



# Law Library Lights

## Helen Newman: GW'S Trailblazing Law Librarian

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If Miss Helen Catherine Newman had dressed appropriately for the role fate assigned her in law librarianship, she would have sported a coonskin cap, fringed buckskins and moosehide moccasins. Then she would have looked the part as well as played it while she pioneered first as GW Law's first professional librarian, and later as the first woman to serve as Librarian of the United States Supreme Court. Along the way she became co-incorporator and president of the American Association of Law Libraries, and co-founder and president of the Law Librarians' Society for the District of Columbia. These are but a few of the ground-breaking achievements of Helen Newman (1904-1965), the canny dynamo whose intelligence, perseverance, and force of personality made her a leader among law librarians in the first half of the twentieth century.

### About Helen

When in 2010 the American Association of Law Libraries announced the first inductees into its newly-established Hall of Fame, Helen Newman was recognized as one of sixteen "Pioneers," so designated "because of the critical roles they played in the formation and early development of AALL."<sup>1</sup> Helen spent her entire professional life at two libraries: George Washington Law, and the Library of the U.S. Supreme Court. This would be somewhat unusual today, when law librarians tend to be more mobile, and often rove among a number of institutions during the course of their careers. She was a native Washingtonian, a rare breed then as now,

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and attended Western High School in Georgetown (now the Duke Ellington School of the Arts). With straight As, Helen was valedictorian of her class, and thrived on competition in athletics as well as in academe: she was captain of the girls' basketball team, a crack ice skater, and fine swimmer. She also captained her debating team, setting the cornerstone for her later reputation as a persuasive orator whose "forceful and compelling speeches" proved invaluable in winning support for her agenda at AALL meetings.<sup>2</sup> Helen was a natural leader.

### **Helen at GW Law**

After Western, Helen went on to GW where she received her LL.B. with distinction in 1925, achieving membership in the Order of the Coif, and was awarded her LL.M. in 1927. During law school she worked as assistant librarian in the Law Library (then located on the second floor of 1435 K Street, N.W.), and also served as Secretary of the Law School. By 1927, Helen was Law Librarian at GW, where she stayed until 1941, going on to assume the Associate Librarian position at the Supreme Court. She became Librarian of the Court in 1947, where she remained until her death in 1965.

By all accounts, Helen Newman was an effective and talented law librarian whose outstanding ability was recognized in the early days of her career. GW (and later University of Michigan) antitrust professor S. Chesterfield ("Oppie") Oppenheim, in his memorial "Helen in Academe," speaks of Helen's creativity and "unremitting perseverance" in building GW's law collection with limited funds. Always mindful of stretching her budget, she traded copies of law reviews with other institutions to obtain issues not held by the Law Library and targeted government sources to acquire specialized materials. The collection of law reviews she built was said to be the equal of any collection in the District of Columbia. In a climate of limited resources, Helen's ingenuity was her key to developing an excellent working collection for students and faculty.

By the fall of 1925, when Helen was assistant, the Law School had moved into its new quarters, Stockton Hall (which it still occupies), at 720 20th Street, NW. The Law Library occupied most of the fourth (top) floor, sharing the space with several professors' offices. At the time of the move to

### **Helen Newman, GW Law's first professional librarian.**



*Special Collections and University Archives, The Gelman Library,  
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Stockton Hall, the Library's collection was stated as "more than 10,000 volumes." In 1929, Helen established a modern card catalog using Library of Congress cards, and began submitting annual reports to the University Librarian in 1930-1931. The Faculty Library Committee was instituted during Helen's tenure. In 1928-1929, the Law Library held approximately 12,000 volumes, and by 1936, 18,073 volumes, with an appropriation for books and periodicals of \$2,601.

## Helen: GW Law's "First" Rare Books Librarian

Consistent with her broad intelligence and inquiring nature, Helen maintained a serious ongoing interest in historical materials and in the history of the law school. It was due to Helen's keen eye and discernment that some of the most important historical materials held by the Law Library today were discovered: the William Thomas Carroll notebooks. Decades before the University purchased the Carnegie Endowment collection, which set the cornerstone for the Law Library's Grotius collection, and the 2002 acquisition of the Payrat library (the foundation of the French Collection), Helen found and rescued from obscurity the unique manuscript volumes of notes taken by William Thomas Carroll (1802-1863) as a student at the Litchfield Law School (1823-1825). Mr. Carroll, with William Cranch, was one of the first two professors of law at Columbian College (GW's earliest incarnation) from 1826-1828. He later was Clerk of the U.S. Supreme Court, and served in this position until his death.

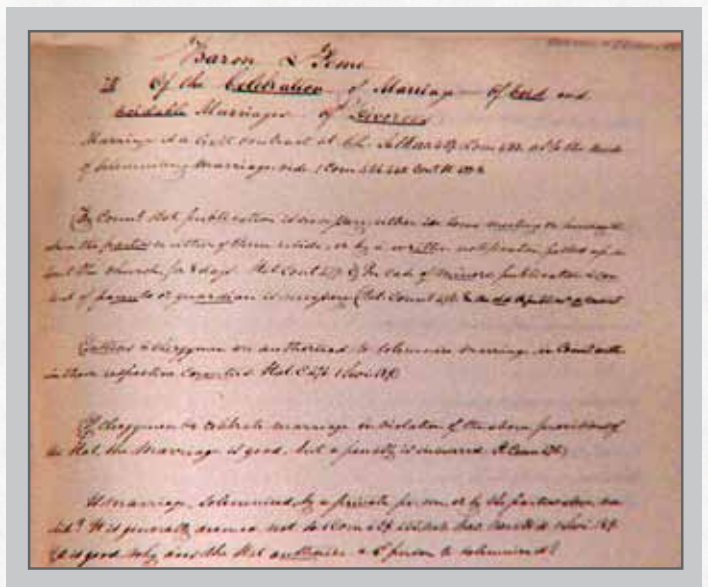
Helen left extensive notes regarding her serendipitous find. She first had observed the notebooks in 1923 during her early days with the Law Library as an assistant. The Carroll notebooks had resided on the open shelves in the Law Library, anonymous and uncatalogued, shelved with law texts under "C." According to Helen, no one seemed to know what they were, or why they might be significant. Ten years later, in 1933, she was in the process of researching for a paper on

**"It was due to Helen's keen eye and discernment that some of the most important historical materials held by the Law Library today were discovered..."**

William Cranch when she found a reference to Cranch and Carroll assisting in the establishment of the first law school in the City of Washington.

She made a mental connection to the Carroll notebooks. After she verified that Carroll and Cranch were the first "GW" law professors, Helen's further research and close work with the notebooks enabled her to postulate with confidence that the notebooks comprised notes taken by Carroll during his course of study at Litchfield, and that he used at least certain of them as lecture notes as professor of law at Columbian College in 1826.

**"Baron and feme" (1823?-1825?), a leaf from the notebooks of William Thomas Carroll, Litchfield Law student and one of GW Law's first professors.**



*Special Collections, The George Washington University Law Library*

Two of these notebooks are written in shorthand. Although examples of Litchfield notes in shorthand now are known to exist in other collections, they are extremely scarce; at the time Helen was sleuthing, the Carroll shorthand notebooks at GW were thought to be unique.

