



**Dispatches from a Public Librarian**  
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*All dispatches previously appeared in "Dispatches from a Public Librarian" on McSweeney.net. "Is Illiteracy So Bad?" appeared in The Morning News. "Suspect" appeared previously as "Working in the Library can be Strange" in the O.C. Register. All other pieces have either never appeared or appeared on my blog "Speak Quietly" ([speakquietly.blogspot.com](http://speakquietly.blogspot.com)).*

*If you enjoy this free book, please also consider buying my memoir of library life: "Quiet, Please: Dispatches from a Public Librarian" (Da Capo Book, 2008), which is available as both an eBook and physical book.*

**Part 1**  
**McSweeney's Dispatches**

## Introduction

For some five years I have worked for a smallish public library nestled cozily between Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm in Orange County, California. This is where most of the observations in this dispatch will take place, although sometimes I do go to other libraries (some even far, far away), and I'll include those observations as they come.

I came into the library scene about eight years ago. I began as a student assistant at a college library in Fullerton. After receiving my bachelor's degree, I was bored, confused, and didn't want to get off my parents' insurance plan, so I enrolled in the Library Science and Information Technology program at San Jose State.

I will update this dispatch on a sometimes-regular basis, and will include stories about strange patrons, strange tales, and otherwise just strange things. The names and description of the patrons are purposely left out, so as to protect their privacy (libraries are real sticklers for this privacy stuff, which is why many have been in a tiff about the Patriot Act, but don't get me started).

# Chapter 1

## Dispatch 1 (12/12/03)

### *Lost & Found*

Toy cell phone

Anime DVD case (no disc)

Immigration papers

Photocopy of an income-tax statement

Child's wallet, including two Mickey Dollars from Disneyland

Stuffed teddy bear

Floppy disc

Ink pen from CarCo.

### *Kids and Porn*

The most popular website this week for kids 8-14 is the borderline-pornographic site Newgrounds.com. Newgrounds features a splendid assortment of innocent kids games mixed together with adult-oriented games. It is full of nudity, crude sexuality, drug references, violence, and swearing. One favorite, for girls surprisingly, is the dress-up Britney Spears game, which so happens to feature a Britney without any underwear on. The content of the site seems geared at high-school-aged kids, but 95 percent of the kids that I caught looking at the site were still in elementary school. The library has decided to ban Newgrounds, and library Internet filters prevent kids from accessing it further. Curious about how they found the site, I asked some of the kids; their responses varied, but by and large it was from web banners on non-adult websites that had either chat rooms or cheat codes for game systems (e.g., PS2, Xbox, and Game Cube).

### *Patron of the Week*

Reflecting on who my favorite patron is on any given week is difficult—there are so many. My favorite patron this week would have to be

the one who tried to take my shoes. The patron was a mentally challenged man who was visiting the library as part of his rehabilitation. He came up to me while I was in the juvenile-fiction area and asked if I would be his friend. I politely nodded and said that I would be his friend. He then asked if he might have my shoes. I told him, as gently as possible, that I needed to keep them. He nodded, and asked if I was still his friend. I said yes, and he asked if he could feel my shoes. Seeing no harm in this, I told him he could feel one, but he had to do it quickly. He nodded, bent down, and proceeded to lift up my foot and pull off my shoe. A little panicked, I told him that shoes had to stay on in the library. He knew by my tone that he had done something he should not have. He began saying he was sorry over and over again. I told him it was okay. He asked if we could still be friends. I said yes and he left. The next day he came into the library looking for me while I was taking a break. He asked the librarian at the reference desk if the priest was there, and then went on to describe the priest as me.

#### *Book Drop*

The strangest item found in the book drop was the head of a blond plastic doll wrapped in pink tissue paper.

## Chapter 2

### **Dispatch 2 (1/5/04)**

#### *Patron of the Week*

It always surprises people to know that patrons frequently verbally, and sometimes physically, assault librarians. This week's memorable patron was the man who said he'd be waiting for me after work. The man came in on a Saturday to use the Internet. He was middle-aged, tired, but seemingly friendly at first. I assigned him a computer on the other side of the library. Saturdays are usually slow and quiet at the library where I work, and usually I pass time by studying the palm of my hand from different angles. Things got a little loud, however, when the man I had assigned to the Internet began yelling into his cell phone (as a side note, if anyone has ever been asked to turn their cell phone off in the library, it is because many people, while normally quiet in regular conversation, get quite loud when on the phone). I approached the man and I explained that it was library policy that cell phones remain off in the library, and if he wanted to continue his conversation, he'd have to use the phone outside. The man, clearly upset that I had so rudely interrupted his phone call, explained that he was talking with an important Sprint PCS customer service agent regarding his most recent billing statement, and that he needed the Internet to access his bill. Before I could respond, the man turned and went back to his phone conversation, explaining to the customer service agent that he was sorry but an "idiot librarian" had tried to end his call. No librarian likes to have his or her authority as librarian undermined. It's not a power issue, rather a simple fact that policy has been disturbed and you don't mess with library policy and get away with it. Nonetheless, I was in a good mood, so I walked around the man (so as to face him), and I asked him if he'd consider talking in a quiet-like fashion and finishing the call quickly. He said he'd finish the call when he was done talking and not a minute sooner. I turned off his computer and asked him to leave; and that's when he stood (and also when I

