

November 2013

## You Gotta Go To School

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### Recommended Citation

Seay, Jerry (1994) "You Gotta Go To School," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 6: Iss. 4, Article 41.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1670>

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# Profiles Encouraged:

## Jerry Seay

**Born:** The usual preferred method, where one's mother culminates 9 long months of acute pregnancy with the amazing and astounding delivery of a future librarian. This incredible event occurred on January 9, 1962 in Greenville, South Carolina.

**Residence:** I live in the "frontier" town of Goose Creek, SC, a mere 30 minutes rugged ride by horseless carriage from historic downtown Charleston.

**Education:** B.A. in film and Arts and Science from Illinois State University. M.L.S., University of South Carolina. A.S.A.P., School of Hard Knocks and Creative Procrastination

**Occupation(s):** Television cameraman and editor; Appliance repairman; Freelance Videographer; Interlibrary Loan Coordinator; Reference Librarian; Publications and Communications Coordinator for College of Charleston Library

**Family:** One each of the following: Wife, mother, father, brother and sister. (Hey, I've got one of everything!)

**Proudest Accomplishment:** Marrying the lady I could not live without. Just ask her.

**Most Recent Goal:** Getting my picture in *Against the Grain*.

**First Job:** Delivering newspapers at the unholy hour of 4 AM in the middle of a central Illinois winter (Brrrrrrrr). Ever tried to ride a bike in the snow?

**Fondest Memory:** My mother taking me and my little brother to a bookmobile that stopped in our little town of Procterville, Ohio. I always fantasized about stowing away in that bookmobile and reading every book in it. Do I have a rich fantasy life or what?

**Favorite Pastime:** Reading, designing games, thinking.

**Last Book Read:** *Bloom County Presents: The Night of the Mary Kay Commandos (featuring Smell-O-Toons)* by Berke Breathed

**Pet Peeve:** People who do not have a sense of humor or cannot accentuate the positive in any situation. I can't stand whiny, complainy people. Either come to grips with it positively or put a sock in it.

**Where do you see yourself in five years?** Heavily involved in library publications and propaganda, educational multimedia design and production and co-producing the next big mega blockbuster *Against the Grain: The Movie!*

**Biggest Surprise?** You mean besides sticking my head in a ceiling fan while doing jumping jacks in a mobile home living room? I'd have to say discovering that working in an academic library is fun and exciting, especially when you work with great, fun people who get along so well with each other. From what I have heard, such an environment is rare.

**Single most important piece of advice?** You are going to have to let a lot of good things go by in this world in order to keep your hands free to grab the best. And for goodness sakes, don't worry, be happy! ☺



# You Gotta Go to School for That?

Stupid Questions  
and the Happy Librarian  
by Jerry Seay (College of Charleston)



It was a slow summer day and, as usual, I was contemplating how I might better serve my patrons' needs without perpetuating the stereotype of the cold, stodgy, aloof, shushing librarian. As it happened, I was sitting at the reference desk flexing my feet in sensible shoes, toying with my hair bun and just waiting for that one reference question that would send me into intellectual spasms. You know the one I'm talking about. The one about the gross national product of Lithuania in 1934.

Suddenly, and without ample warning, this young girl timidly walked up to the desk (actually everyone approaches the desk timidly. Something about approaching the grand seat of raw knowledge, I think).

She came up with a book in her hand and said, "Is it all right if I read this in here?"

I looked at her wondering if maybe she had a copy of Madonna's book *Sex* or a scratch-'n'-sniff catalog with some really obnoxious flavors. A closer look revealed no explosives or unauthorized firearms. It was just a regular book.

"Excuse me?" said I.

"Can I read this in here?" she asked me again, waving the book in front of her.

Seeing my very confused look, she offered a more detailed explanation. "I just checked this out . . . and I was wondering if it was still all right if I can read it in the library . . . or do I have to . . . like . . . take it home now?"

I immediately looked around for the Candid Camera. Seeing none, my reference librarian mind swung into gear, searching and grappling for just the right answer that would satiate the knowledge-starved young mind that stood before me desperately awaiting input. Now most librarians would have taken the standard response and said, "No, of course you may not read it in the library. If you wanted to read it here, you should have thought about that *before* you checked it out! You check it out — you take it out! Now!" But I could sense that I was dealing with a young mind inexperienced in the ways of library custom and lore. It would be my job to mold this young mind and put it on the right path.

To this end, I queried further. One must be certain of one's patrons' needs if one is to properly serve them. (See! *I did* pay attention in library school!) "Do you really want to read the book in the library?" I asked.

She nodded her head quickly. "Oh, yes, sir. If I can."

I rubbed my chin and mused aloud. "Hmmm." This is a very good technique to use if you are at a loss for something to say. It also makes you look important. Having just been addressed as sir, I had to, at least, look important.

Now, some of you out there are saying, "Gosh, Jerry, just tell her: 'Of course you can read it in here! . . . sheesh!' and be done with it." Well, don't be such an insensitive clod! This is the nineties, and everybody is sensitive. How would this patron react if I told her the cold hard truth without any preparation whatsoever? We could have a repressed memory or a bad flashback of something. Besides, remember the first rule you learned in library school? There are no stupid questions. Of course, that really means: there are stupid questions, but you just don't let on that you think the question you just heard ranks right up there with "why don't chickens speak Spanish?"

So, I had to be diplomatic in my response. "Yes, you may read the book in the library, gentle patron," said I. "In fact, despite the odd color of our carpet, we are a progressive library, and we believe deeply in open stacks, open circulation and open love. Even if you do check out a book from us, you do not have to take it home right away. You can, in fact, read it here. Now, go in peace, gentle patron, never more doubting."

"Thank you very much," she said and bounced happily away.

As you can clearly see, by applying the techniques of the "happy librarian," I had single-handedly dispelled, at least to this patron, the stereotype of the cold, stodgy, aloof, shushing librarian at the reference desk. Am I slick or what?

"Gee, Jerry," I hear you saying, "can you keep up this technique after 500 students have asked you about the same Hemingway criticism in the last three hours?"

Boy, that's a stupid question! ☹