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A Good Book is Not that Hard to Find: Librarians and the New Out-of-Print Marketplace

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people profile

BORN & LIVED: Born and raised on Staten Island, NY; lived briefly in Colorado Springs, CO and Lake Parsippany, NJ before moving in 1989 to the "Great Northeast" of Pennsylvania.

EARLY LIFE: Playing with plastic dinosaurs, exploring Native American cultures, looking for fossils, and reading, reading, reading.

FAMILY: Currently cohabitate with 2 cats, 1 dog and 1 husband in Fleetville, PA.

EDUCATION: New York University, NY: MA in Anthropology; emphasis in Archeology, 1987
State University of New York, University at Albany: MLS, 1993.

FIRST JOB: Working as an Administrative Assistant at The Saitama Bank, Ltd., on Wall Street, NYC in 1975.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Acquisitions Librarian at The University of Scranton (1994 to present). From 1990 to 1994, I was the Assistant Director and then Director of the Learning Resources Center at Keystone Junior College (now called Keystone College). I feel very privileged to be able to be involved in my profession on both the state and national levels through my participation on the Board of the College & Research Division of the Pennsylvania Library Association and as a member of the ALCTS AS Publication Committee and as current (and past) Chair of the ALCTS Out-of-Print Discussion Group. The wonderful people I have met through these associations are what make this profession great!

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Walk in the woods, hunt for flea market finds and interact with other species.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and *Death in Holy Orders* — I love a good mystery!

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Whiners and complainers. It's easy to complain when something is wrong; however, it's far harder to find a solution to fix it.

PHILOSOPHY: "The Golden Rule" and "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff...And It's All Small Stuff."

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Being promoted this year to the rank of Associate Professor.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I see the revitalization of the profession as the public begins to realize the importance of unrestricted access to information and the subsequent need for information professionals to retrieve that information. However, I also see the need for higher education to reevaluate the core competencies needed for the MLS in general, and technical services in particular. As the "graying" of the profession continues we need to have competent, resourceful, professional librarians available to fill the impending void.

A Good Book is Not that Hard to Find: Librarians and the New Out-of-Print Marketplace

by **Narda Tafuri** (Acquisitions Librarian, Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Memorial Library, University of Scranton, Scranton, PA 18510-4634; Phone: 570-941-7811; Fax: 570-941-7809) <tafurin1@scranton.edu>

I was using one of the out-of-print (OP) metasearch engines (**AddAll** <http://www.addall.com/used> or **Bookfinder** <http://www.bookfinder.com>) to locate an out-of-print book that had been requested by a faculty member. After a quick online search, I located what I thought was the volume I needed. This was a difficult request as the book I needed was part of a two-volume set. I had been successful in getting volume two, but volume one eluded me.

The online description of the book gave very little information—the condition was listed as "very good," publisher and year was given, and the book had no "dj" (dust jacket). There was no clue at all as to whether it was volume one or two though the publication year seemed to indicate that it was volume one. I sent an e-mail message to the OP bookseller asking if the book was the volume I was looking for and awaited a response. A short, to the point, message came back: "Yes. Book is available."

So, I had our Treasurer's Office send off a check for \$11.00 (\$8.00 to cover the cost of the book and \$3.00 for shipping and handling) and waited for the book to arrive. This

was in the pre-credit card days and we had no other way to pay for an item. Some out-of-print booksellers would take a purchase order; others demanded "cash upfront." When

the book finally arrived, it was in the condition stated in the online description, but it was not the volume I needed. I asked my acquisitions clerk to follow-up and contact the OP bookseller, explain our situation and return the book for a refund.

A letter was written and the book returned. Some time went by, but we received no response from the OP bookseller. After enough time had elapsed that the book should have been received and a refund issued, I suggested that she might try calling the OP bookseller. She called a couple of times and left messages but still no answer. Finally, she tried again and got an elderly gentleman on the phone. She explained the problem with the book, the fact that we had returned it, and that we had not received a refund. She told the OP bookseller that we wanted the cost of the book refunded as it did not meet our needs. The OP bookseller, who happened to be based in Long Island, NY, told my acquisitions clerk that he would have to check with Vito and get back with her—he further informed her that Vito was his dog.

