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The Refugee Returns Home: An MLS in Corporate America

by **Kate Kosturski** (Institutional Participation Coordinator, Europe, JSTOR) <librariankate7578@gmail.com>

One of my library school professors, *Library Journal* Editor-at-Large **John Berry**, calls librarianship the “profession of refugees” — the one that attracts those looking for a second career. In my graduate education, that was certainly the truth. My classmates included former Web developers and designers, publishing executives, higher education administrators, retirees, booksellers — and me, the former legal administrator. We came from different backgrounds, but had one thing in common: we had it *up to here* (to quote my mother) with the lack of opportunity, office politics, and other detritus in our former careers. It was time for something new.

In my case, I had it *up to here* with all three. Rejection from four law schools and bad timing in my applications (lesson learned: an economic nosedive is *never* the best time to go back to school — that brilliant idea is shared by millions of other desperate job seekers!) put the end to any fledgling dreams of becoming an attorney. Office politics kept me out of a career in legal administration. I was in a dead-end job with nowhere to go but...nowhere. My sister told me about library school as part of her gentle but firm “you need something else to do with your life besides that lousy law firm” campaign in 2006, and I have not looked back since. This law firm refugee saw librarianship as her ticket to Somewhere — a Somewhere that wasn’t overcrowded with scores of degreed professionals in a competitive job market or secretaries that thought you were a brownnoser because you found the company of the attorneys more endearing than that of gossipy women who spend their free time complaining about the bosses that keep them gainfully employed.

What naïveté! That Somewhere was not the shining city on the hill I made it out to be. While I didn’t repeat my mistake of law school application, I was in library school when the economy took its most recent tumble and graduated when it was well in the ditch. The promise of a wave of jobs with retirements did not happen. I watched the cohort before me who graduated in 2009 find small pockets of success, but more friends and classmates were filing for unemployment. The economy improved slightly when my cohort walked across the stage in Radio City Music Hall the following year, but I found myself on the unemployment rolls for the first time in my life.

My post-undergraduate job search was limited to New Jersey and New York City, involved around 20 or so applications and took all of a week. My post-graduate job search took me across the United States and Canada, involved 200+

applications (I stopped counting after 200) and almost a year. I crafted each cover letter carefully, gave special care to my work experience outside of librarianship, tying it to the qualifications of that particular job. I spent time gaining necessary library experience through an internship in my law firm’s library and volunteer work alongside my sister in her public library. I used social media to my advantage in networking and professional growth. In short, I played by all the 2011 job search rules...and I was still spending my days in pajamas with cereal and *The Price Is Right* instead of cataloging and answering reference questions. I began to believe that my out-of-the-profession experience, while useful, was a black mark against my stellar professional character because it wasn’t gained *in a library*. Office politics returned once more.

When a classmate sent me word of a temporary position at **JSTOR**, I had second thoughts about throwing my hat in the ring. I was more than aware of the divide between librarians and vendors, and that some saw the choice of the vendor career track as the sale of your information professional soul to Satan. And did I really want to work in an office again? That was the environment I just left, and I was not hungry to go back. Yet, the description of the work (building a knowledge base for the department for the then-new Current Scholarship Program), the technical skills and industry knowledge I would learn (SharePoint! Taxonomies! Electronic resource management!), and a slight bit of desperation over personal cash flow prompted me to send my resume.

That classmate spoke to me in October 2010, and now, a year and a few months later, I am happier than I ever expected. The knowledge base never came to fruition, but executives at **JSTOR** saw potential and assigned me other projects, from the mundane (fact checking in our client management database) to the intellectually stimulating (examining how the latest iteration of Carnegie classification affects the **JSTOR** higher education classification system and proposing changes). By the time I came on-board full-time in April 2011, I was managing a rather large market research calling project for our Current Scholarship publishers. I rose further in six months than I ever did in almost a decade of legal work.

The full-time work continues to be intellectually stimulating with room for my own special spin on projects.

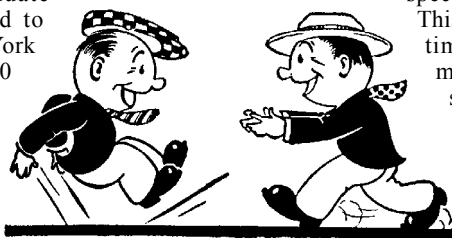
This summer, I had free time to conduct more market research with several librarians in the United States about our newest archive collections and the Current Scholarship Program, and

I had the freedom (within certain minimal parameters) to design and conduct these campaigns. In everyday work, I talk with librarians (who love knowing that they are working with “one of their own” when I mention I have my MLS) around the world and gain what one of our managers calls “librarianship at 30,000 feet” — a broad view of issues and answers that even the most devoted of librarians isn’t able to get within their own institution. I have had more room for creativity and intellectual stimulation than anything I ever received in my legal career. And the work I picked up outside of librarianship that I thought was working against me in other job applications became a benefit to **JSTOR**. I managed projects and used my marketing writing skills to draft messages we use in outreach and sales campaigns to international consortia and Current Scholarship participants.

The fears of a toxic office environment never came to pass either. The class warfare that I saw at the law firm does not exist at all in the **JSTOR** offices. Teamwork got us through large projects and a recent re-alignment of our department. Colleagues told me of the immense respect they had for my managing the aforementioned market research project in my first weeks of full-time employment. That recent re-alignment brought me on to a new team, and my new supervisor and colleagues took care to bring me up to speed on projects and introduce me to contacts a week before the official changeover took place, making this transition smoother for everyone. I see these attitudes towards teamwork and mutual respect even in the small gestures. Two co-workers brought me gifts from their vacations as thank-yous for covering while they were out of the office. The company president sent fruit baskets to two office managers who helped plan the staff picnic. My now former supervisor asks me for help with his homework (he’s now pursuing the MLS), advice on **Apple** products, and finds time to ask about my father’s fight with lung cancer (and had no objection to letting me leave early to pick my dad up an encouragement gift after Dad had a particularly bad doctor’s visit). This makes me happy to come into work each day.

