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Librarian/Publisher Interview-Raissa Fomerand

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Librarian/ Publisher Interview — Raissa Fomerand

Founder and President, Garance, Inc.
by **Katina Strauch** (College of Charleston)

I first met Raissa Fomerand, like I meet a lot of people in my life, over the telephone. I was acting on a tip from Don Jaeger who told me that Raissa and I needed to become friends.

Raissa Fomerand is a librarian who started her own advertising rep firm years ago and currently handles advertising for Wilson Library Bulletin and Multicultural Review. Two years ago, on the strength of her own convictions and money, Raissa started a publication called The Librarian's Yellow Pages. I talked to Raissa earlier this month. — KS

ATG: Raissa, who are you? Tell us anything that comes into your mind about yourself.

RF: I am the mother of two children Thierry, 8 and Ross, 14. My husband, Jacques, works at the UN. I am a former librarian. In 1987, I began my own advertising rep firm which later became Garance, Inc. (1990). In recent years, I have become the publisher of the *Librarian's Yellow Pages (LYP)*.

ATG: Why do you say former librarian? Once a librarian, always a librarian, right?

RF: I am not in a library any more, but I do think that the service orientation I acquired as a librarian is very helpful and makes me a more effective salesperson and publisher. Librarians are always thinking of ways to help patrons; I think of ways to help librarians.

ATG: Why did you leave librarianship and what kind of librarian were you when you were a librarian?

RF: I worked as a public, school, and special librarian for thirteen years. I left librarianship when I had my first child and I didn't want to be tied down to a 9-5 job. Finding a non-9-5 job was not as easy as I had imagined. After a short

stint as a consultant, I was fortunate to be hired as Project Director/Editor for the premier issue of *Art in America's Annual Guide to Galleries, Museums and Artists*. I used art librarians all over the country to help compile this directory and when the publication was completed 6 months later, I realized I now had marketable skills which could help me find a job with more flexible hours. I had also fallen in love with the immediacy and challenge of publishing.

Soon after *Art in America*, I proposed

"I thought librarianship was more like fun than work."

another directory/buyers' guide to *Mother's Today* magazine: *A Guide to Products for Infants and Toddlers*. At both of these jobs, my service orientation led me to constantly search for ways to improve the format and indexes of the publications. I also became fascinated with the information potential of advertising. Ads became the illustrations for these directories and as the old saying goes — one picture is worth a thousand words.

In these two jobs, I was an editor. To learn more about advertising, I apprenticed myself at less than half my previ-

ous library salary to learn how to sell advertising. Six months later, I called ALA to find a library magazine in need of a sales rep. *WLB* was recommended to me. In my first years at *Wilson Library Bulletin*, the advertising expanded from 4 pages an issue often to 60 to 70 pages. One of my biggest problems as an ad salesperson was developing a database of potential clients. There were no reference works in the library field which listed the vendors attending the various conferences. As a librarian, I had had the same problem; hundreds of vendors at every conference but no way to find them by subject.

ATG: Tell us more about your work as a librarian.

RF: I became a librarian right out of college (Brooklyn College) because I couldn't type and few other jobs were available to women outside of teaching and librarianship. My first year at the Brooklyn Public Library, I started reading fiction in the A's and little by little went through the collection of the small branch library. I also put on programs for young adults — book discussions, films, etc., and I thought librarianship was more like fun than work. Subsequent library jobs included an art and music department library, a school librarian for a year (I taught as well and they hired me because I said I was willing to paint the bookshelves!), regional planning librarian for two years and my final job was seven years in a museum library — Historic Hudson Valley.

In college, I majored in French and I was able to go to France for my junior year. My ability to speak French has helped in calling some of our Canadian and overseas vendors.

ATG: Where did you go to library school, Raissa, and what's your philosophy of librarianship?

RF: Pratt Institute. I always liked libraries as a child and I love going there

with my two children now. But I would like to see libraries run more like businesses. I think librarians should reach out to the patrons who walk in their doors and treat them as valued customers. Businesses thrive and expand with satisfied customers and the same can happen with libraries.

ATG: Where did you get the money to start LYP and did you need a lot of money to get it started?