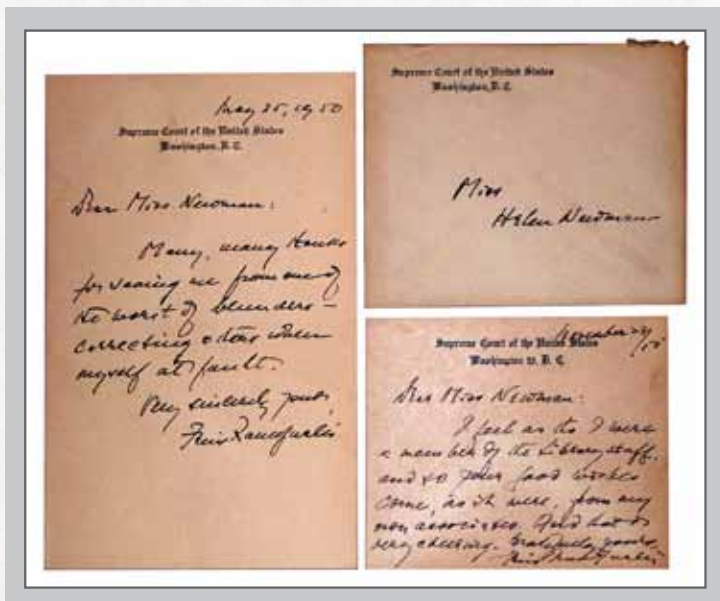
Rare books usually are obtained through purchase, gift, or bequest. Helen's strike illustrates the fourth method: recognizing the significance of heretofore-ignored pieces already in the library. She alone was responsible for making the intellectual discovery of the William Thomas Carroll notebooks, which unquestionably are the

most important pieces of historical legal Americana in the Law Library's collection today.

### Helen at the Supreme Court

Helen was appointed Associate Librarian of the Supreme Court by Chief Justice Harlan Stone in 1942, and became Librarian in 1947. In Chief Justice Earl Warren's memorial tribute to Helen (1966), he noted her myriad skills and talents as a librarian, but reserved his greatest praise for her enduring contributions to the Court's library: enhancing its collection, improving its physical facilities, and providing the high quality and broad scope of service for which she had been noted throughout her career, and which served as a model for her staff. During her service to the Court, its collection increased from approximately 125,000 to 200,000 volumes.<sup>3</sup>

Two cards written in 1950 by  
Mr. Justice Frankfurter to U.S. Supreme  
Court Librarian Helen Newman



Special Collections, The George Washington University Law Library

During her tenure at the Supreme Court, Helen was especially careful to keep Court business from her conversations, and was noted for her discretion (an acknowledged *sine qua non* for that position). She never discussed any subject which might relate to her duties at the Court. In a 1950 quote from

the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Helen confided that "In this job you just can't afford to talk... Suppose there was a 'leak,' and someone found out what the court was going to decide. Can you imagine it?"<sup>4</sup>

Notes from Associate Justice Felix Frankfurter to Helen in the GW Law Library archives reveal a collegial working relationship, and it seems that in one instance she averted a gaffe – we know not what, exactly – that Justice Frankfurter may have been on the verge of committing. His note to her, on Supreme Court stationery, reads:

May 25, 1950  
Supreme Court of the United States  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Miss Newman:

Many, many thanks for saving me from one of the worst of blunders – correcting others when myself at fault.

Very sincerely yours, Felix Frankfurter

Later the same year, Mr. Justice Frankfurter wrote to Helen: "Dear Miss Newman, I feel as tho I were a member of the library staff, and so your good wishes came, as it were, from my own associates. And that is very cheering. Gratefully yours, Felix Frankfurter."

### Helen as a Colleague

Mr. Justice Frankfurter's notes shed light on an aspect of Helen's persona which consistently was noted by those who worked with her: a collegiality and generosity of spirit which carried her beyond the duties of her position. She especially was devoted to welcoming new law librarians into the fold, and reports of her kindnesses and helpfulness to new colleagues are numerous. Her interest in people bore no relation to age or cultural factors. As her longtime colleague Bernita Davies (University of Illinois) wrote in her memorial of Helen, her staff at GW Law and the Supreme Court, her maids,



janitors, and cleaning women, were all her loyal supporters and friends.<sup>5</sup> Helen was known universally for her apparently boundless energy, and routinely at AALL meetings was the last to bed and first to rise for the early-bird meetings the following day. Happily for her colleagues and friends, she was not one to deny the fun-loving side of her nature, and was unlikely to turn down the opportunity to celebrate after a long day of meetings.

“Our Helen,” as she was known proprietarily in the profession, also was called “Miss AALL,” which aptly describes the scope of her contributions to the association (which deserves the attention of another article). She distinguished herself as president, its first executive secretary-treasurer (AALL’s first paid staff position), an incorporator (in order that AALL would be eligible to receive foundation dollars), and managing editor of *Law Library Journal*. She was an early and indefatigable supporter of the then-revolutionary Roalfe Plan of Expansion for AALL, which set the long-term course for reorganization and expansion of AALL

**“During her tenure at the Supreme Court, Helen was especially careful to keep Court business from her conversations, and was noted for her discretion (an acknowledged sine qua non for that position).”**

and its services, and was appointed chair of the committee. In this position, she supplied the dynamism to ensure adoption of the Roalfe Plan by AALL. Of note: in 1936, Helen and William Roalfe (distinguished director of USC, Duke, and Northwestern law libraries; also referred to as “Mr. AALL”<sup>6</sup>) corresponded about the possibility of establishing AALL’s headquarters at George Washington University.<sup>7</sup>

Her unparalleled contributions to AALL would be understood best through studying her papers, now

at the University of Illinois in the AALL archives. According to Roger Jacobs, Professor Emeritus of Law at Notre Dame, who as Librarian at the Supreme Court (1978-1985) effected the transfer of Helen’s AALL files to the archives, these papers show Helen as a powerful force in AALL, and provide “the appropriate view of her energy, intelligence, and professional dedication.”<sup>8</sup>

Helen was honored many times and by many institutions, over the course of many years. Among these recognitions, GW bestowed its Alumni Achievement Award upon her in 1947, and voted her a position on its Board of Trustees (1950-1959). AALL awarded her its Citation of Merit for outstanding service in 1959, only one of three such ever awarded to AALL members up to that time, and in 2010 designated her a Pioneer in its Hall of Fame. AALL also founded the Helen Newman Memorial Scholarship, first awarded in 1967, and later combined into AALL’s general scholarship fund.

Upon her death in July, 1965, the flag of the Supreme Court flew at half-staff for three days for Helen Catherine Newman, GW’s first professional law librarian. ■

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Frank G. Houdek, “Introducing the AALL Hall of Fame: AALL Announces Its Inaugural Class of Inductees to the Hall of Fame,” *AALL Spectrum* 14:9 (July 2010), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Bernita Davies, “In Memory of Helen,” *Law Library Journal* 59:2 (May 1966), 160.

<sup>3</sup> Earl Warren, “Helen in the Court,” *Law Library Journal* 59:2 (May, 1966), 162.

