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Adventures in Librarianship -- Encyclopedia Redux

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Costumed Rabbits in China

by **Janis F. Hauser** (Retired Elementary School Teacher, Newport News, Virginia) <awphjfh@att.net>

At various times in my life, I have collected whole sets of china, hand-made pottery, English bone china cups and saucers, children's books, fabric, cookbooks, rabbit figurines, family photos and stories.

Having to downsize took care of many of my collections. My daughters received an early inheritance of their great-grandmother's and great-great grandmother's china. My step-granddaughter received another set. They also took the hand-made pottery. After realizing I would never have infant grandchildren, I donated the baby-themed fabric to **Edmarc** (www.edmarc.org), where it would be used for quilts for children suffering from cancer. More fabric went to the **Peninsula Agency on Aging**, to be used for lab robes for nursing home residents. When I had to retire, the children's books went to other teachers. While many of the cookbooks were given away, I kept those I use, have purchased a few more, and created two binders of recipes clipped from magazines and newspapers that I want to try.

Many of my collections have begun by accident, seeing something pretty that I'd like to have in my home, or were given me by family members. The bone china cups and saucers came from my maternal grandmother's visits to Canada. When she died, the collection was split between me and my sister-in-law. I have the cups with pink flowers, she has the blue ones. The miniature cup and saucer collection began with two that my grandmother played housekeeping with as a child. I added one or two from "rummage sales" at my elementary school, purchasing them for 10 or 25 cents. Even at that age I was on the lookout for pretty things!

My father became interested in tracing the family's history and handed down copies of all he'd learned. He even made copies of old photos for us. It makes it more interesting to put a face with a story. Even so, many sto-

ries died with him. This is my most important collection.

I collected things because I never turned down any offers of items by others. I made it easier for others to downsize, never thinking that I'd eventually have to do the same. Most of the items were useful or pretty, all for my home. Many trigger memories of favorite relatives. Even as a young girl I thought about my grandmothers using the items they had given me. That made me feel good, to be a link in the chain of life. The photos and stories help me to preserve those memories.

Once you begin to collect things, it is difficult to stop. I no longer collect bone china cups and saucers, but I still look. There may be a rabbit figurine that jumps out and catches my eye, but I try not to add any. Rabbits do have a way of multiplying. I do still add a cookbook, if I think the recipes are unique and useful. I still collect family photos and stories.

My collections are important only to me. Everything I collect serves as a memory, a bridge between generations. To use a grandmother's favorite cookie recipe and

place the warm, fragrant result on her flowered plate with tea from her flowered bone china cup makes the bridge tangible. I feel her presence. The photos and stories help me to understand what has passed, why I am like I am. Because we all have similar physical traits, I can even see how I will look as I age: shorter, rounder, chubbier chipmunk cheeks. I am beginning to link historical events with my own family's time line. As I read books about the **Civil War**, I think of my great-grandfather, a musician from the North. It helps me feel part of the big picture. I wonder what my ancestors thought and felt at certain periods of time. If I am lucky, they wrote it down. Mostly, they didn't and I'm left to speculate.

In 100 years, I imagine most everything will be gone. The blood line does not continue. It will be as if I, and all my collections, never existed — a sad thought. If by some remote chance the stories were ever published, there might be some continuity, for I (and perhaps others) like to read about others' lives, no matter how mundane. 🐰



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at least. I could have done worse!

Once I expressed a desire to have a sword — I can no longer recall why — and friends humored me by bringing me a fancy brass sword (evidently a ceremonial Masonic piece) which I had forgotten about til recently. Somewhere along the line I must have given it to my son **Jim** to keep (along with a lot of other things) and when he visited an antiques store to see about selling the old rural phone we'd brought from New Richland after they went to more modern phones there, he brought the sword in also. Amazingly, he came out with \$265 for me from the sale of those two items! I'll never understand the lure of antiques! 🐰

Adventures in Librarianship — Encyclopedia Redux

by **Ned Kraft** (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State)
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For those who heard that specialized encyclopedias were dropping out of the market, we beg to differ. Some recent selection slips lead us to believe the business must be quite healthy.

Stanik's Encyclopedia of Cloud Formations. **Stanik Publishing**, 2005. From Al-tocumulus to Stratus, from the highest halos to plain old fog, they're all here. Students and scholars alike will appreciate the succinct definitions and etymologies of difficult technical terms such as wispy, buoyant, and low-lying. \$254.

New World Illustrated Encyclopaedia of New Worlds. **Droopy House**, 2006. The "NWENW" is a continuously updated database of all planets that have been discovered around stars other than the Sun. Customers will swoon for the digitally-enhanced renderings of Pulsar Planets, Gas Giants, and Terrestrials. Should the apocalypse draw near,

how many planets could support human life? How long would it take to get there? Are the beaches crowded? Find out! \$154.

Encyclopedia Faucetica. **Fanway & Slander**, 2005. For your customers interested in faucets, the **Fanway & Slander** covers from prehistoric stone faucets, Mayan antler faucets, to Andy Warhol's Elizabeth Taylor Faucet. If faucet history is not adequately covered by your collection, this one purchase will cover it. \$277.

Online Encyclopedia of Juvenile Slang. **Pungent Publishing**, 2006. The fifteenth edition retains the Micropaedia/Macropaedia/Propaedia structures used to great fanfare in 1974, augmented by the often-scorned Trapezia indexing format. So many library patrons misunderstand the word "sweet." They may use "s'up" improperly. Or they may fall short of the many



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Op Ed — Little Red Herrings Libraries-As-Sex: The New Paradigm?

