Two events brought it all to a halt: a legal action and a TV show.

In early April several library staff sought the advice of an attorney on their rights and responsibilities in this situation. What could we do? Were we unreasonable in complaining, on our own behalf, and on behalf of the public? The attorney assured us that we were experiencing an egregious case of third-party sexual harassment, and that most of the materials being viewed in our library (we had brought a thick notebook of printouts) were obscene and thus not protected by the First Amendment. This opinion was confirmed by other attorneys. After much soul searching, 12 staff members decided to file a complaint with the EEOC in the first week of May 2000.

Further, unbeknownst to the staff, a local TV station, spending a week in the Library working on an unrelated story, saw what was going on. They started quietly filming this activity and interviewing some of the people who were viewing sexual material. Some individuals spoke enthusiastically on camera about the material, admitted masturbating as they watched. They went on to say the atmosphere at the downtown library was "more exciting" than at the branches, because a group of people were viewing sex together. The television station then interviewed three staff members, the Library Director, and a member of the Board. A two-part exposé aired on our local CBS affiliate during sweeps week in May, the same week when the EEOC complaint was filed. The evidence was incontrovertible and damning.

Our decision to go the legal route was a difficult one for us. We considered ourselves very loyal to our institution and our profession. What tipped the scale for us was our belief that the library was going down the tubes. We were losing patrons in large numbers. We were watching our users repeatedly assaulted by these images, often recoiling in horror, and sometimes literally rushing out of the building.

Even more, we wondered if the very nature of our profession denied us the civil rights afforded to all other Americans in the workplace. Did our status as librarians deprive us of protection from sexually explicit images as we worked day by day in our jobs? We decided not. We were citizens too. Going back into the staff room and crying, and then coming out into the library with smiles on our faces as

Hillary Theyer suggests in the opening quote, was no longer an option. Such passive behavior carried the message that we were willing to submit to sexual harassment which no other citizens would tolerate.

Nevertheless, the stress on us was enormous after we decided to proceed. Any employee who has ever filed a legal charge against his or her employer knows what I'm talking about. Fear, anxiety, sleeplessness, inability to eat are all part of the picture. The literature on sexual harassment says that the individual who speaks out is victimized twice, once during the initial harassment and secondly when the incident is made public and coworkers subject the victim to disbelief and disapproval. We were fortunate that in our case, almost all of our coworkers were, and continue to be, very supportive. And once you have filed a legal complaint you are protected from employer retaliation.

Some librarians from around the US, as well as writers in professional journals, have held us up for criticism. We have been portrayed as censors, traitors to our profession, bad librarians with "narrow sensibilities" as Mr. Berry wrote in a **passionate editorial** in *Library Journal*. But they weren't there. They did not see what we saw daily, nor did they have to continually respond to an outraged public who also felt assulted by this behavior.

Since we filed, we have received dozens of phone calls and letters from librarians around the US who are facing similar problems, asking for guidance and support as they deal with the same issues. Interestingly, many of the individual calls have included pleas for anonymity, as librarians worried that their employers would disapprove if they spoke up. For some reason, there is a climate of fear and retribution in the library world when the subject of sexually explicit materials on the Internet rears its head. Too often, the problem is denied, glossed over, ignored, or simplistically addressed by ineffective official library policies, which wax poetic about the wealth of information available on the Internet, and the importance of making wise choices when we use it. It is the proverbial elephant sitting in the middle of the living room, which everyone refuses to acknowledge.

Within 24 hours of the EEOC filing and the television special, we had a new temporary policy at MPL, with signs posted on each terminal announcing that it was illegal to send, receive, transmit or display materials which were obscene as defined by Minnesota statute. The Library's permanent **Internet policy** was drastically re-written and made more substantial and explicit, and the MPL sexual harassment policy was also altered to make reporting paths and responsibilities clearer. The security guards were given authority to monitor Internet use and enforce the policy. In less than a week at least 25 of our daily users left the library, and have not been seen since.

A year later, in May of 2001, the EEOC found probable cause for a sexual harassment lawsuit. (Only 7% of complaints to the EEOC receive this finding.) The Library has repeatedly declined to participate in EEOC-sponsored mediation to reach a settlement. Therefore our complaint has now been forwarded to the Department of Justice, and they are currently conducting an investigation. The DOJ may decide to sue the Library. If they do not, we will proceed with a private lawsuit. Either of these scenarios will require a trial where each of us, and many others including Library Administration, will testify as to the events which transpired at MPL.