A long while passed after this conversation. Needless to say the \$8.00 check did not appear in the mail. A question I asked myself at this point was, for \$8.00 should I just chalk this up to experience? Not all online booksellers are created equal and this could just be another online scam. I decided to give it another shot. After all, anyone with a dog can't be all bad—I have a dog and two cats—and perhaps I could reason with a fellow New Yorker. So I dialed the number and got the OP bookseller on the phone. I started slowly and explained my situation.

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The "New Out-of-Print Marketplace" from page 1

the **Online Books Page** located at the **University of Pennsylvania** and now providing links to over 18,000 English language titles. **John** continues his investigation of digitization projects with a description of the ongoing efforts of the **National Yiddish Book Center** which is helping to preserve and revive out-of-print books that were once thought lost.

Lest you think that books are the only items to fall out of general distribution, **Gary Handman** at **UC Berkeley** takes us on a tour of the out-of-distribution (OD) video marketplace to help us locate that long lost copy of "Babes on Broadway."

Finally, to get an inside track on book bar-

gain hunting in Toronto, I have interviewed **Deanna Ramsay**, an out-of-print bookseller in Ontario, Canada for over sixteen years. **Deanna** is the Webmistress of *Littera Scripta*, a website providing resources for readers, rare book collectors and used booksellers. As the daughter of a former bush pilot she knows the adventure searching for a good book can bring.

In the world of out-of-print books and out-of-distribution videos the more things change the more they stay the same. Sometimes it's not the purchase of an OP book that gives you a thrill, it's the hunt, the quest for something you thought you'd never be able to locate let alone buy. It's the indescribable feeling you have that someday an email message will show up in your inbox to let you know that book you've been searching for has finally arrived!

ation. Then I asked him about his dog, Vito. What followed was a friendly conversation. The man turned out to be from the old days of out-of-print bookselling, he missed his open shop and he was uncomfortable with online selling. He was also concerned about the health of his long-time companion, Vito the dog, who now was 15 years old. After listening and commiserating awhile it was agreed that the money would be refunded. In a few days a check for \$8.00 arrived in the mail. You might ask, "What does this 'shaggy dog' story do for me?"

Are there unscrupulous dealers out there? Yes, be wary and be warned. Just as there are false/disreputable publishers (who has not heard of the Gilles?) there are disreputable online OP booksellers. However, there are many honest and reputable dealers out there as well. Out-of-print booksellers are an eccentric, independent breed (I know, I live with one). For some booksellers, book descriptions are not their forte. As with anything, if you are not sure, ask questions and get answers prior to purchasing. If you aren't satisfied with the answers you receive (or don't receive) don't buy it.

Didn't this little "transaction" take up an inordinate amount of time? Yes, indeed it did. This is where you, dear acquisitions librarian, have to make a few executive decisions about how you are going to acquire out-of-print books. While not every transaction is as difficult as doing business with "Vito the Dog," if you are ordering directly from various OP booksellers there is a fair amount of interaction involved. You place your order online, wait for the OP bookseller to confirm availability, send your payment information (here's where having a credit card speeds up the process), and wait for the book to arrive. You might also have to ask a few questions and wait for answers before deciding to proceed with your purchase. Despite all of the advances of the Internet and being able to locate and purchase out-of-print books online, it still does take up a fair amount of time. Not as much time as in the days of sending want lists to *AB Bookman's Weekly* and going through bookdealers' postcards, but it still adds up.

