

April 2010

Building Library Collections in the 21st Century -- Making Hay While the Sun Shines, or Being Laid up When the Snow Falls

Arlene Moore Sievers-Hill
axs23@case.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sievers-Hill, Arlene Moore (2010) "Building Library Collections in the 21st Century -- Making Hay While the Sun Shines, or Being Laid up When the Snow Falls," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 22: Iss. 2, Article 35.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5524>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

both the constant police interrogation and the dictates from the state. **Lola** never finishes university as she, a victim of suicide or murder, is found hanged by a belt in a dorm closet. Later, **Georg** jumps, or maybe is pushed, from a hotel window after emigrating to Germany. **Edgar** lives in Cologne after finishing school. **Kurt** supposedly hanged himself with a rope (another possible “quieting”), **Tereza** dies from the “nut” (tumor) growing inside of her. The nameless narrator (think **Müller**), who gives me hope that our friends can sustain us even in their death, muses: “To this day, I can’t really picture a grave. Only a belt, a window, a nut, and a rope. To me, each death is like a sack.”

Müller opens *The Land of Green Plums* with “When we don’t speak, said Edgar, we become unbearable, and when we do, we make fools of ourselves.” I am intrigued with this observation and soon discover that **Müller** intends to hold the intrigue, as this is also the last line in the book. This quote by one of the principal characters is, for me, what connects these two books. Communication and trust among friends who live in fear of oppression requires creativity. The letters written between the students in *The*

Land of Green Plums contain a small strand of hair. The presence of the hair was the security system designed to detect if the letter’s seal had been comprised—a necessity in order to maintain the trust developed among the friends. One can only surmise how much of **Müller**’s hair was used to secure her communications. The conflict, love/hate relationship with Romania, and paranoia described in *The Land of Green Plums* screams autobiographical, or maybe it just screams. One final twist. The Romanian title for this book translates as *The Animal in the Heart*, which is a purer translation of *Herztier*.

Two young girls trying to learn, love, and live under social oppression provide the main characters in *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*. **Lily** and **Snow Flower** are growing up in the Hunan province of China during a time where women are valued only if they married well and produced a son. They are from pronouncedly different socioeconomic backgrounds but are encouraged to sign an “old same” or laotong contract by one of the local matchmakers with an ulterior motive. The girls need to learn from each other in order to function and survive their respective destinies, for unknown to them they will switch social positions upon marriage. See’s use of letter writing between **Snow Flower** and her “old same” **Lily** is in a secret woman’s calligraphy known as nu shu.

Snow Flower is versed in this secret woman’s writing because of her social standing and must teach **Lily** this art form. Letter writing becomes their lifeline, gives them purpose and the letters are exchanged via the matchmaker. This communication nurtures and sustains their relationship from the innocence of their youth, to the uncertainties of their respective marriages, in the pain and bliss of the birth of their children, even in the horrors and tragedy of war until the subtle nuances of the nu shu writing are misinterpreted; an unfortunate misreading of a calligraphic figure that places a wedge between the women ending the trust and nurturing communication.

Just as every nu shu brush stroke evoked an emotion, a confidence, or a celebration, so does the **Müller**’s poetic description of the painful oppression she experienced. She was betrayed by the country of her birth, and the pain of this betrayal awoke her creative soul.

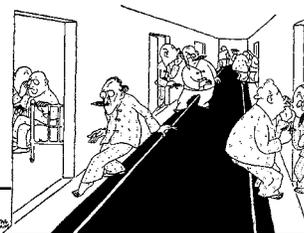
As Romanian novelist **Mircea Cartarescu** stated on the occasion of her **Nobel Prize**: “We can only speculate about what her writing would have become if Romania were a free world. I’m certain she would still have been a great poet, but she would not have been **Herta Müller**.”

Fondly,

The Nobel Laureates Booklover 

Building Library Collections in the 21st Century — Making Hay While the Sun Shines, or Being Laid up When the Snow Falls

Column Editor: **Arlene Moore Sievers-Hill** <axs23@case.edu> <arlenesievers7@hotmail.com>



What do you do, and what happens when the department head isn’t there? This is my account, my true reality show, for the past two months. I ruptured my Achilles tendon, completely severed it, and had to have extensive orthopedic surgery in January. On the one hand, missing the commuting in Cleveland in winter — and in Cleveland, winter goes well into March — is not a bad thing. Surgery is no fun, and having to scuttle with a bandage and wheelchair then a walker and cast just to get to the bathroom is also no fun. Our house is split level, which meant I was a prisoner on the top floor for quite a while. The logistics of everything is a pain. The device that the elderly use called a grabber, comes in very handy.

Eight weeks is about the amount of time one can expect to be off work with such a thing. As it happened, two library staff members were on medical leave overlapping with mine. The other two, one the head of the mailroom, the other an administration employee doing vital work with human resources matters, had to be replaced with a temp in the meantime. He was actually an excellent employee who had worked in the library on projects and was familiar with the place. In my case, however, as a department head, a lot of the work devolved on my staff, and other things, some dealing with acquisitions on my supervisor, the Interim Director, and

collection development issues from my subject areas to the Associate Librarian for Collections and Human Resources.

Expertise and accountability of my staff are stellar. That was a key element in the continued functioning of acquisitions in my absence. There are just two of them, but they are enthusiastic, hardworking, and were able to figure out the conundrums that would have come my way. One is a long-time employee whom everyone in the library admires and depends upon for her excellent work — that going-the-extra-mile quality. The other employee is fairly new but has an MLS and has a great deal of that important element that makes a person a “self-starter.” She will rise far fast in the profession.