These events raise so many questions. Can effective policies be written to deal with obscene materials and child pornography on Internet terminals in libraries? Do librarians have a right to a workplace reasonably free of sexually explicit materials? Do members of the public have the right to come into a public library and not see such materials openly displayed on terminals? Should each community decide on what standards it wants enforced in its own library? Is the library a public forum (like a street corner) or a "limited public forum?" Were the librarians who filed the complaint responsible and courageous, or

cowardly and unprofessional? Can and should obscenity laws which are on the books in various states be enforced in libraries? Should we have separate viewing areas where people can look at sexually explicit materials away from the general traffic in a library? And the "F" word - are filters sometimes useful, appropriate, helpful, at least on some terminals in a library?

And the final question, can we in our profession discuss these issues in a calm, mutually respectful way without criticizing, belittling or vilifying one another? Can a librarian having difficulty with this in his or her institution speak up and ask for help and advice without fear of having her/his loyalty and professionalism questioned? Can we understand that the complex questions the Internet poses are being studied by legal scholars, and that there are no easy, pat, simplistic answers?

At MPL, we succeeded in bringing a problem out in the open. We firmly believe that each Library has a variety of tools to address this problem. Each library will find a different solution. It is our responsibility to take a part in the larger dialog in a search for a variety of answers, rather than putting our collective heads in the sand and resolutely clinging to theoretical principles that may be doing more harm than good. Let's work together in an atmosphere of openness, tolerance, and respect, to explore ideas and craft some solutions that will benefit us all.

Isn't that what intellectual freedom is all about?

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## F E A T U R E   I N T E R V I E W

::: APRIL 2002 :::



**Michele McGinnis** is the personal librarian to Kevin Kelly, cofounding editor of *Wired Magazine*. This is her first job post grad. In this interview, she tells us how she lucked into this job, the kind of work that she does, and why she couldn't imagine a better deal.

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### NewBreed Librarian: What do you do and how long have you been doing it?

**Michele McGinnis:** My hand-picked title is “research librarian” although I toyed with “personal librarian,” “private librarian,” “kept librarian” and “infoslut.” I work for Kevin Kelly, founding editor of *Wired Magazine*. He remains Editor-At-Large at *Wired* and is also involved in the start up of a couple of foundations, **All Species Foundation** and **Long Bets Foundation**. He has authored a couple of best selling books too. I spend over half of my time doing research related to his personal writing interests. The remaining time is spent on his **web site**, helping him with a few self-publishing projects and administrative tasks such as keeping him organized.

### NBL: How did library school prepare you for this job?

**MM:** First off, library school gave me the fundamentals for understanding how information is organized and how to access appropriate resources to help solve information problems. Secondly, in school, I was exposed to the Internet, Web, and other electronic resources. Here is where my fascination with online searching began. I was fortunate to have as my advisor and mentor Dr. Carol Tenopir, who is well known for her work with online databases and information search and retrieval. She fostered my desire to become a good searcher.

One of the things I avoided in library school was anything to do with Web publishing. I just wasn't interested — mainly because I consider myself artistically barren and believed creative prowess to be a requisite for Web work. Fortunately, I acquired a little html coding experience at the two library jobs I held while completing school which ultimately paid off. Now, one of my big responsibilities is Kevin's site. This has required that I learn a host of publishing/graphics software. Even though this is not my thing, I've learned enough to get by. For the more sophisticated coding and design, we hire a programmer.

### NBL: Why did you want to become a librarian; and, is this the kind of job you had in mind?

**MM:** I actually didn't want to become a librarian. I wanted to be an independent information broker. I learned of the field from a book on home based businesses. Working my own hours from home finding information sounded great. This was just what I wanted: no boss, no dress code, no set hours. The book suggested that having an MLS would make me more credible as an information broker. Further, the time

was right for me to return to school and chance a second career. I'd always liked libraries. I have that gene. I also enjoy secondary research and writing. I figured if things didn't pan out with the information brokering, I'd fall back on librarianship.

I didn't anticipate or dare to dream of my current position. Yet, it is exactly what I wanted. I still have no dress code, I can work from home, set my own schedule, and have a brilliant, cool, **laid back boss**.

**NBL: Tell us about the path that led you here.**

**MM:** I studied how to be an information broker through course work and outside reading three years before starting the business. During the same time, I continued to work in my first career — social work — and attend library school. All the while, I planned for my new business.

In the summer of 1998, I took the plunge, quit my job, rented out my house to strangers, and lived out of my truck while traveling around the country rock climbing. This was my last big hurrah before hanging out my IB shingle in August. I spent the next three years as a part time information broker, part time student, and part time, non-degreed reference librarian at a community college and later at a DOE facility. As an information broker, I did everything wrong from the start. . . I had no formal research experience, no former clients, no current clients, no potential clients, no professional contacts, no information niche, and no other means of financial support to fall back on. Through luck, tenacity, and subscribing to my own definition of success, I was able to stay in business. I ended the business when Kevin hired me.

