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OLA Quarterly



Humor US: Librarians and Laughter

Gonzo at the UO Libraries

My Life as an Action Figure

Cancellations Librarian

But ... You Don't Look Like a Librarian!

Laughter: The Best Medicine?

Humor Lust: Recommended Reading for Every Library Humor Need

News to Us: Library Humor Web Sites

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Upcoming Issues

Summer 2005
This issue cancelled due to budget issues.

Fall 2005
President's Issue

Winter 2005
A Day in the Life

Humor Us: Librarians and Laughter

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Vol./No.	Theme	Deadline	Pub. Date	Guest Editor
Summer 2005	Summer issue cancelled due to budget issues.			
Vol 11 • No 2 Fall 2005	<i>President's Issue</i>	July 15, 2005	September 15, 2005	Leah Griffith Newberg Public Library
Vol 11 • No 3 Winter 2005	<i>A Day in the Life</i>	October 15, 2005	December 15, 2005	Jey Wann Oregon State Library & Bill Kelm Willamette University



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Humor Us: Librarians and Laughter

Librarians and laughter; do you consider this a non sequitur? If so, hopefully this issue of *Oregon Library Association Quarterly* will change your mind.

Those of us in the profession face a number of challenges: we work in a constantly changing and increasingly technical environment; face escalating costs yet still provide cutting edge services with shrinking budgets; are often stereotyped; and we must meet the needs of our sometimes challenging patrons. Humor is a necessary ingredient in everyone's life, particularly those of us who work in libraries. There is no single way to maintain a sense of humor or incorporate humor into our lives and I hope you will enjoy the variety of solutions presented by contributors to this issue of *OLA Quarterly*.

One way to infuse your life with humor is to schedule it in your calendar. See what librarians were doing in 1922 at Oregon Agricultural College in a photo and caption forwarded by Elizabeth Nielsen. Or, consider the University of Oregon where librarians and staff set aside an afternoon at the end of every spring term to host the "Gonzo Review" as described by Leslie Bennett and Aimee Yogi in "Gonzo at the UO Libraries."

One key element in a sense of humor is to be able to laugh at ourselves. Nancy Pearl wrote her essay "My Life as an Action Figure" for *Swivel Magazine* and the *Swivel* editor transformed it into the comic drawn by Christine Olsen, reproduced here with Nancy's original essay. As you can see, we need not be stand up comedians or comic strip authors to express our wit! We are also fortunate to have a contribution from Ruth Kneale titled "But You Don't Look Like a Librarian." Ruth has researched the image of librarians and is a sought after speaker on this topic.

Maintaining a sense of humor under pressure is a true sign that we are coping well. Joe K. Stephens wrote his fictitious "Cancellations Librarian" position announcement when faced with the need to cancel resources due to spiraling costs. Mr. Stephens also published a serious treatment of the same subject illustrating that professionalism and humor are not mutually exclusive. "It's No Laughing Matter" by Kris Anderson describes humorous moments during the aftermath of the devastating University of Hawaii mudslide and is a wonderful glimpse of dedication and camaraderie, all with a sense of humor.

What better way to stay healthy and upbeat than to find humor in your day-to-day encounters? Jey Wenn has written a wonderfully amusing account of life amid government documents in "What's So Funny About Government Documents?" As a Science Librarian I wanted to look a bit more closely at the scientific evidence behind that often used phrase "Laughter is the best medicine" and have reported my findings here as well.

Finally, what library publication would be complete without bibliographies? Janet Webster and I offer up an annotated list of web sites in "News to Us" and "Humor Lust," is an obvious tribute to Nancy Pearl's "Book Lust."

There are many options when it comes to having humor in your life so pick what works for you, and surround yourself with appropriate, positive humor.

—Barbara Butler, *Guest Editor*
Oregon Institute of Marine Biology



OLAQ

Gonzo at the UO Libraries

by **Leslie Bennett**
Head of Music Services
University of Oregon

and

Aimee Yogi
Interlibrary Loan Department
University of Oregon

“**D**amas y Caballeros, bienvenidos al fabuloso Gonzo!”

The audience cheered, “Gonzo!” The master of ceremonies, with silver and black sombrero and black glittery scarf covering his face, welcomes the crowd to another Gonzo Revue at the Knight Library of the University of Oregon. He is “El Invisible,” an anonymous staff member resurrected each June to entertain us, and in many years, to introduce the acts.



David Landazuri: Copy Cataloger by day, “El Invisible” during Gonzo.

2004 marked the 20th anniversary of the resurrected Gonzo Revue. Myth and memory state that the Gonzo started in 1977 when former Library Director, William Axford, put together a show of songs and dance. With a change in library administration Gonzo was forgotten from 1980 until 1984, when it resurfaced in spirited storytelling, songs, and dance.

At the Gonzo Review everyone can get into the action: animals, families, and of course, staff. One year a librarian’s beloved

bull-mastiff dog *found the meat* by tracking a piece of bread tacked to the bottom of an audience member’s chair. Along with numerous singing family duos, we’ve had jugglers, tap dancers, drummers, clarinetists, and vocal groups featuring staff families. Staff members have even fulfilled private visions of fame, including one who sang *Animal Crackers in My Soup* while dressed in Mary Janes and a curly hairdo.

Whole departments have gotten into the act as well. Metadata and Digital Library Services (formerly known as the Cataloging Department) are famous for their many routines including: Bootscootin’ Line Dance; a very patriotic synchronized book truck routine by the Catalog Department Book Truck Drill, Revised, Second Edition, to the tune of Stars and Stripes Forever; and a piece by the Catalog Department Kazoo Consort entitled *Finale of the 1812 Overture* (by that famous composer, Tchaikovsky) featuring balloons being popped (or not!) at the appropriate climax of the piece. Not to be outdone, the Circulation Department has provided merriment in routines such as *Waiting for 11: the Automation Rap* (an ode to the early days of online circulation, when the system went down for hours at a time) and, as the Dewey Decimals, performing *Barcodin*, by Lyle Brairy (an obvious ode to another era in library projects).



Erica Rivera and Aimee Yogi perform as well as teach the hula to staff every year at the Gonzo Review.



Dancers take off their shoes or put on their shoes as the case may be! Heather Ward and friends get our heart rates up with Irish jigs and reels. Cataloger Lori Robare and her daughter tap dance to nostalgic standards. Aimee Yogi and Erica Rivera are Gonzo regulars and after they sway through their Hawaiian Hula, staff receive their annual *Hukilau* Hula lesson.

