Oregon Trails
by Tom Leonhardt (Director, Information Resources Center and University Librarian, International University Bremen, Germany) www.iu-bremen.de

This time I am trimming to the bone. No fat. Only the bare essentials. As I begin to clear out my office I marvel at how much precious junk I have accumulated in less than four years. Much of it has followed me around for many years and much of it has sentimental value but this time I need to travel light. This is to be a new beginning in several ways, so I want to simplify my life beyond anything I have done since beginning my career. That is not to say that my new life won’t have complications, of course it will, but I will be parting with all of my worldly possessions except for my clothing. Even my books will stay behind, some with my children, others in storage. My trumpet, my two cornets, my guitar, my music, my CDs will be staying in Oregon. Will I miss them? I already do. Will I replace them? No, but I may find some substitutes.

Already I have thrown away several reams of papers that I have accumulated and transported but ceased referring to. As an Army brat and itinerant librarian, I have carried my history with me but now it has become possible to recognize that much of it no longer has any value to me and its connection to my past needs to be severed forever. The drawers of a large, long file cabinet have been purged. Only a couple of items escaped the recycling cartons.

I will keep the correspondence (and the speaker’s badge) related to The Fourth International Conference on Approval Plans—Collection Development, held in the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee on October 29, 30, & 31, 1979. For the first time, I had a paper accepted. It was a thrill and a proud moment. The conference was chaired by Peter Spyers-Duran, now retired, then Director of the University Library at California State University, Long Beach. Other members of the Conference Advisory Board were Charles C. MacLeod, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee; Joseph A. Boisse, Library Director at the University of Wisconsin—Parkside; Hendrik Edelman, University Librarian, Rutgers; Max W. Gruhn, President of Blackwell North America; Doyle C. Pickett, Director of Program Services, The Baker & Taylor Company; William C. Roselle, Library Director at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee; and Julie Virgo, Executive Secretary of the Association of College and Research Libraries. Those names will mean little or nothing to most readers but to other old-timers, they will undoubtedly trigger memories of those and other influential librarians of the day. I am also keeping my complete run of the “From the Fringes” column written by T. Harrison Linkwood, B.S., M.S., M.L.S., Ph.D. for the library journal Library Underworld. Let me quote some introductory material from Library Underworld when it introduced Linkwood to its readers. And let me add that despite this introduction, few librarians know of this writer who may never write again unless he can overcome a desperate case of writer’s block. He once thought that his steady diet of Guinness and single malt whisky had killed essential brain cells but I visited with him during the ALA Midwinter Meeting in Washington, D.C., this past January and he seemed as sharp as ever. Writer’s block is a serious ailment but its cause and cure are more matters of psychology rather than physiology. Here is the introduction. His writings you must get from him and that may prove difficult. He is very much alive and active as a librarian but a reader J.D.B. Salinger when it comes to his private life.

“Substantial facts regarding the life and career of T. Harrison Linkwood are few. The editorial staff has been able to verify the awarding of two degrees in the natural sciences, a B.S. in 1963 and a M.S. in 1965. There is little dispute that a M.S.S. was earned in 1975. The degree granting institutions, all in the West, pleaded that their names be not given. There were allusions to several shameful episodes of naked lust and outrageous interpenetration associated with Linkwood’s student days that the registrars pray will never again be brought to light. Reports of the occasional bit of violence are thought to exist. Repeated attempts by the editorial staff to ascertain the date, subject and granting institution of Linkwood’s Ph.D. have met with no success. To be honest, there is a growing concern that the doctorate may be self-awarded. Readers can rest assured that our investigations into this matter will continue with all possible vigor.”

“Dr. Linkwood’s professional life seems to have been spent in acquisitions departments in academic libraries in the West. Despite inference to a cussed independence and an outspoken intolerance to ineptitude, his work history is without interruption, albeit also without distinction. There is some evidence to suggest that Linkwood took an internship in journalism with a Dr. Hunter S. Thompson at the University of Woody Creek. Details of this phase of Dr. Linkwood’s life are sketchy. When queried, Linkwood’s only response is to grin weakly and beg for strong drink.”

“Little is known of Linkwood’s private life. Based upon limited correspondence and a few garbled phone conversations, the editorial staff has been able to piece together the following: Dr. Linkwood has been accused of being slow to adapt to modern librarianship. Late at night he has been seen to rail profanely against such thongs as hardware, software and systems. In contrast, he speaks fondly of books and writers. In spite of a small stature, he is known for a large appetite for single malt whiskies and ales of the strongest type, a predilection he blames on a Scottish heritage. Dr. Linkwood’s personal credo, which oddly enough, is printed on his business cards, is: ‘I’m not here for a long time, I’m here for a good time.’

The few columns that Linkwood has written to date are profoundly irreverent and funny as hell. His description of an ALA conference speaks, so long-winded and unintelligible that he is attacked and beaten by members of the...

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at the end of my adventure. Although they are heavy, too, I will take my paperweight collection to my new office. I will either pack them with my clothes or have my children mail them to me later on. I must have a dozen of them, some from a visit to England years ago but most with some kind of conference association. In other words, I am not an active paperweight collector (marksmen are another story) but an occasional collector. Someone once noted that once you get three or four of something you have a collection. As I grow older it is easier to discard those inadvertent collections so that I can better concentrate on books and bookmarks. The paperweights are really mementos and do not seem to be propagating as my wife's spoon collection is. She claims it is my collection but I am only the delivery boy, bringing back a spoon from whatever city I happen to have been in. They, too, will go into storage. Let's just hope that I don't, I mean, she doesn't acquire any duplicates as a result of their inaccessibility.

I'll take my two Dilbert heads, too—Dilbert and the Boss. They used to say things when you pressed down on them. Their batteries are dead now but their spirits live on. They also remind me not to take myself too seriously and to reflect on how I behave. I don't want to become like some administrators I know who love to share Dilbert cartoons with the rest of us but fail to see that they have met the enemy and it is them. They only think that Dilbert is funny. How sad.

From the opening paragraph you have guessed that I am on the move again but this is not an ordinary move and not the usual job change. On May 1, 2001, I will begin my duties as Director of the Information Resources Center and University Librarian at the International University Bremen (IUB). This is the chance of a lifetime for me, starting a new library at a new university in a country where I went to high school (albeit an American high school) and whose language and literature I have studied for many years. Finally, I have the opportunity to really learn the language and I will be able to browse regularly in German bookstores.

I am not sure if I will be in San Francisco for the ALA Annual Conference in June but I plan to attend the other midwinter and annual meetings for the next three years, just as I have done for the past twenty-five years. I also hope to continue writing for Against the Grain and continue writing for Against the Grain and hope to hear from my readers once I have my new e-mail address. In the meantime, you can get in touch with me, from May on, in Bremen, Germany. See this URL for details: www.iubremen.de.

Aufwiedersehen!