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University)
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“Libraries are a lot like sex.”

There just had to be a way, I kept telling myself as I watched somnambulant freshperson after somnambulant freshperson (is that what we’re calling them now?) drag his or her soporific self into our library research classes.

There just had to be a way to wake them out their stupor and into the glorious, resounding, magnificent ... well, okay, just startle them out of their misperception that was etched permanently on their faces: “Ugh! The pencil-neck, geek-world of librarians and libraries.” So I just blurted it out one day.

“Libraries are a lot like sex.”

And you can bet it had the desired effect. Suddenly everyone woke up. Several gasped for air. One young man whispered, “Sex in the library!” You see, freshpersons are a trying lot, as anyone who has done these talks knows. They have, most of them anyway, passed from that highly volatile pubescent stage that sends hormones careening in all directions, to that young adult stage, where their neurons *occasionally* out run their hormones to yield a facsimile of reasonable thought. Of course their hormones still win most of the time, and so they are, roller-coaster like, racing from sniggering like clowns to affectations on the order of **Professor Higgins**. A new angle is always needed. So, I just said it:

“Libraries are a lot like sex.”

I first uttered the phrase like some throw-away line. But I realized right after I said it that unless I wanted to find myself in the president’s office pleading for my job against charges of sexual harassment, I had to come up with something! So I quickly completed the thought.

“No, I’m serious,” I said. “Libraries really are a lot like sex. Think about it. Everyone on this campus will wax long and eloquent about libraries. **Dr. Dryasdust** will utter the profundity, “The library is the center of this university.” And this will be followed by other latte, tweed coat-wearing-types who will begin waxing their wane: “In order to pass this class you’ll have to spend your life in the library, everyday, every night, every weekend. Forget dating, forget” Even your friends will talk about the library. Like sex, some will boast about the library (“I check out fifty books for each paper, minimum!”). Others will resort to wishful thinking (“You outtah see the verso page on the books in the Oversized section”). Still others will attempt to scare the devil out of you (“Have you seen “The Hunch-

back of Notre Dame?” Remember Quasimodo? That’s our librarian!”). But the awful part about how libraries are a lot like sex is really the saddest part of all,” I concluded. “You’ll discover at some point in your university education that the library, contrary to every hope, is indispensable to your education even in the face of the Internet *uber alles*. That’s when you’ll ask your friend about it only to discover he’s got it all wrong.”

Okay, so maybe this is a throw-away line. But the more I think about it, the more convinced I am that this analogy isn’t the influence of *gaudeamus* acquired from a long stint in a university setting. I think there may be something here. It’s no secret that librarianship borders on the true definition of ennui: stifling boredom, to hear others talk about. Watch the face of the next person you tell you’re a librarian. Catch that invol-

untary yawn? See their eyes droop? Did you watch that head dotter?

Now try this: “Libraries are a lot like sex.”

I think the analogy may solve our problem. Sex sells literally everything these days, so why not libraries? We may well be pushing even the limits of sex here, I don’t know, but it’s worth a try. I kept telling myself there must be a way and perhaps that day before all those sleepy-eyed students I stumbled on to it. Beside, with the Web, libraries really are filled with sex with you think about it. Didn’t **Google** just release data that said 75% of all searches involved porn last year?

Now before anyone resents the implication, bear in mind **Hamlet’s** good counsel: “Diseases desperate grown/By desperate appliances are relieved/ Or not at all.” Librarianship may not be on its last leg just yet even if it is wavering vertiginously in the face of so many trying to jettison it for the Web. The need for a desperate remedy has long been upon us!

Now can we, so to speak, keep this analogy up? Take the Internet, please. Isn’t it like anonymous sex? You never know what you’re going to get or from whom, and the information can be highly unreliable if not downright suspect. Then there’s online information with its high-priced hullabaloo. This is nothing more than a high-priced ... oh, well, you get the picture.

Watch how the library-as-sex analogy

deepens when compared with the research process: the stops and starts, the fraught-with-error end runs, and the long and involved escapades that take you far off the beaten path, leave you breathless with nothing you can use, consume huge amounts of valuable time, wreck your home life, only to leave you spent and good for nothing for the rest of the day. To this add the unintended consequences of library research and there you have it, a baby — no, I mean, something you’re delighted to have but not sure what to do with next.


Lastly, there’s the piece de resistance of research to make the analogy complete. When you find the right match, are in the right place, and have surrounded yourself

with the right circumstances, sex — I mean — research (I’m getting confused here myself) can be vastly and extraordinarily rewarding!

Heck, we could even invent pretty ribbons to wear for those who were lost to research. A way of saying, “We remember **Kilroy**. Walked into the almanacs and never returned!”

Maybe it isn’t such a bad analogy after all. Tactless, no doubt, but not bad. Libraries are a lot like sex when you ponder it. Think of the possibilities for **ALA** posters: “SEX: Have you been to the library lately?” Well, it sure beats those **READ** posters.

Maybe, just maybe, we’ve been going about teaching library skills all wrong. I’m not saying we should turn it over to the Sex-Ed classes just yet, although we’d be sure to reach far more students. But maybe if we work a little harder on drawing these not-so-far-fetched analogies students will actually begin not only to like the library, but also to begin learning something about it ineffable riches.

Who knows, we may be able to teach them how to practice safe research after all! 



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colorful terms available to describe one’s girlfriend. **Pungent** uses an editorial staff hired from seven metro-area high schools to keep this database up to date. \$450. 