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Books Are Us

by Anne K. Robichaux (Professor Emerita, Medical University of South Carolina) <awkr7721@sc-online.net>

Column Editor's Note: This column covers fictional accounts of people in our industry—librarians, publishers, vendors, booksellers, etc.—people like us. All contributions, comments, suggestions are welcome. —AR

I'm a fan of southern writer Anne Rivers Siddons and read her latest novel, Islands (Harper Collins, 2004, ISBN 0-06-621111-5), not expecting fodder for this column. In part three, however, the author introduces a character who is a former librarian from the “Rural Center Library,” on John's Island, SC. Siddons weaves intricate tales and her characters are always richly described, generally well developed, and occasionally eccentric. This depiction of the librarian did not disappoint!

The former librarian is described as tall, broad shouldered, heavy-bosomed, snub-nosed, wide-mouthed, with a “mass of frieza-looking rusty red hair and a mask of freckles.” She is a single parent of a seven-year-old pageant participant and budding beauty queen, described later as a “trailor park Lolita.” She has a biker for a boy friend. She alternately drives a truck or a fuchsia colored motorcycle, decorated with “tongues of painted purple and gold flames” and is actively involved in a local hick club. She has advertised for work on the local Bi-Lo’s bulletin board using heavy pink card stock and lavender marker. She describes her skills in terms of information science but in the areas of housekeeping, baby-sitting, cooking, chauffeurng and home repair.

The narrator of the story responds to the ad, inviting her to interview for a job as housekeeper, cook and part-time companion for an ailing woman. Oh, it also turns out, conveniently, that the former librarian has previously worked in a nursing home. She rode to the interview on her motorcycle, wearing tight black jeans, a black leather, metal-studded jacket, her “melon-like” breasts bra-less under a stretch pink turtleneck shirt, or as described by another character in the story: “a Harley-riding librarian with boobs like the front of a ’53 Studebaker and a Little Miss Tomato Princess for a daughter.”

When asked what she had done at the library she responded: “I was the librarian. I have a degree in library science.” When admonished that she should not waste her education by cleaning houses she indicated that she could make better money cleaning and cooking and enjoyed doing this, adding that she reads all the time and has taught reading to her daughter and other young children. Besides, her husband ran out on her and she needs the money. She lives from paycheck to paycheck in a crimer block apartment building.

Aside from the amusing, if not stotypical, physical description and flamboyance of the librarian character, we understand that she did not earn a livable wage in her profession. She is further presented as a genial, capable, nurtur-