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Lightning Visits / Yvonne Grandbois

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INTERNATIONAL DATELINE

Section Editor: **Glen M. Secor, J.D.** (Yankee Book Peddler, Inc.)

Welcome to the newest feature of *Against the Grain*. This is an idea which Katina has been talking about for the past few months, and for which I gladly volunteered my services. The purpose of **International Dateline** will be to bring you news and profiles of happenings and people in the publishing, vendor, and library communities around the world. Our hope is to establish correspondents throughout the world, whose job it will be to report and analyze the news of the book and journal trades in their region. We will also welcome articles on international publishing, the international book and journal trade, international standards, etc.

We hope that this section will appear in every issue of *ATG*, but that depends on how successful we are in recruiting correspondents and feature writers, and how regularly those individuals can make contributions. If you are interested in contributing to **International Dateline**, please contact me at:

Yankee Book Peddler, Inc., 999 Maple Street, Contoocook, NH 03229
603-746-3102 (phone) 603-746-5628 (fax) e-mail: gsecor@office.ybp.com

We already have our first European Correspondent, **Gilles de La Rochefoucauld** and **Liz Chapman**, our first British Correspondent.

Or, if you'll be at the upcoming Charleston Conference, just approach me there.

In our inaugural section, we have two interviews which our intrepid editor conducted on her recent "vacation" in Europe. (Does the woman ever stop working?) I think that you'll find these interviews, with **Yvonne Grandbois** of the World Health Organization and **Gilles de La Rochefoucauld** of Aux Amateurs de Livres, to be interesting and informative.

Lightning Visits — Yvonne Grandbois

Head of Collection Development, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland

I had never been to Switzerland and thought you could walk to WHO from downtown Geneva. Big Mistake. After half an hour of hoofing it, my husband and I hailed a cab and gratefully paid for a ride to a modern complex in a park-like environment. I forgot to mention that over there they call it OMS (Organisation Mondiale de la Sante). That threw the cab driver off a minute. The WHO/OMS library has a pleasant feeling to it. As you walk in, a huge bulletin board is titled "The OMS in the News" and has articles regarding the World Health Organization in the international journals. Yvonne Grandbois was delightful. I think that you will agree.
- Yr. Ed.

Alexandria, Copenhagen, New Delhi and Manila).

ATG: You just got a phone call and it sounded like you were talking Russian. Yet you speak perfect English. Are you an American?

YG: Guess again. I am Canadian. My mother was born in Ukraine and married a Canadian when she emigrated to Canada. We spoke Ukrainian in the home, and marriage plus living in Montreal gave me a crash course in French. When I do go to the Ukraine I am considered rather quaint, as the Ukrainian I speak has not been subject to the influences of the last 70 years.

ATG: Can you tell us about the WHO and what you do here?

YG: The World Health Organization is the directing and coordinating authority on international health work, whose goal is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health. Within this framework, the Office of Library and Health Literature Services, known as the WHO Library, provides

library and information services in support of WHO staff and programs worldwide, as well as runs its own program aimed at the development of relevant health information and documentation activities in the 188 Member States. The Library serves as the Organizations' collective memory in that it is a comprehensive source of WHO documentation produced at Headquarters in Geneva and in the six Regional Offices of WHO (located in Brazzaville, Washington, DC,

ATG: What's it like working here? How do you keep your head straight? How many languages do you have to know?

YG: Our library is very up to date from a technical point of view, and the team is committed, hard-working, extremely user-friendly and fun. So there is a good balance between hi-tech and people-oriented service. Our backgrounds, cultures and languages are so

different. In the Library alone, we have staff from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America and South America. We deal with a lot of coordinates in communicating with our users, who are medical doctors, scientists, researchers, technical officers, secretaries, consultants, staff of diplomatic missions, and staff of other international organizations who come from all over the world. It is perhaps easier in a homogeneous

"The librarian is the hyphen between the information producer and the user."

environment where everyone is, say, Japanese or British, but it is so interesting to constantly stretch your understanding of the world through the people you are working with and for. You keep your head straight by enjoying what you do, who you work with, and the goals that you feel are worthwhile accomplishing as a professional and as a human being. In terms of languages, the more you know the better, but English and French are the main languages used here at Headquarters.