**NBL: How did you find this job, or, how did it find you?**

**MM:** I am a member of AIIP, the **Association for Independent Information Professionals**. In December of 2000, I saw a posting for Kevin's position, submitted by one of the well known super-searchers.

I had not heard of Kevin before. I had only limited exposure to *Wired Magazine* and *Whole Earth* — two of the publications he has been associated with. I really had no idea that he is kind of famous in some circles. He is considered one of the "**Digerati**." I'm small town. I get all star struck when I look through his vast contact file and see the names and personal contact information of well known writers, politicians, rock stars, dot comers, and scientists. He knows so many people and yet, he's humble about it.

But back to the position: the posting was so enticing, that I was compelled to reply — never believing I would have a shot at it, let alone move to California. A couple of lines in the post were just irresistible: "*I am completely unimpressed with credentials. . . most important to me is a spirit of persistence, organizing intelligence, rapport with people, and ambition to succeed*" and "*I work out of my home in Pacifica, about 15 miles south of SF on the coast. It won't be necessary for a researcher to be on site everyday, but twice a week will probably be needed.*"

The posting was quite unconventional and I replied in like spirit, giving personal details of my life, dreams, and character. I risked being perceived as a lunatic. Kevin called me on New Year's Eve, thus beginning several months of interviews and negotiations. Initially, he hired me to do a couple of research jobs. I must have performed to his expectations. The following March, he flew me out to interview. Part of our interview was spent hiking on a ridge high above the coast. A few days later, he

offered me the job and I moved my dog and myself 2500 miles to San Francisco from Knoxville, Tennessee, having never lived anywhere else.

**NBL: Do you miss having colleagues or do you prefer working by yourself?**

**MM:** I miss having colleagues but I usually prefer working independently. I like collaborative efforts, as long as something gets done. I get impatient when things don't move forward. I miss the water cooler stuff that occurs between colleagues. I miss intellectual discussion surrounding our profession, the jargon, and collective commiseration. Library and information listservs and weblogs have become important to me — a substitute of sorts — in this regard. Right now, I have indirect coworkers. I work in close proximity to the staff at the [All-Species Foundation](#), [Internet Archive](#), and [Applied Minds](#). Soon, however, Kevin and I will be moving our office space from the Presidio, to a small coastal town south of the city. I'll be a bit isolated.

**NBL: What are some of the more interesting aspects of your work — what do you find extra fulfilling?**

**MM:** What makes my job interesting are Kevin's own diverse interests. The culture surrounding technology is a big one for him. This makes for some entertaining assignments. One of my favorites was a piece he was writing on the music industry for the *New York Times*. My assignment was to download and evaluate music swapping services like [Morpheus](#) and [LimeWire](#). I spent days finding and listening to music. Cool.

Some of the other projects I've worked on involve species extinction, intellectual betting, artists in residence, shipping containers for art space, web economy, intellectual property, and much more. An upcoming assignment has me working with a crew of volunteers that will set up a large installation piece at this year's [Burning Man](#) in Nevada. Kevin's curiosities and enthusiasms afford the opportunity to utilize a variety of information sources. I find myself doing more "telephone" or primary research much more than I anticipated. By this I mean I use the information sources to find experts and then make contact with them for background information, answers and more leads. Like most people, I appreciated it when my efforts are recognized — like when Kevin tells me "thanks this is just what I needed."

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## PEOPLE

::: APRIL 2002 :::

### NIGHT FOR DAY: A Library Director's Special Work Shift

LINDA HARRIS MEHR



**Linda Harris Mehr** has spent over twenty-five years in history and film-related study and work. She received her Ph.D. in History from UCLA in 1973 and has taught history and film courses at USC and UC San Diego. She was selected to be the 1997 Visiting Scholar at Pasadena City College, and has served as moderator on numerous panels. Mehr was the principal investigator, bibliographer, and editor in charge of cataloging film, television and radio collections in over seventy institutions from 1973 to 1977.

Since 1982, Mehr has been director of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Library. In this article, she shares with us an extraordinary evening of the concentrated preparation that takes place every year at her library.

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**9:00 PM. Monday, February 11.** I've just reported for a work shift which will continue until tomorrow morning. This is a departure from my regular 8 AM to 5 PM day, but one I've made for twenty years. You see, tomorrow at 5:38 AM the nominations for the 74th Academy Awards® (to be telecast on March 24) will be announced to the world from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences headquarters in Beverly Hills. At that time, those results will also be available via the official oscars.org and oscar.com websites, and through printed handouts given to the press. To accomplish this requires the efforts of over two dozen Academy staff, including a number of librarians from the Academy's **Margaret Herrick Library**.

