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Booklover: Synchronicity

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arranged to publish the texts of the talks from the meeting in the *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* (<http://jlscc-pub.org>), whose peer reviewer derided my contribution in dismissive and hurtful language that the editors will not permit me to quote. (The piece is forthcoming nonetheless.)

So writing this piece has been fraught with concerns. I feel obliged to uphold the side of the library publishers, who seem to me at times in peril of being patronized or hegemomized by the more established presses, but I am very aware of the idiosyncratic quality of our experience at Nebraska and the outré nature of my own personal views. I don't wish to offend the traditional publishers, or to stir up trouble with the university presses. I have (or used to have) some dear friends in that world, and I am not ashamed to have spent 25 years as a publisher — all of it at start-ups or small presses in the \$3 million to \$20 million range.

Some worthy organizations, including the Library Publishing Coalition, have enunciated the mission and role of library publishing far better than I can. All I hope to contribute here is a somewhat salty critique and antidote to the frequently bland and ameliorist narrative of “synergies” — in which libraries are taken to school by consultants who cannot see the forest of opportunities lying beyond the trees most

frequently and habitually watered (usually by the tears of authors).

I believe the academy has room for both library and university press publishing. I believe this because each has a radically different role and mission. I do not think that either one has the solution to the other's problems. I don't see library publishing initiatives as opposed to the university presses, but I think they are better off independent of them. I want library publishers to “come out of Babylon” (as **Bob Marley** might say) — to leave behind the ownership-based, property-accumulating, copyright-hoarding, commercially-driven publishing model practiced by the corporate giants and imitated to various degrees by academic presses struggling for self-sufficiency.

Library publishing is an opportunity to jettison the things that make commercial and university press publishing unpleasant at times: the constant scrambling for sales, the terminable meetings, the tyrannical deadlines, the anxious sales projections, the radioactive inventory whose value decays every day, the backwash of returns, the frenzy of being out-of-stock, the chewed-over catalog copy, the seasonal ups and downs I no longer feel obligated to read the *Sunday New York Times Book Review*; for what I do, it just doesn't matter, and frankly, I don't miss it. Most recently my desktop has been occupied with the return of black-footed ferrets to the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, revisions to a translated 17th-century German music encyclopedia (**Praetorius**' *Syntagma Musicum II, De Or-*

ganographia) proposed by an expert reader, composition of a 1,000-page reference on the *Historical Common Names of Great Plains Plants*, and layout of a collaborative study of the methods of the pioneering Italian educator **Loris Malaguzzi**. It is tremendously gratifying to work face-to-face with the author-creator, and not at arm's length through an editorial or promotional bureaucracy. Accommodations and compromises are more easily and conveniently made without the involvement of multiple departments or the satisfaction of numerous egos each needing a win.

If there remains anyone I have not offended, I'm sorry if you feel left out. My object has not been to deliver Hamlet's whipping to anybody, but rather to point out that we all have opportunities to do better. What **Thomas Hooker** called “A True Sight of Sin” is necessary before reformation can take hold. If we repeatedly tell ourselves how wonderful we are, we will only sink deeper into quicksand. All of us have a chance to do more and do better. In fact, the universe of publishable materials has never been more exciting and energizing. There is more than enough to go around. To those who would say “that's not real publishing” or “not good publishing,” I can only say: it's not a contest. We are all seeking to serve the communication needs of scholars and researchers. The Copyright Office defines publishing as “offering copies for distribution,” and that's enough for me. We can all get judgmental, or we can each take advantage of the opportunities that the new technology has handed us. 🐾

Booklover — Synchronicity

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In late September I became curious about the exact timing of the announcement of the **Nobel Prizes**. I knew it was in the Fall but had never paid attention to the date. Since I have been writing **Booklover**, it has become a “tradition,” if you will, to seek out the current year's recipient of the **Nobel** and write about their work. However, my Google search did not produce a date — they like to be cagey about this — but it did produce some trivia about the **Literature Prize**. One piece of trivia on the **Nobel** site was a list of the “Most Popular Literature Laureates.” **Rabindranath Tagore** was at the top of this list. Instead of waiting for the 2014 announcement, I decided to research **Tagore** and his work.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in Calcutta, India in 1861. His biography is a tale of wealth, travel, self-education, and international influence. He was the youngest of a large family. Servants influenced **Tagore's** upbringing because his mother died when he was 14 and his father traveled exten-

sively. The young **Tagore** chose to skip formal classroom schooling and explore. This pattern followed him throughout his life. His travels would expose the world to his writing and thus his popularity grew outside of his native land.

