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ATG Interviews Mary Ann Liebert, Founder and President of Mary Ann Liebert, Inc.

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Against the Grain

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Founder and President, Mary Ann Liebert, Inc.

by Tom Gilson (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

and Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *Mary Ann, you have been a leader in STM journal publishing for a number of years, however, for our readers who don't know, can you tell us how you got started in this area of publishing? As a woman in a male-dominated field, what were the special challenges that confronted you? Do you have advice for anyone contemplating a similar career path today?*

MAL: I pursued a career in biomedical publishing because my father had Parkinson's Disease, and I was sure that somehow, somewhere, I would find in the literature, if not a cure, at least a treatment that would make a difference. Alas, that was not the case, but it ignited my interest in the field. I have been fortunate that I did not experience much, if any, gender discrimination, or maybe I was just wearing blinders. I was too absorbed in what I was doing, exploring the promise of science in so many different fields.

ATG: *We interviewed you in June 1995. At that time you had 50 people working at Mary Ann Liebert. How many people work there now? And in 1995 you were preparing to launch five journals. How many are you preparing to launch this coming year?*

MAL: We have had to relocate four times since the company began. I hope this is the last relocation. We have wonderful, spacious offices where everyone has natural light, and we are in a very convenient area for transportation, whether by car or train, in New Rochelle, NY. We launched five new journals this year, and are planning for several new publications in 2013.

ATG: *You said in that interview that libraries have become much more selective and cost-conscious. With all the new products being launched and libraries having their budgets cut, what do you think will happen? Are you seeing cancellations of subscriptions for pay-for-view, for example?*

MAL: We are not seeing much attrition in subscriptions, although libraries have migrated to online. One of the reasons we may not be experiencing worrisome cancellations is that we do not force libraries to take big packages that they may not want, and librarians appreciate this flexibility. Also, we are not a "me too" publisher, and seek to establish unique publications that will advance an embryonic field.

ATG: *When you started, publishing and print were synonymous. Now we live in a digital world. How has that changed your approach to the business? How has it impacted your relations with authors? How about with libraries and librarians?*

MAL: My relationship with authors and editors is extremely gratifying. Scientists enjoy working with an independent publisher, because

we are flexible and creative, do not have cookie-cutter models, and our approach is to create publications that suit the needs of a particular field. My goal is to create and nurture publications that are not just repositories of literature, but will enable advancement in a field.

I am dismayed, however, by a perception that "commercial" publishers lack the integrity of "not-for-profit" publishers. Publicly-owned companies must satisfy their stockholders. Privately-owned companies do not have such an onerous mandate, and some not-for-profit publishers have very expensive headquarters, furnishings, and art, with impressive tax benefits. My sense is that staff salaries are comparable. Sweeping generalizations are troubling.

I think extensively about the differences between the print and digital worlds because I am immersed in both, of course, professionally and personally. I recently had an interesting experience when I read the biography of **Steve Jobs** on my **Kindle** and then was given a copy of the book in print. I discovered that I gleaned very different perspectives from both; things that didn't necessarily resonate with me online had a greater imperative in print. On the other hand, I found the weight of the **Kindle** very appealing and like the ability to adjust type size. Print vs. online reading will be most interesting to evaluate in 20 years.

ATG: *In an article you wrote for the April 2007 issue of ATG ("The Devil is in the Details") you talked about the strengths of print and electronic and the advantages of each format. You said you couldn't imagine life without the Internet (neither can we!), but you also point to the many subscriptions that you have for print journals and the fact that you continue to get them in print. Five years later, is this still the case?*

MAL: When I speak to researchers, they want journals online, but many of them say that they read print differently as well, and are more likely to come across a piece of important and thought-provoking information than by flipping through the pages and browsing. Print seems to foster serendipity. There is no question in my mind that they are read differently, but librarians may not think so. I am personally addicted to both, as I am a voracious reader.