<sup>4</sup> AALL Archives Exhibit, 1990, “Helen Catherine Newman: A Lifetime of Professional Dedication and Excellence, 4. <http://www.library.illinois.edu/archives/e-records/aall/8501022a/1990Final-scanned.pdf/>

<sup>5</sup> Bernita Davies, “In Memory of Helen,” 160.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Chiorazzi, “William R. Roalfe: Builder of Libraries, Scholar, Association Animal,” <http://www.law.arizona.edu/Library/research/guides/lawlibrarian.cfm?page=research/>

<sup>7</sup> AALL Archives Exhibit, 1990, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Jennie Meade correspondence with Professor Roger Jacobs, by e-mail, December 6, 2011.



# From the Editor

**“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”**

— *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

**Jill A. Smith**

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Career planning: two deceptively simple-sounding words. And yet, who has not experienced the frustration of a perfect-seeming plan going awry or the delight of a happy accident? Sometimes it feels that a career is not a thing which is controlled, planned, or steered but something that one just hangs on to, hoping not to fall off. But planning is essential for the long-term success of any large endeavor. And a career is certainly a large endeavor.

Luckily, we have a community which rises to all challenges. I am particularly pleased and proud to deliver this issue of *Lights* to you. This issue focuses on career planning and leadership, and it presents the entire spectrum of careers in law librarianship: from library students to new graduates to mid-career librarians and the life story of Helen Newman, first female librarian of the United States Supreme Court. This issue also solicited some special perspectives from senior leaders in our profession via a “Proust questionnaire” (fans of the television show *Inside the Actors Studio* will recognize the format, though I have changed up the questions – favorite curse words did not make the cut). These questions were designed to showcase both their professional and personal perspectives and give us the opportunity of seeing at least a corner of law librarianship through their eyes. In our Book Review, Dawn Bohls reviews the classic leadership text *How to Win Friends & Influence People*, and our Tech Talk columnist suggests a few blogs for librarians to intellectually engage with the ever-present question: what it means to be a librarian at this point in history when libraries are shifting from books to bytes.



No matter where you are in your career, I believe you will find something in this issue that will help you plan your own career. I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I enjoyed seeing it come together. ■

## Submission Information

*If you would like to write for Law Library Lights, contact Jill A. Smith at [jasmith@law.maryland.edu](mailto:jasmith@law.maryland.edu).*

*For information regarding submission deadlines and issue themes, visit the LLSDC website at [www.llsdc.org](http://www.llsdc.org).*



# Proust Questionnaire

In this issue we solicited some special perspectives from senior leaders in our profession via a “Proust questionnaire.” These questions were designed to showcase both their professional and personal perspectives and give us the opportunity of seeing at least a corner of law librarianship through their eyes.

## Rick McKinney

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**1** What did you think you wanted to do when you were in college/ what did you major in?

*I majored in Psychology because Occupational Outlook’s description of a “Social Psychologist” sounded very interesting.*

**2** Which of your talents has helped you the most to succeed in librarianship?

*My talent for organizing knowledge and information in a simple coherent fashion.*

**3** What aspect of librarianship has changed the most since you entered the profession?

*The nature and availability of electronic communications.*

**4** Who is your personal hero (in fact or fiction)?

*John Paul II*

**5** What is your idea of happiness?

*Being content with the people, circumstances, and gifts you have been given.*

**6** What is your idea of misery?

*Not being content with the people, circumstances, and gifts you have been given.*

**7** What is your favorite virtue?

*Faithfulness.*

**8** If you were not a law librarian, what profession do you think you would have undertaken?

*A librarian in a different field.*

**9** Who is/are your favorite author(s)?

*C.S. Lewis, Peter Kreeft, J.R.R. Tolkien*

**10** What natural talent do you wish you had?

*Speed reading.*

**11** What is a favorite motto of yours?

*Love without sacrifice is cheap and not worthy of the name.*



# Insights from Four Recent Graduates about the Transition from Student to Private Law Librarian

*Janet Hager*

Reference Librarian, Keller and Heckman LLP, [hager@khlaw.com](mailto:hager@khlaw.com)

The private law firm library is a unique creature. Quirky personalities, demanding deadlines, and complex subject matter are just a few of the challenges that await any new entrant into the field. To get a sense of the experience of a newly minted private law librarian, I sent a questionnaire to four individuals who worked at private law firms shortly after completing a MLIS program:

**Louis C. Abramovitz**

Librarian, Wilkinson Barker Knauer, LLP

**Benjamin T. Almoite**

Former Reference Librarian, Keller & Heckman LLP,  
Now Librarian at the Virginia State Law Library

**Caroline Jones**

Reference Librarian, Crowell & Moring

**Jeffrey Nelson**

Research Librarian, Troutman Sanders LLP

Read on to discover their thoughtful responses on how they got into the field, what skills they learned from the MLIS that proved useful, what skills could only be learned on the job, and what role professional organizations play in the development of a young private law librarian.

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Why did you decide to work in a law library generally, in a private law library more specifically, and at your law firm employer most specifically?

**Louis C. Abramovitz:**

Law librarianship was a good fit with my particular background and interests. I've worked

at one time or another in the public, nonprofit and private sectors, but the private sector is where I've felt the most comfortable. What drew me to my current employer was the opportunity to work in an environment where I have a great deal of autonomy, as well as opportunities to learn new skills and strengthen existing ones.

**Benjamin T. Almoite:**

Well, my library work experience was specific to law libraries already, so I was generally familiar with them. I had previously worked at a county-level public law library, and an academic law library. However, in working specifically at Keller and Heckman LLP, I wanted to expose myself and learn to work in a new environment, the private law library. In addition, working at K&H gave me the opportunity to apply and build my skills in legal reference, serials management, interlibrary loan, and library database maintenance. Finally, the opportunity to work with Library Manager Abigail Ross and learn from her was a huge plus.

**Caroline Jones:**

I went into library school not sure if I'd pursue archives or law libraries. I took classes in both and decided I found law librarianship more stimulating and interesting. I was also much more drawn to reference work than a technical service path. I chose to work at a private law library because that's what I have experience with. My mom is a law librarian and my dad is an attorney, so it's sort of in my blood. I feel so lucky every day that I found my job at Crowell & Moring. It just so happens they placed an ad looking for a reference librarian the day after I finished my





comps at Catholic University of America (CUA). I applied that night and before I knew it I was speeding through the interview process and had a job lined up before I graduated. Like I said, I feel so fortunate that this timing worked out. Crowell is great because of our diverse practice areas—there is always something new and interesting to do.

**Jeffrey Nelson:**

Before graduating college, I started an internship working at a boutique law firm. My time was split between working in the library and in human resources. I was considering law school at the time and thought it would be good experience to see firm life. Once I graduated from George Washington University (GW), the firm offered me a full-time position working exclusively in the library. At this time I decided that law school was not the right choice for me but wanted to continue working in firms; law librarianship seemed to be the perfect fit. After being with my old firm for four years, I was seeking new challenges and wanted to become familiar with other types of law (my old firm specialized in one area of law). Switching to a large international firm that does general practice provided me with the new experience and challenges I was seeking.

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What skills did you acquire from your LIS degree that were particularly useful as a private law librarian?

**Louis C. Abramovitz:**

Library school gave me hands-on experience with a wide range of resources. It also taught me how to approach legal research tasks and to identify users' information needs.