realized he was quite tall) and screamed, "you want to see loud" in a fashion that made everyone in the library turn around and look at the man a little frightened. I didn't think he meant it as a question, so I decided not to answer him, which only made him louder as he asked, "Who do you think you are?" I knew at this point that the situation was quickly getting complicated, and to make matters worse the man really did not have very good breath. I told the man he was being disruptive and he needed to leave the library. I knew he wasn't going to go out without further fuss, but I still hoped. I returned to the reference desk, and the man of course followed. He asked for my name, and when I gave it, he said he was going to go see the mayor and have my job. He started to leave, but turned back around after only a few steps, and said he would be waiting for me after work and I was going to be sorry. Finally, he left, at which point one of the library volunteers (a high school kid) approached me and said, "that was awesome, I thought he was going to jack you up right in the library!" Later that day I received a call from another librarian at the city's main library asking if I had had any problems that day with a patron. I said yes, and asked the librarian why. He said the man had come into the main library and filed a complaint against me. I asked if he mentioned coming back after I got off work to beat me up. He had forgotten to mention that. After work, I approached the parking lot with a bit of caution, but the man was not there, nor have I seen him since that Saturday.

### *Book Drop*

The strangest item in the book drop this week was an unlit firecracker. Patrons putting firecrackers in the library overnight book drop does not happen as often as some people imagine. This is only the second time I've seen one (although it was the first time I had seen one unlit). The first one destroyed seven books and damaged over a dozen others.

# Chapter 3

## Dispatch 3, Special Movie Edition (2/03/04)

As the film-award season begins its winter blossom, it seems appropriate to include a special movie pullout edition of this dispatch. Enjoy...

### *Books to Movies*

Every winter, summer, spring, and... well, basically every month... it happens. A movie comes out that everyone thinks is good and that movie happens to be based on a book. As it turns out, Hollywood is big business for libraries because they increase the circulation of books that have been otherwise collecting dust for some time. This holiday/Oscar season has released a swarm of movies based on books, which has been a true blessing for some books, and did nothing for others. With the exception of *The Return of the King* and *The Cat in the Hat*, it has been months (in some cases years) since the books have been checked out. Here is how the books made into movies are faring this winter.

### *The Return of the King* by J. R. R. Tolkien

4 - Available

3 - Missing

1 - Lost

7 - Checked out

### *Master and Commander* by Patrick O'Brian

3 - Checked out

0 - Available

### *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier

1 - Available

*Cheaper by the Dozen* by Frank B. Gilbreth and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey

1 - Missing

*House of Sand and Fog* by Andre Dubus III

1 - Available

1 - Check out

*Big Fish* by Daniel Wallace

1 - Available

*Paycheck: And Other Classic Stories* by Philip K. Dick (also in *The Short Happy Life of the Brown Oxford*)

1 - On order

*The Cat in the Hat* (English) by Dr. Seuss

8 - Checked out

2 - Available

1 - Lost

1 - Missing

*The Cat in the Hat* (Spanish) by Dr. Seuss

8 - Checked out

1 - Available

1 - Lost

*Mystic River* by Dennis Lehane

2 - Available

*Timeline* by Michael Crichton

1 - Available

1 - Check out

*Notable Librarians in Sometimes Notable Films:*

\*Sylvia Marpole, *An Extremely Goofy Movie* (voiced by Bebe Neuwirth)

\*Marian Paroo, *The Music Man* [1962] (played by Shirley Jones)

\*Lynn Wells, *Major League* (played by Rene Russo)

\*Librarian, *Billy Elliot* (played by Carol McGuigan)

\*Angela Benedict, *Seven Faces of Dr. Lao* (played by Barbara Eden)

\*Sara Waters/Laura Burney, *Sleeping with the Enemy* (played by Julia Roberts)

\*Children's Librarian, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (played by Lillian Bronson)

*Notable Library Scenes in Sometimes Notable Films:*

\**The Breakfast Club*—most of the movie takes place in a school library of sorts.

\**A Beautiful Mind*—several scenes are shot at the Princeton University library.

\**Finding Forrester*—The New York Public Library is featured in one

scene.

\**Forever Young*—One of the scenes takes place in the California Public Library in Inglewood.

*Number of Oscar Best Picture—Nominated Films That Were Once Books: A Five-Year History*

2002—4/5

2001—2/5

2000—2/5

1999—2/5

1998—1/5

# Chapter 4

## Dispatch 4 (2/16/04)

### *Lost & Found*

Eminem [*The Eminem Show*, edited version], scratched CD (no case)

Pacifier

Pink plastic sandal, left foot (toddler-size)

Black cotton sweater

Floppy disc

JanSport backpack (empty)

Worn out copy of *The Client* by John Grisham with the inscription:

<sup>3</sup>Happy 19th birthday! Love, Grandma and Grandpa, 1999<sup>2</sup>

*Library Books Most Likely to Go MIA or AWOL Last Year:*

*GED Study Guide*, by Various Authors

*On the Road*, by Jack Kerouac

*Night*, by Elie Wiesel

*The Red Badge of Courage (Cliffs Notes)*, by Patrick J. Salerno

*Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?*, by Melvin Tinker

*Two Badges: The Lives of Mona Ruiz*, by Mona Ruiz and Geoff Boucher

# Chapter 5

## Dispatch 5 (4/22/04)

### *Tax Day*

Number of patrons on April 16 who asked, "When is the last day to file my 2003 tax return?": 5