Some performances feature a cross section of staff from various library branches. Of note was a Gilbert and Sullivan rendition by the D'Oyly Shelving Carte Opera Company of *I Am the Very Model of Computerized Librarian*, featuring singers and musicians from all branches of the library system. We've tried our hand at *My Word*, the English game show wherein contestants receive a phrase from literature or proverbs, and make up a story to go with it. A talented library staff ensemble has performed a version of *Stomp*, entitled *Counter Point*, using found library objects as percussion instruments. A highlight of 2004's *Gonzo* was a recreation of that old *Riders in the Sky* routine, *Palindrome*, featuring a slow-talking cowpoke (played by our Documents Center Head, Tom Stave) that used only palindromes to answer questions.



Paul Frantz, Reference Librarian, asks the questions and Tom Stave, Documents Center Head, answers in palindromes during the 2004 *Gonzo*.

But most memorable of all are the many returning performers who have amazed and astounded us with their creativity over the years. We've had Jo-Anne Flanders doing innumerable variations on the *Little Red Riding Hood* story, including *Little Red Hooding Ride*, etc. We've listened to Lawrence Crumb, who truly exemplifies someone with both right-brain and left-brain abilities, performing humorous songs of many decades, including those by Flanders and Swan, parodies on Gilbert and Sullivan, and many a Tom Lehrer ditty. And not to be forgotten is a home-grown library group of 8 to 10 gentlemen known as the Knights of Glee who have provided the library staff with many tuneful and memorable songs (in 4 part harmony no less!) over the years.

Our masters of ceremonies often wear unusual get-ups or present the acts using unique themes. For a couple of years, Bill Woolum, who now teaches courses on Shakespeare at Lane Community College, provided a running dialog about the New Age Library whose leader, Fennel Seed, specialized in whole-earth management practices. Our law librarians haven't been silent either. Angus Nesbit has served as master of ceremonies for several years.

The *Gonzo Revue* has allowed library staff to try out new songs, find their inner poet, share dancing skills with colleagues, and make total fools of themselves in a safe and supportive atmosphere. What more could you ask for staff development? When future library articles ask how to keep your staff motivated, the UO Libraries suggests the perfect solution: hold a *Gonzo Revue* and unlock the creativity in your library staff! 🌿

For a semi-complete list of the UO Libraries' *Gonzo Revues*, see: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/lisa/comm-program/gonzoindex.html>



My Life as an Action Figure

by Nancy Pearl
Former Executive Director
of the Washington Center
for the Book

The Beginning

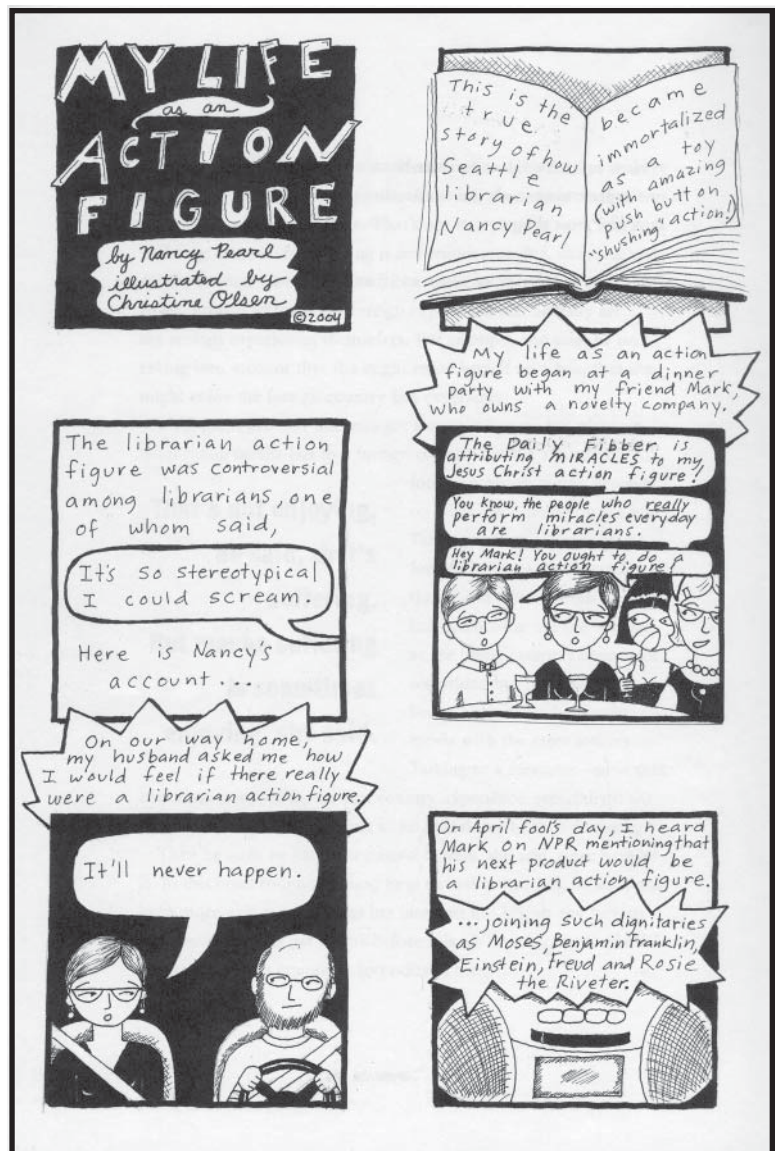
My life as an action figure actually began at a dinner party. Mark Pahlow, the owner of Accoutrements, Inc., a novelty company in the Pacific Northwest, was there. So were I and my husband, a patient and low-maintenance sort of guy. We were talking about a recent article in one of the supermarket tabloids, in which people were attributing miracles to the Jesus Action Figure, one of Mark's best selling items. Someone said, "But you know, the people who really perform miracles every day are librarians." And someone else said, "Mark, you ought to do a librarian action figure."

After we all picked ourselves off the floor (where we'd fallen because we'd been laughing so hard at the oxymoronic notion of putting the words *librarian* and *action figure* together in one sentence), someone else said, "Nancy never takes herself too seriously, she should be the model." Then the conversation turned in other directions.

On our way home, my husband asked me how I would feel if there really was a Librarian Action Figure (LAF) based on my likeness. I told him that it would never happen. "But if it did," I said, "what a hoot it would be, and how great for librarians to have their good work celebrated by a wide audience." "And," I added, "it would be a wonderful

opportunity to promote books, reading, and libraries," which is, after all, the mission of the Washington Center for the Book at the Seattle Public Library, of which I just happen to be the Executive Director. "Besides," I said again, (oh famous last words!) "it will never happen."

Time passed. One spring day, many many months later, Mark Pahlow was interviewed on the local National Public Radio affiliate and mentioned that the next product Accoutrements would bring out would be a Librarian Action Figure, joining



such dignitaries as Moses, Benjamin Franklin, Einstein, Freud, and Rosie the Riveter, and modeled on the station's own weekly book reviewer, librarian Nancy Pearl. This was all well and good, except that the show was on April Fools' Day, so no one, including me, knew how seriously to take his announcement.