**Benjamin T. Almoite:**

Legal research, reference skills, cataloging and classification.

**Caroline Jones:**

I use skills learned obtaining the MLIS every day. CUA has a great faculty of full time and adjunct professors, and I feel like I was able to get exposure to many resources I need working in a PLL. To name a few, I took a couple of legal research classes, a class on government resources, and a class on business research. Working for a law firm you can get asked to research almost anything, so taking a variety of reference classes really helped me.

**Jeffrey Nelson:**

The most valuable skill I acquired from my LIS degree was the ability to work with other librarians in group projects. As stressful as group projects may be, you get to know other people and soon realize that there is someone out there who may know just a little bit more than you do about a particular aspect of librarianship, and that you can use it to your advantage. Those group projects and discussion groups are really the first place to start developing your network. These connections with fellow students, professors, and even guest speakers can be invaluable throughout your career; these are relationships that should be cultivated and maintained over time. You never know when you will need help, and who better to ask than a colleague who understands where you're coming from, and more importantly, is willing to help. In addition, those group projects have taught me the importance of working with others in your company.

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What legal research skills were you only able to obtain through practical experience?

**Louis C. Abramovitz:**

Best practices in cost-effective research, and how to teach users legal research techniques.



**Benjamin T. Almoite:**

While working at K&H, I mainly gained more advanced legal research skills of using proprietary research platforms such as Westlaw, LexisNexis, and Bloomberg Law. In addition, I did obtain a more practical experience of understanding and using legislative histories.

**Caroline Jones:**

I quickly learned that unlike my homework at CUA, all the questions I was asked in my real world job did not have definite and exact answers in one resource. Learning how to pull together a complete answer for your patron is something I could only learn from actually working in this environment. You have to check multiple treatises, different case files, use both Westlaw and Lexis (if available) and be open to other resources off the beaten path.

**Jeffrey Nelson:**

I would say that the majority of my research skills were obtained through practical experience gained through employment.

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What skills have you gained from professional organizations and what skills would you like to see a greater emphasis on?

**Louis C. Abramovitz:**

Copyright compliance and business intelligence research. SLA Click U seminars and SLA conferences were most useful to me. They could actively encourage library students to join and attend at least some of these. Knowing how to use social networks to research individuals and companies is an area growing in importance.

**Benjamin T. Almoite:**

By participating in professional associations, I believe I really learned how to network with other law librarians and professionals. LLSDC and SLA were very helpful in training my networking skills while I was at K&H. I think the professional associations can try to expose students more on the reality of working as a private law librarian. It would really be beneficial to them – knowing the law firm environment, what kinds of different legal personalities they would encounter and deal with (partners, PAs, paralegals, etc.), and the types of legal research they would most likely be doing. Some training on becoming familiar with using library information systems would also be helpful.

**Caroline Jones:**

I was really unaware of how to leverage my memberships. Maybe more outreach to students would be helpful. I had a great mentor in Cameron Gowan (past LLSDC president, classmate, and the woman who gave me my practicum). She encouraged me to be assertive, attend events, and make contacts. Now I am actually more involved than I ever expected to be since in January 2012 I became the chair-elect-elect of the SLA legal division.

**Jeffrey Nelson:**

Professional development outlets such as LLSDC and AALL have taught me the importance of networking and becoming involved in the library community. I think these outlets do an excellent job in reaching out to new professionals. I have never met so many people willing to help develop new professionals' careers. I think LIS programs could sponsor events jointly with local library organizations. This will give new professionals the opportunity to meet with others in the community. LIS programs certainly are advocates of these associations and encourage students to get involved, but I think there is still a considerable gap between the two. ■



# Proust Questionnaire

## Abigail F.E. Ross

Library Manager, Keller and Heckman LLP  
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**1** What did you think you wanted to do when you were in college/ what did you major in?

*I knew I wanted to be a Librarian, though I originally thought I'd be a museum librarian. Then I realized I needed to support myself. I double-majored in German Language and Linguistics with a minor in Archaeology.*

**2** Which of your talents has helped you the most to succeed in librarianship?

*Budgeting, numbers, Excel! I spend most of my day thinking about money - my budget, how to spend it wisely, when and where and how to fight for it, so those skills have really come in handy.*

**3** What aspect of librarianship has changed the most since you entered the profession?

*I have developed a thicker skin - you have to when dealing with attorneys. :o)*

**4** Who is your personal hero (in fact or fiction)?

*I agonized over this one - so many to choose from! But if I can only pick one, I think I'll go for Eleanor Roosevelt - a woman ahead of her times in many ways.*

**5** What is your idea of happiness?  
*My family, a very large hot chocolate, and a good book. Not always in that order.*

**6** What is your idea of misery?  
*Any legislative history having to do with tax law.*

**7** What is your favorite virtue?  
*Industria.*

**8** If you were not a law librarian, what profession do you think you would have undertaken?  
*Egyptologist.*

**9** Who is/are your favorite author(s)?  
*Neal Stephenson, Jane Austen, George R.R. Martin.*

**10** What natural talent do you wish you had?  
*I wish I could sing Opera - such an incredible gift to have to produce such music - to carry such a beautiful instrument with you at all times.*

**11** What is a favorite motto of yours?  
*Show some adaptability!*



# President's Column

## Spring 2012 Issue Theme: Development

**Roger V. Skalbeck**

Associate Law Librarian for Electronic Resources & Services,  
Georgetown Law Library, rvs5@law.georgetown.edu

From the looks of 2012 so far, many challenges and changes are coming. There are major changes afoot for our commercial content providers: Bloomberg bought BNA. AALL named Bloomberg Law its "Product of the Year." LexisNexis bought Law360. Thomson Reuters is getting out of the academic course book business.

Meanwhile, we are seeing new developments in accessing the law in all its forms. "The State Decoded" project ([www.statedecoded.com](http://www.statedecoded.com)) just launched an impressive, free alternative to the *Virginia Code*, dubbed Virginia Decoded ([vacode.org](http://vacode.org)). In January, the Library of Congress launched their free iPad app to access *The Congressional Record*.

In the area of technology, it seems that every month brings us a new smart phone, tablet or collaborative tool. With these, we need to decide how and when to integrate them in our libraries and our lives. We also need to figure out how to help others put these technologies to work. Important questions about research tools and new devices are as likely to come from your senior citizen relative to a senior partner at your firm. Whether it's debating a Nook v. Kindle e-reader or helping explain why footnotes cannot be created on an iPad app, high tech information needs arise constantly.

New developments create new challenges. Perhaps that's an unremarkable statement. Of course change can be a challenge. Thankfully in LLSDC we've got a lot of smart people trying to turn challenges into opportunities. Every month since I started as chapter president, we've had opportunities to come together and learn about new resources. Let's continue the great work we've done here in LLSDC. If you're challenged with change, let's find a way to figure this out together.

I arrived in Washington, D.C. in the late 1990s, accompanying my wife for her two-year government fellowship. I had worked at a few law firms before, and felt pretty confident I could find *some kind of opportunity* as a law librarian in the area. It turns out I was right.