Number of patrons on April 17 who asked, "When is the last day to file my 2003 tax return?": 1

### *Lost & Found*

Blue gym shorts

One toddler shoe (right foot)

Handwritten poem (untitled)

Black wallet (no cash or identification)

### *Rate Me*

This week the apparent "it" site for kids is [ratingpictures.com](http://ratingpictures.com). This is a curious site that teaches kids how to be shallow. Visitors to the site rate pictures of people based on what they look like. The scale is a one-to-ten format with one being the ugliest and ten being the prettiest. When asked why they spend hours at this site, the most common response was "It's fun." The average age of kids viewing the site was fifth to eighth grade. None of the kids suspected that the pictures were of real, actual people; to them the people were fake, and therefore had no feelings.

### *Series Books*

Total number of available copies of books in the series:

Harry Potter series: 87 (hardback and paperback)

Left Behind for Kids series: 34 (paperback)

Captain Underpants series: 51 (hardback and paperback)

Baby-sitters Club series: 78 (paperback)

Series of Unfortunate Events series: 26 (hardback)

Star Wars series: 43 (paperback)

Magic Tree House series: 69 (hardback and paperback)

Goosebumps series: 19 (paperback)

Mary Kate & Ashley series: 37 (paperback)

# Chapter 6

## Dispatch 6 (5/10/04)

It's not incredibly strange to have an odd thing happen with a patron in the restroom, but to have two in a week... that kind of thing's worthy of an entire dispatch devoted to the bathroom.

### *Patron One*

On Saturday, I was minding my own business when a library clerk came to me and said there were complaints about a patron sleeping in the restroom. "Sleeping in the restroom?" I questioned, believing that somewhere in this short statement there had surely been a misunderstanding. "Sleeping in the restroom," he assured me. I hate being informed of such things, because this means I have to do something about it. I could handle the time I had to tell a man he needed to pull his pants up a little higher because he was exposing himself in such a way that it was offensive to patrons; I could handle telling patrons that they're not allowed to look for pornography on the library computers; I can even keep a straight face when someone asks if we have *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Sex*. But sleeping in the restroom—there was something sacred about the restroom that I hated to disturb. I approached the restroom with a bit of weary caution. Man #1 was using the urinal; Man #2 was sleeping on the floor of stall one (our only stall) with his head resting against the toilet. I left the restroom and told the clerk that, yes, there was indeed a man sleeping on the restroom floor. I knew what his follow-up question would be: "What should we do?" I shrugged, waited for Man #1 to leave the restroom, then entered the restroom once more and said, "Sir, are you okay?" It had not escaped me that Man #2 might have had some sort of freak restroom accident and was thus unconscious. "Yes," was Man #2's reply. I was really hoping he was unconscious and there was thus a reason for his odd behavior that was justifiable. Instead I had to reason that Man #2 was just plain nutty, and I hated having to reason such thoughts about patrons. I thought quickly for what I could say. "You're not

allowed to sleep in the restroom." There was nothing original about this, but it was fast thinking. "Okay," Man #2 said. I had expected some resistance and when none came a part of me was a little disappointed. I left the restroom with that feeling of accomplishment you get when you kick a man out of the restroom for sleeping on the floor, then ran to the front of the library to get a good view of the man when he left the library (he had been behind the stall with the door shut and I could only make out his backside). When Man #2 left, I was surprised to see that this was a regular patron, granted one that was sometimes a little off, but not exactly the type of person I'd take for sleeping on restroom floors.

### *Patron Two*

Patron number two is the man who sang romantic Spanish tunes in the restroom. He came on an otherwise normal Thursday evening about an hour before closing. I was sitting at the information desk looking intently at a blank computer screen when a library page came to me and said, "There's a man in the bathroom who's been in there a really long time." I shrugged and thought to myself that it was a little weird for the library page to be keeping track of how long patrons used the restroom. I said the patron was probably just having a rough go at it, and to let me know if he was still there in thirty minutes. The page nodded and continued, "That's not all. He's singing in Spanish. He keeps flushing the toilet and then singing a new song every time he flushes it. He's flushed the toilet at least ten times since he went in." I asked what songs he was singing. I don't know why I asked what he was singing; I don't think I would have treated the situation differently if he were singing disco or grunge. I suppose I was just curious. The page said he didn't know because they were in Spanish, but they sounded romantic. I nodded and told the page to follow me to the bathroom (it's always a good idea to approach a strange situation in the library with another person who can act as a witness should anything happen that requires police attention). I stood with the page at the restroom door for several minutes listening to the man sing in Spanish. He had a nice voice, although he sang high notes a little off key. "What are you going to do?" the page finally asked me. I shrugged. I was preparing the encounter with the singing restroom man in my head; first I'd ask if everything was okay, then I'd tell him to wrap it up because we were closing the restroom in five minutes. I hated restroom encounters with patrons—there was no way to make them less awkward. I started for the restroom door, but it opened before I went in. A tall Spanish man with a large sombrero on his head exited. He was wearing a

Disneyland T-shirt and faded jeans, and he carried a ceramic cactus (the ones street vendors sell for haggled prices in Tijuana). "Everything okay?" The man smiled and nodded, "Sí." Then he left the library.