RF: It is hard to say how much the first edition of the *LYP* cost. I tried to go out and find backers or publishers. I was

"Businesses thrive and expand with satisfied customers and the same can happen with libraries."

committed to the idea but I thought that it would cost more money than I could get my hands on and I had a family which depended on my monetary contribution. But finding the backers never worked. So I decided to pay for it myself, out of my own resources. A lot of it was a matter of cash flow. I had to employ people and I had to pay for computer hardware and software and other office supplies and equipment before the money came in from the advertisers. We print and distribute *LYP* ourselves and do not charge for the book so that is another cost. In 1993 we printed 35,000 copies and in 1994, 52,000.

In a time of recession it was pretty hard and we feel that we have done pretty remarkably. The response to the first edition (January, 1993) was appreciation and amazement. Since librarians received the book free of charge they were amazed at how useful it was. The response this year (January, 1994) has been 100% stronger. We try to take suggestions and comments from librarians and vendors so that every edition will be better and better.

ATG: Tell us about competitors to LYP. Is it a value-added product or one that can be easily usurped?

RF: Up until now, there really has been no competition worthy of the name. No one has tried as hard as we have to produce a work which includes so much information, arranged by subject, at such a reasonable price to vendors at no charge

to librarians. There is the *American Library Directory* with an ad section in the back of volume 2, but the *ALD* is used more by vendors to find out about librarians than it is used by librarians to find out about vendors. It also has a hefty yearly subscription price. *Library Journal* has been doing an annual sourcebook for many years. My colleagues and I found it frustrating and difficult to use when I was a librarian and it still is.

The way we do the *Yellow Pages* is very time-intensive. We don't hesitate to spend time on the small advertisers. There are thousands of listings in the 1994 edition. People don't realize that this book is a labor of love. We are in there for the long run.

We are making the *LYP* freely available. We have distributed it free of charge to over 50,000 librarians among them subscribers of *Wilson Library Bulletin* and *Against the Grain*, and members of various library associations. We are also available online through CARL.

ATG: The LYP is available through CARL? How does that work exactly?

RF: When I met her, **Becky Lenzini** (President of the CARL Corporation) offered to put the *LYP* online for no charge. She sees it as a service which attracts people to her own services. She told me recently that the *LYP* is receiving an average of 110 calls per day. I think that's pretty impressive. This means that it is also available internationally.

ATG: What exactly is Garance and what is its relation to The Librarian's Yellow Pages? What kind and number of staff do you employ?

RF: Garance was a remarkable French woman played by Arletty in the old French movie *The Children of Paradise*. It was a name I had picked for a daughter but since I had two sons, it was my first choice as a name for my company. Garance is the company which handles the advertising for several publications as well as for *The Librarian's Yellow Pages*. I employ three people for *Wilson Library Bulletin* alone and another person handles *Multicultural Review* as well as 4—5 other sales people for *LYP*. I also employ some people who are not located in my office, i.e., they contract on their own. At the moment, only one other person, **Joan Torrone**, is also a librarian. **Jing Motilall**, who was

first my assistant at *WLB* and worked on production with the 1993 *LYP* is now doing sales and is the assistant publisher of the *LYP*.

And I think that Garance is a different kind of company, a service organization which can make money by doing good for both the vendors who advertise and the libraries which need the products and services which the ads promote.

ATG: Wired magazine recently (February, 1994) had a headline — "Is advertising dead"? What do you think about advertising in the future?

RF: You can't browse through a computer. The ad will always exist as a communication medium. There is no substitute for going through a magazine and looking at what is out there. It is a matter of seeing as well as reading. Advertising is an important information source. There may be additional forms of electronic advertising, but there will never be no advertising.

In the future, we will do our best to increase the value of the advertising medium and to improve *The Librarian's Yellow Pages*. I am always interested in hearing from people who use our product.

Besides wanting to include every vendor who goes to a library conference, we would like to see *LYP* available on more of the online databases. Right now we are on CARL. We are due to be up on **NLIGHTN** and we are always open to other possibilities, be they online or others.

ATG: To what do you attribute your success and what are some of the tips you can give us for starting a business?