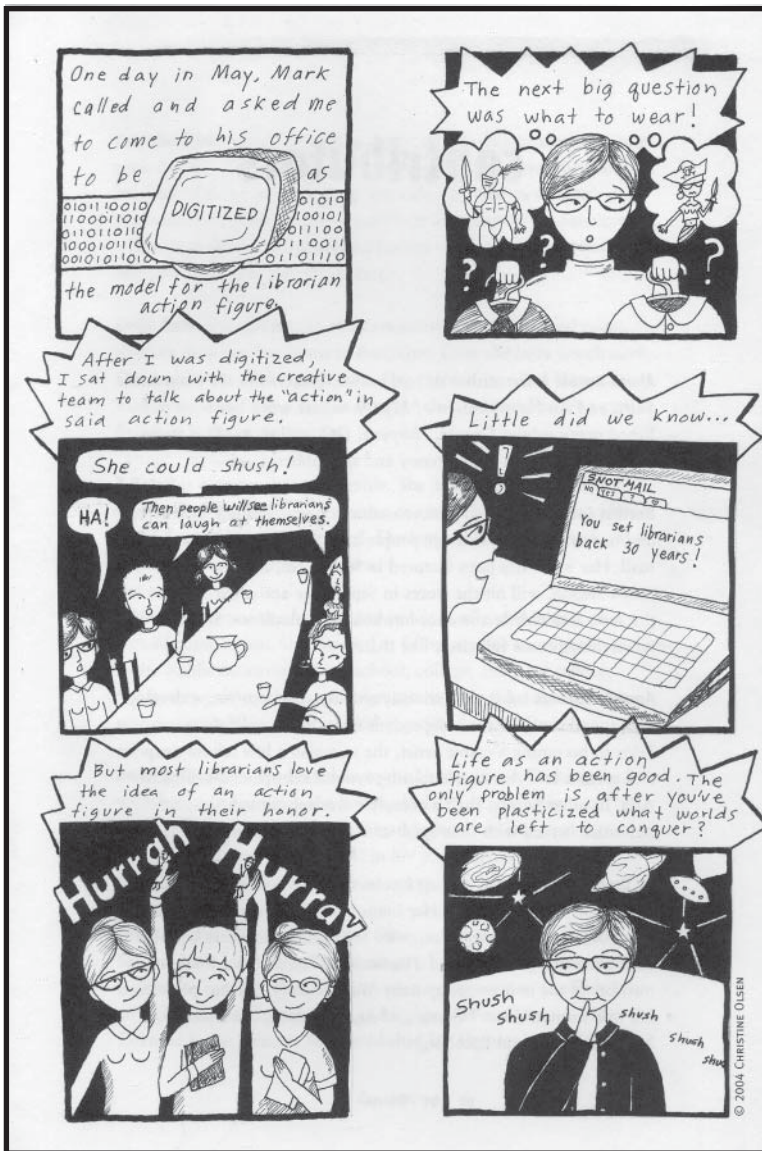
Time passed, although not quite so much time, and in May Mark called and asked me to set up a time to come to their offices and be digitized. Hot diggety dog!

The next big question was what

to wear. Because I had several important speaking engagements coming up I splurged and went to the Eileen Fisher store and bought not only the most beautiful, but also the most expensive clothes I had ever purchased: a wool skirt, turtle-neck sweater, and long cardigan in a beautiful heathery-grayish blue. They looked great on me; I decided to wear them to be photographed in. (Big mistake. On the basis of my own experience, I can declare without fear of contradiction that Eileen Fisher's classic clothes just don't translate

into plastic well. Part of what I had to live with, once the LAF came out, was accusations about how dowdy I looked, or rather, how dowdy the LAF looked. I always get the two confused!)

Once the photos were taken, I got to sit down with the creative team at Accoutrements and talk about what action the figure should be doing, and what the accessories should be. Hands down really, there was no discussion, and everyone agreed the stereotypes that most people associate with librarians are that they wear their hair in buns and say *shush* a lot. (Remember the scene in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* when Audrey Hepburn gets shushed at the New York Public Library?) We all thought that having the librarian make a shushing motion



Cancellations Librarian

by Joe K. Stephens
State of Oregon Law Library

*I*n describing what led to him to create this position description Mr. Stephens writes: "... it was in a very dark time for this library. Our funding had been level for three biennia, and this was during a period when many American legal publishers were being bought out by the Canadian Thomson Corp. When Thomson acquired a publisher, prices for their publications escalated rapidly. In 1996, Thomson acquired the premier American legal publisher, West Publishing Co., and there was despair in Law Library Land, since West publications are practically indispensable in law libraries. It was clear that our only recourse was canceling some of what we received, and the question became what to cancel. To make those decisions, we required the expertise of a *Cancellations Librarian*. I think I wrote the ad in about ten minutes."

To read Mr. Stephen's more serious treatment of the subject, see:

The Merger: What will it Cost Law Libraries? which appeared in *Legal Reference Services Quarterly*, V. 17, 13-23 (1999).

Cancellations Librarian (the advertisement)

The Oregon Supreme Court Library anticipates a vacancy for an experienced Cancellations Librarian. This position is contingent on the early retirement of our Acquisitions Librarian, who no longer has anything to do, but is temperamentally unsuited to cancellations work.

Qualifications: JD and MLS from accredited institutions; three years experience in a shrinking library. Ten years experience in debt collection or repossession work may be substituted for the academic degrees. Must be able to deal with vendors who refuse to acknowledge that it is possible to cancel their products and who therefore have no cancellation procedures

in place, as well as customer service employees who are recent immigrants from other planets. Position requires excellent communications skill, such as the ability to curse in several languages, as well as the ability to carry on in the midst of pointless change and demoralization of staff. Ruthlessness and irascibility are desirable traits. Must have no sentimental attachments to books or history. Indifference to the legal information needs of judges, lawyers, and the public at large a plus.

The Cancellations Librarian will write and implement a new Collection Destruction policy. It is imperative that the unorganized destruction of the recent past be replaced with systematic destruction procedures as we move into the 21st century.

Salary commensurate with qualifications, experience, and amounts cancelled. Excellent benefits package includes psychiatric counseling and outplacement when the library is destroyed.

The Applicant

Dear Mr. Stephens,

I wanted to get my application off to you the instant I saw the notice of the fantastic opportunity you are offering a person of my particular skills.

First let me point out that I consider this field a calling rooted deep in my blood. One of my ancestors was the Papyrus Cataloguer at the Library at Alexandria. (Not really a good position for an absent minded chain smoker.) Another sorted books for Savonarola. (He sorted them into two piles: Burn and Burn Along with Author.) Another, my Great-great-grandfather Dewey Ryan, developed the first scientific methodology for deaccessing a collection 10 percent at a time. This was, of course, the famous Dewey Decimation System.