I thought I would stay here for two or three years. On that point, it turns out I was wrong. Nearly a decade and a half after arriving in DC, I'm still here. Exciting opportunities for law librarians in town continue. That's a good thing. Through the passion and drive of our 600 members, LLSDC plays a central part in providing these opportunities.

On paper, our chapter is only required to hold a few events each year. We go far beyond that. I know we can keep it up. Thanks to all the energetic members in our chapter who have helped make LLSDC and the entire DC area a great place with great opportunities for law librarians. ■



# Proust Questionnaire

## Kate Martin

Law Librarian, Montgomery County Circuit Court Law Library  
kmartin@mcccourt.com

**1** What did you think you wanted to do when you were in college/ what did you major in?

*College major: Comparative lit. I wanted to be a museum curator.*

**2** Which of your talents has helped you the most to succeed in librarianship?

*Doggedness and good organizational skills. Also patience, generosity and a sense of humor.*

**3** What aspect of librarianship has changed the most since you entered the profession?

*In 30 years, it's changed so completely, I couldn't even begin...but the one thing that hasn't changed is the camaraderie and generosity of my librarian colleagues.*

**4** Who is your personal hero (in fact or fiction)?

*I admire Eleanor Roosevelt and Sandra Day O'Connor.*

**5** What is your idea of happiness?

*Peace and love.*

**6** What is your idea of misery?

*Enduring stress, cruelty, or meanness and not being able to do anything about it.*

**7** What is your favorite virtue?

*Kindness.*

**8** If you were not a law librarian, what profession do you think you would have undertaken?

*Museum curator, book store manager, psychologist, ballet dancer, actor, artist, interior designer, adventurer, caterer. Fortunately, I've had to wear all these hats as a law librarian.*

**9** Who is/are your favorite author(s)?

*Eudora Welty, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Sherri Tepper, Bob Oaks, John le Carré, Diana Wynne Jones, Anne Tyler, George R.R. Martin, Patrick O'Brian, Honoré de Balzac, and many, many others!*

**10** What natural talent do you wish you had?

*An ease of writing well. Otherwise it's painful.*

**11** What is a favorite motto of yours?

*If it's not fun, and you have a choice, why do it? Be passionate about your life!*



# Finding the Right Career Path in Librarianship

**Emily Kasprak**

*Library Science Student, The Catholic University of America*  
*emilykasprak@gmail.com*

“What do you do?” is frequently one of the first questions asked in D.C. That question is generally easy enough to answer. One question I’ve heard less frequently is “how did you get there?” This question is just as important to have an answer to, especially when determining a career path — getting from what you *do* to what you *want to do*. One thing that initially attracted me to librarianship was the sheer number of options of the types of work that were possible. While this flexibility is a positive, it can also make the start of a career path overwhelming.

I am currently in my final year of a master’s program in library science at The Catholic University of America (CUA) and work as a library assistant at a law library. During my tenure at CUA, I’ve spent a lot of time deciding what course of study to pursue, ultimately deciding to focus on law librarianship. In making this decision, I found several strategies helped me sort through my options effectively.

## **Talk to Those in the Know**

It is likely that colleagues and coworkers in the library world have been through similar decisions and the process of finding their place in a career. Through my time in libraries, both in college and in the D.C. area, I have been able to talk to multiple

librarians and other library professionals about their jobs. Being able to find out what people liked or disliked about their jobs, what interested and what challenged them, has helped me get a better perspective of a library career than if I was just looking from the outside. Similarly, I’ve had people beginning to consider library science ask me about my experiences to gauge their own interests.

**“Being able to find out what people liked or disliked about their jobs, what interested and what challenged them, has helped me get a better perspective of a library career than if I was just looking from the outside.”**

Speaking to others can also provide new ideas on which direction to go. As an undergraduate student, the thought of getting my degree in library science first crossed my radar when my former boss, a science librarian, told me “You should think about doing this!” At the time I did not consider it seriously but filed the idea away in the back of my mind. The seed was planted for several years later when I found myself enjoying library work and seriously considering it as a career.



## What You Don't Want is Just as Important as What You Do Want

When facing too many options, being able to weed out a few can help. Beginning my studies at Catholic, I was not initially set on law librarianship, despite working in a law library. Since there were so many types of librarianship, I wanted to look into what other career paths were available in the field.

I knew initially that I wanted to work mostly with adult library patrons, so that helped me eliminate a school library media path from my exploration. Beyond that, my vision was not so clear, but I was able to continue to reevaluate different paths. For example, taking a course on cataloging has taught me that while it is a useful skill, it is not my calling. I found the philosophy and processes of archives and materials preservation interesting and took a class on the subject. After a semester of study and trips to view rare book collections and preservation

**"It was ultimately through my employment in a law library along with more general classes that I realized part of where I wanted to be."**

labs, I still found the topic interesting, but I could not see it as where I wanted to be in ten (or more) years. It was ultimately through my employment in a law library along with more general classes that I realized part of where I wanted to be. I found I enjoyed the challenge of reference work as well as fulfilling the needs of attorneys and staff

### Get Experience

Library science graduate programs generally encourage gaining experience in library work through employment, internships, or practicums to

add to the curriculum. Along these lines, I've found that working while completing my coursework adds another dimension to learning. Work experience can fuel ideas for school projects; likewise, a thought-provoking reading assignment can spark an idea on how to improve a process at work.

While at CUA, I've enrolled in several courses that sought to address real world issues along with an academic basis for librarianship, but being faced with real reference interviews or technical service problems requiring a solution provide real life context for exercises and theories. When trying to answer a reference question for a library patron, you are not trying for a decent grade, but instead are trying to meet the requestor's needs to the best of your ability. Fixing a technical service issue isn't just an assignment to complete but also has concrete results, like freeing up time for other work that needs to be done. They are learning experiences, but with "real world" grounding.

Being able to work in a law library allowed me to gain knowledge and experience in specific library processes. I barely knew what a docket was when I began, but my knowledge and interest in the field grew progressively over the years. Ultimately it was this experience, combined with learning more about the profession as a whole, that allowed me to realize that law librarianship is what I want to pursue.

Finding a career path to suit your interests, skills, and needs is difficult, as many can attest. While I'm just at the beginning of my career path in law librarianship, these steps have allowed me to face in the right direction. No matter where the path leads, gathering information and experience will hopefully allow me to be able to answer not only "what do you do?" but the questions of "how?" and "why?" as well. ■



# Proust Questionnaire

## Judy Gaskell

Retired Law Librarian

Volunteering at the Law Library of Congress

**1** What did you think you wanted to do when you were in college/ what did you major in?

*My original career goal was to be a high school math teacher, so I majored in Mathematics during my freshman year. I switched to English Literature at the beginning of my sophomore year with no clear career goal in sight.*

**2** Which of your talents has helped you the most to succeed in librarianship?

*I would like to think it has been a common sense approach to problem solving, taking all issues into consideration and coming up with balanced solutions.*

**3** What aspect of librarianship has changed the most since you entered the profession?

*I marvel at the speed at which information is transmitted in the computer age. Back when I started working at the University of Chicago Law Library (before faxes and the internet), we relied on first class mail for US Supreme Court opinions. Now they are released to the world minutes after they are announced from the Bench. Also, as one of my library school professors predicted, the computer has eliminated some of our most tedious tasks, such as filing catalog cards and typing added entry headings.*

