Back Talk-It is Getting Very Crowded Under Publisher Buses These Days

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copies, had ZERO copies available, and 186 people were on the waiting list. For Fifty Shades Darker, they had purchased 20 copies, had ZERO available, and 90 people waiting to read this title. For Fifty Shades Freed they had purchased 15 copies, ZERO were available, and 87 people were waiting to read a copy. The only other Top 15 title they owned was Gone Girl for which the library owned 17 copies, ZERO copies were available and 128 people were on the list to read it.

If the library only had four of the Top 15 titles, why didn’t the County library buy the other 11? Not surprisingly, given Sullivan’s letter, seven are from Penguin. This means that one publisher is responsible for denying the eBook readers of Pima County, Arizona’s public libraries the right to read what others are reading. Three of the other four titles are published by the Little, Brown/Hachette group, and the other title is published by Hyperion.

So, what should all of this mean to these anti public library publishers? They should recognize there is nothing to fear. In the face of long cues, many readers will simply buy their own copies if they have a passion to read a particular title or author. In my own case, with my credit card registered and gift card cash balances, it is only too easy to buy an eBook. In most cases for the fiction writers I most enjoy, I have long since read the county library’s print and electronic holdings and, using my own funds, have loaded up my Kindle so that I am never in danger of boredom. Please retrieve public libraries from beneath the bus. 

Conference next November! November 6-9, 2013. Hooray! Looking forward!

Speaking of dynamism, just heard that the awesome OCLC Senior Research Scientist Lynn Silipigni Connaway, Ph.D. has been elected to a three-year term on the Board of Directors of the American Society for Information Science and Technology. A frequent speaker in Charleston, Dr. Connaway leads the OCLC Research User Behavior Studies & Synthesis activities theme. Her responsibilities include research projects that directly involve OCLC libraries and users as well as collaborative investigations of digital information seekers, users in the virtual research environment, and digital “visitors” and “residents,” and IMLS-funded grant projects to study virtual reference and social question and answer services and the behavior patterns of college and university information seekers. The American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) supports a range of efforts to improve access to information and advance the information sciences and related applications of information technology. Congrats, Lynn!!

A long-time colleague from the College of Charleston is returning to Charleston in November for the Conference after 20 years! The last time I saw the gorgeous Leslie Abrams was in San Diego when my daughter Ileana and I were there for a medical convention. It was the year that Big Brown was supposed to win the Triple Crown. Leslie says her job at UCSD is radically changing since they are doing away with all the subject libraries. Leslie will now be the director of a “new” program, Information Development and Management, including preservation and scholarly communication. Responsible for all collections, all formats, and soon she will begin constructing a new program. And Leslie will remain the head of the Arts Library until June 2013. She says she will probably be coming to the Conference every year! By coincidence, we have an interview with Peter Brueggeman ( Scripps Institute of Oceanography, UCSD), this issue, p.56. Another coincidence—an article in this issue by the awesome Martha Hruska (UCSD) on patron-driven acquisitions (p.30).

And, finally, here are the scholarship and contest winners for 2012 Charleston!

Library Connect Charleston Conference Award goes to Maliaca Oxnam, Associate Librarian, University of Arizona. http://libraryconnect.elsevier.com/articles/supporting-users-organizations/2012-10/maliaca-oxnam-wins-2012-library-connect-charleston

Harrassowitz Charleston Conference Scholarship goes to Chris Bullock, Electronic Resources Librarian, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville.

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cently, ALA’s President Maurine Sullivan published an open letter to the information world about the refusal of Simon & Schuster, Macmillan, and Penguin to provide U.S. public libraries with access to their eBooks (See An Open Letter to America’s Publishers http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/e-content/open-letter-america-s-publishers).

Basically, in my view, Sullivan made three points:
1. It is “strange” that these publishers are refusing to sell their eBooks to America’s 169 million public library readers, 66% of whose libraries provide eBooks and spend $1.3 billion dollars annually on all content.
2. Their action denies public library eBook readers access to about one-half of the books on the New York Times best-seller fiction list.
3. Other publishers are not acting like this. Some are even making it easy for their patrons to buy their own eBooks if their library lacks the books they want, or if their library has the title but the reader doesn’t want to stay in the cue waiting for the book they want to become available.

Why are these publishers acting so strangely? Is it simple greed? Is it because some of them want to make up for their share of the fine no doubt hurt a bit (See Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Throw_under_the_bus).

In the past, authors, publishers and libraries had to be at least passing friends for each to prosper. Authors write; publishers polish, market and sell; and libraries buy what they publish. Libraries are among the prime buyers of the written word, for university presses almost always extremely long. For example, I recently checked on how many of the top 15 bookstores continue to be in doubt. (For more on this see The Bookstore’s Last Stand http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/business/barnes-noble-taking-on-amazon-in-the-fight-of-its-life.html?pagewanted=all).

That Sullivan resorted to an open letter to bring the library world’s attention to the how public libraries are being treated is a sign to me that she feels libraries are also being thrown under the publisher bus. I realize my academic librarian colleagues are rolling their eyes when they read this last sentence since they have experienced having the STM publishers’ bus run back and forth over their bodies for the past three decades.

For me, I don’t see why these publishers feel they have so much to fear from libraries. My own experience with borrowing eBooks from public libraries is fairly negative.

It seems that no matter what many copies of what I want to read which the Pima County Library buys, these copies are all checked out and the waiting list to read one of these books is extremely long. For example, I recently checked on how many of the top 15 New York Times best selling fiction titles were available for my Kindle. Unfortunately, I found they had only bought four of these titles and none were available for reading. For Fifty Shades of Grey my county library system had purchased 50 copies and no one was able to check one out! It seems that the bookstores are being treated better.

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