My own experience to date has not been nearly so lofty. I have been associated



with a number of large libraries, which were forced to downsize, having formerly occupied one large facility with several wings. I was responsible for pulling the wings off. I also had a brief stint as the Client/Collection Interface Librarian at the library at the University of Southern Labrador. Clients would ask me to retrieve a particular book from the closed stacks and I would tell them not to be so particular and to please go away. I was the Labrador Non-retriever. Finally, I recently completed a doctoral dissertation titled: *Computer Cataloguing for the 21st Century: Infinite Possibilities for Misfiling*. I would gladly send you a copy but, unfortunately, I don't seem to be able to locate one.

All in all, I believe I am just what you are looking for in the way of a Cancellations Librarian. I do hope you will be in touch. I can be reached here or through my web site at:

<http://www.librarybooks.wedon'tneednostinkinlibrarybooks.com>.

Very truly yours,

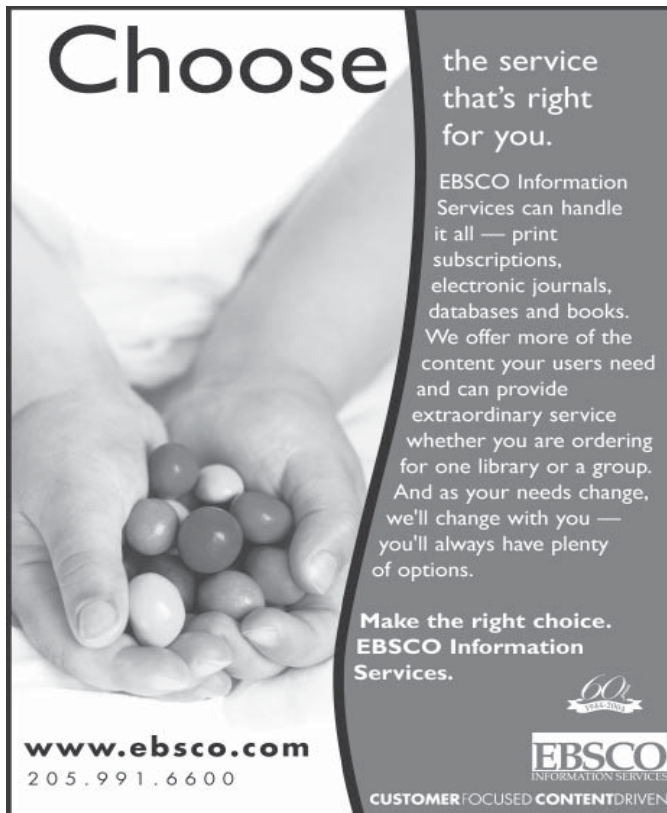
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The Cancellation Librarian position announcement, originally posted to a law librarian discussion list in 1997, has been reprinted in numerous law library newsletters and in a slightly altered form in the AALL Spectrum Job Announcement: Cancellations Librarian (11/97:32).

"A keen sense of humor helps us overlook the unbecoming, understand the unconventional, tolerate the unpleasant, overcome the unexpected, and outlast the unbearable."

Dr. William A. Ward



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But ... You Don't Look Like a Librarian!

by **Ruth Kneale**
Systems Librarian
National Solar Observatory



Have you ever had someone say, “You can’t be a librarian—you don’t look like one!”? Or “Wow, yeah, I believe you’re a librarian.” Sure you have—we all have—at one time or another. Some think it’s funny, some think not—but I tell you, sometimes I just have to laugh! It amazes me what folks will say to us, what happens to us when we’re out and about, on TV, in bars, in comic strips—heck, they even make comments about our eyewear!

One bonus of researching the image of librarians over the last several years is that folks share their stories and experiences with me. Here are some comments forwarded to me during the course of my research:

- You sure fit the stereotype.
- I never would have guessed you’re a librarian.
- Libraries are really changing, huh?
- No, really, what do you do?
- You have a Master’s Degree?!?
- I like to read, I should be a librarian too!
- You dance really well for a librarian!
- Since you have a bun and glasses, it’s a good thing you don’t dress like a librarian!
- What are you doing in this field?
- I didn’t know librarians could be so young!
- If librarians looked like you while I was in school, I would have spent a lot more time in the library!
- Isn’t that a woman’s job?

- You’re not a typical librarian, are you?
- I never met a librarian who rode a motorcycle before.
- Where’s your bun?
- I didn’t know you had to go to school to be a librarian!
- You’re too (young, funny, noisy, messy, cute) to be a librarian.
- You don’t dress like a librarian.
- You dress too hip to be a librarian.

And, here are a couple of stories I received (as part of a survey of librarians) and that made me chuckle:

“Several years ago, while at an ILL conference here in Denver, I went into a restaurant with a colleague from a college library. After we sat at the bar and ordered beers, the bartender noticed our name tags (which we’d obviously forgotten about) and asked what sort of conference we were attending. We said that he had to guess and proceeded to give out lots of hints—about all the places one can find libraries, what we do, who we help, etc. During the 30 minutes or so that we sat there, he and a few other interested customers tried to figure us out, but with no luck. So, we finished our beers, stood up, tossed our heads, and said ‘We are LIBRARIANS!’ Everyone said something like ‘Wow!’ and we waltzed out.”

“I have a little game I like to play when I meet new people. I keep business cards from friends, vendors, professionals and I find it’s fun to place 5 or 6 from diverse female professionals (including my own) and ask which



one business card they think is mine. It's pretty interesting and fun. No one has ever picked my business card because 'I don't look like a librarian.'"

I am constantly on the lookout for things that reference or influence the image of librarians and it can be a thoroughly enjoyable pastime. There are the more obvious images, like the Librarian Action Figure (see Nancy Pearl's essay *My Life as an Action Figure* in this newsletter); there are also less obvious humorous references, like articles about Ella Gunderson, a young lady in Washington who appealed to Nordstrom stores for a *less racy* line of clothing.

"Fashion watchers such as Gigi Solis Schanen, an editor for *Seventeen* magazine, told the *Times* Gunderson should be pleased with the new trend on the horizon. 'If modesty is what she is looking for, it's going to come full force in the fall,' she said, adding 'tween and teen girls can expect to see fuller skirts, higher waist lines and more *layering* of tops. 'The 50s sexy-librarian look is in,' Shanen told the *Times*, and the Britney Spears-style exposed belly is out.'"

—Kristen Gelineau,
Associated Press;
WorldNet Daily
May 22, 2004

Just what we all wanted! The sexy-librarian look of the 50s! Yeah!