RF: My success as a publisher can be attributed to my strong desire to do

"People don't realize that this book is a labor of love. We are in there for the long run."

things the right way, to be able to learn readily and easily from my mistakes, and my absolute perseverance once I have determined what I want to do.

Tips for running a business — First, start out with your financing in place. Second, research the field and know where you want to take your product. Third, spend money on quality where

necessary. A quality product helps sell itself. And, finally, find the best possible staff and show them your appreciation whenever possible — if not monetarily at first, at least in praise.

ATG: *Do you have any leisure or are you working all the time?*

RF: In my spare time, I try to “run a successful family.” My husband, Jacques, and I came to parenthood in our mid-thirties and we bring to the process a different perspective than younger couples and a serious commitment to succeed as mother and father of two lively, growing boys.

Ed note: Well, there is a little something about the highly energetic (not to mention innovative) Raissa Fomerand. What a delightful librarian! Look for her at the next ALA and, who knows, maybe we will get her to come to a Charleston Conference! — KS

Drinking from the Firehose

When the Super Highway Collapses — Thoughts About Earthquakes and the Internet, Or, Is the Internet Out of Control?
by **Eleanor I. Cook** (Serials Librarian, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608 COOKEI@CONRAD.APPSTATE.EDU)

I cannot access the Internet tonight. Our campus computer cluster is being tapped out by students, faculty and other legitimate users, all attempting to dial in at the same time. The computer center is going to install more ports, telephone lines and/or whatever else it takes to let us all successfully knock on the door and be allowed inside. I am relieved that they are taking steps to alleviate the problem, but how soon will it become a critical mass situation again? Maybe not for awhile, at least on this campus, but I am thinking big picture here.

In fall semester 1993 all the students at my institution were assigned e-mail accounts. Doubtless not all of them will use their accounts; but the fact that an additional 12,000 human beings now have the ability to reach the campus computer — well, that's a pretty amazing jump in use. No wonder I cannot get through.

We're spoiled. Many of us have been using the “net” either via BITNET or INTERNET now for a couple of years and we like it just the way it is. It's a folksy community. We can talk to our friends and colleagues in a way that's like having an 800 number. Sure, somebody out there is paying the bill, but it isn't our concern. But, it won't be long I'm afraid and we'll be pining away for the “good ol' days”

Remember never getting a busy signal when you dialed in?

Remember when no one cared how much stuff you left in your account? Remember when listservs and bulletin boards were novelties and you could subscribe to as many as you wanted to and keep up with all of them?

Remember when you could name all the electronic journals that existed?

Lately, it seems that the Internet is out of control; it's becoming overwhelming and disorganized. Everybody has a Gopher, but each one is arranged differently and it's hard to know where to look for information. (The Internet needs cataloging, but that's another column.) Everybody wants in on the Internet. Before

“... who owns the Internet anyway?”

we know it, there will be advertisements for Campbell's Soup and McDonald's on the Internet. I guess that's the American way; if something is good, it catches on and eventually it is spoiled by becoming TOO much of a good thing.

And that's the way we're headed if Vice President Gore had his way. Looks great on paper, Al, but what will the national information superhighway really be like? It's already mind-boggling as it is, and we'll probably have ourselves an all-American traffic jam before long.

Also, the Internet is becoming somewhat dangerous. Gangs of hackers are committing electronic-style drive-by shootings. University computer centers are sitting ducks if they don't keep the moat full of alligators and the drawbridge up. Such security concerns make it harder for those not affiliated with academic centers to gain access legitimately. Several recent articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2/9/94 and 2/16/94) have discussed security problems at universities and the impact these attacks have had on access to the Internet.

How many people do you know who think nothing of leaving their offices open, computer logged in, while they go off to a meeting for a couple of hours? How about those who leave passwords on sticky notes next to work stations, or let coworkers use their accounts? Not only is this laziness, it's irresponsibility. It's these kind of habits that, though innocent enough in themselves, are invitations to major security breeches. If you lock the door behind you when you leave your home in the morning or when you retire for the evening, then you ought to have enough sense to do likewise with your computer account. It just doesn't SEEM like a big deal.