The phones have been turned off and we are unable to communicate with the outside world until after the announcement of the nominations. The Academy staff has convened on the fourth floor to eagerly await the handout of the photocopied lists of the nominations, the results of tabulations made by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) in secret. Now, our various assignments begin. Some Academy staff work to ensure theater readiness for the morning broadcast — they coordinate camera crews, monitor tight security, and prepare for the arrival of hundreds of press personnel. Librarians have their special tasks. One joins the Academy's executive director and executive administrator to help prepare special fact sheets based on the just-revealed results. Several assist the web site people to ready nomination information for Internet distribution. Others join me to organize the stuffing of over a thousand press kits to be distributed immediately following the nominations announcement.

The first order of business in readying the press kits is to find the appropriate photographs and production information for those selected in the following categories: picture, animated feature (a new category this year), actor, actress, supporting actor, supporting actress and director. To do this, staff sorts through the myriad materials previously sent to the Academy by the various film companies in case their films will garner nominations. We set up the stacks of photographs and paper material on long multiple

tables, along with the PwC printed nominations sheets, and wait for the completion of the various fact sheets which will also be included in the press kits.

**11:30 PM. Monday, February 11.** Everything is now ready, and the librarians, with other staff assistance, commence the three- to four-hour snaking around the tables, collating the material for the press kits. When work is completed, the kits are securely locked away until announcement time.

**4:00 AM. Tuesday, February 12.** We take a break and have breakfast in the Academy's main lobby. Since by this time there will be others in the lobby who have not yet learned the results — camera crews and press — that old adage about librarians and silence comes into play. Our lips remain sealed, at least with regard to nominations information.

**5:00 AM. Tuesday, February 12.** The librarians and I take our seats in the Academy's [Samuel Goldwyn Theater](#), and observe the camera crews and news media personnel preparing for the announcement which will begin in approximately one half-hour. I think back on what we've been doing the past eight hours — a rather atypical work shift for a librarian, but then our regular days are somewhat uncommon as well.

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Note: The Margaret Herrick Library is a unique special library, open to the public, that was created to support the Academy's mission of fostering the arts and sciences of motion pictures. To accomplish this, we strive to collect as much relevant material as possible to document all aspects of film, as an art form and an industry, past and present. We need to be prepared to provide material to answer queries on anything and everything related to the world of film for our various users: scholars, students, Academy members, entertainment industry personnel, journalists, and the general public. Our holdings are vast — the world's most comprehensive and extensive film-related collection: books, periodicals, and pamphlets; massive clipping files on productions, individuals and subjects; over seven million photographs; more than 22,000 posters, lobby cards and other advertising ephemera; 70,000 screenplays; and hundreds of manuscript collections from prominent industry individuals and organizations, including directors Alfred Hitchcock, Fred Zinnemann, George Stevens, John Huston, and Mack Sennett; actors Cary Grant, Mary Pickford, and Gregory Peck; producer Hal Wallis; costume designers Edith Head and Dorothy Jeakins; production designers Bob Boyle, George Jenkins and Henry Bumstead; studios Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Paramount, and RKO; and organizations such as the Motion Picture Association of America and the Academy itself.

Some individuals are looking for specific bits of information, and our reference staff (in person, and by telephone) might typically encounter such questions as: Who wrote the music score for *Gone With the Wind*? Do you have a contact for the *Sundance Film Festival*? What was John Wayne's shoe size? What was Julianne Moore's first film credit? Who was the casting director on *Something to Talk About*? What is the availability of a script for *Romeo is Bleeding*? Do you have information on William Holden's wildlife preservation activities? Do you have a contact for the Bela Lugosi estate? At which Academy Award ceremony did Frank Sinatra wear a Nehru jacket? I need makeup and hair credits for *Batman Forever*. What are the domestic gross figures for *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Nell* and *Tender Mercies*? Do you have a map of the MGM lot in the 1940s? What is the copyright status of *Invaders From Mars*? Does the library have stills of film stars wearing *Cecil Beaton* and *Edith Head* designs? Where is Marilyn Monroe buried?

This past year our collections were used to assist individuals working on a wide range of topics, including early exhibition, Protestants and the American cinema, African-American crime films, studio power in the 1930s-1940s, production design in film, history of the Screen Actors Guild, censorship in 1930s comedies, Oscar Wilde and film, Hollywood and Latin America during World War II, women in early Hollywood, and the portrayal of scientists and science in film. Extensive use of our holdings was also made by those writing biographies or making documentaries on industry figures; and of course, by the many seeking information on any and all aspects of Oscar® history.

