

50 things librarians do: a paean for small libraries

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When I look back at my nearly 50 years in libraries, mostly being in medical libraries, I realise that the majority of it was spent in one-person libraries. While I did have some very able staff at times it was always a small team.

One person libraries have some distinct features:

- The librarian often reports to administrators who use the library sparingly and have little library training. The library must stay visible to compete for resources.
- Professional development is your responsibility and you do it by any means possible. This can be done, but you have to be proactive and take advantage of opportunities.
- It is a constant battle to publicise the library and its services. Participating in social events and liaising with staff is a must. This often means that you need to do things that no library school has taught but which make the library visible.

I have been fortunate to know many people in the medical library world who have been very good at innovation and promotion. They have come up with excellent ideas and follow them through. I have done a few myself, but some of them are hardly conventional.

In the list that follows, everything on the list was done for one of four reasons:

- My manager requested me to do it.
- A user requested me to do it.
- I did it to make the library more visible.
- It was a professional development activity.

So here are 50 ideas. Some are good, some not so good, some even strike me as odd. I hope something there stimulates your imagination!

1. Co-supervised a doctoral thesis for a female divinity student in a medical library.
2. Ran a library Melbourne Cup Sweep which presented library clients with 6 winners in a row in a bizarre fashion
3. Tended to a horse on agistment outside my library (In a Sydney hospital!)
4. Assisted an anaesthetic registrar to compose cryptic crosswords during operations.
5. Sang during a library conference dinner at Sydney's Maritime Museum dressed as a pirate.

6. Became a reluctant expert on the medical aspects of crucifixion
7. Represented my hospital in the Hospital Olympics
8. Managed to win a limerick competition at an overseas conference
9. Played Touch football for the hospital
10. Was a founder member of Gratis and the First Secretary
11. Sent a consignment to a bookbinder with instructions to remove the weevils
12. Played indoor cricket for the hospital
13. Was a staff Union Rep and election scrutineer
14. Played a multiple game blindfold (no sight of the boards) chess exhibition to get to know the Pathology staff better
15. Acted as an obnoxious, demanding, very highly qualified dummy job applicant for Personnel Selection Training (just following instructions)
16. Compiled a medical library from scratch
17. Played in an interhospital cricket match where I had to play for both sides and train a novice scorer (Both sides a player short)
18. Created and ran a library blog
19. Conducted an all of hospital Health and Safety inspection so scathing that I wasn't asked to do it again
20. Successfully swapped a medical library volunteer with a theological library one
21. Acted as a movie extra
22. Taught the General Manager to sing (a major stretch given my own unnatural talent)
23. Co-wrote 2 user guides for CIAP
24. Ran an oral history project with long serving staff
25. Sang with the Governor of New South Wales while dressed in my dressing gown and bedroom slippers
26. Wrote a book with a foreword by iconic "Thorn Birds" author Colleen McCullough
27. Acted as location scout for a movie company seeking somewhere to perform a miracle
28. Retrained a doctor to work as a library technician
29. Ran (walked? jogged?) 5km per week for 10 weeks in Adelaide's Corporate Cup
30. Opened a conference paper with a description of a hospital ghost
31. Performed a comedy skit at a theological library conference

32. Re-worded many Christmas carols for a series of staff Christmas concerts
33. Once acted as a patient for podiatry trainees who could find no pulse
34. Appeared on a panel with the then Acting Prime Minister, Tony Abbott
35. Co-Presented 2 papers at a World Conference (ICML 2009)
36. Did CIAP training in remote health services
37. Had an Olympic wrestler as a regular library user
38. Was a member of the first group of hospital libraries in Australia to adopt the Koha Open-source library system
39. Acted as relief bus-driver and tour guide for medical students
40. Was the independent on several interview panels for clinical positions
41. Sole author of a paper in an international journal
42. Supervised and supplied some of the material for a sesquicentenary Heritage Wall in my hospital
43. Wrote part of an ALIA Senate Inquiry submission
44. Formed some medical students into a choir and sang with them
45. Co-authored a systematic review
46. Ran an Aboriginal Health list serve
47. Participated regularly in a research group for students and researchers
48. Presented at Grand Rounds a number of times
49. Worked on 3 versions of the Guidelines for Health Libraries
50. Moved an entire library with no help and no movers (definitely NOT recommended)

As I didn't quite get to 50 years in the profession, everything in this list is TRUE... EXCEPT FOR 1.

If you are brave enough to guess which one the email is donkeast1@gmail.com