**4** Who is your personal hero (in fact or fiction)?

*I have been reading Law Library Journal, volume 104, No.1: A Tribute to Morris L. Cohen, and am reminded*

*again what a scholar, gentleman and good friend he was.*

**5** What is your idea of happiness?

*I am happiest when I am reading a book, while sitting in a comfortable chair in a lush garden, with a cup of tea or glass of red wine close at hand.*

**6** What is your idea of misery?

*February.*

**7** What is your favorite virtue?

*Honesty. I value it in others and try to practice it myself.*

**8** If you were not a law librarian, what profession do you think you would have undertaken?

*I would have been very happy to be a naturalist.*

**9** Who is/are your favorite author(s)?

*Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and Josephine Tey.*

**10** What natural talent do you wish you had?

*A photographic memory would have been very handy in many situations, such as law school.*

**11** What is a favorite motto of yours?

*I was a Girl Scout and this is the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Girl Scouts, so right now my motto is "Be prepared."*



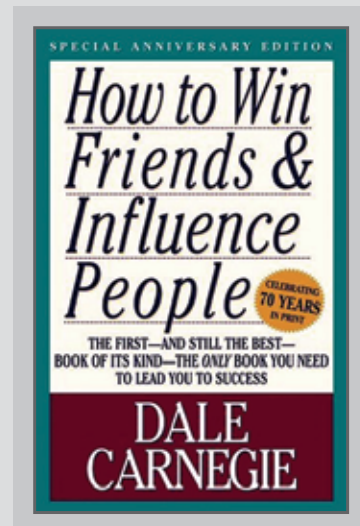


# Book Review

## Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends & Influence People*, rev. ed. (New York: Gallery Books, 1981)

**Dawn Bohls**

Reference Librarian, Bingham McCutchen LLP  
dawn.bohls@bingham.com



For this issue of *Law Library Lights*, with its focus on management and leadership, I thought a review of a self-help book on leadership skills would be a fine topic. The only problem with that idea is that I really can't abide self-help books in general, and I couldn't have less in common with the Jack Welches and Lee Iacoccas of the world. I have no desire to run a Fortune 500 company. I have no desire to make millions of dollars. I just want to develop my people skills in a way that helps me to be a great reference librarian. And so, on a whim, I ended up checking out the ultimate classic of the self-help genre — Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends & Influence People*. Originally published in 1936, I figured the book would at least be interesting from a sociological perspective.

The book turned out to be more than just interesting. I would actually rate it as one of the most entertaining books I've ever read. My review is full of quotations because Dale Carnegie's style is so engaging. His boundless confidence, energy, and enthusiasm burst out from every page. Carnegie says that in doing research for the book, "We were determined to spare no time, no expense, to discover every practical idea that anyone had ever used throughout the ages for winning friends and influencing people" (p. xviii). This is a man who wants you to succeed! He wants you to be happy! He wants people to like you! And he tells you how! "The rules we have set down here," writes Carnegie, "are not mere theories or guesswork. They work like magic" (p. xviii). It's kind of funny that

human beings should need to be taught how to deal with other human beings, but that's exactly what Carnegie does. His lessons are simple and for the most part they're just elaborations on the Golden Rule--treat others as you would like to be treated. There's something so refreshing about a book that teaches you how to succeed by being nice!

The book is organized into four progressive parts. In Part One, you learn "Fundamental Techniques for Handling People." One of his principles in this part is "Don't criticize, condemn, or complain." Criticism is counterproductive to establishing good relationships: "Criticism is futile because it puts a person



# Book Review, Continued

on the defensive and usually makes him strive to justify himself. . . . By criticizing, we do not make lasting changes and often incur resentment” (p. 5). So true! I hate being criticized; don’t you? Carnegie urges us instead to work on improving ourselves: “From a purely selfish standpoint, that is a lot more profitable than trying to improve others — yes, and a lot less dangerous” (p. 12). As for others and their faults, he urges us to “try to understand them. Let’s try to figure out why they do what they do. That’s a lot more profitable and intriguing than criticism; and it breeds sympathy, tolerance, and kindness” (p. 16). As he does so often, Carnegie supports his own words with a zinger of a quotation from someone even more eloquent; in this case, he borrows from Samuel Johnson, who observed that “God himself, sir, does not propose to judge man until the end of his days.” And so, says Carnegie, “Why should you and I?” (p. 16).

In Part Two, we progress to learning ways to make people like us. Most of the principles in this section have to do with being a good listener and letting other people talk about themselves and topics that interest them. But you can’t just pretend to be interested in another person. Carnegie is adamant that we “become genuinely interested in other people” and “make the other person feel important — and do it sincerely” (p.105). Oh, dear. Now we’re getting to the hard stuff. Other people can be sooooo boring! But somehow Carnegie manages to make me feel like my life would be richer if I followed his advice. He even offers two very simple principles that everyone, no matter how misanthropic

or antisocial, can try to follow: Smile, and make the effort to learn people’s names.

Now that we’ve learned how to deal with others and how to make them like us, we move on to Part Three, in which we learn “How to Win People to Your Way of Thinking.” I strongly feel that every politician running for office today (not to mention any number of 24-hour “news” channel hosts) should be required to read this section of Carnegie’s book. Here, we are told that we have to respect other people and their ideas:

Remember that other people may be totally wrong. But they don’t think so. Don’t condemn them. Any fool can do that. Try to understand them. Only wise, tolerant, exceptional people even try to do that.

There is a reason why the other man thinks and acts as he does. Ferret out that reason — and you have the key to his actions, perhaps to his personality. (p. 161)

Only if we understand why people think as they do can we begin to change their minds, or (gasp!) perhaps even change our own. I suspect most of us could benefit from Carnegie’s tips on how to disagree productively, one of which requires: “*Promise to think over your opponents’ ideas and study them carefully.* And mean it. Your opponents may be right” (p. 114).

Finally, we get to Part Four, in which it’s time to learn how to “Be a Leader,” but not just any leader; Carnegie wants us to be able to “Change People



# Book Review, Continued

Without Giving Offense or Arousing Resentment.” One of the techniques Carnegie addresses in this section is the strategy that we’ve come to know as constructive criticism — you know, where you emphasize someone’s good points before you nail them with everything you find wrong with them. I’ve never really been a big fan of this technique myself because, like most people, while I want to do the best job I possibly can, I don’t like to be reminded of my faults. I’m pleased to note that Carnegie agrees with me and offers a simple solution: “Many people begin their criticism with sincere praise followed by the word ‘but’ and ending with a critical statement. . . . This could be easily overcome by changing the word ‘but’ to ‘and’” (p. 200). Better yet, try an approach based solely on praise: “Use of praise instead of criticism is the basic concept of B. G. Skinner’s teachings. This great contemporary psychologist has shown by experiments with animals and with humans that when criticism is minimized and praise emphasized, the good things people do will be reinforced and the poorer things will atrophy for lack of attention” (p. 217). To bring about change, try encouragement rather than condemnation (p. 227).