Tagore wrote in almost every genre, but he began in poetry at around the age of eight. His first substantial poetry was published under the pseudonym **Bhanushingho** (Sun Lion) when he was 16. Short stories and drama followed very quickly from the pen in his young hand. “*Gitanjali*” is **Tagore's** best-known collection of poems and is referenced as the reason for his being awarded the 1913 **Nobel Literature Prize**: “because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West.” He was the first non-European to be awarded the **Literature Nobel**.

However, the work I chose to embrace has a different title: “*Fireflies*.” Published in

1928, it is a collection of 253 verses that critics speculate were inspired by the Japanese Haiku style of writing that **Tagore** was immersed in during the 1920s. In the forward of the illustrated collection I read **Dr. Ashok Kumar Malhotra** creates a beautiful analogy: “A tiny firefly is a much loved insect in India and the rest of the world. When I was growing up in India, during the darkest of the dark nights, while lying on the bed at the roof of the house, we used to watch these little creatures. Through their minuscule lights they opened up windows of hope, breaking the blackness of the sky. We learned this from our wise grandfather who used to say: ‘When you cannot find your way in the darkness, these fireflies act as messengers of hope.’” **Alberta Hutchison's** illustrations give an additional dimension to each of the 253 “firefly” wisdoms of **Tagore**. Enjoyed together, it is a unique spiritual experience.

The timing of my awareness of this author and this particular collection of his poems is not lost on me, and here is the connection. This past year I learned that the *Photinus carolinus* firefly is one of at least 19 species that live in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Their mating season is late-May to mid-June.

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activities I want to get more involved in. You may have heard that we had a little Referendum here in the UK, where the proposal was to break up the country. Fortunately, the secessionists were defeated, but they do not appear to have accepted this democratic result and continue to stir things up. Those of us who believe in the Union must therefore be prepared to devote further energies to ensuring that we stay together. I am sure, however, that I have not paid my last visit to Charleston.

ATG: *What about fun things? What activities do you plan to pursue now that you will have a bit more time to focus on personal interests?*

PS: Well, there are many fine Scotch malts I have yet to try, there are salmon waiting to be caught, and Highland hills to be climbed. Apart from that there are Italian operas to be heard, more French cheeses to be tasted, as well as Trollopes to be read. I understand that being retired is a full-time occupation!

ATG: *Peter, thank you so much for all of the things you have done for the industry over the years, and of course, for taking the time to talk to us about them.*

PS: It has been both a pleasure and privilege to work with such great colleagues in the publishing and library worlds. We are very fortunate in this industry to be able to combine business and pleasure. 🍷

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During this time these lightning bugs create a unique synchronous light show. This particular species is the only one in America that can synchronize the light patterns. With the coming of a milestone birthday, three of my very close high school buddies and I have reservations to experience this synchronous light show. We were eager to explore life when we were young, and now we gather to remember that we can still be fascinated by both the simplicity and the complexity of that life. Some of our wonder is reflected in **Tagore's** "Fireflies." I leave you with five:

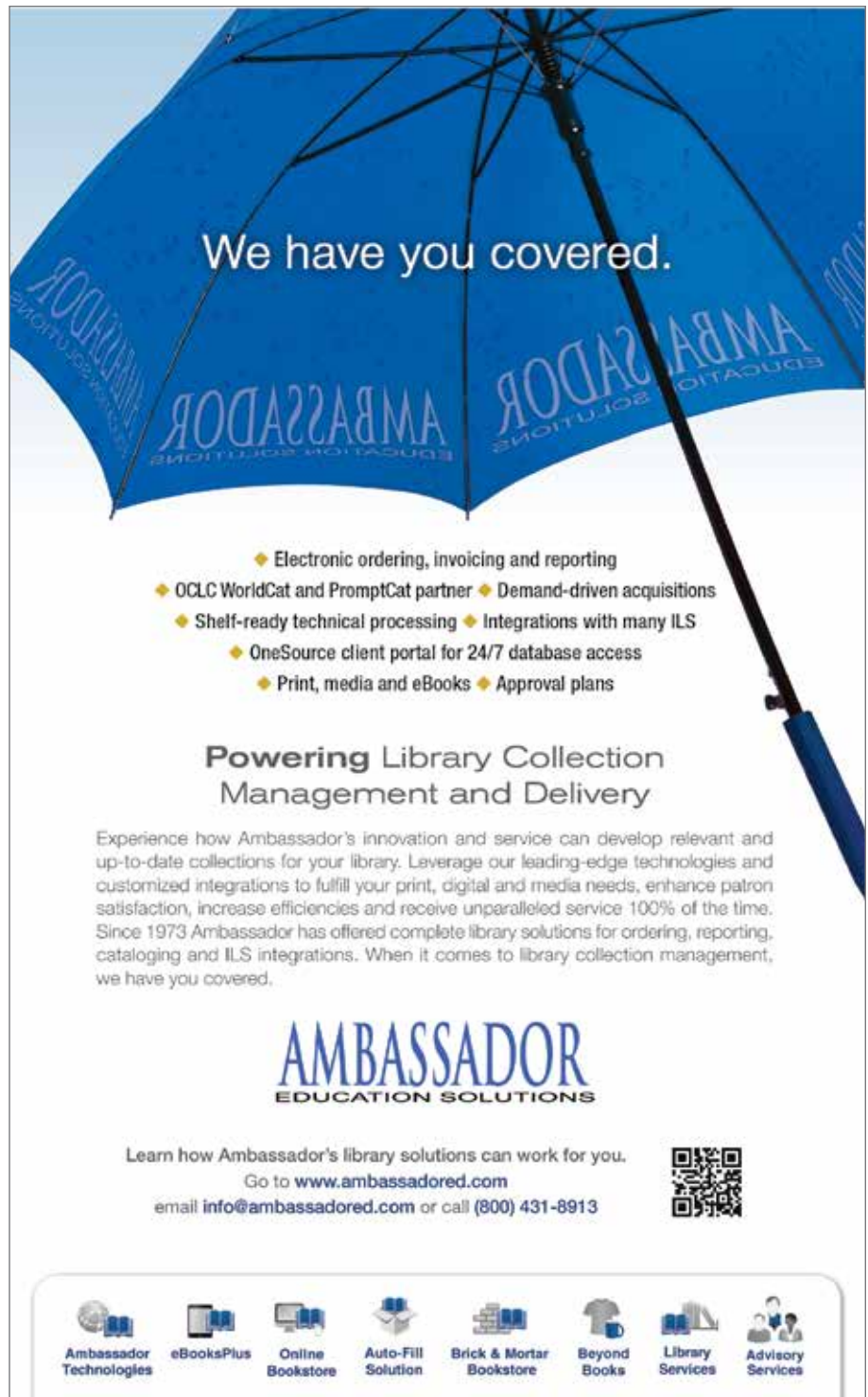
"The fireflies, twinkling among leaves, make the stars wonder."

"In the drowsy dark caves of the mind, dreams build their nest with fragments dropped from day's caravan."

"The sea of danger, doubt and denial around man's little island of certainty challenges him to dare the unknown."

"Day with its glare of curiosity puts the stars to flight."

"The tapestry of life's story is woven with the threads of life's ties, ever joining ever breaking." 🍷



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January 13, 2015, surrounded by family and friends. He was 80. **Jerry Curtis** was a true legend. He attended the **University of Scranton** where is played varsity basketball and was voted MVP for the 1956 season. After serving in the **U.S. Army**, he went on to a distinguished career as a Senior Executive in the publishing industry. He was working at **Springer-Verlag** when I first met him. **Jerry** didn't mince words and was one of the most

astute people I have ever encountered. His wife of 52 years, **Mary Jane**, three children and two grandchildren survive him. Donations may be made to **Dana Farber Cancer Institute**, P.O. Box 849168, Boston, MA 02284, and **Clergy Health and Retirement Trust**, 66 Brooks Drive, Braintree, MA 02184. For info and online condolences, www.richardsongaaffeyfuneralhome.com. Obituary published in *The Scituate Mariner* from Jan. 15 to Jan. 22, 2015. <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/wickedlocal-scituate/obituary.aspx?pid=173858041#sthash.n9R6W8AM.dpuf> 🍷