*Odd Things Found in the Restroom Sink*

Toothpaste

Half-eaten Snickers bar

Shoelace

Toothpick

Shaving cream

Prom picture

Bundles of hair

# Chapter 7

## Dispatch 7: Summer Movie Edition

Unlike the holiday season, when studios are eager to release movies with somewhat decent plots copied from sometimes decent books, summer movies tend to get their ideas from other movies. There will be, of course, some that come from books, but this does not do a lot for the books' circulation. Here's a rundown of how this summer's books-into-movies are faring as the summer box offices open for business.

*A Slipping-Down Life* by Anne Tyler

1 - Available

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (English) by J. K. Rowling

5 - Available

10 - Checked out

4 - Missing

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Spanish) by J. K. Rowling

3 - Available

1 - Checked out

*The Stepford Wives* by Ira Levin

Not Available

*Around the World in Eighty Days* by Jules Verne

1 - Available

1 - Missing

*A Widow for One Year* by John Irving (inspired the film *The Door in the Floor*)

1 - Available

*The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks

2 - Available

1 - Missing

*I, Robot* by Isaac Asimov

5 - Available

1 - Checked out

*The Bourne Supremacy* by Robert Ludlum

1 - Checked out

*A Home at the End of the World* by Michael Cunningham

Not Available

*Princess in the Spotlight* by Meg Cabot (inspired the film *The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement*)

2 - Available

3 - Checked out

*Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray

1 - Available

*Notable Librarians in Sometimes Notable Films:*

Betty Lou, *The Gun in Betty Lou's Handbag* (played by Penelope Ann Miller)

Bertha Anderson, *Citizen Kane* (played by Georgia Backus)

John Lewis, *Only Two Can Play* (played by Peter Sellers)

Alicia Hull, *Storm Center* (played by Bette Davis)

Lily, *Lily of the Dust* (played by Pola Negri)

*Notable Library Scenes in Sometimes Notable Films:*

*Ghostbusters*—New York Public Library is featured

*Breakfast at Tiffany's*

*Philadelphia*—Furness Building at the University of Pennsylvania is featured

## Dispatch 8: Three Tales of the Internet

### *Tale #1: In Which an Elderly Patron Unintentionally Tries to Destroy a Computer*

Elderly patrons are very sweet people who very frequently bring me food, tell me how much they appreciate the library's presence in the neighborhood, and small-talk about their favorite mysteries and true-crime books. They're pleasant to be around—unless they want to use a computer. I am convinced that grandkids are inherently evil people who tell their grandparents to “just go to the library and open up an e-mail account—it's free and so simple.”

Of course, the free part gets them to the library in swarms, and, of course, they don't want to take part in the library's free Internet classes, because ... well, in the words of one elderly patron, “I don't need a class, because my grandkid said it was simple, and you can just show me the basics.” One such elderly patron came to the library not too long ago with such ideals. Strangely, his trouble was not so much opening an e-mail account as it was using the print card.

Print cards are pesky little things librarians institute for the sake of harassing patrons and discouraging them from printing anything. Often, it works, but this little old man was persistent. I showed him step by step what to do to print, and he was doing pretty well. He seemed to be paying careful attention: he hit the print button like a pro, walked to the print station like a king. Then he screwed up—big time. At the print station, another patron told me some teenagers had just said the “f” word to her five-year-old son and then ran off to the boys' room, where she was pretty sure they were up to no good. I told the elderly gentleman to hang tight and I'd be right back to help him.

I learned in just a short time that expecting him to hang tight was a mistake. When I returned to the man, he looked hopelessly confused. "It didn't work," he explained, frustrated. "And it won't give me my print card back." I walked to the print station and stared for several seconds at the card reader. I studied it from several angles but did not see his card. "You're sure it didn't come out?" I asked. He nodded, but then pointed at his computer. "It's in there."

I looked at the computer, confused. He pointed at the floppy-disk drive and said, "I tried pushing the button, but it still won't come out." I knelt down and immediately saw the print card wedged deep inside the floppy-disk drive. I had seen paper clips, scrap paper, and pencils inside the floppy-disk drive, but this was the first print card.

I went to the workroom to get out some tweezers, and when I returned, the man was gone. I never saw him again.

*Tale #2: In Which a Patron Decides to Record the Internet*

Because I work in a small branch library with only a dozen or so Internet terminals (all of which are very close to where I sit), it has become a habit to do my best to ignore what patrons are viewing, so as to ensure their privacy. Last week, however, I noticed a woman sit down at a computer and pull from her small handbag a video camera. She logged in to her e-mail account, turned on her recorder, and proceeded to record messages that had been sent to her inbox. Using a video camera in a city building without prior consent from the city is not allowed, but I let her do it for a few minutes, more for the sake of personal amusement and curiosity than anything else. Finally, after about five minutes, I became bored watching the woman, so I approached her and explained that she would have to get city approval if she wanted to use her video camera in the library. She rolled her eyes and said, "Well, I was finished anyway." She stuffed her camera back into her bag, looked suspiciously around, and left in a hurry.

