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Millenium Minutes-My Life as a Page

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MILLENNIUM

Minutes

My Life as a Page

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hen I tell people I've been working in libraries for over thirty years, they look at me in disbelief. Now, I'm not too shy to admit that I look a lot younger than I am. In part, this can be accounted for by the abundance of fresh air in Peterborough, although a colleague at another institution attributed it to the ability to "party hardy." In truth, though, I was a mere 14 years of age when I got my first job as a library page in a local public library. And despite the sties in my eyes from dust flying off the bookshelves, a powdery complexion guaranteed by working with deteriorating paperbacks, and dry and chapped hands resulting from the so-called "climate controlled" environment, I have persisted in working in libraries of all kinds since then. I do have very fond memories of that first job, however.

Brentwood Public Library was located on a small one-way street in an ultra-WASP middle class neighborhood in Toronto. The interior of the building was a beautiful mix of blonde wood, terrazzo flooring, and long, narrow windows accentuating the high ceiling. The library was bounded on one side by the venerable "Kingsway Fish & Chips," and on the other by Tony's Barber Shop. Many of us came from high schools in the surrounding area to work at the library. Our favorite shifts were Friday nights, punctuated by a stop at the fish 'n' chips shop, and Saturday mornings, when we could catch up on shelving, shelf-reading (we really did that!), and gossip. Some who were lucky enough to work in the reference and government documents section could also catch up on sleep after a late night out.

The highlight of every shift was working at the checkout counter. Here we would take the circulation card from the back of the book and the patron's card and run these through a canister-like photographic device. Talk about automated processes! Unfortunately, my shifts at checkout were scaled back because of my unsightly black nail polish and tendency to talk too much, especially to the male clientele.

In the back room, under the tutelage of Mrs. Bird and Mrs. Air (yes, these are real names), we would sort out the incoming books and be on the look out for reserve items. The first year I worked there the most

sought after book was *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. I didn't understand that book then, and I don't understand it now, either. Nice photos, though. The most popular novels in our library were those by Daphne Dumaurier, Mazo De La Roche, and my own personal favorite, Phyllis Whitney. Biographies and travel books were also immensely popular. We even had a copy of the first edition of the *Joy of Sex* but this was kept under the circulation desk — presumably for the benefit of those who worked there since nobody else dared ask for it.

As *ATG* readers know, libraries are great magnets for brilliant, eccentric, kind, and funny people, and library managers have the good sense to keep in their employ a wonderful cast of characters. Not long after starting at the library, Mr. Richardson, the reticent reference librarian, gave another fortunate page and myself tickets to see the opera *Aida*. Can you imagine being a teenager and having a night out on the town like that? Needless to say, this kindness sparked a lifetime enthusiasm for that fine art that is a blend of music, theatre, and camp. My favorite librarian, though, was Miss Ruby Cripps. If she were alive today she would be over 100, but I am positive that in her glory days she was one of the original flappers. She was an

extraordinary woman of immense strength, who saw the funny side of everything. One unforgettable evening, the pages decided to get together and have a party to resurrect the roaring '20's. Naturally, we invited Miss Cripps — actually she was the only librarian we invited. She regaled us with all kinds of obscure but tantalizing hors d'oeuvres never before seen, including pickled water chestnuts, fluorescent sweet gherkins, Russian caviar, and miniature French toasts — all perfect complements to the martinis she favored.

In all seriousness, though, I did receive a very important piece of advice from one of the women who worked in the library. While typing out a borrower's card one day, she came over to check how I was doing and admired the speed and accuracy with which I was typing. This prompted her to ask if I was taking a typing course. I replied that I was, and to this she wisely remarked, "Never forget your touch-typing, it's very important." Well, my experience in libraries has confirmed this simple observation. In every job, on every checkout counter, in every cataloguing department, at every reference desk, the skill of touch-typing has opened many doors and been my salvation. Were it not for having the importance of this skill impressed upon me, I would never have gotten any of the jobs that lead me to a career in libraries. With the current ubiquity of computers, it is impossible to go through a workday without drawing upon this critical skill as I edit records, search the 'Net, or compose a document. Mrs. Sage was absolutely right on that one! 🐾

Drinking From the Firehose: Reminiscing About Old Technology

by **Eleanor I. Cook** (Appalachian State University, Boone, NC)
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aven't contributed a "Firehose" column in exactly a year, much to my and perhaps Katina's dismay. However, I am pleased to report that the end of the world as we know it (Y2K) was a non-event, and that in spite of my promises to migrate to a new email system, I'm still not quite there yet. And that turns out to be a good thing, actually, since my old ASCII-based email cannot accept attachments and therefore I can't pick up viruses that way. (I am slowly

migrating to the new system, and I use it almost every day, so there is still hope for me.) But what I really want to address here is old technology, since we have been asked to do this for the Millennium issue of *ATG*. I might also add that I am pleased that *ATG* acknowledges that the new Millennium begins with January 1, 2001, not January 2000.

Katina challenged us to reach back in our memory. My life began during the last half

continued on page 38