

ATLAS POSTSCRIPT

For more than a year, this manuscript has been a passion and, frankly, an obsession with me. I have written it in my office, late at night at home, on trains, on planes, and even on an iPhone next to a pool in the summer. I have slipped out of parties, events, and even church to scribble down some idea.

In many ways, it has been a process akin to sculpture. I rough in the basic shapes and forms, and then I go over and over it, tweaking, smoothing, and refining. I could spend easily another year in the process. The Agreements Supplement in particular cries out for more citations and more depth. But to continue to do so only continues a conversation with close colleagues and myself. It is time to invite the wider community in to continue the work and expand that conversation.

What lies ahead in that conversation I cannot say. Will it be contentious? Riotous? Resigned? Quiet? Apathetic? I don't know. I do know that if you wait for it to happen or if you wait for it to finish, it will never occur. If you remain on the sidelines, how can you expect others to jump into the fray? If you sit quietly with your criticism or comment, you abdicate the future. Let me say that again. By not choosing to engage in the conversation on the future of librarianship, you abdicate your power to shape it.

In our field, we have examples of those who chose to shape librarianship and strive for a better world. We can think of Dewey, of course, or of Cutter or Ranganathan. But I ask you also to think of Dinberg, von Dran, and Taylor.

When Donna Dinberg was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer, she did not quit, she did not hide. Instead, she worked until she was not able to, and then she told doctors to try any experiment they may have; if being a test subject to a possible cure for others was all she could do to improve the world in her final days, then she would do it.

Unlike Donna, Ray von Dran didn't have forewarning when pneumonia took his life, but he must have sensed something. Days

before he died, he decided not to sell his dream car to a colleague but instead offered it to a staff member battling breast cancer because “she could use a pick me up.”

Bob Taylor spent his last few days in Francis House. There was a memorial service a few months later for a man who in his career had been a sports reporter, an intelligence officer in the army, a librarian, a professor, and a dean. In his years, he can be easily credited for reinventing reference with his question negotiation work, LIS education by creating the first information school in the states, and beginning the era of user-based design with his work on value-added systems. Instead, those who talked spoke of a kind and thoughtful man. A man who, years earlier, on withdrawing from academia, devoted his life to care for his wife dying of Alzheimer’s.

I retell these events to show you that Taylor, von Dran, and Dinberg are not just names but real people. They created a legacy not just through writings but actions and values that went beyond their professional lives. All of these people furthered the conversation of librarianship. They all faced struggles, they all faced resistance, and they all persevered.

Dewey, Cutter, Ranganathan, Dinberg, von Dran, and Taylor all created a legacy that we, by calling ourselves librarians, have become stewards to. This legacy is one to be respected and continued not simply enshrined and frozen. All of these giants, on whose shoulders we now teeter, never saw the field as finite, fixed, or passive. Unlike some fine sculpture or glorious piece of architecture, we preserve the legacy of these librarians by constantly tearing down convention for efficiency, structure for effectiveness, and past assumptions for future success.

I end the way I began the Atlas, with Israel Zangwill’s quote¹:

The Past: Our cradle, not our prison; there is danger as well as appeal in its glamour. The past is for inspiration, not imitation, for continuation, not repetition

Be proud of your heritage as a librarian. Ours is an old and noble profession that can count among our members radicals, missionaries, teachers, and more. They have started for you an amazing conversation full of richness and history. They have written this conversation into our values, our institutions, and our education. But they did not complete the work or finish the conversation. They held it open for you, for those you mentor, and for those who they mentor. The conversation that is librarianship is alive and waiting for your voice.

1. <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/4482.html>.

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