*Tale #3: In Which a Patron Has a Little Too Much Fun*

There are different types of Internet users who visit the library. There's the casual user, who uses the library's Internet service perhaps once a month; the regular user, who uses it every day; the college user, who comes to the library only when their school's lab is full; and many other types, which I'll leave out for no real reason.

This final tale involves what I would describe as a regular user. I rarely saw him doing anything on the computer except sending and reading e-mail. He was quiet and never asked for help on the Internet. Then one day, as I was helping a younger patron find a book for his state-report assignment, the man came to me seeking help with printing.

When I got to his computer, I saw a picture of an overweight, fully nude Caucasian woman holding a jar of peanut butter. I told the man that this kind of material went against the library's Internet usage policy. I have had to explain this policy to several patrons who have used the Internet terminals to view pornographic images, and every time, the patron does one of three things: they act embarrassed and apologize for their actions, they nod and quickly leave, or they try to defend their actions by saying that they are a taxpayer and can look at whatever they want to on the computer.

This man, however, explained quite seriously that, "I didn't know you weren't allowed to look at pornography on the Internet." I nodded and pointed at the large sign above the computers, which stated clearly the library's stance on this issue.

The man nodded and asked if he could still print the picture. I said no and added that, because he'd abused the library's policy (a major no-no), he would now be banned from using the Internet. He nodded; then, to my surprise, flipped over a computer printout of a nude woman; and left with no further comment.

I did not bother asking how he was able to print the other picture without help.

# Chapter 9

## Dispatch 9 (7/22/04)

### *Lost & Found*

Butterfinger candy bar (unopened)

Bottled water

Goodnight Moon board book

3 pencils

Plastic wallet with Mickey ears

### *Patron of the Week*

Walter Scott's weekly "Personality Parade" in the "Parade" section of the Sunday paper always reminds me of the library, mainly because it almost always has someone who starts out their question with something along the lines of "Please settle a bet." It's amazing how many information-seeking phone calls libraries receive that start in such a way, and I always enjoy answering them, because it gives me pleasure knowing that someone somewhere has made a quick buck off something I said. Last week, I received such a call from an elderly woman wanting me to settle a bet between her and her son. She wanted to know what countries in Europe the Great Wall of China went through and what was the year Reagan tore it down. When I explained that the Great Wall of China was still mostly intact and that she probably meant the Berlin Wall, she replied coolly, "No, hon, you see, the Berlin Wall is just the part of the wall that goes through Berlin." I put on my best geography-teacher hat to try and explain the Great Wall of China was, in fact, exclusively in Asia. She replied, "I'm pretty sure you're wrong. What would be so great about tearing down a wall in Germany? It's not even that big of a country."

### *Book Drop*

This week someone decided to put all their creative powers to work by dumping dirt into the library's overnight book drop.

# Chapter 10

## Dispatch 10 (8/26/04)

### *Librarian Confessions*

When I tell patrons to lower their voice in the library, I like to say it in a loud voice.

I tell patrons the library is closing in five minutes even though it's closing in ten minutes, just to make them think it's closing so they'll check out their books.

Sometimes I tell parents that their child's library card is showing a fine of \$57.20 when it is actually showing a fine of 20 cents. After their eyes widen, I tell them I was just kidding.

I like to make up stories about people who work at the library. One day, for instance, two young boys were looking for books on wrestlers; I pointed to the man shelving books and said they should talk to him because he is a former pro wrestler. They spent 10 minutes asking him about various wrestlers he had beaten, even though he repeatedly denied that he was a pro wrestler.

When a patron asks what we do with the money we collect from fines, I tell them it's a Christmas slush fund and at the end of the year we buy each other presents.

When a kid asks for the fourth Harry Potter book, I tend to say, "Is that the one where Harry dies? Oh wait, no, that's in the fifth one—my bad."

When the fifth Harry Potter book arrived at the library before it was scheduled to be released to the public, I opened it up and read the first sentence just because I knew I wasn't supposed to.

I am frequently nicer to female patrons than to male patrons.

Sometimes I act like I don't know very much about computers just so I won't have to help a patron on the computer.

When a kid comes to the reference desk and asks, "Where are the books on dinosaurs?," I frequently will point very broadly at the rows of bookshelves and say, "Over there."

In the break room, I frequently complain to other workers about patrons who smell funny.

# Chapter 11

## Dispatch 11 (10/13/04)

*An Interview With Josh, Who Is a Library Page, and Whose Name Has Been Changed*

*What size shoe do you wear?*

11½.

*What's the best kind of shelving shoe?*

Vans.

*What technique do you use to secretly read a book while you're supposed to be shelving?*

There's a section in Juvenile Fiction—JF-L to JF-Z that cannot be seen by the senior clerk unless she is wandering around the library. I get in a squatting-type position in this area and position the book truck in front of me in such a way that it sort of looks like I'm sorting books on the bottom of the truck and not reading.

*Do you remember those two Russian girls that came in that one summer and all the guys were trying to figure out ways to hit on them when they didn't know English?*

Yes.

*If there were a biopic made detailing your life as a page, who would you want to play the role of you?*

I think Adam Sandler would do me justice, but only if it were a drama—his comedic ability is at times lacking.

*What's your favorite area to shelve? Why?*

Depends on my mood. I like videos and paperbacks, because they can be shelved quickly, and bringing back trucks quickly makes the clerks think

I'm productive. If I'm reading what I shelve, then I like the 900 section; I know more about history from shelving in this section than from all the classes I've taken in college.