Does anyone these days NOT have a Conan the Librarian image somewhere in his or her office or on their computer? I was quite surprised to find an entire sub-culture devoted to this particular individual online. There are blogs, graphic art, stories, movie excerpts, even software applications (there's one where Conan the Librarian pops up and insults you if the volume on your workstation speakers exceeds a certain level).

Conan is even used in some libraries as a cartoon to show folks how to get library cards. Early credit seems to go to the clever folks of William Mitchell College of Law, who created the character for a library talent show under the pseudonym *Hadley V. Baxendale*, a pun on the famous law case *Hadley v. Baxendale*. Read more about their Conan the Librarian adventures at: <http://www.aallnet.org/chapter/mall/conan/conanhp.html>.

I was also highly amused by the excerpt from the movie *UHF* with a TV advertisement for an upcoming movie called *Conan the Librarian* ... "let's admit it, aren't there days when you really would like to be able to take a long sword to the patrons who just keep pushing your buttons?"

Speaking of television shows, in December 2004 TNT aired a made-for-TV movie called *The Librarian: Quest for the Spear*. Who didn't have fun watching Noah Wyle save the world as the guy who knows everything? Please don't send me any irate e-mails about how this was a horrible presentation of librarianship—I thoroughly agree. Then again, I wasn't expecting high literature or an accurate description of our profession, and that allowed me to laugh out loud several times during the movie. Perhaps not at the places TNT had intended, but still!

For those of you looking for more of an *Ooh, wow, ha ha, ouch!* change in image, you can always investigate Pierced Eyeglasses. Although not specifically intended for librarians, it certainly does bring a different twist to the bespectacled approach! The gentleman in this article decided he'd rather do something different with his eyeglasses, and being a fan of body piercing, thought he'd combine a bridge piercing (a piercing through the flesh at the top of your nose, right between our eyes—basically, right where the bridge of a pair of eyeglasses hits) with lenses. You can see pictures and read his



Let's not forget these comments made to folks who are in library school,
wittily collected by Jane Gresham
and shared in the June 15, 2004 *Library Journal*.

1. I'd love to be a librarian because libraries are so quiet.
2. I thought about becoming a librarian, but I need enough income to support myself.
3. You need a graduate degree for that?
4. I thought the Internet put libraries out of business.
5. Don't you have enough college degrees now?
6. I think it's wonderful that you can pursue a hobby like that.
7. You have to go to college for that?
8. I don't see much purpose to libraries; I buy all my books at Costco.
9. I'd love to be a librarian because I'd love to read at work.
10. You have to go to school for that?

story online at <http://www.bmezine.com/news/pubring/20041214.html>.

The issues surrounding the image of librarians can be serious ones; they can impact our job responsibilities, our salaries, even whether we get hired or not. But they can also be downright silly sometimes, and

often the best way to deal with the situation is to laugh about it! Being able to laugh at yourself is a valuable tool and can often be used to defuse a potentially sticky situation—and that's true for us as a profession as well. So remember—when in doubt, look at the funny side! 🌿

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Laughter: The Best Medicine?

by **Barbara Butler**
Oregon Institute of Marine Biology
University of Oregon

Welcome to a crash course in *Gelotology 101*. That isn't a typo, Gelotology (from the Greek root gelos (to laugh)), is a term coined in 1964 by Dr. Edith Trager and Dr. W.F. Fry to describe the scientific study of laughter. While you still can't locate this term in the OED, you can find it on the Web. The study of humor is a science, and laughter researchers publish in the psychological and physiological literature as well as subject specific journals (e.g., *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*).

While at the Special Libraries Association annual conference last June, I was able to attend a session by Elaine M. Lundberg called *Laugh For the Health of It*. The room was packed and she had the audience laughing and learning for the entire 90-minute session. I have always used humor as a coping strategy and it was validating to learn that others actually promote this behavior, and that I haven't simply grown eccentric after 13 years of working in a remotely located one-person library. Among other interesting tidbits, Ms. Lundberg reported that laughing aloud (real or feigned) 20 times produces a cardiovascular workout similar to three minutes of work on a rowing machine. I have seen similar statements elsewhere in my reading, but as a science librarian I need to see citations and I want the facts; here is what I found.

The mechanism

Rod A. Martin, University of Western Ontario, describes four potential mechanisms by which humor might influence physical health. First, physiological changes in the body may result from vigorous laughter, the results being relaxed muscles, improved respiration, enhanced circulation, increased production of endorphins, and decreased production of stress-related hormones. Second, a positive emotional state may increase pain tolerance, enhance immunity, and undo cardiovascular

consequences of negative emotions. Third, using humor as a coping strategy may also benefit health indirectly by moderating adverse effects of stress. Finally, humor may provide another indirect benefit to health by increasing one's level of social support (Martin, 2002, 2004).

The physiology of humor

Dr. William F. Fry from Stanford University has published a number of studies of the physiological processes that occur during laughter and is often cited by people claiming that laughter is equivalent to exercise. Dr. Fry states, "I believe that we do not laugh merely with our lungs, or chest muscles, or diaphragm, or as a result of a stimulation of our cardiovascular activity. I believe that we laugh with our whole physical being. I expect that this total participation will eventually be recognized." He goes on to say, "... it is appropriate to conclude that humor, mirth and laughter are on the side of contributing positively to the maintenance of health and survival, from the standpoint of their physiologic effects" (Fry, 1994).

Ronald A. Berk of Johns Hopkins University agrees, writing that, "Humor produces psychological and physiological effects on our body that are similar to the health benefits of aerobic exercise" and in synthesizing 30 years of research in this field he lists 15 psycho-physiological benefits of humor and laughter (see sidebar on page 13). Humor is considered to be a genetic, biologic characteristic of the human race. But, we aren't alone. Besides humans, three of the higher primates (chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans) show a paroxysmal, expiratory breathy respiration, much like human laughter, when exposed to tickling (Fry, 1994). Interestingly enough, Dr. Fry also writes, "The incidence of heart attack while shoveling snow, for persons with impaired heart function, is alarmingly high. But unexpectedly and



Know the lingo

From *Journal of Nursing Jocularly* we have a complete introduction to the language of laughter (Kuhn, 1994 as adapted by Berk, 2001).