Carnegie’s book isn’t just a collection of clever ideas. What makes his principles so eminently applicable to daily life is Carnegie’s constant use of anecdotes. His examples range from stories about everyone from the likes of Abraham Lincoln, Aesop, Mark Twain, Napoleon, and George Washington to car dealers, secretaries, travelling salesmen, landlords, parents, and spouses. Everybody is capable of making a difference, whether the cause is promoting world peace, convincing potential

customers that ordering lumber from you is the way to go, or encouraging your children to overcome obstacles.

As far as its flaws, Carnegie’s book can be criticized nowadays for being a product of its time — the mid-1930s. While the book is not overtly religious, it definitely comprehends a western, Christian worldview. Nearly all the examples used are of males, and almost exclusively white males at that. There is no gender neutrality in the language used. I read the revised 1981 edition, in which some of these critiques were supposedly addressed. Carnegie’s widow Dorothy writes that “Certain examples and phrases [in the 1936 edition] are as quaint and dated in our social climate as those in a Victorian novel. The important message and overall impact of the book is weakened to that extent” (p. xii). I don’t know how the excised segments read, but I do know that some of the new insertions can be jarring to run across. In particular, jumping from an example about hiring department store sales clerks to an obviously interpolated one about hiring a new employee with a Ph.D. in computer science really broke the narrative flow for me (p. 64-65).

If you choose to read the book, you may want to hunt down an unrevised version. I found Carnegie’s advice to have stood the test of time, and I definitely enjoyed reading a self-help book about achieving business success that encourages genuine friendliness and teaches valuable social skills. If everyone followed Carnegie’s advice, the world would be a much nicer place. Less interesting, perhaps, but definitely nicer! ■



# Proust Questionnaire

## Billie Jo Kaufman

Associate Dean for Library and Information Resources and Professor of Law, Pence Law Library,  
American University Washington College of Law, bkaufman@wcl.american.edu

**1** What did you think you wanted to do when you were in college/ what did you major in?

*I always wanted to be a librarian – I started out with a BS in Information Science from Indiana University – School Library & Audio Visual Services. I did my “student teaching” as a high school librarian at the University Lab School.*

**2** Which of your talents has helped you the most to succeed in librarianship?

*Loving the search, finding what is needed – my original generalist approach has always served me well; I am not limited by subject specific needs. I like people. Embrace technology – early adopter – entrepreneurial spirit – I get the big picture.*

**3** What aspect of librarianship has changed the most since you entered the profession?

*Technology and people – the specificity of job descriptions and assignments.*

**4** Who is your personal hero (in fact or fiction)?

*Don't laugh: my first grade teacher, Mary Kay Hartsock.*

**5** What is your idea of happiness?

*Working hard and playing hard.*

**6** What is your idea of misery?  
*Laziness or people who lie.*

**7** What is your favorite virtue?  
*Helping others – I give to all kinds of causes and charities – sometimes very small amounts, but every little bit helps and there but the grace of God go I – you never know what the next day could bring.*

**8** If you were not a law librarian, what profession do you think you would have undertaken?  
*Business – sales/marketing.*

**9** Who is/are your favorite author(s)?  
*I have dozens – John Grisham, Lisa Scottoline, P.D. James... dozens!*

**10** What natural talent do you wish you had?  
*Better analytical skills – I can do that but it's hard for me.*

**11** What is a favorite motto of yours?  
*Work hard, play hard.*



## From Books to Bytes: Random Thoughts on the Changing Nature of Libraries and Librarians

*Harvey Morrell*

*Associate Director for Information Technology at  
Baltimore School of Law, hmorrell@ubalt.edu*



I was recently interviewed by a law student who was considering becoming a law librarian but was concerned about the future of libraries and librarians. Like anyone who hasn't been hiding out alone in the stacks, the student had read (online, of course) that Google was consigning librarianship to the same slagheap as travel agents. In this narrative, Google and the creation of huge databases have eliminated the need for librarians as information intermediaries. The notion is that patrons now have direct access to the information they are seeking and can find everything themselves, a notion that has been around since I was getting a library degree, back in the last millennium.

I told the student that although there might be a kernel of truth in this view of libraries, born out, at least in my library, by declining reference transaction numbers, there is more to it than that. For one thing, the information being sought has not really changed, it has merely changed format. While some things are easier to find, others may not be, or may be hidden in a surfeit of information hits. This is where we as librarians have a role to play.

Just as travel agents have access to, and knowledge of, a broader array of options than a person searching on their own (especially when it comes to seat selection or good deals), librarians usually have a better sense of how to construct useful searches as well as what databases are available to get the information the patron needs. As a profession, we librarians need to make sure we make our patron base

– and the keepers of the purse strings – aware of what we can do and why this is necessary.

This is supposed to be a tech column, so I guess I ought to add a little tech-related something or other so that you don't feel cheated. Thus, I am including a couple of blogs that I have found to be helpful in thinking about the rapidly evolving nature of libraries and librarians, and how we can better market ourselves.

**3 Geeks and a Law Blog**  
(<http://www.geeklawblog.com/>):

A law blog addressing the foci of 3 intrepid law geeks, specializing in their respective fields of knowledge management, internet marketing, and library sciences, melding together to form the Dynamic Trio.

# Tech Talk, Continued

## **The Embedded Librarian**

(<http://embeddedlibrarian.com>):

Exploring new, embedded roles for librarians in organizations of all types. While not solely a blog focusing on law and law libraries, this blog offers many useful tips on how librarians can thrive in the information technology era.

## **Librarians Matter**

(<http://librariansmatter.com/blog/>):

I met the blog owner, Kathryn Greenhill, an Australian librarian, in Second Life (remember that?). In a bit of serendipity, when I first met her I had a question from a faculty about a particular Australian journal and she was able to provide an answer. Anyway, this blog often discusses how new technology can be used in libraries.

## **Pogue's Posts: The Latest in Technology From David Pogue**

(<http://pogue.blogs.nytimes.com/>):

This is the blog of New York Times columnist, David Pogue, who

was a keynote speaker at AALL not too long ago. Again, not a library blog, but the tips on using Google and other technologies are worth their weight in gold.

## **Bonus Feature**

This is a really handy hint about creating strong passwords that are easy to remember from the blog of Rich McCue, who is the System Administrator at the University of Victoria School of Law: <http://richmccue.com/2011/06/07/easy-to-remember-very-strong-passwords/> ■

## Member Announcements

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In February 2012, Nicole Harris, formerly head of electronic services at the George Washington University Law Library, was appointed to the position of assistant director for information services.

Kevin O'Mahony recently joined the firm of Independence Legal Support, Ltd. as a manager and principal. His contact information is 301-580-4819 and [kevin@independencelegalsupport.com](mailto:kevin@independencelegalsupport.com).