If you have the staff, don't have too many OP titles, enjoy the "thrill of the hunt" so to speak, then ordering direct is for you. It's certainly the cheapest way to purchase OP titles. But where, you may ask, do I start to find these OP booksellers and their wares? Why just about everywhere these days! **Amazon.com**, **Barnes & Noble** online as well as specialized out-of-print/used book sites such as **Alibris** and **Abebooks** abound. **AcqWeb** (<http://acqweb.library.vanderbilt.edu>) provides links to many of these sites under the link to "Out-of-Print, Rare and Antiquarian Agents" on its homepage. There are also a number of international sites that can be handy. You can search for books on **eBay**, however, this is best for rare or hard-to-find titles. A couple of things to keep in mind if you are using **Amazon.com** or **Barnes & Noble** to locate OP titles, is that they get some of their listings from **Alibris** and **Abebooks**.

Out-of-print booksellers that use **Alibris** and **Abebooks** can opt to have their listings loaded onto the **Amazon.com** and/or **Barnes & Noble** Websites. However, OP booksellers that do business with **Alibris** or **Abebooks** do not have to sell their titles on **Amazon.com** or **Barnes & Noble** (*BN.com*) online. Therefore, there may be more copies of a book available than what you come across on **Amazon.com** or **BN.com**. The best way to locate the most available copies of a title is through the metasearch engines mentioned at the beginning of this article: **AddAll** or **Bookfinder**. They each cross-search numerous online OP Websites and bring back search results. The results can be sorted by price if that is the primary concern. Some of the sites that they search are international in scope. You can limit by type of binding and a number of other criteria. It's important to remember that limiting can eliminate possible "hits." Generally a minimalist search may yield greater results.

Condition of a book is very important. I generally do not want to purchase a book that is below the condition "very good." Most designated OP bookseller Websites have a "glossary of terms" based on those originally established by *AB Bookman's Weekly*. (A brief guide to terms is contained in the endnotes for this article.) It's a good idea if you are unfamiliar with a term to do a little reading before deciding on which copy will meet your needs. If you have any concerns or questions, the best thing to do is to contact the bookseller directly and ask him/her to be more specific about the condition. For example, "What exactly do you mean by 'light underlining'?" How many pages are we talking about? How big exactly is the stain on the front cover? etc." There have been times that I have purchased a book for significantly more money because a cheaper copy's condition did not meet the standards set by our collection development policy. I have also been willing to spend a bit more for a hardcover version of a book than a paperback as it saves the time and expense of binding. Make sure you know what the bookseller's return policy is. If you are dissatisfied with a book, send it back!

What if you and your staff (this is assuming you have any staff in these days of downsizing) don't have enough hours in the day already to accomplish what you need to do? Well, you have a few different options available to you. You could set up library accounts with **Alibris** and **Abebooks** (whose library site is: *AbeLibrary.com*). Both sites will allow you to search, select the books you want, and order them on an online purchase order. You will be sent an invoice or you can use your credit card, the choice is yours. You can also set up "want lists" with either one. Your "wants" are matched against their databases of books and you are a sent notification if the titles you need are found. You then have the option of going online and purchasing the titles you want. Your "wants" stay in the online OP systems indefinitely so if a title you need is not currently available you will be notified by e-mail should it be listed by an OP bookseller in the future. **Alibris** hand inspects books prior to shipment and allows returns within 30 days if you are dissatisfied for any reason. **AbeLibrary** allows returns within

14 days of a book's receipt. However, the buyer is responsible for shipping charges both ways if the book is "as described." If the book is "not as described," unreasonably late, or it did not arrive, the bookseller is responsible for all charges.

If that is still too much work for you, some print vendors can also search and acquire out-of-print books on your behalf. **Aux Amateurs des Livres**, **Blackwells Book Service**, **Casalini**, **Harrassowitz**, **Midwest Library Service**, as well as others will search for out-of-print copies. However, expect that the cost will be higher than if you had spent the time searching yourself. Try to remember "there is no such thing as a free lunch." You probably will spend 50% or more than if you had searched and acquired the titles yourself.