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**5:38 AM. Tuesday, February 12.** On a podium adorned with Oscar® symbols, Academy President Frank Pierson and award recipient Marsha Gay Harden begin the announcement of Academy Award nominations which are being broadcast world-wide. After twenty years of witnessing this ritual, it's become very familiar but, nonetheless, still very exciting. The announcement marks the end of our unusual, albeit annual, special work day, and we leave the Academy to go home and rest. We will return to a normal work schedule on Wednesday, February 13, but while the hours may be standard, we know that our library work will remain far from the ordinary.

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A S K   S U S U

::: APRIL 2002 :::

Susu, our sometimes irreverent advice columnist, answers your questions about work, school, the job hunt, and librarianship in general. In this issue, Susu discusses paraprofessionals at the reference desk.

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**Dear Susu,** The only library class I have this semester is LIB 150, Reference and Database Searching. The very first question that was asked of us was "Do you think Paraprofessionals or Library Assistants should work at the Reference Desk?" What do you think? Besides the quality of service numerous other issues arise. How do librarians feel about paraprofessionals encroaching upon their domain? Why did I bother to get a MLS? Do the patrons even recognize the difference? Mary, from [she can be taught](#).

**Dear Mary,** I felt I needed to do some field research on this one, so I asked several colleagues their thoughts on this issue. (Keep in mind that my field research was done in an academic library, where we already staff our reference desks with students several hours each week.) As you might imagine, my questions evoked a variety of responses:

- Suspicion: "Why are you asking me this?"
- Outright rejection: "I don't think paraprofessionals belong at the desk."
- Qualified acceptance: "I think if they're the right person and they're trained well it could work."
- Reluctance: "Well, I really haven't had time to think about it - it's a huge philosophical question."
- Practicality: "It's a lot of work to train them, but is it really the best use of resources to have librarians fixing printer jams, showing people how to use the photocopiers, or helping them fill out interlibrary loan forms?"

One of the questions I asked was about the qualities of a good reference "person" - whether professional, paraprofessional, or student. Among the qualities they listed were curiosity, a general knowledge of the world, someone who is well-read, good people skills, and good computer skills. Strangely enough, no one listed patience, persistence, or tenacity as required qualities.

Are these qualities that are exclusive to folks holding an MLS? Certainly not. So what magic does the MLS hold that makes us reference *librarians*, as opposed to folks who are just good at answering questions?

First of all, let's consider the fact that the MLS is the result of a graduate education. Librarians have an undergraduate degree in some subject area, as well as at least one graduate degree. A graduate education requires a deeper commitment to the intellectual life, a desire to continue exploration within a discipline. In our case, the discipline is information. Graduate school introduces us to the principles and

foundations of our profession - intellectual freedom, intellectual property, access, equity, and control - and (hopefully) instills in us a commitment to the profession and to service.

Second, we have a commitment to continuous learning. Graduate school is certainly the first step in this process, but most of us also take steps to continue to grow as professionals, to learn new things, to keep abreast of developments in technology, new products available to us, new ideas within the profession. We engage in conversations and debates about professional issues - to filter or not to filter, providing public Internet access without bankrupting the library, the spiraling cost of journal subscriptions - and work together to find solutions. We read the professional literature. We take responsibility for learning the things we need to know to be a good librarian.

Finally, we are more than just people who answer questions. We learn about our collections, participate in building our collections, and note patron behaviors that might indicate a problem in the way we provide service or resources and seek solutions to those problems. All of the things we do away from the reference desk contribute to our ability to connect patrons with the information they need.

I've known people without an MLS who are darned good librarians, and what makes them good is that they do all the things I just listed above. They don't have that MLS, but a combination of experience, professional development, and determination have given them a similar understanding of the profession. It took them a long time and a great deal of work to get there, and I value them as professional colleagues.

If we turn the question around, we could ask what value paraprofessionals bring to the reference desk. Paraprofessionals are more permanent than students, and therefore build an institutional history that can be useful at the desk. This also saves on the cost of continuous retraining that occurs when we use student labor. They can be dedicated to the values of the information profession - I've known paraprofessionals with a deep commitment to intellectual freedom, for example. Paraprofessionals can be continuous learners, and perhaps seek to work at the reference desk because of this interest in learning new things. And paraprofessionals certainly do other things besides work at the reference desk, but here is where the difference may be most significant. Paraprofessionals' duties away from the reference desk are more likely to be administrative (such as office management) or technical (such as materials processing or ordering) in nature. Their knowledge of the internal processes of the organization can be very useful while at the reference desk, but they are often not afforded the same opportunities to explore the larger questions within the profession, or the same professional development and networking opportunities.