1. **Smirk:** Slight, often fleeting upturning of the corners of the mouth, completely voluntary and controllable.
2. **Smile:** Silent, voluntary and controllable, more perceptible than a smirk; begins to release endorphins.
3. **Grin:** Silent, controllable, but uses more facial muscles (e.g., eyes begin to narrow).
4. **Snicker:** First emergence of sound with facial muscles, but still controllable (if you hold in a snicker, it builds up gas).
5. **Giggle:** Has a 50 percent chance of reversal to avoid a full laugh; sound of giggling is amusing; efforts to suppress it tend to increase its strength.
6. **Chuckle:** Involves chest muscles with deeper pitch.
7. **Chortle:** originates even deeper in the chest and involves muscles of torso; usually provokes laughter in others.
8. **Laugh:** Involves facial and thoracic muscles as well as abdomen and extremities; sound of barking or snorting.
9. **Cackle:** First involuntary stage; pitch is higher and body begins to rock, spine extends and flexes, with an upturning of head.
10. **Guffaw:** Full body response; feet stomp, arms wave, thighs slapped, torso rocks, sound is deep and loud; may result in free flowing of tears, increased heart rate, and breathlessness; strongest solitary laughter experience.
11. **Howl:** Volume and pitch rise higher and higher and body becomes more animated.
12. **Shriek:** Greater intensity than howl; sense of helplessness and vulnerability.
13. **Roar:** Lose individuality; i.e., the audience roars!
14. **Convulse:** Body is completely out of control in a *fit* of laughter resembling a seizure; extremities flail aimlessly, balance is lost, gasp for breath, collapse or fall off chair.
15. **Die laughing:** Instant of total helplessness; a brief, physically intense, transcendent experience; having died, we thereafter report a refreshing moment of breathlessness and exhaustion with colors more vivid and everything sparkling; everything is renewed.

against logic, the incidence of heart attacks suffered while laughing is surprisingly low, despite the occasional greatly elevated heart rate. Occurrence is so infrequent; there is no medical literature on mirth-provoked heart attacks.” Now that we know we aren’t likely to die laughing—bring on the humor! This man is an expert and I, for one, won’t argue with him!

Positive emotions and increased pain tolerance

Nurses and researchers can attest to the therapeutic value of humor and laughter (Adams, 1986). There is even an organization known as Nurses for Laughter and their leader is known as the Master Giggler. To top it off, there is even a *Journal of Nursing Jocularly*. Librarians are like the nurses of the information world and perhaps we can follow in the steps of our medical counterparts.

Humor as a coping strategy


Dr. Fry quotes three colleagues who wrote: “Freud places humor beside neurotic and psychotic disorders as basic mechanisms of adaptation to human suffering, with the essential difference that humor alone is not pathological” (Fry, 1977). Once again, are you going to argue with this expert now that we have a green light and know that our behavior isn’t pathological?

Humor and increased social support

The trick here is to know the difference between good and bad humor. Elaine M. Lundberg says that positive humor is nurturing and makes everyone feel good. Joel B. Goodman agrees and urges us to use humor as a tool and not a weapon. He writes: “Laughing with others builds confidence, brings people together, and pokes fun at our common dilemmas. Humor is laughter made from pain, not pain inflicted by laughter.” If there is one overriding criterion necessary in order to have a *good* sense of humor it is clearly the ability to laugh at yourself. Mr. Goodman urges us

to take our jobs seriously but ourselves lightly and I believe that is sage advice.

Why librarians need humor

Everyone needs to incorporate humor into their life and this is particularly true of librarians. We care for the needs of our patrons. Our budgets are limited yet patron needs are not, so we struggle as *third party* purchasers of increasingly expensive services. We must not only do our jobs, but also influence the marketplace and the scholarly publishing process. We know we are professionals, yet we don't pass the bar exam like lawyers and we aren't board certified like doctors. As a profession, we are misunderstood and as we seek to correct misconceptions and educate others about what we do as librarians in our constantly changing work environment, a sense of humor is a vital tool. There is no single prescription when it comes to humor, so pick what works for you, insulate yourself with positive humor, and keep up the good work. 

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Humor really is good for you

15 psychological and physiological benefits of humor
(Berk, 2001).

Eight psychological benefits of humor:

1. Reduces anxiety
2. Reduces tension
3. Reduces stress
4. Reduces depression
5. Reduces loneliness
6. Improves self-esteem
7. Restores hope and energy
8. Provides a sense of empowerment and control

Seven physiological benefits of laughter:

1. Improves mental functioning
2. Exercises and relaxes muscles
3. Improves respiration
4. Stimulates circulation
5. Decreases stress hormones
6. Increases immune system defenses
7. Increases production of endorphins



St. Patrick Party:

Oregon Agricultural College Librarians, 1922

by **Elizabeth A. Nielson**
Senior Staff Archivist
Oregon State University



Courtesy Oregon State University Libraries, University Archives; Harriet's Collection #635.

Oregon Agricultural College Librarians, 1922.

Oregon Agricultural College library staff celebrated St. Patrick's Day with a costume party. Lucy Lewis, College Librarian from 1920 to 1944, was known for her ready laughter, sense of humor, and sportsmanship—which likely set the tone for gatherings such as this.

STANDING: Nelle U. Branch, Reference Librarian; Edith Hague, Assistant Continuations; Mrs. Elzie V. Herbert, Order Clerk; Mrs. Evangeline Thurber, Assistant Reference; Bertha Herse, Head of Periodical Department; Elizabeth Ritchie, Cataloguer; Laurel Canning, Assistant Circulation; Lucy Lewis, Librarian; Ethel Goudy, Assistant Circulation.

SEATED: Ethel Allen, Assistant Periodical Department; Lucia Haley, Head of Continuations; Elizabeth Palm, Head Circulation; Janet Herbert (daughter of Mrs. Herbert).

These images are among a group of images of Library staff in *Harriet's Collection*, a subject-based collection of Oregon State University photographs. More about Harriet's Collection is available in the catalog record (which includes a link to the finding aid):

<http://oasis.oregonstate.edu/search/X?SEARCH=harriet%27s&l=&m=&searchscope=5&Da=&Db=&SORT=D>



"A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done."

Dwight D. Eisenhower

It's No Laughing Matter

by **Kristen Anderson**
University of Hawaii

Trick-or-treat came a day early for those of us at University of Hawaii. As most of you know, on October 30th a river of mud flowed through the basement of Hamilton Library. The University's map collection, government documents collection, our technical services departments (cataloging, acquisitions, and serials), and the computer room housing the library's servers were demolished. It wasn't a treat.

Now why would this story have a place in a publication focusing on humor and librarians? Why I'd be happy to tell you. Many of us use humor as a coping tool. Is there a time when it ISN'T appropriate to laugh? How about when you are up to your knickers in mud? For the sake of sanity, that is EXACTLY the time when you need your sense of humor to see you through. It would have been impossible to enter that pit of destruction every day if we hadn't been able to laugh.

During the first two weeks after the flood I joined other library staff and volunteers in salvaging computing resources, the five dry percent of our government documents, about 20 percent of the library's 166,000 maps, including historic maps going back to the 1600s, and almost all of its 91,000 Trust Territory aerial photos. In case you aren't familiar, the Trust Territories of the Pacific are those Micronesian countries that had been ruled by Japan before World War II which became U.S. Territories after the War and are now independent countries.

