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Library School

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You Gotta Go To School For That?

as related by **Jerry Seay** (Planet Earth)
(Library school student par excellence)

Writer's note: The other day, Katina said something like, "Golly, Jerry, wouldn't it be nice if you wrote something that really had to do with acquisitions or publishing. I mean, since that is the focus of this journal and all." (Okay, she really did not say "golly".) Heeding the advice of my highly esteemed, overworked editor (she likes it when I say that), I have attempted to include the elements she suggested. You get 10 extra points if you can spot them.

I am now and have previously been in many professional positions where I had to act like a professional. I think I'm pretty good at it when I have to be. But, this Library and Information Science degree will change everything. Just think, someday soon I'm going to be able to operate from a position of real power as a fully degreed information professional (hopefully with a real job).

I recently had a chance to practice my "power" on a class assignment for serials and technical services. We are learning about (you guessed it) serials and technical services including serials cataloging, **acquisitions**, management, and **publishing**. The assignment involved filling out the MARC record fields for an OCLC serials record. Each student was given a different periodical for which to fill out a report.

Did I get a normal serial to work with? Nooooo. It was a skinny strip of a thing that basically listed airline arrivals and departures. The reading was a bit dry, but the information could be useful for the frequent flyer types. I was given three issues. The issue numbers did not, however, match up logically with the months. I immediately perceived this as one of those trick assignments where only an astute, methodical mind would find the answer. Fortunately for me, I found an "800" number on the inside cover of the magazine instead. At that moment the many months of gruelling, intense library study and research would come to fruition. Any publisher would surely be impressed that a member of the library and information science profession would call to correct or clarify a problem with their periodical. I dialed the "800" number and prepared to bring my immense storehouse of library knowledge to bear.

Some guy named Bob answered. I knew his name was Bob because he told me

as much. But it turned out that was about the only information Bob was in possession of. I realized that I was not talking to the company CEO.

Now, I am not going to say that Bob was just someone off the street that just happened to answer the phone. But he sure did a great impression of someone off the street that just happened to answer the phone. First, Bob told me in a dreary, monotone voice to "please hold." I did not mind in the least being put on hold. It gave me time to collect my thoughts so that I would sound like a real librarian when I opened my mouth. Besides, Bob (or someone there) played some really incredible "hold" music. It was a rousing Russian symphony. It was just the thing I needed to get in the mood to sound authoritarian.

After about two minutes, Bob came back on the phone and droned, "I'm Bob, can I help you?" He sounded like this call was only slightly more exciting than watching a slug race.

I cleared my voice and proceeded to be librariansque. "Yes," I said, "I'm looking for some information about this magazine of yours." I did so want to say "serial" instead of "magazine" so I could flaunt my new lingo, but being a former non-librarian myself and remembering how the real world talked, I decided not to put visions of Captain Crunch in Bob's mind.

I then paused to let Bob jump in and say something like, "Yes, sir, and what sort of information could I help you with." Or maybe "Yes, sir, would you like a subscription?"

Instead I got silence. Dead silence. From what I had heard from Bob so far, I started to wonder if maybe he was saddling up his slugs.

Fearing that this pregnant pause was about to give birth, I decided to pull rank. I would now impress this guy with my status as an information professional, a move guaranteed to get immediate results. "Bob, my name is Jerry Seay and I'm calling from the library at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina." I paused, oh so briefly, to let the gravity of my position sink in. "And we're running into some problems trying to catalog this magazine of yours."

Bob was supposed to say, "Well golly, Mr. Seay, we would be honored to help you catalog our little ol' magazine. What information can I possibly give to help you in this noble quest for information accuracy?"

Bob, however, had not read the script. Bob was not impressed. In fact, I am sure that other people have been less impressed with my status than was Bob, but I cannot remember back that far.

Bob just said, "Oh," in his same dreary voice, and then, "What do you want to know?"

Somewhat rattled by his rejection of my professional demeanor, I pressed on. If Bob was not going to volunteer anything, I would drag it out of him. "Did this publication start in January of this year?"

"Yes."

"Is it monthly?"

"Yes."

"Did volume one, number one, start in January?"

"Yes."

Aha, though I. Now I had him. "So, Bob, if this is a monthly, and volume one, number one started in January, then why is volume one, number two, printed in the month of April?" Sherlock Holmes would have been impressed with the way I assembled my flawless case. "What happened to February and March?"

"I don't know," said Bob offering his personal theory of what happened. "I guess somebody just messed up."

I could not argue with that, and after Bob's enlightening statement, the conversation died. Bob did not know anything else (or anyone that did know), and I had run out of non-dumb questions. Since I wanted Bob to think that I had a busy schedule instead of merely running out of intelligent things to say (I am a professional), I thanked him for his time, wished him a nice day, and hung up.

I guess the moral here is never call an "800" number in New Jersey to ask publication questions, especially if a guy named Bob answers. ☘