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And We Weren’t There

Art Brody and the Sheets of Plastic
by Nat Bodian (Publisher’s Marketing Consultant)

Out of high school, the youngster held
a variety of jobs, none too successfully.
One had been as a shoe clerk at
Bamberger’s Department Store in down-
town Newark, but he had been fired for
insubordination to his manager.

His father had a drug store on Bergen
Street in Newark and the youngster helped
out with rentals from the drug store rental
library. He noticed that after a few circu-
lations the book jackets became so tatter-
ted the books could no longer be circu-
lated.

He had an idea. He bought some sheets
of plastic and cut them a bit larger than the
book jacket size. To fold the rigid plastic
sheets, he used the rubber rollers from an
old washing machine wringer in his base-
ment. With the plastic wrapped around
the paper book jacket, the books had an
indefinite life and could be re-rented again
and again. Here was an idea he felt sure
would be of interest to libraries.

He accumulated about $100 and went
to the Library Journal in the R.R. Bowker
offices in New York City. He met with
the advertising manager, told him of his
idea, and asked his help in drafting an ad
to libraries offering the plastic book jacket
covers for sale. He asked for as much
advertising as his $100 would buy.

The ad pulled well and the young man
filled all the orders and took all the in-
come from the ad and reinvested it in a
larger advertisement in Library Journal.

He repeated this many times with larger
space. Slowly, he was building a business
as a manufacturer and supplier of plastic
book jacket covers to libraries.

From that modest start and effort, young
Arthur Brody became the father of an
industry — the plastic book jacket cover
industry and from that modest effort rose
the firm of Bro-Dart Industries, named
for Art Brody.

Years after the founding of Bro-Dart
Industries, librarians and booksellers of-
ten wondered why Bro-Dart Industries was
so often the largest single advertiser in
most issues of Library Journal. If they
had inquired of the company head, they
probably would have told them it was his
way of paying back Library Journal for
helping him get his start in the busi-
ness.

NB: This story was assembled from
three individuals, Arthur Brody, who told
me of his start and of the washing ma-
chine, the Bamberger’s Department Store
shoe department manager who had been
Brody’s employer, and the advertising
manager of Library Journal who designed
and wrote young Brody’s first advertise-
ments to help get him started in the busi-
ness.) — Nat Bodian

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and databases all over the world. Be-
cause of this, personnel are being
stretched more and more. But we are
being stretched because we KNOW
something and we have a valuable con-
tribution to make to individuals and to
society.

• We are still buying print books and
journals, but we are buying a lot of other
things — CD-ROMS, electronic jour-
nals, articles, full text access, etc., etc.

• Outsourcing is going on in Technical
Services. Katina doesn’t like it, but
in a lot of cases, it makes sense. Judy
does like it when it is cost-effective and
efficient. After all, sending our orders to
vendors rather than to publishers was
the original outsourcing before outsourcing became a word.

• There are a lot of sources out there
on the Internet for Technical Services
work. They change every day and it takes
tons of time to keep up with them.

• Even off the Internet, there are so
many new resources out there every day,
we have trouble keeping up with them.
The mind becomes jaded and over-
crowded. We need an extra hard disc to
carry around for onsite storage of the
information we should be able to keep in
our brains.

• We are forced to learn stuff about
issues that we barely knew about last
year. And it’s not just copyright, intel-
lectual property, licensing agreements,
site licensing, We’re talking about SGML
and Z39.50 and EDI and FTP.

• Technical Services librarians are
what librarianship has been all about.
We started cataloging and organizing
knowledge way back many years ago.
We started selecting and acquiring the
best of woman’s knowledge. We started
making bibliographies to give a system
to that knowledge. Public Service librar-
ians are great (If you can believe it, we
both used to be one in another life.), but
Technical Services librarians have put
the ACTION in librarianship as a pro-
fession.

• The Savage Marketplace of the in-
formation society is becoming so over-
crowded and overpopulated that it is be-
ing driven by the end consumer rather
than the information scientist. That is
not necessarily bad, but the information
scientist needs to keep her eye on the
ball — the ball is the changing scope of
information and publishing. We should
not be scared of disappearing, we should
be excited about emerging as leaders in
this Savage Marketplace!

We don’t know if the tail is wagging
the dog or if the dog is wagging the tail.
But we DO know that we want to play a
role in shaping our future and the future
of libraries and the future of society. If
we just stand around and do nothing,
somebody else will figure out the next
step. Why can’t that somebody include
us — you and me and even Christian
and Ross Atkinson and Sandy Paul and
John Tagler and everybody who has
something to contribute?

The Charleston Conference is com-
ing November 3-5. Why don’t we use
the Rump Session, 4-6 PM on Sat-
urday, November 5, to make inroads? Why
don’t we set up Task Forces or Working
Groups or whatever to make statements
on some of these issues? Such statements
will not be bound by ALA or MLA or
AALL or anything like that. They won’t
to have to go through committees and Coun-
cils and editorial boards and hierarchies.
And that is okay. They will be state-
ments and plans composed by interested
and committed professionals in the schol-
arily information chain.

We can do it. How about it??

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