ATG: *How many people work in this library?*

YG: Twenty-three people work in this library, and there are seven professional librarians. We have had posts eliminated through attrition as people retire, and so it is sometimes necessary to wear several hats, for example reference librarians doing indexing part of the time. It is perhaps a good thing that we know the overall workings of our information profession.

ATG: *How can I get a job here?*

YG: You can write to the Personnel Department of the WHO, or to the Chief of the Library, **Dr. Deborah Avriel**.

ATG: *Where were you trained in librarianship?*

YG: McGill University, which was the first university in Canada to initiate a two-year post graduate program for library and information science. I find that there is a need for off-site doctoral training in librarianship here in Europe.

ATG: *I agree with you. In order to get a doctorate in librarianship, one must*

give up a job for at least two years and lose income for those years, relocate a family which imposes other financial burdens, and get a degree for which the payoff is very small. If I got my doctorate in librarianship, I would probably have to take a salary cut unless I could go back to my current position. If I wanted to teach in library school, I would probably have to take a salary cut if I could even find a job.

YG: I know. This is one reason discussions on the future of librarianship are pretty grim, as far as I can tell. The winds of change are blowing, the traditional library (and librarian) role is evolving into something new. I believe that librarians must get more involved in the content of the information which they handle. The librarian is the hyphen between the information producer and the user.

ATG: *I notice that the WHO library is working to bridge this gap in many of the things which it is doing. Can you elaborate on this?*

YG: Yes, actually one of our goals is to facilitate and promote the use of the information produced by the World Health Organization, and to this end, we not only maintain a database but we disseminate WHO bibliographic information and assess its use. We also seek to serve as a reference point for information in the health sciences, particularly public health and topics related to WHO activities. We publish a newsletter, *Liaison*, directed mainly at developing countries, and the *WHO Library Digest*, which is an electronic current awareness service transmitted by satellite monthly to Africa, and also available on the Internet. In addition we produce specialized subject lists of both WHO and non-WHO publications in high-demand topics. The Library has produced information packages of core WHO publications that are indexed, labeled and ready to go on the shelf. A project being developed is the Essential Information Kits, which evaluate WHO and non-WHO publications for specific targets, a direct benefit of the dialog between subject experts and librarians. Our WHOLIS database is available on the LILACS CD-ROM and will soon be available over the Internet.

ATG: *Speaking of that, the library here has all kinds of computer equipment and CD-ROMS. Can you tell us*

about what is available and how you decide on this?

YG: Presently we have 8 computer terminals and 4 CD-ROM players for public use in the Library. In addition, the Library has a server that enables us to put our WHOLIS database, WHODOC, our major CD-ROMs, our recent acquisitions list and Current Contents on the local area network. This, therefore, can be accessed directly in people's offices. These decisions are made with the Chief of the Library and with our professional staff in regular meetings where we evaluate feedback and statistics. We also have a small Research and Development team who are constantly looking to keep us on the cutting edge.

ATG: *Tell us more about your collection development activities.*

YG: Besides being responsible for the selection and ordering of material for Headquarters, producing recent acquisitions lists, subject lists, and essential information kits, we order all the health literature for four of our Regional Office Libraries as well as WHO projects in countries. We run an international exchange in which donor libraries with duplicate recent health sciences books and periodicals can send them to needy libraries in the developing world. At this point we are looking for donor libraries. Perhaps your readers can help.

ATG: *Tell us about your life in Geneva.*

YG: I love living here. We live in a little village about 15 minutes from Geneva, and in many ways it reminds me of growing up in Canada in the fifties. Geneva is very central and you can

"I believe that librarians must get more involved in the content of the information which they handle."

travel very easily from here. The international aspect is one that I find stimulating, and because you are actually living in a foreign country, you are never stuck in a comfort zone. My husband has his own business here. We have one little girl, Julia, who makes it all worthwhile.

Thanks to Yvonne. Maybe we can get her to Charleston some day! ☺