*What's your least favorite area to shelve? Why?*

398s. They're never in order, and it's hard to read the call numbers, because the spine is usually narrow.

*What are the most common questions you're asked while shelving?*

Mostly where the bathroom is and what time does the library close.

*What's the best way to put books in order? Dewey or LOC? Why?*

Dewey. I don't know why.

*On average, how many book trucks do you shelve in one hour?*

If I'm not careful about making sure the books are in order—about 3. If I'm taking my time, then 1.5.

*Are you jealous or competitive with other pages?*

Only when we're working on the same shift. I try to shelve more than everyone else.

*If you could be any book, what one would you be? Why?*

Probably one of those paperback romances. Lonely, desperate women are always checking them out—it would make me feel hot and wanted.

*What do you think about the library's checkout policy?*

It's OK.

# Chapter 12

## Dispatch 12 (12/6/04)

### *Waking the Dead*

I've heard awkward stories about people who've seen their patrons in an uncomfortable setting. It's never happened to me until quite recently. I was at a funeral. Can you see the writing on the wall? No? Let me elaborate just a bit more. The church where the funeral was being held was only a few blocks from the library I worked at. The church's elementary school had visited the library a handful of times, and I was usually the one that read them stories. After the funeral, as I walked through the parking lot with other mourners, I heard a kid yell from the playground on the opposite side of the parking lot: "Hey, it's the library guy." I've always wondered what it would be like to be a celebrity and not be able to go anywhere without someone shouting your name; I sort of felt like a celebrity at the funeral, and now I know how it feels... awkward—incredibly awkward. I looked at the handful of kids who had gathered together after they heard the child's announcement; they stared at me with curious eyes, and seemed excited that I had stumbled onto their territory. I smiled, waved, and then bowed my head and pretended to be mournful. I hoped the wave would have been mighty enough to silence them. It wasn't. Another child yelled across the parking lot: "What are you doing here, anyway?" I looked around hoping by chance no one else had noticed the scene. Unfortunately, people had. I wasn't about to yell out to the kids, "I'm at a funeral," so I pretended I hadn't heard them and walked quickly to my car.

### *Lost & Found*

Virgin Mobile cell phone (with a sticker picture of a boy who looks curiously similar to the "Mikey Likes It" boy)

Transparent green diskette

Old Navy sweater

Right-footed flip-flop

DVD: *Day After Tomorrow* (no case)  
Tattered copy of *Junie B. Jones Is a Graduation Girl*  
Children's Pokemon wallet (no cash) with ticket stub for *The Incredibles* from the AMC 30 @ The Block of Orange

# Chapter 13

## Dispatch 13 (12/15/04)

### *The Bus Stop Is Near, No?*

Working near Disneyland, I see a lot of people walk into the library from out of town—people visiting the city for the conventions, amusement parks, or (though they certainly won't admit it) the motels with ... hourly rates. Most of these patrons never come in long enough for me to remember their name, but there are exceptions. One such exception was Zelenka, a homely Czechoslovakian, and Veronica, her drop-dead-gorgeous (also Czechoslovakian) friend, who were both working for a hotel for the summer.

Veronica never once came into the library unnoticed; whenever she entered the building, it was like seeing a model do her thing on the fashion runway, putting on a little show for every person in the library (male, female, and even small children). It was fun watching all the desperate old men (who normally were occupied in Internet chat rooms and posting personal ads on dating sites), trying their best to communicate with the Czechoslovakian vixen, who knew little English and really just wanted to check her e-mail. There were even one or two requests for books on learning the Czechoslovakian language. Library pages, in their own attempts to get to know the wondrous lady better, would accidentally tap their book cart against the back of her chair, then apologize and engage in small talk, not seeming to notice that she probably understood only 10 percent at best of what they were saying. Sometimes the pages would say something she understood, and she would smile and joyfully repeat whatever word she had picked up: "Ah, yes, *pancake!*" Then, believing they had established a common connection, they would use the word in every sentence that followed.

I, of course, kept it professional (a hazard of the job being that all librarians must pretend to be boring while working ... except children's librarians, who, I'm pretty sure, take pills to maintain their abnormal

amount of energy and perkiness). I felt a little sorry for Zelenka, who got no attention, but it was her own fault for this—there was no dazzle in her step or charm in her smile, and she had a horrid sense for fashion; to be quite honest her name only comes to mind when thinking of Veronica, but that's beside the point. As their stay progressed and it became certain that they would soon leave for their homeland, the pages made mad attempts to have just one date.

Ultimately, however, it was I—the librarian—who had the last waltz ... though not literally, of course. The library was closing one night and Veronica was the sole patron in the building; I had not seen her companion Zelenka all day. As best as I could tell, she was supposed to have a ride home, but something happened; how anyone could have left such a beauty abandoned at a library in the night is beyond me, but they did, and I knew it would be up to me to protect the damsel in distress from the dangers of Southern California. I used gestures and slow speech to try to tell her that if she stayed outside the library alone she would surely die and that she should let me give her a ride home. And she did. I tried to make her feel safe as we drove; I told her about my country and asked her about hers—it was the same corny small talk I observed patrons using on her in the library. The same corny small talk that she never seemed to understand. She smiled mostly and stared at me confused. Once, she said, "I am Veronica," and another time, "The bus stop is near, no?" but mostly she smiled and said yes to things that didn't exactly warrant an answer. Before taking her home, I had never had any sort of conversation with her; the only thing I'd ever asked her was "How are you today?" and "Would you like to use the Internet?" Now that I had her in my car, and I was asking her less generic questions, she seemed less attractive. Seeing her stare at me confused, as I did my best to make her feel comfortable, made her seem a little ... dumb. I realize this feeling was caused mostly by the language barrier, but nonetheless, I couldn't help but feel as though I'd violated something a little sacred, and had stolen forever that beauty she had once given to me. She was like a store mannequin meant to be adorned but never touched.