# Proust Questionnaire

## Leslie Lee

Assistant Director for Administration, Jacob Burns Law Library,  
George Washington University Law School, llee@law.gwu.edu

**1** What did you think you wanted to do when you were in college/ what did you major in?

*I majored in economics, which is code for "I did not know what I wanted to do, career-wise, when I was in college." To be honest, at that stage in my life, I did not have a long-range plan mapped out (sorry Tiger Moms!); rather I was focused on preparing for my next educational step, which was grad school. I chose law school because I felt that regardless of the profession that I would eventually land in, the educational experience would provide me with flexible and practical future options.*

**2** Which of your talents has helped you the most to succeed in librarianship?

*I think that knowing how to play well with others can go a long way in terms of individual and institutional success. (Think: Robert Fulghum's All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.) Regardless of whether I agree with the actions or opinions of others, I think it's important to respond with courtesy, attentiveness and respect, which are among the basic building blocks for managing healthy relationships. Beyond that, I'm a glass-half-full kind of person; I try to bring a positive vibe to my work, which I hope projects outward to those with whom I work.*

**3** What aspect of librarianship has changed the most since you entered the profession?

*I entered the profession at a time when the Internet was starting to gain momentum as a game-changing presence in the information world. Technology in general, especially the ease of gathering information through, for example, Internet search engines, and the rapid-fire pace of emerging technologies in the information landscape has changed our users' expectations over the years, which has impacted how we think about, deliver, and manage our resources and services. These days, new platforms and tools for delivering information seem to pop up overnight; we have to be prepared to address their relevance to our users, and if they are relevant, to integrate them into our workflow and business practices. While librarians have always analyzed, selected, and processed resources that best suit our user populations, I think the aspect of librarianship that has changed the most has to do with speed — technology has driven us to become savvier much more quickly.*

**4** Who is your personal hero (in fact or fiction)?

*I have two: my parents. They immigrated to the US in the '60s and left behind all that was familiar to them in hopes of creating better opportunities for*



# Proust Questionnaire, Continued

## Leslie Lee

Assistant Director for Administration, Jacob Burns Law Library,  
George Washington University Law School, llee@law.gwu.edu

*our family. They dreamed big, worked hard, and made many personal sacrifices without fanfare or applause. If you were to ask them about their life's journey and the choices they made along the way, they would modestly say that they did only what they were supposed to do as parents; they would not fuss about inconveniences, hurdles, hardships, and the like. I have always admired the quiet courage, spirit, and grace with which they approach life.*

### 5 What is your idea of happiness?

*I'd say that my happiness comes from making a positive impact on or contribution to whatever I'm doing, whether in my personal life or my professional life. Triple coupon weeks at Harris Teeter are a close second.*

### 6 What is your idea of misery?

*High pollen counts.*

### 7 What is your favorite virtue?

*Humility.*

### 8 If you were not a law librarian, what profession do you think you would have undertaken?

*Before answering this question, I have to give a big shout-out to my friends and colleagues at GW Law*

*and other libraries, all of whom contribute to the fact that I genuinely enjoy what I do and that I feel lucky that my trajectory landed me in this profession. That said, if I were not a law librarian, I think I would try my hand at a line of work that combines my love of words with my interest in small-scale graphic design, something along the lines of designing greeting cards.*

### 9 Who is/are your favorite author(s)?

*Alice Hoffman.*

### 10 What natural talent do you wish you had?

*Charismatic public speaking skills.*

### 11 What is a favorite motto of yours?

*I'm not sure if this counts as a motto or just a snappy comeback, but I'll go with "Big fat boo hoo." This phrase was coined over a decade ago when a good friend and I were trading "woe is I" stories, and at some point, one of us eventually blurted out, "Oh, big fat boo hoo!" The details of the stories have long since faded, but the phrase has stuck with us; it means lighten up and don't sweat the small stuff; shake it off!*





# Sticking With Law Librarianship: A Philosophical Rant or a Practical Thought?

*Scott Wales*

*Librarian, Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP, swales@sheppardmullin.com*

**“Should I stay or should I go now? If I go there will be trouble. And If I stay it will be double.”**

**— The Clash**

I would venture to guess that most of us have a love-hate relationship with the world of law librarianship and the law in general. Over the years I have discovered that if gripes were grapes, a room full of librarians would be the largest supplier of vinegar ever. I have also discovered, however, there is often plenty of the sweet wine of praise to go along with that vinegar.

Whether we work in law firm, government or university libraries we have long faced the same battles. And if you went to library school, no matter when you attended, I am certain that you often heard the same refrain. Librarians have to continually fight for funding and for respect. They also have to fight to prove their relevance to people who have no idea what they do on a daily basis.

Twenty years ago, with the ever expanding collection of case law, the issue was space. How could we justify all this space taken up by these many reporters? Today, we often need to justify the expense of many of our electronic databases. There also is a frequent debate over who is going to pay for these databases. Many clients now refuse to

pay for the cost of research. Database costs continue to escalate. Difficult economic times have meant internal competition for the allocation of resources.

Practice groups often fight among themselves, and librarians are caught between them and the accounting staff that wants to see the bottom line.

I am sure that all of us have as a major stressor the ever increasing amount of information that is requested, available and needed. The speed of delivery still astonishes me. How many feel like an overloaded robot on Star Trek? Too much data, too quickly and smoke will start to fly from your ears. Do you feel like the computers are taking over? Are you worried about being replaced by a robot like in an episode of The Twilight Zone?

Yet, while many of us have had complaints over the years, most of us have stayed with the profession. We may have changed firms or agencies – but within the law library field. There must be something about it that remains attractive despite our rants. What could it be?



Is it the challenge? While not every day brings us an interesting conundrum to solve, some days do. Librarians seem to be the kind of people who enjoy solving puzzles. I know that I derive a certain satisfaction from tracking down a difficult to find piece of information. I actually enjoyed writing papers in school. Maybe you did too.

Is it the sense of cooperation? Are you part of a big staff? If not, do you enjoy helping and receiving assistance from others in the law library community? I think we tend to be a cooperative lot.

Perhaps it is also because as far as professions go, it is not a bad one. While there are exceptions, most of us have at one time or another found an organization that suited us very well. Nobody probably gets rich, but I imagine few starve. Some of us are fortunate enough to have access to cutting edge technology. And while we may have issues, for the most part it is a pretty good job. There are certainly worse ones. Most of us would not have stayed with it for as long as we have if we really had that many important gripes.

**“Twenty years ago, with the ever expanding collection of case law, the issue was space. How could we justify all this space taken up by these many reporters? Today, we often need to justify the expense of many of our electronic databases.”**

Erma Bombeck once wrote, “The grass is always greener over the septic tank.” Maybe we should try to remember that the next time we find ourselves upset over the a publisher raising its price by 100 per cent, or a budget cuts that we feel are not in the organization’s best interest. We do need to pick our battles and show some innovation.

For example: there are many databases out there that are mere aggregators of free sources available on the Internet. Instead of paying these companies, get your top programmer to work on creating your own alerts. You will save the firm money and look great at the same time. If you are already a “Web junkie,” take advantage of all that knowledge. Be the first to hear about an event of importance to a partner.

Remember that the attorneys are there to practice law. They do not have the time to do the research. Learn a bit about IPOs, patents, and especially Congress. My mother used to say, “A little knowledge goes a long way” – and more knowledge will take you further.

No profession is perfect. All have their problems. But it is up to you to take the initiative. You can make your job interesting and increase your standing in the organization. You can use your skills to turn those sour grapes to your advantage, as you mix them into the salad bowl of skills that you have. Don’t whine a frustrated refrain. You are in a unique position at this time. “Stay just a little bit longer” and you will find in the court of your organization’s opinion that when it is *Wine v. Vinegar* the jury will rule in favor of *Wine* every time. ■



# LLSDC Law Librarians' Society of Washington, DC

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