With the good comes the bad, and I have had my fair share of challenges. One of the stranger ones is learning to relax on the job! Accepting more independence in my day-to-day activities and time management is a challenge when one comes from a career where someone (metaphorically) breathes down your neck 40 hours a week. Mundane perks, like wearing jeans to the office (a big no-no in Lawyer Land) to not having to sign out when you leave for the day takes some adjustment when the stricter schedule is such a part of your psyche. My writing and speaking also

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still tends to be rigid, more forceful legal professional than customer service-oriented sales representative. I am grateful to have a co-worker, one of **JSTOR**'s long-time employees, who takes time out of her busy schedule when asked to review my writing to make sure content reflects the "**JSTOR Way**."

A final challenge comes in my own professional development: at **JSTOR** it's been done mainly on an individual level. While I have chances to attend conferences as an official representative of the organization, I have to make sure I have the time to devote to personal conference attendance — balancing sessions I want to attend at **ALA** versus time I have to work the **JSTOR** booth in the exhibit hall and maintaining my extensive library network alongside my own work schedule and duties. I also must take care in what I write or say, sometimes keeping quiet on certain news developments because the outside world can construe my words, innocent as they may be, as an official organization opinion or attitude on an issue. I do make sure to let our marketing department know when I am writing or speaking just so that no one is caught off-guard when they see **JSTOR** in a journal or conference program. (This article included!)

I grew up Catholic, and one *Bible* story we heard in school was that of the prodigal son — the son who left home, found himself poor, and returned to his father in rags, not expecting a welcome with open arms. As this father reminds his other son, "My son," the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" I am that prodigal younger son, returning home to an environment and career path that I ran away from just because the industry and workplace was not a good fit for me. Lost for so many years, I feel as though I have finally come home. 🌿

Kate Kosturski received her MLS from Pratt Institute and is Institutional Participation Coordinator, Europe at JSTOR in New York City. Ms. Kosturski is also a 2010 ALA Emerging Leader and has presented at ACRL, the ALA Annual Conferences, and InfoCamp Seattle. More on her work is available at www.katekosturski.com.

Rumors
from page 14

look for the picture of **Audrey**'s grandbaby in this issue, p.69.

The awesome **Gail Schlachter** is running for **ALA Council**. I still remember when **Gail** told me that she gave her daughter a fax

against the grain
people profile

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Kate Kosturski

BORN & LIVED: Born in Woodbridge NJ. Now living in Norwalk, CT.

EARLY LIFE: Graduated **Woodbridge High School** in 1996. Member of award-winning **WHS Concert Choir**. Active on school newspaper, theater performances, **National Honor Society**.

FAMILY: Parents (**Rosemary** and **Joseph**) are retired and reside in New Port Richey, FL. Sister (**Chrissy George**) lives in East Windsor, NJ with husband **Tom** and three-year-old daughter **Cassie**.

EDUCATION: B.A., Government/Public Administration *summa cum laude*, **York College of PA**, 2000. M.S.L.I.S., **Pratt Institute**, 2010.

FIRST JOB: First ever job: cashier at **CVS** in local mall. First post-college job: legal assistant at **Carpenter Bennett & Morrissey** (now **McElroy Deutsch Mulvaney and Carpenter**).

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Editorial Board, *Reference and User Services Quarterly (RUSQ)*, effective June 2012. 2011 **ALA** Emerging Leader. Chair of **RUSA** Structure Taskforce, Co-Chair of **ALA** NMRT Student and Student Chapter Outreach. Full list of professional activities available at www.katekosturski.com.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Crafts (knitting), good books, cooking, travel, jigsaw puzzles, technology, board and card games, steampunk culture, renaissance fairs.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *Sideways* (**Rex Pickett**), *Millennium Trilogy* (**Stieg Larsson**), *Bridget Jones series* (**Helen Fielding**), *84 Charing Cross Road* (**Helene Hanff**), *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (**Michael Chabon**), anything by **Neil Gaiman**, or **George R.R. Martin**.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Stupidity.

PHILOSOPHY: Two quotes sum it up best:

"Nobody in life gets exactly what they thought they were going to get. But if you work really hard and you're kind, amazing things will happen." — **Conan O'Brien**, *The Tonight Show*, January 22nd, 2010.

"I am certain that after the dust of centuries has passed over our cities, we, too, will be remembered not for victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit." — **John F. Kennedy**

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Being named an **ALA** Emerging Leader in 2011.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: **ALA** Councilor, **JSTOR** Sales Director, or **ITHAKA S+R** Research Strategist.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: A stronger partnership between librarians and their resource providers/vendors through collaboration on projects. More mutual understanding of the challenges each faces from technology and economic pressures. Publishing market will be dominated by electronic resources and eBooks. Evolution from print to digital will lead to serious examination and revision of copyright law. 🌿



machine for a wedding present! Have I told y'all that before?

One more candidate for **ALA Council** — the wonderful **Mary Page**! Let's get out the votes!

Speaking of the **Charleston Conference**, we plan to open registration in mid-May/early June. Watch for it! And we are trying a new registration system, **Constant Contact**. Hope

you all like it! The call for papers and pre-conferences is already up. Visit www.katina.info/conference.

Several speakers are already lined up for the 32nd. **Annette Thomas**, the CEO of **Macmillan, Ltd**, will be our main keynote speaker. **Ann Okerson** will return for the **Long Arm of the Law Panel** and she has

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