When I pulled into the parking space in front of her motel room, I thought of all of the pages and patrons who had dreamed of such a moment—to be here, in front of her room, in the right seat to make a move. They probably would have had pickup lines that she would not have understood, or perhaps tried to charm her with their looks or incoherent

ramblings that passed as humor in English, but there was only one thing I had in mind to say to her. I told her good night. She told me, "I go. The bus stop is near, no?" and then she waved and ran to her room. From that moment on, I did not view her with the same admiration that I had when she first came into the library; all I saw when she came into the building was the friendly woman who had said "I am Veronica" when I asked her, "Do you like California?" I learned an important lesson with Veronica: I realized that some patrons were special, and should never be touched; they were given to the library to be mysterious figures who walked through the doors and were never meant to be known; people who were meant to be recounted through the ages in breakrooms as legends and myths of the library.

# Chapter 14

## Dispatch 14 (12/20/04)

*Reflections on the TNT Original Movie The Librarian: Quest for the Spear Starring That Guy From ER*

When the ALA sends out an e-mail request to librarians to share their thoughts on a movie, you know it's a big deal. I'm not a film critic, so I'm not going to get in your face Ebert-and-Roeper-style; instead, I'll opt to explain this movie from a librarian's POV:

First off, let me say that there was one thing this movie hit dead on—what librarians do. The *ER* guy's actual job description is "the librarian." Throughout the movie, all he does is wander around a basement full of mythological artifacts. But why does the librarian do what he does? Is he supposed to be running around the world trying to protect these artifacts? His job is never really explained, and it's here that there is a similarity between the movie librarian and the real librarian. Do you really know what a real librarian does? I mean do you really think we sit around and order books for eight hours a day? Think about it.

Second, the *ER* guy received a mysterious magical card asking him to interview for the job of librarian. A lot of people probably were wondering about this, so let me explain. This is not the normal procedure for interviewing as a librarian. Usually one finds out about librarian jobs through Internet sites such as [lisjobs.com](http://lisjobs.com), e-mails, librarian message boards, or the classified section in the newspaper. If you want to be a librarian, don't sit around waiting to receive the magical letter—it's just not going to happen that way.

Third, the movie presented a popular cinematic librarian motif: nerdy librarian gets the beautiful girl. Guys, I cannot stress this enough: Don't enter the library field expecting to get beautiful women. It may happen,

but it's probably not going to, because remember, you're a librarian. There just aren't a lot of librarian groupies out there—not beautiful ones, anyway.

Fourth, there was a line in the movie that went something like this:

MALE: That's the librarian?

FEMALE: Don't underestimate him.

While the movie had several false moments, this was not one of them. Don't ever mess with a librarian—we will kill you, grind up your body, then create a cannibalism edition of *Harry Potter* that other librarians will use to teach literacy to flesh-eating tribes in Papua New Guinea. I'm not kidding about this.

Fifth, about 30 seconds into the film, I started wondering whatever happened to that girl who liked the *ER* guy in the second season—did she ever make any movies? About five minutes into the movie, I started thinking about Dr. Green—sure was sad how they had to kill him off, but at least it was tasteful (not like the way he died in *Top Gun*). About 10 minutes into the movie, I started making up movies that the *ER* guy could do with George Clooney—I think they'd do good together, and it would probably help the *ER* guy's career (enough that I might actually start to remember what his name is). About 11 minutes into the movie, I realized I really hadn't been paying very much attention to the movie, and I promised myself I would try harder.

Finally, in the movie, Bob Newhart can magically appear at a moment's notice. Few people know this (mostly just librarians), but he actually can magically appear at a moment's notice. I can't explain how he does this.

# Chapter 15

## Dispatch 15 (2/15/05)

*Corny Library Pickup Lines, and How Librarians Effectively Shoot Them Down*

Pardon me, could you please tell me what kind of card I need to check you out?

*Visa, MasterCard, or American Express.*

You must have been burning books, because you're looking hot. My apologizes—the new Harry Potter is coming out and I was in the back burning the Newbery winners to make room for it.

Can you tell me where I can find books on overcoming a deeply passionate love I have for a librarian?

*636.45 MICH.*

Libraries should allow food in the building, because right now I could just eat you up.

*Policy is policy, but if you'd really like to change that, the appropriate forms are behind you—just drop it in the suggestion box when you're done, and in due time it will be pulled out and set in the loser pile.*

I know what I need to access the Internet, but what do I need to access your heart?

*A life.*

What book would you recommend to help me sweep you off your feet?

