

September 2011

Occasional Thoughts From the Road -- Why I Do What I Do

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Recommended Citation

Schatz, Bob (2011) "Occasional Thoughts From the Road -- Why I Do What I Do," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 23: Iss. 4, Article 45.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5970>

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Rumors
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Speaking of **Tom Gilson** who retired from his reference duties (so he could have more time to devote to *Against the Grain!*), we have hired a new Head of Reference at the **College of Charleston** and she is fabulous! Her name is **Christa Poparad** and she comes to us from **Lynchburg College** in Lynchburg, Virginia where she was head of reference and information services. **Christa** came to the College barely three weeks ago and she has hit the ground running! She has two dogs who she loves taking to the beach PLUS — y'all best of all — **Christa** knows a lot more Greek than I do and she may be able to tutor me!?

Speaking of Greek asked my all-time favorite Greek buddy **Christine Stamison** (Swets) if she knew **Christa** (no) so I am looking forward to introducing them to each other in Charleston in November!

Guess what? A few weeks ago heard from the awesome **Matthew Ismail** <mdis@mail@aucegypt.edu> (don't know if that address still works). **Matthew** has accepted the position as **Director of Collection Development** at **Central Michigan University** where he will start work on October first! Good things come in groups! **Matthew** has also published the book he has been working on for some time!

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Take a closer look at....

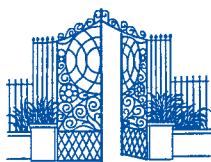
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Occasional Thoughts From the Road — Why I Do What I Do

by **Bob Schatz** (North American Sales Manager, BioMed Central; Phone: 646-258-2126) <robert.schatz@biomedcentral.com>

His name is **Musa**, and he works in an institute in Nigeria for the study and treatment of trypanosomiasis, or sleeping sickness. Dressed in a long, bright blue caftan and taqiyah, he made his way past the **BioMed Central** booth at **ACRL**. Given our name and some of the signage we displayed, he stopped to talk about what kinds of journals we publish and to tell me about his institute.

We talked at some length about our various journals and the numerous articles we publish about parasitic diseases, including trypanosomiasis. On a whim, I typed "tsetse," the name of the fly that carries the sleeping sickness parasite, as a keyword search of the **BioMed Central** database and came up with nearly two hundred hits. He was impressed. I then told him that all these articles were available to him and his fellow researchers without subscriptions, since **BioMed Central** is an open-access publisher.

Musa's English is excellent, but it is not his native tongue, and my statement stopped him. He heard me correctly, but his brain was not ready to accept that he had.

"Excuse me," he said, "but we would need to subscribe to your journals to reach these articles. Is this not right?" I told him no, that we make our peer-reviewed research available without subscriptions. "But we would need a special password to have access, would we not?" Again, I explained the open-access model and our desire that institutes of his kind have access to the corpus of our work without restrictions.

"Is this possible?" he asked. I assured him it was. It took a few more seconds, but his face then lit up into a broad smile. "Mr. Bob," he said (my first name was prominently displayed on my badge), "this is the most wonderful thing I have heard since I got here. This could save lives where I come from." I told him that was exactly our intent. To say he was elated is an understatement. He kept shaking my hand and patting me on the back. "This is a wonderful thing. This is wonderful."

By the time we finished our talk, he had taken my photo and received stuffed

Gulliver toys for his two small children. (Gulliver is a turtle-like mascot of **BioMed Central**.) He must have shaken my hand twenty times more. We parted good friends.

Later that evening, not long after I had related my encounter with **Musa** to a co-worker, I saw him in the lobby of the Marriott. I went over to say hello. He was talking on his cell phone to his brother who resides in Washington, DC. Before I knew it, **Musa** handed me the phone and said his brother wanted to talk to me. The brother told me how grateful he was for the work that **BioMed Central** was doing and how much it would mean to **Musa's** institute. He said **Musa** could talk of nothing else during their phone call. I think he called me **Mr. Bob** too. I'm not sure, because I was so unprepared for that conversation to take place.

I won't tell **BioMed Central** and **Springer** that the wage they pay me isn't important, but ultimately encounters like this one with **Musa** and his brother are why I do what I do. Occasionally my work takes on a very human face, this time of a gentle, grateful Muslim man who is working for the betterment of his people: my brother and friend, **Musa**.

I love my job. 🐾

