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A TSLL Think Piece

READING THE PAPER AND ON MY MIND...

*Submitted (mostly for your entertainment) by Joni Lynn Cassidy
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I started college in 1971. Campus life included draft dodgers, anti-war activists and agitators. I know all the words to "Alice's restaurant" and I know what Arlo Guthrie meant when he sang about "starting a movement."

With that socio-political orientation, I felt rather sad reading *The New York Times* front page article, "In Small Town, 'Grease' Ignites a Culture War" on February 11, 2006. Fulton, MO, just 90 miles from St. Louis where we are scheduled to hold our upcoming AALL annual meeting, is the battlefield for this culture war taking place in the public high school.

The Fulton Superintendent of Schools received three letters of complaint about the production of "Grease," even though the drama teacher had carefully modified the script to avoid offense to the conservative small town of 10,000 residents. The complaints were written by members of the Callaway Christian Church, none of whom had actually seen the production. Upon receipt of the complaints, the Superintendent decided to cancel the spring play, "The Crucible," and replace it with "A Midsummer Night's Dream." He is quoted in a school district newsletter as saying he dropped the play after seeing the following summary on the Web: "17th century Salem woman accuses an ex-lover's wife of witchery in an adaptation of the Arthur Miller play." In point of fact, "The Crucible" IS the Arthur Miller play (not an adaptation) written in the 1950's in response to the McCarthy hearings meant to purge Hollywood of Communists (Miller's current-day witch hunt).

As I pushed forward through the article, I expected to read about student protests or a faculty counter-complaint. However, instead, there was this depressing little paragraph, "It's over," said Emily Swenson, 15. "We can't do anything about it. We just have to obey."

Days later, the *Times'* "Letters to the editor" page featured three letters that all expressed disappointment over the state of affairs in Fulton, MO where differing ideas are simply not presented for public debate, library books are banned with

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little or no discussion, and, worst of all, no one is protesting the steady loss of civil rights.

So, with a nod to Arlo Guthrie, perhaps those of us who do not agree that three individuals should be allowed to select and reject culture for a community of 10,000 can begin a protest movement. Naturally, my first instinct is to say we should boycott the AALL annual meeting because it will be held only 90 miles away in St. Louis. But that won't be any fun, and probably will go unnoticed. It would be better if we can form an Advocacy Committee to draft a letter of protest. Then collect signatures at the TS/OBS/RIPS/CS-SIS Joint Reception and, finally, send representatives to Fulton to advocate for the open expression of cultural ideas in schools and libraries. If librarians don't, who will?

On the lighter side of the news, the cover article of *Newsweek* for February 6, 2006 is "Genes & Family: What Science Can Tell You about Your History and Your Health." In my family, in just two generations, there are five women who have obviously inherited what we affectionately call "The organizational gene." There's me, The Cataloger; my cousins, Jennifer and Kaye, The Law Librarians; my younger cousin, Adena, whose clothes are meticulously classified by category with subclasses for length, quality and color range; and my cousin, Phyllis, whose work has always been mathematical.

However, if truth be told, Phyllis' real organizational magic takes place in her kitchen pantry. It's a place any cataloger would be happy. Food items are grouped together by category, and then alphabetized by name within the group. There is some color-coding, especially in the vegetable area where, say, all the green vegetables are together and then alphabetized by name. Imagine our delight when we toured the Biltmore Estate in Asheville together and discovered that their huge pantry was classified using the same system!

As a casual afterthought to outlining this article, I described Adena's clothing classification system to Phyllis in hopes of amusing her. She registered surprise and said, "You never asked ME about my closet. You've always been so fixated on making fun of my pantry, I never thought to mention it!" It turns out that Phyllis developed an *identical* classification system, only hers was a bit more expanded in its subdivisions because she is older and has more clothes!

These are somewhat predictable similarities amongst people *known* to be genetically linked. But, new scientific evidence is finding genetic links between unpredictable tribes. One example cited by author Claudia Kalb in *Newsweek* involves the Cohanim, members of the Jewish priesthood. They "trace their roots back more than 3,000 years to Aaron, Moses' older brother. For generations, fathers have passed on the priestly status to their sons through oral tradition. But, science has also uncovered a unique genetic lineage among the Cohanim – a common set of markers in their Y chromosome. Dr. Karl Skorecki, a Cohan himself, launched the research. The signature has been identified not just in Jewish Cohanim, but in the DNA of some members of the African Lemba tribe, who believe they were descended from the Biblical land of Judea. In Albuquerque, N.M., Father Bill Sanchez [a Roman Catholic priest] discovered that his DNA contained some characteristics of the Cohan lineage, too."

All this talk about shared genetic markers got me thinking about catalogers and how similar we can be to one another.

- Would you always rather *plan* the party than *attend* it?
- Do you have to tear the letter-trim perforation off continuous-feed computer paper?
- Don't you hate it when someone uses your desk when you're away and moves your stuff around?
- Do you enjoy straightening things out, lining things up and generally creating symmetry wherever possible?

If the answer to two or more is "yes," we could be related!



What would you think about using the next TS/OBS/RIPS/CS-SIS Joint Reception to collect DNA-swabs for comparison to see how many of us actually are kinfolk? Is anyone willing to write a proposal for the OBS/TS research grant?

The latest American Library Association statistics, released this month, show that 58% of their membership was born between 1940 and 1959. That's lots of librarians approaching retirement age. ALA's trade publication, *American Libraries*, offers pointers for coping with the job market most months for employers and employees. Creative recruitment was the focus of the October 2004 issue, including a discussion of long-term use of graduate interns.

Participation in the graduate internship program of one of our local library and information science schools has turned out to be a great success for our office. Each intern has worked 60-140 hours for us on a variety of projects, many of them "pro bono" in libraries where I have volunteered our services, such as synagogues and elementary schools.

I would be misleading you if I let you think that inviting graduate interns to work in your shop gives you access to low-cost, or free, labor. At least one professional on your staff must be assigned to instruct and supervise an intern's work. They are in your library or department to learn from you and it's important to take your instructional role seriously. In some cases, this internship will be the only hands-on experience the student will have before entering the job market. But, at the end of the internship, you and your staff can feel really good about the contribution you've made back to the profession and know that you've done your part to help educate the next generation of librarians and information scientists coming up the ranks.

If you want to go a big step further as far as educating the next generation goes, think about approaching your local library and information science school regarding teaching a class or two. If you don't live close to a campus, check out new opportunities in distance learning. I can tell you from personal experience that students love professors from "the outside," professionals out there doing the job. There has been nothing more rewarding for me than bringing my own enthusiasm for a subject I love, cataloging and classification, to students still fishing for a career objective. Four graduates that I know of are working as full-time catalogers because they were turned on in my class. Believe me when I say it doesn't get any better than that!

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