ATG: *You recently made an announcement about expanded use of the Literatum platform and offering Liebert for Mobile (LAM), which provides 24/7 mobile access to the company's entire online collection of journals as well as Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology News (GEN). Please tell us about these new initiatives. How will they enhance user access and use of your publications? What has been the response so far?*

MAL: We announced that *Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology News (GEN)* would be available on Literatum and Literatum for Mobile because this magazine, which is our flagship publication, has information that is essential for so many departments within an institution; among them, academic research, purchasing, technology transfer, regulatory and business development, and collaborations both in the United States and abroad. Literatum enables libraries to make *GEN* available to the broad base of users who need this information about tools, trends, and global collaborations between academia and industry.

ATG: *Open Access is an increasingly important mode of journal publishing. We could not help but notice a link on your Website entitled "Liebert Open Access Options & Benefits." What is that all about?*

MAL: Many of our authors have inquired about making their papers open access. We offer "Liebert Open Option" to authors who would like their articles posted free online with immediate unrestricted open access via payment of an Open Option fee. This includes immediate upload to **PubMedCentral** without an embargo, which some authors find particularly attractive. Authors publishing subsequent articles using Liebert Open Option pay a reduced fee.

ATG: *When we click on your open access link there was no mention of peer review? Is peer review part of the process?*

MAL: Thanks for calling our attention to the fact that the phrase "peer review" did not appear on our open access Webpage. It has been added. Peer review is very important and we take this responsibility very seriously. In fact, this year we launched our first fully open access, peer-reviewed journal — *BioResearch Open Access* — in which participating authors pay an article processing fee once the article is accepted for publication.

ATG: *While your flagship publication is still Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology News (GEN), you added five new journals in 2011, so it would appear that content still matters. Can you talk a little about that? What do you look for when considering new journals possibilities?*

MAL: When I am considering publication of a new journal, I think hard about the field: where it was, where it is, and about its future. Is there a real reason for launching a new journal? A good example is *Journal of Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology*. Patients who develop cancer in the 15-39-year-old bracket have different problems, physically and emotionally. They don't fit in a pediatric unit, nor is it really appropriate to group them with older patients.

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They have concerns about fertility issues and other aspects of life, and their treatment options need to take these into consideration. It is truly becoming a discipline of its own within oncology, and hospitals are grappling with where these patients should be cared for within the hospital setting. Another new journal is *Disruptive Science and Technology*, but what else would you expect from a disruptive publisher?

ATG: *Your son is working with your online Website and offerings. Can you tell us about his role in the company?*

MAL: My son decided to strike out on his own and is president and CEO of an aviation company, **Performance Flight**. Lewis made an extraordinary contribution to the company, particularly in growing our IT capabilities. It was a difficult decision, but it has worked out very well for all concerned.

ATG: *If you were to look into your crystal ball where do you see STM journal publishing in five years?*

MAL: Ours is an evolving field: New government mandates, new “publishers” such as **Howard Hughes Medical Institute** and **Wellcome Trust**, scientist revolts, over-pricing, and ensuring sustainable models.

Looking into the future, I am very concerned about the spam open access publishing that is a growing phenomenon. These companies are proliferating, peer review is nominal or non-existent, and like the Burmese python in the Florida waters, they continue to proliferate. I am absolutely astounded that there has been so little discussion about this in the library community, and I have the impression from listservs that if a company calls itself an open access publisher, they are accepted without question. However, much research is based on previous research that has been reviewed with the utmost integrity. And therapeutic options for patients are also partially determined by published papers. I am extremely worried about the consequences of the OA spam publishing endeavors. If peer review is

not authoritative and absolute, and done with the utmost integrity, it will be regrettable, with negative consequences.

I also am both amused and concerned about the gaming of both citation and usage factors. Both libraries and authors put great stock in both, and publishers teach authors how to push up their rankings. Currently, libraries give great weight to both, but I have seen some egregious steps taken by publishers, and there was an article about this in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2006. Citation data are two years old by the time they are published!

The future of STM publishing holds many changes, forwards and backwards. The author-funded model may have trouble sustaining itself, given budget cuts, and more authors are resisting the pay-to-publish option. Their institutions are assuming larger portions of their grant money, and all of these costs take away money that is best spent at the bench. Pay-per-view sounds attractive for a specific paper, but again it totally negates the importance of the serendipity factor that many times is what is responsible for the “Eureka” moment that results from less specific browsing. Perhaps there will be a blending of all three. Personally, I am tired of all of the long-winded discussions about gold, green, etc.