On occasion, I have also had excellent success locating out-of-print books using a specialist OP bookseller. This works especially well if you are collection building in a particular area. **Brian Elliott**, Senior Vice President, Sales and Marketing at **Alibris**, recently stated at the 2003 Midwinter meeting of the **ALCTS** Out-of-Print Discussion Group that most OP booksellers probably do not have more than 25% of their books online. This means that there is an untapped potential that is not going to be found by searching the various online OP book sites. This is borne out by information that I had gathered for an ALA Poster Session I presented in June 2001 entitled: "The Search is Over! Locating Out-of-Print Books Online and Offline." I compared the results I achieved by purchasing 40 titles using an OP specialist bookseller to the cost and availability of the same titles if purchased through various OP Websites. The OP specialist bookseller was able to locate four titles that were not available on any of the online OP book services.

In most cases the amount charged by the bookseller was either the same or less than the average cost of a particular title located through using the **Bookfinder** metasearch engine for 50% (18) of the 36 titles located by both. By using a book vendor or an OP bookseller, you can set price limits or ask for price quotes, set condition limits, and let them do the work. You also avoid having to ask "Vito" for a refund it you need to return an item. Will you get the OP book at the cheapest price possible? No, however, sometimes purchasing books this way is cost effective because it saves you and your staff time.

As regards price, the average cost of the 40 titles searched for this study was \$32.75. This is a decrease of approximately 35% from the average price I had determined in an article I wrote for the February 1998 issue of *ATG* entitled "The Out-of-Print Marketplace." I had stated in that article, "The average cost of an out-of-print book ranges from \$45 to \$50." The decrease in the cost of OP books in general is due to the proliferation of online OP Websites and online OP booksellers. This proliferation has brought about its own set of problems. Personal experiences (and my husband's disparaging remarks as he marks down his stock) indicate that prices for more common titles have

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fallen drastically. However, at the same time the prices on more collectible titles have actually experienced a dramatic rise. (It is quite unfortunate that my husband doesn't seem to own any of those titles.)

I have found OP specialist booksellers through the old "trial and error" method of searching for books in particular subject areas and noticing when a dealer's name seems to appear with a great deal of frequency, comparing that dealer's prices with other dealers to make sure that they aren't overinflated and then doing some business with them to see how things transpire. You could also "Browse" books by subject category on **Abebooks** or **Alibris** and check out which dealers' names keep reappearing in your subject area. You can also check out the dealer descriptions in the **Book Wire Index of Antiquarian Booksellers** (<http://www.bookwire.com/bookwire/booksellers/antiquarian-booksellers.html>) or visit the **Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America (ABAA)** (<http://www.abaa.org>) or **International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (ILAB)** (<http://www.ilab-lila.com>) Websites for listings of members and their specialties. Another helpful site is **Deanna Ramsay's Website Littera Scripta** (<http://www.litterascripta.com>) which provides resources for readers, rare book collectors and used booksellers. (Check out my interview with **Deanna** in this issue of **ATG**).

Let's return back to the tale of poor Vito the Dog because his story has one final point to make. As you recall, I was trying to locate a particular volume of a two-volume set. I had looked everywhere I possibly could and was not able to find it. And that's the final point. Even with millions of OP books available online and more being added every day, automated want lists, and armies of OP booksellers, not every OP book you need is going to be available. This is difficult to explain to folks who feel that just "everything" is available on the Internet. But it's not. There are many OP books that will never be available for purchase.

The new out-of-print marketplace certainly has a lot more to offer librarians than was available in the past. The choice of options for locating and purchasing OP books seems to be growing every day. No longer can it be said that a good book is hard to find!

A Short Glossary of Out-of-Print Book Terms and Abbreviations

4to, 8vo, 12mo, etc.: refers to the size of the book. This is based on the number of pages that a single printed sheet has been folded in the production of a book. Fewer folds mean a larger book. Most hardbound books are 8vo.

aeg: all edges gilt

As New: see Condition

bds: binding

bds: abbreviation for boards, the stiff front and back parts of hardcover books.