If you want to know whether there's anything left for the reference librarian once paraprofessionals have "taken over" the reference desk, just ask the catalogers. They've successfully integrated paraprofessionals into their environment, and I'll bet that most professional catalogers will tell you they still find plenty of things to do and that they have no regrets.

As for patrons, do they recognize the difference? Some call everyone behind the reference desk a "librarian;" most don't realize that librarians have master's degrees. But what they're most interested in is getting an answer to their question, and if they're repeat customers, they'll learn to recognize a librarian when they see one - she'll be the one waiting expectantly for the opportunity to put all her knowledge, skills, professional values and talent to work for them.



## T E C H T A L K

::: APRIL 2002 :::



Travis Ritter is Library Network Manager for the University of Oregon Libraries. He is on a continuous search for the perfect library public workstation. In this issue, he talks about his library's decision to use a terminal server to provide Internet access for the library's patrons.

Maybe you don't miss those old text-based computer terminals that only access the catalog, but your Systems department probably does. We still have some at our library; they're like sneakers: quick, quiet, and when they stop working, you replace them. All good and simple things must become complex, and now that we've grown up, we have "Graphical Public Access Internet Terminals" that provide a graphical interface and access to the Internet. You have to have them, but they're expensive, they crash, they spend half the time in the shop, they're often loud, and you're always being pressured to upgrade to the latest model. It used to be that the only difference among terminals was whether they were green or amber, but now the selection of software you offer and how well you keep it updated can make a serious impression on patrons before they even visit the stacks. The cost of providing this service to patrons has grown significantly - in dollars, in the time it demands from your Systems department, and in the attention required by policy-makers who make decisions about acceptable usage, filtering, time limits, and activity logging. I don't know if anybody can help the policy-makers, but at our library, we've found that using terminal servers is a cost-effective way to improve our level of service and reduce administrative overhead.

For any organization whose goal is to make information available, giving patrons an Internet connection is a must; as of the year 2000, 94.5% of public libraries provided Graphical Public Access Internet Terminals [1] (hereafter referred to as "workstations"). These workstations open up the library's catalog, other libraries' catalogs, electronic databases, corporate and organizational web sites...you know all of this. Librarians sometimes have a reputation for being defensive about their books, but few people in other professions have so quickly grasped the potential of the Internet and labored so hard to provide it as a tool for their clientele. Internet workstations are not easy to set up and maintain, and the very fact that so many libraries have them is evidence of their determination. We can only expect the number and importance of workstations to grow.

When I first came to my current position, the library and my direct predecessor had made a Herculean effort to provide internet connectivity to the student body and members of the public. Using gift money, they purchased a total of seventy workstations, in three separate batches, and configured them all with Windows NT and Netscape Navigator, plus a myriad of helper programs and plug-ins. The machines worked, initially their speed was acceptable, and Windows NT policies provided sufficient security. However, they were never easy to update.

In order to install an upgrade, we would have to make the change on one machine and identify every altered file and registry entry. We could then design a script to make the same change to all the others. This was time-consuming, and we usually put off upgrades until we made major overhauls to the workstations. These redesigns (or "debacles") required us to develop brand new images for each of our three different kinds of PC. An image is what we in Systems call a compressed snapshot of all the software on a computer, which can be copied to other computers in a process usually referred to as cloning or ghosting (after [Symantec's Ghost software](#)). Different hardware requires different software, so an image designed on one PC may be worse than useless for a PC with even slightly different components. At any rate, we had to build three workstation images almost from scratch, installing, patching, resolving conflicts, tightening security, and testing. This took weeks, and then we capped it off with an all-night cloning marathon.

Worse, our workstations had just about reached the limit of what they could do. As we upgraded software, the poor things started to drag. When we added Internet Explorer 6, they had reached the limits of their abilities. If we wanted to keep our current system, we were going to have to upgrade at least thirty of our computers, and we estimated that we would have to upgrade the rest within two years. We experimented with different operating systems, different browsers, and different security programs: either they didn't offer the features we needed, or they were too slow. We simply couldn't continue along the same lines and count on regular funds to support our increasing appetite for technology.