Of course, some off-the-wall things came up or kept going, but they were resolved by my staff, the financial officer, and others, or they were still here when I came back. I have worked in libraries a long time, and at this library for a long time as well, and there are always the usual suspects.

The timing was actually pretty good work wise. Fall is always the time with a heavy rush of ordering and receiving of reserve materials, meeting with faculty, just doing new things — period. The period after the holidays with the new semester is less busy in that regard. Now

as I’ve returned, the rush of orders is coming, as well as Library Opportunity Grants, which consist of proposals to acquire materials by a collaboration of a faculty member and a librarian. The orders that come out of these grants are often out-of-print, microfilm sets, arcane stuff. They are a challenge — to get them done as well as the regular orders by the end of the fiscal year. I came back at the right time!

I thought that I would be able to do some things at home, but legalities regarding medical leave were such that they excluded any library work by me during that time. It was probably for the best anyway. Pain medication and decision-making shouldn’t mix.

We did have some of the mammoth snowstorms and generally cold and bad winter weather of Cleveland while I was at home. However, our lovely fireplace is in our family room on the lower level so I missed that during a good part of my recovery. Our four cats thought it was heaven to have me on the bed with them for a good while. After I could move around a little from level to level the dogs enjoyed my presence, as well.

Family Medical Leave or FMLA is a great thing. My recovery took about nine weeks, and I had more than enough sick time accumulated for that. My husband took a month off to take care of me on FMLA, as well, and very useful

continued on page 77

Don't wait for the grapevine when you can find out ONLINE.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Your selection profiles can now be created and customized by LC Class Number on our updated web site.



KEEP YOURSELF INFORMED OF NEW TITLE RELEASES EACH MONTH WITH OUR ONLINE NEW TITLE SELECTION PLAN.

Want to get new title information even faster? Now you can.

At Emery-Pratt, our number one job is to make your life easier. So we're offering the "New Title Selection Plan" an online program that will let you see the newest book releases 1 to 6 months in advance, right from the convenience of your computer. Your Selection profiles can be easily created and customized for complete flexibility on our web site at www.emery-pratt.com by publisher, author, BISAC subject code, or LC Class Number. These selection profiles can be added, edited, or deleted by you at any time. Best of all, when you see a book you want, you can order it immediately online for fast turnaround.

Finding the latest book at the best price is what we do.

No more researching to find out what's new. Just keep an eye on your e-mail and rest assured that you'll be notified as soon as a new book is available.

Emery-Pratt[®]

Book Distributors
since 1873

1966 West M-21, Owosso, MI 48867-1397
Phone (toll-free) 1 800 248-3887
Fax (toll-free) 1 800 523-6379
E-mail: mail@emery-pratt.com
Internet: www.emery-pratt.com

THE NICEST PEOPLE IN THE BOOK BUSINESS



Our New Title Selection Plan is just another way we're working to make your book purchasing fast, efficient, and fun.

6250

Building Library Collections ... from page 76

it was, too. He happens to be an RN but not a real nurse, as he puts it, but a "psych" nurse. Other nurses always seem very impressed about it, however.

Everyone always thinks they will get all the books read they put aside, but really when you are recovering from anything, you simply haven't the wherewithal to do much of that. I read some of the things I wanted to but started and stopped more than I read. I don't think librarians are any better than any other recovering people in this regard. I did enjoy round-the-clock access to TCM — something I've long desired and have often envied my retired friends for having. Whole days of **Bette Davis**, **Ginger Rogers** and **Fred Astaire**, **Hitchcock**, **Film Noir** — I had enough of an attention span for that essentially passive activity.

My last column was about writing a procedures manual and I feel like a broken record — boy, that makes me sound old — but manuals are really useful when key employees are gone. I think having had the experience of a medical leave for surgery or an illness makes you more cognizant of the realities of employees in these situations. As a supervisor I feel the experience is such an asset. Even though university regulations and law limit what any supervisor can do, just having experienced it makes you realize things will go on without you or any other particular person for a while. 🍷

Something to Think About — Gifting is a Gift

Column Editor: **Mary E. (Tinker) Massey** (Serials Librarian, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Jack R. Hunt Library) <masse36e@erau.edu>

In these tough economic times, we have cut after cut in our budgets. Results: there are fewer books, media and serials that can be bought and we get further behind in being able to fulfill the needs of the patrons using our libraries. We tend to the basic needs, looking for issues and volumes to fill our missing periodical ranks. We hope for the classic books to be donated from a concerned patron or alumnus. We can't really order items from our unknown donors, but sometimes we can lay the groundwork for specific donations. We have a number of people come by the library or call on the phone and they like to start with a declaration of how much they have to donate and how great the condition of the material. You want to jump up and say yes we'll accept anything, but the truth is, we have to be careful of what and how we accept donations. There should be an agreement that states the material will be given freely, but if we can't use it, we would be able to dispose of it as we wish (trade the material with other institutions, substitute new issues for old, utilize to trade for issues being purchased through another agency,

or just recycle). This gives us the ability to utilize donated materials more efficiently.

I had one faculty member who donated a complete run of a technical journal title that allowed us to switch out our older used issues for the new ones. The older ones were still good enough to ship to a back issue agency where we established credit and we're able to purchase issues we need at half price. Another retired alumnus brought a number of titles to us. When we checked our titles, they were scattered and tattered. I invited the gentleman into our binding area where we allowed him to choose the color of the binding that would be used and we told him when they would be bound. He visited us the next year to see the results and was very proud. We can help people make the decisions to gift us with good material and sometimes very special materials. Frequently it is an accident that donors show up at the right time or gift us with the appropriate materials that will continue to enhance our collection for years to come. Sometimes we can't even use the materials being



continued on page 78