What is so funny about that?

Maybe you just had to be there, but on the second day of the salvage effort items had begun to mold and the air was getting nasty. I was pulling hanging file folders of aerial photos, which were filled with mud that I was squeezing out by hand. Mud wasn't the only thing in the folders; there were cockroaches in there as well. Bugs, frogs and snails brought more life than I wanted to see to the mess. The theme

song for the day (and we were all singing) was *I Don't Like Spiders and Snakes* by Jim Stafford. Yep, the giggles had set in.

After hours pulling maps and wading through thousands of destroyed books in Government Documents we went in search of our Electronic Resource Librarian's CPU. After clambering over huge piles of door-blocking debris and then sliding around in the mud, we came to a relatively clear area. In the middle of the clearing was a cardboard box containing four *Withdrawn* stamps. I took one look and declared that we MUST salvage those stamps as there were a couple of dump trucks of books in the next room that were headed that direction. You can bet that we laughed.

How many librarians does it take to "un-secure" a computer?

Have you ever thought of what you would do if you needed to clear out your computer room in a hurry? Remember those security cables we all install? Here is a *news flash*; it is incredibly difficult to cut through those cables with bolt cutters! I won't tell you how long we tried, or how many of us were involved in the effort. Luckily a student came along and asked if we had a flat-blade screwdriver. She then went from computer to computer effortlessly popping off the brackets through which the cables were threaded. Now I should have thought of that!

Hidden treasure

Before the flood I kept the staff lounge refrigerator stocked with cold drinks for my coworkers. Several days after the flood I noticed the metal cabinet storing extra sodas was nowhere to be found. As it turns out the cabinet had washed downstream about 30 yards. A relatively bright spot that day was to uncover a dozen cases of soda. Sure we had to wash the cans with antibacterial soap before we could open them, but it was a



Humor Lust:

Recommended Reading for Every Library Humor Need

by **Barbara Butler**
Oregon Institute of Marine Biology
University of Oregon

As Nancy Pearl writes in *Book Lust*, “Humor, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.” Hopefully one or more of these will catch your eye.

When nothing less than the pure humor of a comic book will do:

- Interlibrary Loan Sharks and Seedy ROMs
- Dewey Decimal System Defeats Truman
- Unshelved, Volume 1 (Online too but it is great to have a whole year’s worth of them in your hands!)
- What Would Dewey Do (More from the Unshelved folks)
- You Can Tell Your Kid Will Grow Up to Be a Librarian When ...

When you want a collection of amusing anecdotes and stories:

- A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the School Library
- Happy Bookers


For lighthearted satirical observations of librarians, try any of the *Manley* books:

- The Manley Art of Librarianship
- The Truth About Catalogers
- The Truth About Reference Librarians
- Uncensored Thoughts
- Unintellectual Freedoms
- Unprofessional Behavior
- Unsolicited Advice

Slightly more sarcastic, and edgy, but wonderfully wicked:

- Revolting Librarians
- Revolting Librarians Redux
- Biblia’s Guide to Warrior Librarianship

Other amusing possibilities:

- Anatomy of a Literary Hoax (A practical joke a librarian would love!)
- BIB/TRIV: Profundities, Banalities and Trivialities in Libraryland (For those interested in the image of librarians this is truly the equivalent of Trivial Pursuit.)
- Library in a Book: Seven Books in One (As a fan of the Griffin and Sabine correspondence I look forward to seeing this item some day. If ILL doesn’t work out, a trip to Reed Special Collections is in order.) 

“Humor is the great thing, the saving thing, after all. The minute it crops up, all our irritations and resentments slip away, and a sunny spirit takes their place.”

Mark Twain



News to Us:

Library Humor Web Sites

by Janet Webster
*Hatfield Marine Science Center
Oregon State University*

and

Barbara Butler
*Oregon Institute of Marine Biology
University of Oregon*

Most of you are familiar with the myriad of library-related Web sites. Given the wealth of sites and limited browsing time, we thought you might like to know about a few interesting library humor Web sites. Some of these sites are devoted specifically to library humor while other sites contain a more serious treatment of the profession, but also include links to humorous material. These go straight to the point with humor that is both validating and amusing to many of us:

- **Warrior Librarian Weekly:**
<http://www.warriorlibrarian.com/>
From Australia, comes this zine that offers short twists on news stories along with great links to valuable resources such as weird calendar days.
 - **Laughing Librarian:**
<http://www.laughinglibrarian.com/>
Though not updated with great frequency, this site has very useful listings of wacky library quotes and hard to find music lyrics dedicated to librarians.
 - **Librarian Avengers:**
<http://www.librarianavengers.org/>
This one is part blog, part library evangelism, and part schlock. It's about being proud to be in the library world, yet edgy and realistic.
 - **Unshelved:**
<http://www.overduemedia.com/>
This claims to be the only daily comic strip set in a public library. Who else but a librarian would come up with this concept?
- And just a reminder: humor (or humour) is international. We all laugh.
- **IFLA's joke site:**
<http://www.ifla.org/I/humour/subj.htm>
 - **Danish version of familiar comics**
<http://www.christian-kirsch.de/boring/borhumor.htm>
 - **More from the Danes with a complete listing of humor sites:**
<http://www.netbib.de/art/fun.html>
- If you need a boost in the humor department, try one of these activities for welcome relief from a bad reference desk experience or just to regain perspective. We're sure you'll find one that fits your sense of humor and skill level:
- **Library Administration Assessment:**
<http://warriorlibrarian.com/JUSTKIDDING/ratetheboss.html>
 - **Library Science Jeopardy:**
<http://www.wam.umd.edu/~aubrycp/project/jeopardy.html>
 - **Job Title Generator:**
<http://lamar.colostate.edu/~mach/jobtitles/>
 - **Reshelfing Shuffle:**
<http://www.bibliozone.com/lighter-side/hangman/hangman.shtml>
 - **Cataloger's Revenge:**
<http://www.bibliozone.com/lighter-side/index.shtml>
 - **No More Questions:**
<http://www.bibliozone.com/lighter-side/wastern/wastem.shtml>
 - **Bookcatcher and Scanner Lander (hint, use your arrow keys):**
<http://www.bibliozone.com/lighterside/flashgames.shtml>
 - **Reading on a Dream:**
A Library Musical (viewing time about two minutes)
<http://www.prangstgrup.com/lm/lm2.htm>



What's So Funny About Government Documents?

by Jey Wann
Oregon State Library

When I first entered the library world in the late 1970s, government documents were a mystery. The Documents staff lived in the room next door to Acquisitions, so I saw them frequently, but I had no idea what they did. The one thing I did know was that their office was overflowing with piles of boring-looking publications, and their conversations were incomprehensible.