Our salvation was the terminal server, which brought back the benefits of the text-based terminals with all the functionality of the standalone workstations. We use [Citrix Metaframe](#) software, which works in conjunction with [Windows Terminal Services](#), on Windows 2000 servers. The terminal server sits in a closet and runs all the programs, the individual clients (workstations) don't do anything but connect and show the user what is happening on the server. To beat a dead analogy, it's like riding the bus: the clients only have to hop on, and the server does the driving. Our terminal server provides the entire Windows 2000 desktop, Internet Explorer, Acrobat Reader, Office viewers, RealPlayer, QuickTime, various other plug-ins, and printers. The clients don't need to be powerful, because they don't do much; they have a stripped-down operating system (it can be just about anything - we use Windows 95) and a program that allows them to communicate with the server. This program is like [telnet](#) with graphics. The user's keystrokes and mouse clicks are sent to the server and processed there, and video updates are sent from the server to the client. If you've used remote control software like [pcAnywhere](#) or [Timbuktu](#), you know exactly what this is like. The servers do need to be beefy, and we needed several. We determined through testing that a terminal server with two 1GHz processors could easily accommodate 20 busy clients. In practice, we've had thirty or more clients on one server and not noticed a significant decrease in performance. We have five servers (plus a spare) supporting 90 clients; and even the Pentium 60 clients run Internet Explorer like a GHz computer.

The terminal server allowed us to actually increase the number of our public workstations for three reasons. We could use obsolete PCs for the clients, because they no longer needed to run intensive operating systems and software. Because the client is so simple to create, we no longer had to worry about the number of images we use, so we could make use of just about any PC that came into our inventory. We could even use sexy black thin clients with flat panels and no internal moving parts (\$400 - \$800), but I suppose that's hard to justify when you have a ready supply of old staff machines. Finally, the administration is so much easier! Changes are usually made to the servers, not the clients. Citrix comes with a Package Manager that lets you install or upgrade a program and then roll that change out to all of your servers automatically. One of these days we'll want to do something that forces us to modify the client workstations, and once again we'll plod around to every machine, but that shouldn't happen very often.

Nothing is perfect. We have had problems, some expected and some surprising:

- We thought that our network could handle this system, and as far as bandwidth is concerned, 10Mb does seem to be more than sufficient; but we discovered some wiring and a hub that needed to be replaced. Network problems that were annoying before can be disastrous with a terminal server, because when the clients disconnect, they no longer have a desktop or any applications. Likewise, if a server should go down, about fifteen clients will go down with it. They can reconnect to other servers, but it's a dramatic interruption of service.
- It's easier to fix security holes on the terminal servers than on 90 scattered workstations, but at the same time they pose more of a risk. Each user is working on your server, which is a scary thought for a network administrator. We've been very careful about locking things down: users have only a couple icons on the desktop and start menu, and they have very few permissions. We use Windows 2000 policies to tighten security even more, restricting Windows and Internet Explorer privileges. Still, it's eerie.
- Streaming audio and video are not quite there yet. Don't expect CD, or even radio, quality sound over RealPlayer. Video is sometimes distorted and choppy enough that a news clip can look like a scene from "**They Live**." We anticipate great improvement in the near future (fingers crossed). With the increasing importance of multimedia, this could turn out to be our Achilles heel.
- Every once in a while, one of our servers will fail to start the Citrix service when it reboots. If we had fewer servers or more clients, this could really be a problem; as it is, we can operate at a reasonable level while down one or even two servers.
- There's really nothing wrong with giving all of your clients the same computer name, it's just that the Citrix License Server doesn't like it. When our workstations restart in the morning, they give a very stern warning about us not having enough licenses.
- We run into interesting problems with vendors of web-based electronic resources who want to restrict our access to a certain number of individual workstations. The standard way to do this is by IP address, but the IP addresses that the vendor sees are actually those of our servers, not our workstations. If they allow all of our servers, they allow all of our workstations. We think we've found a way to deal with this from our end using proxy configuration scripts in Internet Explorer.

These are problems we can deal with. Moving to a terminal server solution has allowed us to increase the number and speed of our workstations, and it allows us to respond faster with updates, which makes patrons and librarians happy. It also reduces the time our small Systems department spends maintaining workstations, which allows us to concentrate on making things better.

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[1] Bertot, John Carlo and McClure, Charles R. "Public Libraries and the Internet 2000: Summary Findings and Data Tables" NCLIS. 7 September 2000. Available:

<http://www.nclis.gov/statsurv/2000plo.pdf>



## L E T T E R S

::: APRIL 2002 :::

### 24 MAY 02 :: "Tiger by the Tail? Hand me the gun!"

It's time for librarians to face new and old truths. The old-fashioned view that librarians acted as gatekeepers and chose what went into the collection remains valid and practical. If the Web were a print source (remember those obsolete things called books?), librarians would read reviews and select the best and the most appropriate items.

If someone offered a printed magazine consisting of thousands of pages of unedited, uncited articles with no authority to support them, we wouldn't buy it. Gimmick the same thing by digitizing it, and we're all supposed to love it.

