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ACL and God’s Call to Librarianship

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Many people have asked me how, as a librarian in a secular institution, I became so involved in ACL. I have been at Auburn University Libraries since 1978, but before that was at a Christian liberal arts college, now defunct. ACL has been part of my life since the early 70's and, of all the professional organizations to which I have belonged, it is the one that has had the greatest effect on me personally.

My Call to Librarianship

I have liked libraries from my childhood, and worked in my tiny public library for several years (starting at $.25 an hour). I worked one year typing catalog cards for my high school library, not something I enjoyed because the librarian was very, very picky! Actually my first library job was to organize my sixth-grade classroom library. That teacher eventually became a librarian and was my first mentor.

When I entered Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, I had no intention of being a librarian, though I did intend to get a job in the college library and worked Circulation/Reserve Desk for most of my college days. From my earliest years I wanted to teach, especially history, and used to line up my dolls as if they were in a classroom. My parents were both teachers; they never pressured me to go in that direction, but that was my heart. I majored in Secondary Education, with major emphasis in History and a minor in Speech and Drama. My mother had returned to teaching when I started school in order to be able to put me through college without my having to work as hard to earn the money to attend college as she did. Her only requirement in college was that I get a second minor in Library Science just in case I couldn’t get a job teaching History - hence, my foray into the world of professional library science. However, I had a call to teach, not to be a librarian.

After teaching History and English at a high school for a few years, I had to leave my job and move to Lansing in order to get a Master’s Degree in History for Secondary School Teachers at Michigan State University. My only thinking about libraries at that point was using the library to do research. Having finished the degree, I was involved by then with the Navigator ministry at the University, so decided I wanted to stay in the area. The only job I could get was as a high school librarian, so I took it. Believe me; I did not consider this a calling! There was no money in the budget for library materials (I bought one reference book with fine money and spent a lot of time clipping and filing newspaper articles so students had some information for their papers!) At the end of that year, when their millage failed for the third time, they pink-slipped their first year teachers and I was out of a job.

To make a long story short, God brought Owosso College (later called John Wesley College) into my life and I took a job there as the one and only librarian. They were a newly purchased school and knew they might not get a librarian with an MLS. (Actually, at the time, I didn’t know what an MLS was!) I love how God works! Because my mother insisted I get a minor in library science with my Education degree and because I had worked circulation at the University, I was able to get the high school library job. Because of that, I was considered for the college library job. I had never considered working at a college in any capacity.

Within a very short time, I knew I was called to be there at that College. Two years later they told me they wanted to keep me and if I wanted to stay, I needed to work on my MLS. At that point, I knew God was calling me to become a college librarian and I worked on...
my degree over the next few years. By the
time I finished my degree, John Wesley
College was very close to closing its doors, so
at that time I moved to Auburn University in
Alabama. My parents were moving to Florida
and I wanted to be close enough to them to
to get there in a day, without worrying about
snow and airports! The story behind getting
that job is as miraculous as the one where I
first began working in a Christian college
environment. Neither story is short enough to
include here, but it was obvious that God was
broadening my “call” to a wider field.

The Role of ACL in My Life

Now, what contribution did ACL make to my
development as a librarian? At the time I
began at Owosso College, I had no idea ACL,
then Christian Librarians’ Fellowship, existed.
But I learned of it in 1973, so in 1973 I
attended my first conference at Asbury
College.Wow! Here were all these issues I had
never thought of – and practical things to
learn! And here was a group of folks I not only
identified with as a librarian, but as a
Christian. The fellowship was wonderful and
I soaked it up.

Then I got involved (initially with The
Christian Periodical Index) and that began an
involvement as a learner, a doer and a teacher
over the years. Because I learned so much in
those early years, I was committed to giving
back. This continued even when I left the
Christian college world and moved to a
secular university. God especially blessed me
by bringing me to Auburn University, where
my administrators never discouraged my
participation in ACL, as long as I was also
active in secular library organizations. This has
continued through the years.

Being a Librarian in a Secular Institution

I suppose it would be appropriate here to talk
about my life as a librarian in a Christian
institution and in a secular institution. The
differences are pretty overwhelming in many
ways, not the least of which is that I have only
worked in Acquisitions at Auburn, where at
John Wesley College I did a bit of everything.
Some might wonder why I didn’t mention
money. When I came to Auburn to interview,
I was told that big libraries have money
problems, too. Of course, I answered that I
didn’t think this school would be in danger of
closing this year and I didn’t imagine anyone
had gone without a paycheck recently! But in
many ways they were correct. It doesn’t
matter how large or small the library, there is
never enough money to buy everything that
students and faculty need.

In terms of adjusting to a secular institution, it
was made easier for me in that I attended
secular universities as a student and was aware
of some of the moral and cultural differences.
While Auburn is a secular institution with a
more liberal teaching and library faculty than
student body, this is the rural south and in the
middle of the Bible belt, which made the
transition easier for me.

Conclusion

It is really hard to put in writing what ACL has
meant to me over the years. Professionally they
helped me get started and offered me
opportunities for service both with CPI and
conference workshops and on the Board.
Personally I have made more friends than I can
count. Spiritually, ACL has been a lifeline to
me, especially with my health needs. I always
know I am being prayed for and that people
will respond to my prayer requests. That
blanket of prayer support interacts with my
prayer support here and gives me a feeling
of being held in the hands of God and
His church. ♦