

Bronia Renison's life in libraries

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LIFE IN LIBRARIES, 1972-2019

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In 1997 Bronia Renison literally sailed into Townsville, coming from Melbourne in a boat she had built with her husband. Not long afterward she was appointed Director of Library Services at Townsville General Hospital. In July 2019 she retired from this position, capping a distinguished career in health and special libraries.

This career began well before Townsville. In Bronia's words, she became a librarian in part because fifty years ago there were very few career options available for girls who wanted to attend university. A high school librarian encouraged interest in practical ways, and after completing an arts degree she obtained a cadetship with the State Library of Victoria and commenced library studies. Bronia is pleased that cadetships are coming back into favour, with employers once again accepting responsibility for investing in people to develop skills which will be to the organisation's benefit, while recognising the mutual dependence of theory and practice.

Bronia always thought she would end up in a music library, but her first library job was in agriculture, followed by others in small special libraries. Her first health library job came in the 1980s in a small hospital which later became part of the Monash Medical Centre. She took several career breaks for children and travel, and while they resulted in financial and professional setbacks, she has no regrets. She considers health librarianship to be very rewarding. In particular, Bronia always enjoyed the close client contact and the autonomy associated with special libraries, as well as the collegiality inherent in networks of similar focus. She was also a staunch advocate of ensuring any special library was well-placed in the wider structure of the organisation. In her words "The library manager may have little influence in the decision, but every opportunity should be seized. Placing the library within the hospital's clinical structure gives the best chance of being given a sympathetic supervisor, one who uses the library for patient care, understands what libraries can provide and can lobby on behalf of the library at higher levels in the organisation".

Bronia saw many changes to health librarianship during her career, particularly with the advancement of technology. When she first started, she used the monthly Index Medicus in print or searched Medline via an expensive phone call to the National Library in Canberra. After a few days wait for the printed search results to arrive, she would take the abstracts selected by the requesting clinician and then consult holdings on microfiche to find which Australian library held a certain journal. The request was then sent by snail mail, as was the photocopied article in reply, leading to a turnaround often measured in weeks, a far cry from today's ubiquitous access to PubMed and ease of PDF retrieval. Bronia also oversaw the construction of a new library as part of a Townsville hospital rebuild. The old hospital library had a beautiful view of Magnetic Island, but it was inaccessible and very few staff knew it existed. In the new hospital, an ideal location was secured overlooking the front entrance. In Bronia's words "The Douglas library has a wall of windows and is welcoming, visible and accessible; you can always see people studying here which is wonderful".

One of Bronia's favourite memories was a phone call she received from a librarian in a major Sydney hospital. An anaesthetist was in theatre with an obstetric patient who'd had an uncommon reaction to a drug and the doctor urgently required a journal article to help him decide his next steps. Given it was daylight saving on the East coast, all the other hospital libraries were closed, so thankfully Bronia was able to locate the article quickly and fax it through. The patient and her baby had a positive outcome as a result. Though not every situation is as dramatic, this memory is in keeping with Bronia's overall commitment to evidence-based practice and person-centred care. She was a strong proponent of library staff becoming enablers by choosing to participate in general hospital business, arguing that most projects or committees could benefit from a quick literature search. She was an equally tireless advocate for a library's support of health literacy, arguing that even experienced clinicians can benefit from a librarian's assessment of the value of different information sources. Collaboration with public libraries (something she achieved with the "Words for Wellbeing" program) can then send this expertise out into the community and increase the visibility of the health library.

Support for education and research were equally strong passions throughout her career. Bronia was disheartened by the assumption that education can only be effectively delivered online, on-demand. She cared that too many students, international graduates and those returning to the workforce struggle without face-to-face tuition in the many new programs mandated for managing hospital business. She saw a real role in library staff stepping in and providing the missing educational support, earning the lasting gratitude of staff and students and providing further promotion for the library. Bronia also walked the walk, presenting numerous local

and industry-wide education sessions, authoring a number of papers and contributing to several systematic reviews and serving on Townsville's Human Research Ethics Committee (a role she will maintain into retirement).

Bronia was also a dedicated contributor to the profession through ALIA and HLA. She joined ALIA as an associate on 29 November 1979 (author note – I may or may not have been born in 1979). She was a HLA committee member 2000-2018; a project team member on the ALIA/HLA workforce education and research group 2009-2012; a HLA News editorial advisory group member from 2010-2018; a HLA portfolio leader (awards) 2014-2018 and Chair of the Anne Harrison award panel 2012-2018. She was a past member of the information online committee; she coordinated events such as regional visits by Carol Lefebvre and Julie Glanville and for many years managed vendor relationships to generate considerable sponsorship for HLA events while ensuring fairness and value for money for industry partners. Bronia saw great benefit in networking – generating personal contacts both nationally and internationally; learning about others' solutions to problems; being exposed to different contacts and new trends. As Bronia neared the end of her career she was surprised, and no doubt quietly but rightly proud, of the apparent value of her corporate and professional knowledge.

As mentioned, Bronia found health librarianship to be very rewarding. In her words, she didn't need to know all the answers, but she enjoyed telling people (politely) where to go. She liked demystifying the databases and contributing to systematic reviews. She firmly believes that shared information enriches everyone, while hoarded information only benefits one person and hoarding can prevent the best solution being found. She found it most gratifying when she could correctly anticipate a client's needs, while the most challenging aspect was invariably prioritising the urgent and the important. There are always too many urgent tasks to allow proper attention to the important, but if there are too many things to do and not enough staff to do them it probably means the library is growing, which is never a bad thing.

In her words, Bronia was definitely ready for retirement and has settled into it seamlessly. For a start, she no longer falls asleep in front of the TV. She is still working on overdue maintenance and planned renovations for a new house she moved into a year ago. She has much more time for playing and teaching music, especially the accordion in two ensembles, and accompanying others (including some clinicians) on the piano. She can also visit family and friends outside of Townsville more frequently, especially the grandchildren in Melbourne, and is eager to head back to Europe, in particular, Bulgaria.

A friend and mentor, a confidante and innovator, a fierce advocate and inveterate interlocutor, a dedicated volunteer and skilled professional, Bronia will be greatly missed and fondly remembered by all in Townsville Health Service, Queensland Health Libraries Network, and Health Libraries Australia. If you wish to pass on your own message of farewell, please email tsv-library@health.qld.gov.au



Townsville Hospital library director Bronia Renison