Truth: Book selection is a form of censorship. Truth: We do it all the time. Truth: Those who show bad behaviors, we eject from the library. Truth: It's our job.

Children and staff should feel safe and protected in their public libraries.

When the ancient city of Pompeii rioted over chariot races, the government banned sports events in that city for a decade. It worked. Rioting stopped.

When patrons or "customers" show that they cannot handle a service, it's up to those who know better to remove or regulate that service. Paternalism? OK. Over-protective? OK. That's our job — public librarians are public servants. We can, and must, protect the first amendment, together with the rest of the Constitution, but we should not break the law or abuse our patrons while we do that.

If our patrons can't handle the internet properly, then our choices are limited, but clear:

Keep things as they are (intolerable and just plain wrong), limit uses (such as librarian-mediated searches), or have the guts to recognize the true library mission and pull the plug! If we cannot or refuse to police ourselves, someone else will do that for us.

Daniel A. deStefano  
Director, Nahant Public Library  
Nahant, MA

### 01 APR 02 :: "Poor management, not sexually explicit material, was the real problem at Minneapolis"

The one lesson that I learned from Wendy Adamson's experience is that poor management, not sexually explicit material, was the the real problem at Minneapolis. As she stated herself, once the policies were clarified, posted and enforced, much of the problems went away. As there was no reference to the use of

Internet filters or other measures to restrict access, presumably the same material was still available to those who chose to view it. While the material remained, the enforcement of policies changed the behaviors of patrons in the library.

While she may believe that libraries are in denial about sexually explicit material, the reality is that in the eyes of the law, only sexually explicit material is treated differently than any other kind of speech. If her patrons had chosen to view pictures of victims of torture, or acts of violence, or web sites advocating in favor of drug use or illegal activities, she would have had no legal recourse at all. I'm sure that that kind of material would offend many librarians too. Does she also advocate for shutting off the filth that pours out of web sites that promote hatred towards Jews or African-Americans or in these times, Arab-Americans and Muslims?

There's no doubt that there are patrons who use the Internet to view material that is possibly or clearly illegal. As public places, libraries have always been a reflection of a greater society where some people live and act outside the law. The Internet, as the most public forum we have these days, only serves to magnify those behaviors. But there is also much material that, while offensive to some librarians and patrons, is clearly protected by the law. Some of the images that Wendy Adamson saw on the Internet surely are duplicated on books on the shelf or described in graphic details both in the non-fiction and fiction areas. While they are not as in-your-face, they are certainly part of the library's collection.

Wendy Adamson talks specifically about child pornography and obscenity, which are illegal in any situation, but her position seems to advocate the exclusion of any sexually explicit material. And if it does not, how do you create policies that exclude the gratuitous viewing of material from the scholarly? Is the scene of sexually-explicit behavior allowable when surrounded by educational text but excluded when framed by banner ads? She argues that librarians should not be subjected to such material but how do we enforce such rules that would seem to allow the most conservative of sensibilities to dictate the content of allowable material?

The great danger of the actions of the "Minneapolis 12" is not that a few perverts will be denied the opportunity to view obscene material on the taxpayers dollar. The real danger will come from those groups who seek to deny adults access to that which is legally protected by the First Amendment. In their minds, there is no distinction between Mapplethorpe and Hustler. Indeed, in some of their minds, Mapplethorpe's sado-masochistic subjects and acknowledged homosexuality make him the greater evil. The "Minneapolis 12", wittingly or not, will provide these groups with the legal wedge to drive their way into libraries. Does anyone doubt that a EEOC ruling in favor of the "Minneapolis 12" will be followed by a rush of groups across the US who will push Internet filters and restrictive policies, all in the name of protecting librarians? It would be quite a legacy to leave the profession.

Andrew Mutch  
Waterford, MI

**NBL responds:** Andrew, points well taken. However, the one thing that really struck me in Wendy's article was the fact that these patrons' behavior put librarians in a difficult situation: not because of their viewing material, but because of their behavior. They deliberately called attention themselves by trying to engage library staff in their activities, and by repeatedly exposing children to these sexually explicit materials. The law is imperfect, but so are people. The "Minneapolis 12" were faced with an impossible situation - on the one side, a library administration unwilling to address patron behaviors, and on the other a small group of patrons deliberately creating an unsafe environment for library staff and other patrons. Their decision to go the legal route was undeniably a difficult one, but the only recourse they

felt was available to them. This is not an intellectual freedom issue, it is a workplace safety issue, and I would hope that the legal system would be able to make that distinction in future challenges that may arise as a result.

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