I got my Documents toes wet a few years later when I moved from Acquisitions to Circulation, and had to verify requests in the Monthly Catalog. It confirmed my opinion that government documents, while definitely filling a niche, were weird and obscure. Why, then, did I react with such glee every time a cumulative volume replaced the individual MoCat volumes? Was it some sort of documents disease?

I found myself immersed in state documents a few years later when, for a few months, I compiled and packed Oregon Documents Depository Program shipments. It was during a record hot spell, the office was crowded, and the building wasn't air-conditioned. Imagine how thrilled I was, then, to read this in the July 1981 newsletter from the Medical Examiner's Office: "As he wiped the sweat from his eyes, the County Sheriff/Deputy Medical Examiner thought about better ways to spend this hot, mid-August afternoon. Wrestling with decomposed bodies was not on the list." I soon discovered that there was evidently a frustrated novelist working for the Medical Examiner, as I was treated to such gems as this (from the January–February 1982 issue): "Scalpel, a junior pathologist, sat alone at his desk. Another holiday hospital party was ending, and despite his 1971 resolution, the young physician had mingled late near the punch bowl. He rubbed his

microscope gently and turned to seek comfort with a tray of cervical smears."

It turned out that this particular newsletter was notorious for being creative, but gory. In fact, we had a list of depository libraries that asked us not to send it to them.

I spent only a few months in state documents at that point, and then moved on to the (I thought) more interesting worlds of reference and acquisitions. But I eventually found myself back with the Oregon Documents Program again. And, over the years, I've found that government documents are darned funny.

First of all, there are strange things that happen with depository shipments. Federal depository libraries, for instance, have reported getting things like peanut butter sandwiches in their shipments. To the best of my knowledge, the Oregon Documents program has never made such a faux pas, but we have had some problems with shipments. At one point, when all of us who were working compiling shipments were new to the program, we found ourselves choosing publications by color, not title. It took awhile before we realized that there were several different publications that looked exactly alike, but were totally different if you actually bothered to read the title.

Then there are the boxes the shipments are packed in. At the State Library, we re-use boxes as much as we can to save money, but there still are times that we have to buy a supply. One such supply of boxes was printed with "Chili Hot With Beans." Certainly something to spice up an OrDocs shipment!

Then there was the batch printed with "Sausage perishable." We didn't really think anything about this, and happily

"So long as there's a bit of a laugh going, things are all right. As soon as this infernal seriousness, like a greasy sea, heaves up, everything is lost."


D.H. Lawrence



sent out shipments without crossing the printing out. That worked fine until the shipment right before Christmas that year. The documents librarian at one of our depositories was a fan of spicy sausages. The shipment arrived the Saturday before Christmas, when the library was open, but the documents librarian was not there. The vigilant staff, however, called him at home when they saw the “Sausage” on the side of the box, sure that it was a Christmas present that someone had sent to the library. Imagine everyone’s disappointment when they opened it, only to discover the latest OrDocs shipment.

The documents themselves still yield some giggles. The folks at the Oregon Office of Communicable Disease and Epidemiology publish a newsletter called CD Summary, and have a talent for clever headlines. For instance: “Asthma: It’s Nothing to Wheeze at” (v. 51, no. 21); “Look, Ma, no SARS!” (v. 52, no. 9); “A Disease Most Fowl Chicken Pox in the Third Millennium” (v. 53, no. 26). Volume 50, number 15, is about changes to disease-reporting rules, and carries the following caution: “Warning: may cause drowsiness. Do not read while driving, operating heavy machinery, or performing surgery.”

The CD Summary folks are being funny on purpose. Some of the humor in documents, however, is unintentional, but charming. Take, for instance, the title of this publication from the Oregon Game Commission: *1958 Fish Stockings by Watershed*. (When I asked our natural resources librarian what kind of stockings fish wore, he answered (naturally) “Fishnet.”) Then there’s this recent publication from the Oregon Department of Transportation: *A Fitness-for-Purpose Evaluation of Electroslag Flange Butt Welds*. It almost sings!

So never let it say that government documents, or the people who work with them, are without humor. If you need a good dose of laughter, visit your government documents co-workers today! 

Library haiku

From Revolting Librarians Redux:

patron in corner
looking at pornography—
maybe researcher

by Kathleen Kern

The following were contributed by the
Hatfield Marine Science Center Staff:

Once again, a fine.
Does anyone check these things in?
—Book found on the shelf!

Oh, my aching hands!
Why is this volume bound so tight?
Photocopy blues.

Paper-cut on my
Middle finger—I will not
Show you where it hurts

Journal articles
I could write grants in my sleep
though I’d rather dream

I wish to photocopy
directly onto my brain.
How would the recall
be expected to perform?



Action Figure


Continued from page 5

would set a tone for the LAF that would let the world see that librarians are not uptight and don't take themselves and their profession too seriously; we can laugh at ourselves.

Little did we know that there would be people who wouldn't see the humor, or the fondness with which the LAF was conceived and produced. It's hard to imagine that anyone looking at the packaging, which is basically a huge tribute to librarians and reading, could possibly be offended, but as I now know, there's no predicting people's response. I actually got two unsigned e-mails from people saying that I had set the profession back 30 years! But in all of my recent travels around the country to promote my new book, *Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every*

Mood, Moment, and Reason, and in the many e-mails, letters and phone calls I have received, the vast majority of librarians love the idea of an action figure in their honor.

The end

My (brief) life as an action figure has generally been good. The only problem seems to be that now I don't quite know what to aspire to next. After you've been plasticized, what worlds are left to conquer? 

Nancy Pearl is the author of *Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every Mood, Moment, and Reason*, and its companion, with all new books and categories, *More Book Lust*, due out in May 2005.

Laughing

Continued from page 15

hidden treasure nonetheless. Maybe part of the therapeutic value in this *find* was using a hammer to beat the cabinet open. Remember, there is a physical component to humor after all.

Looking on the bright side

Some would argue that sarcastic humor doesn't belong in the workplace. In the midst of the recovery effort some of us were in the trenches, squeezing cockroaches out of folders, and were covered with mud. Other staff members opted to stay clean. A mud-covered colleague encouraged me to hug one of our pristinely clean coworkers. I still regret passing up

that opportunity, but just the thought still makes me laugh. When our humor resources were at their lowest we would pull out the sarcasm and point out the bright side of this disaster; no more cataloging backlog!

In writing this article I asked my fellow workers what we were laughing at during those difficult times and they all agree—a whole lot of nothing. Clearly, we just knew that we had to use humor to work through the disaster. Recovery efforts at the Hamilton Library continue and let's hope each of us involved in the effort continues to retain and use our sense of humor during this challenging time. 