BOMC: Book of the Month Club

Brodart: plastic cover which is used to protect a book's dust jacket.

bumped: dented; this usually occurs on a book's edges and corners due to use.

chipped: small tears, or small pieces missing from the edges of pages or dust jacket.

cocked: the spine is twisted so that the boards will not line up evenly with each other.

condition: following are standard bookseller terms generally used to describe the following condition of a book. These terms are those as stated in the *AB Bookman's Weekly*. Abbreviations for these terms are:

NF—Near Fine; G—Good; F—Fine; VG—Very Good; P—Poor; Fair—Fair; As New—As New. When two abbreviations or terms of condition are used together with a slash, the first term generally refers to the condition of the book, the second term generally refers to the condition of the dust jacket, i.e.: **VG/VG** means that the book is in Very Good condition and the dust jacket is also in Very Good condition.

As New: to be used only when the book is in the same immaculate condition in which it was published. There can be no defects, no missing pages, no library stamps, etc., and the dustjacket (if it was issued with one) must be perfect, without any tears.

Fine: approaches the condition of **As New**, but without being crisp. For the use of the term **Fine** there must also be no defects, etc., and if the jacket has a small tear, or other defect, or looks worn, this should be noted.

Very Good: can describe a used book that does show some small signs of wear — but no tears — on either binding or paper. Any defects must be noted.

Good: describes the average used and worn book that has all pages or leaves present. Any defects must be noted.

Fair: is a worn book that has complete text pages (including those with maps or plates) but may lack endpapers, half-title, etc. (which must be noted). Binding, jacket (if any), etc., may also be worn. All defects must be noted.

Poor: describes a book that is sufficiently worn that its only merit is as a reading copy because it does have the complete text, which must be legible. Any missing maps or plates should still be noted. This copy may be soiled, scuffed, stained or spotted and may have loose joints, hinges, pages, etc."

DJ or DW: abbreviation for dust jacket or dust wrapper dust jacket: also called dust wrapper; the paper cover, usually illustrated, placed around a book to protect its binding

ep: abbreviation for endpapers; these are the sheets of papers pasted onto the inside covers joining the text block to the cover. One side is pasted down onto the cover, the other is left free.

exlib or ex-lib: a book that has been purchased from a library and will therefore have library stamp marks, pockets, due date slips, etc.

F: fine; see Condition

Fair: see Condition

ffep: front free endpaper (the blank sheet that is not pasted down onto the cover).

Fine: see Condition

first edition: the first printing of the first edition; the first time a book has appeared.

foxed: brownish spotting of paper usually due to acid content.

G: good; see Condition

Good: see Condition

half leather: the spine and the corners of the book have been bound in leather, while the rest of the cover is in cloth or paper.

hinge: the joint (either outer or inner) of the binding of a book (the part that bends when the book is opened).

ill.: illustrated or illustrations

insc.: inscribed

laid in: a piece of paper, leaf, letter, etc. inserted but not glued into a book

ltd.: limited edition

ms or mss: manuscript

nd: no date

NF: near fine; see Condition

Near Fine: see Condition

P: poor; see Condition

pb or pbk: paperback

pc or price clipped: the price has been cut out; usually a small triangle from the inside dust jacket containing the price information is removed.

Poor: see Condition

pub.: publisher or published

rubbed: indicates that the outer layer of the binding material has been rubbed off.

shaken: book is no longer firm and crisp; textblock feels loose in the hinges.

signed: inscribed with the author's signature.

slipcase: a container (usually cardboard) specially made to hold a book.

spine: the bound outer edge of a book.

teg: top edge gilt

tipped in: a sheet or sheets added after the book was produced through the use of minute amounts of glue along the edges of the sheet(s) to be inserted.

tp: title page

uncut: older books did not have their edges trimmed and are thus described as "uncut."

VG: very good; see Condition

Very Good: see Condition

vol.: volume