Usage factors also do not truly reflect the value of articles about esoteric research that find a home in very focused journals. Esoteric research has a very important role if there is to be meaningful progress in areas such as rare diseases.

ATG: *Care to make any predictions about the future of libraries? Of publishers? Of print?*

MAL: Sadly, librarians may find their role less important, and their libraries may shrink. Both print and online publications will survive, however, as did radio after the advent of television.

I believe that libraries have to think about their future very carefully. Will the libraries themselves still matter? Will researchers from various disciplines still come to the libraries and interact with one another? Why will they come? There won't be any stacks to browse

unfamiliar but possibly intriguing journals and ignite new and meaningful collaborations.... Also, sitting in front of a computer monitor doesn't foster much interaction. It may be that librarians will find that their positions will become virtual, and that the library space will be used for other purposes, new office space for other endeavors, etc. Librarians may find that there will be staff cuts in their future, since libraries as places for sharing information may not have the same priorities in institutions that need more space for other purposes, but do not have the budgets for new buildings.

ATG: *We have asked some pretty serious questions up until now, so we were wondering if we might switch gears a bit. Can you tell us what fun things you do with your down time? What are your main interests outside of work? Are there any recent books or movies that you'd recommend?*

MAL: Down time: I love to read, and my curiosity level is off the charts. I also have a backstage mentality. If I go to an art museum, for instance, I want to know where all the paintings are stored, on and off the premises; where the restoration is done, how many paintings that are donated are never shown, and how provenance is established (I am especially interested in that). Then I want to know how much money the gift shop makes and contributes to the funding of activities of the museum. If I go to the circus, I want to meet the dog trainer! I adore gardening, and my landscaper and I have become best buddies. I don't need very much sleep, so in the middle of the night, I do find myself Tweeting. A few years ago I had the pleasure of conducting the first movement of **Tchaikovsky's** Fourth Symphony with an orchestra in Westchester County, and I must say it was one of the most thrilling moments of my life. I would love to conduct it again, many times, the way **Gilbert Kaplan** (publisher of **Institutional Investor**) has conducted **Mahler's** 2nd Symphony....

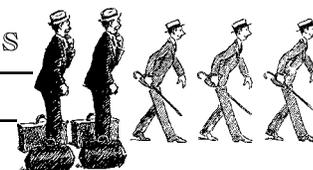
ATG: *Any pet peeves?*

MAL: Not today, but please stay tuned!

ATG: *Mary Ann, thank you so much for graciously giving us your time and answering our questions.* 🌻

Something to Think About — Spring Changes

Column Editor: **Mary E. (Tinker) Massey** (Retired Librarian) <eileen4tinker@yahoo.com>



It's that time again when we go through evaluations, clean shelves and cabinets, and reminisce about the old times. At ERAU, many of the folks can talk about beginning in trailers, living in the ABC complex, and then being in the present structure, the No.4 building behind the **Orville** and **Wilbur Wright** statue of the Kitty Hawk plane. We're almost to graduation, and we watch as so many groups and families take pictures around the plane. There is talk of moving the plane closer to the Boulevard for a dramatic flare, but we all really love being able to locate ourselves behind it, as

a direction finder. From being an appendage to being a vital force on the campus has been an exciting challenge for those who have that history. So many things change in a library's life.

Remember all the ways we did things without computers: handwritten call numbers, embossed ownership, colored tape for locations, pre-cabinet shelving for microfilm in Technical Services, 8am-5pm service, and many others I don't know from my lack of history. I get a thrill just to hear and see the planes on the tarmac behind the school. Our new hangar and research facilities are almost complete

now. It's been awhile since the tornadoes took the old ones down. The ABC teaching structure is almost down and the new complex will begin construction this summer. Another floor of our library is being converted to office space, and the books have been weeded beyond belief! We have 24/7 reference, especially for our worldwide campuses. We are open most days, but the campus is forcing workers to a more conventional four-day week, so the library is really having to figure out some difficult schedules

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