

---

Volume 11  
Number 4  
*A Day in the Life (Winter 2005)*

---

July 2014

## A Day in the Life... Keeping it Light in the Library

Pam North  
*Sherwood Public Library*

### Recommended Citation

North, P. (2014). A Day in the Life... Keeping it Light in the Library. *OLA Quarterly*, 11(4), 22-23.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1100>

© 2014 by the author(s).

*OLA Quarterly* is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

# A Day in the Life... Keeping it Light in the Library

by Pam North  
Sherwood Public Library



Libraries are filled with rules and regulations—tedious policies, procedures, “proper behaviors” and all the rest of the faldral that suggests those bun-wearing, pursed-lipped, shushing librarians of long-ago. The old perceptions can easily mislead us into thinking work in libraries is monotonous and dull. And certainly, dealing with the public, with students, with administration—*can* be trying. Added to that are the pressures of “doing more with less”—less space, fewer staff, and shrinking budgets. All of these circumstances can certainly add up to a diminished possibility of joy in our day.

But don't be fooled! We are surrounded by a wealth of opportunities to add fun to our workday. Our co-workers, patrons, materials, processes and surroundings can all offer pleasant escapes from the routine. Fun and frivolity are within easy reach and are recommended for a thriving staff and work environment. Keeping ourselves open to finding the fun is the key.

Now I know not everyone is going to buy into this “fun is good” in the workplace line of thinking. I can already see the naysayers running to their spreadsheets and calculators to determine how much productivity is wasted with the addition of joy. But STOP, I say! A happy staff is a productive staff—let the joy run rampant!

## We, the Library Staff

First, it is up to us to bring fun to the library. We are fortunate to work in a profession where there is a great passion for what we do. This “library passion” does not always include the concept of fun, but to flourish, our passion needs to be tempered by the belief that there can be delight in what we do.

Without even thinking about it we do things daily that make the workplace fun. How about the food? Show me a library that doesn't have some snack or tidbit in the break room or on the back counter! Someone is always bringing in something from the garden, something found at the store that looks new and yummy. At the moment we are dishing up a wide variety: cherry tomatoes, a giant chocolate bar, cucumbers, a bag of trail mix, grapes, fried cheese curds (gasp!) and two bags of Pepperidge Farm Goldfish.

Some days we declare the next day dedicated to a specific color and, if we remember, all try to wear something with that color in it. Easy? Sure! Fun? Yes!

Take the time to share what's funny. I had a vendor call not long ago who prefaced her sales talk with “I am so sorry but I've got a whole lot of donut in my mouth.”

Library staff are inclined to be folks who practice mutual respect and open communication, but are sometimes of a reserved nature. We need to recognize that we are individuals away from the library; by sharing the interests and talents we enjoy outside of the workplace we form deeper and more meaningful relationships with our coworkers. We can also learn what each of us enjoys, what makes us laugh, what makes us feel a part of the whole. The simple act of getting to know one another allows us to have more fun as we go about our day.

## Them, the Patrons

Yes, the patrons—be they from the general, academic, corporate, medical or whichever public. We are here to support them and



---

there is no reason they can't help provide light moments and laughter (either intentional or unintentional) in our day.

We all have our "regulars." The patrons we know and love (or love to...) and their daily visits often brighten our days or provide us with material for chuckles in the back room. Yesterday we had a young lad come up to the counter and say, "I'm sorry but this book has expired" in hopes we would understand it was overdue.

Patrons of near-legendary status here at Sherwood include a gentleman who, during the holidays, elaborately re-crafts traditional Christmas carols to include staff names and anecdotes and then performs the ditties at our annual holiday party. This past season he tried a new genre, reworking Dr. Seuss. One verse read:

"No, shouted Mary, with a shouty-shout, shout,

Hal-in-the-Hat you must get outy-out-OUT!"

He also brings homemade penuche fudge, which always improves our spirits.

We once had a family of four children who would careen with delight to the picture books to find their favorite. I can't believe I can't recall the title but it was a big book filled with tiny, cartoonish renderings of hundreds, no thousands, of children and on one page there was one tiny boy sans pants (anatomically correct) at a swimming pool—they would howl each and every time they found it as if they had never seen it before.

We have been known to abbreviate patron attributes to "protect the innocent," as it were.

HMP is a "high maintenance patron" and often we are the victims of the TMI, "too much information."

Something we've started to do is keep a journal of patron quotes that strike us as funny or unbelievable. A few from our pages:

"Do any animals die in this movie?" as the woman was holding up "Old Yeller."

"Is that a full-time job?" Asked of the director's position, followed by, "It is so

nice of you ladies to volunteer" referring to the rest of the staff.

And an all-time favorite, "Can you heat my sandwich?" When the staff member politely responded in the negative the patron rejoined, "You didn't look like the kind of person who would."

### **Stuff and Nonsense**

Libraries are filled with stuff—oftentimes too much. We tend to hold on to everything, "just in case." Yet every day materials pass through our doors filled (literally) with keepsakes that can bring a chuckle. We decided to make a record of the items we have found in returned materials, primarily books.

Photographs, membership cards, a French fry, handmade bookmarks, notes that no one's eyes were ever supposed to see, recipes, candy wrappers, drawings, lists, pasta, a small furry pelt... They have all dropped from the pages of books and into our keepsake journal.

Every day we repeat tasks done the day before—checking items out, checking items in, filling hold requests, covering books, answering reference questions, answering the phone... and the list goes on and on! Well, don't decry the drudgery—find the fun in it.

Change your perspective and as you check in the holds, guess who they might be for or speculate on how or why the patron might be using the information.

Have fun with weeding—those old, torn "Where's Waldo?" books—don't just discard them, find the Waldos and circle them with an El Marko! Haven't you always wanted to do that? OK, now discard the book.

### **Finding the Fun**

As Mary Poppins sang, "In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun. You find the fun and - SNAP - the job's a game." So add your own spoon full of sugar to bring laughter to your library and keep things light.