*How to Divorce a Jealous Mad Person.*

Can you tell me how to spell love? I'm writing a letter to you.  
*Do you mean the agape love, or the love you have for someone you don't have a chance of ever getting?*

Can you settle a bet? My friend says librarians have no life, but I say they're wild beasts. Can I take you out to dinner and prove my friend wrong?  
*Tell your friend he's right.*

# Chapter 16

## Dispatch 16 (4/8/05)

### *Jeffica*

Giving nicknames to problem patrons is one way to provide humor on the job. It also establishes handy covertlike code-names for people should problems persist. I have nicknamed many patrons over the years—the Red-Faced Man, Mumbles, the Mole, and Potty Mouth, just to name a few. Recently, I developed a new nickname for a patron: Jeffica. Jeffica has a long history with the library. About four years ago, there was a patron named Jeff. He fit perfectly into the she-male category of the human species (which is the category for a person whose appearance could easily be passed off as either male or female; it was made popular by *SNL*'s "It's Pat" skit). Jeff would come to the library two or three times a week and spend hours at a table poring over books. He was usually quiet but would occasionally harass librarians over things like having only one book of poetry by John Donne. Then one day he stopped coming. I didn't realize it immediately; it was several weeks until somebody said, "Say, I haven't see that one guy in a while." After a brief discussion on who "that one guy" was, I realized it was Jeff, and indeed it had been a while. I didn't see Jeff for four years, but last week he started coming in again. There are some patrons you never forget—Jeff is one of them. He had the same routine: he would pore over books for hours at a time, and at one point he complained to me that we didn't have a single book by Ben Jonson. Toward the end of the week, he applied for a new library card because his old one had expired due to lack of use. I was surprised when I read the application—under "Name" he wrote "Jessica." It was odd; he had the chest of Jeff, the voice of Jeff, even the same dress shoes that Jeff used to wear. There was no mistaking it: Jeff was now Jessica.

# Chapter 17

## Dispatch 17 (5/16/05)

### *Lost & Found*

Virgin cell phone with a Hello Kitty sticker

Raincoat

Bottle of aspirin (3 extra-strength pills left)

Wallet with Bart Simpson (empty except for a fake driver's license from Disneyland's Autopia)

Toddler sandal (right foot)

### *Choose Your Battles Wisely*

Old-lady patrons add a unique flavor (and smell) to the library. For the most part, they're either warm and fuzzy or bitter and rude. Either way, it's fun to listen to their rambling theories about life, happiness, and why everyone should read Dick Francis. Libraries, however, wouldn't be quite right if there weren't at least one woman who was loud, crude, and sometimes a little drunk. For me there is Ms. Haskell. I can think of several older patrons I get a kick out of, but I knew Ms. Haskell was special the first day I met her; she asked for the dictionary ... on audiotape. Not an abridged version, or a "500 Power Words Everyone Should Know"—not even a collegiate dictionary would do. She had it all scribbled out on a stained napkin, which she proudly dangled in front of my eyes: "OED Dictionary on audiotape." When I said no, we did not have that, she said, "Well, compact disc will have to do then." That was my first encounter with her, and all the encounters that followed were also about audiotapes. One night, she came in loudly and spent 10 minutes at the circulation desk telling a helpless library clerk what she thought of each of the seven audio books she was returning. When the clerk explained that the library was closed and she would have to leave, she turned toward the audio books to make that night's selection. I saw where she was going and intercepted her. "The library is closed, Ms. Haskell—you'll have to come back tomorrow." She kept on coming, and

said, "Out of my way, honey." She then shoved me out of her way. "I'll be just a second," she said. I think I was more surprised by her strength than the fact that she pushed me. "Did she just push you?" a page quietly asked. "I think she did," I admitted. "Dude, what are you going to do?" I didn't reply. I stared at Ms. Haskell, who had made her selection. "See, honey, that didn't take but a second." I could have forced her to come back and check out the next day, but she would have argued that idea longer than I cared to listen. In a public place like a library, you have to choose your battles wisely. Plus, I was kind of afraid she might push me again and I'd have to fill out an incident report saying a 70-year-old woman physically assaulted me.

# Chapter 18

## Dispatch 18 (6/28/05)

### *Adventures in MySpace*

There's a stereotype about librarian jobs that goes something along the lines of "all librarians ever do is sit around all day and wait for someone to ask for a book." This is simply not the case. For starters, most people don't even know how to read anymore, and the few that do don't come to the library—they're obviously smart, and therefore well off financially, and therefore go to Amazon.com to buy books, which they in turn donate to the library, which the library sells at a book sale, from which proceeds go to buy new computers.

Second of all, librarians do plenty: they buy books, form committees to decide what sort of committees the library needs, type up minutes for those committee meetings, complain about how people can't read anymore and only use the library for free Internet access, burn books to make room for the new Harry Potter (which I'm pretty sure most kids only check out for the illustrations), and if all that isn't enough, librarians also take breaks and lunches. Now occasionally librarians sit behind a desk bored out their minds (but hiding it well), but never for more than seven hours a day. Which brings me to MySpace.com.

MySpace was started a few years back in the proud tradition of other social-networking sites like Friendster.com. My library is full of high-school kids who think MySpace is the greatest thing since Razor scooters—if you're on MySpace, then I'm sure you've run into one or two of them. What does this have to do with my previous point? Well, I'll tell you if you just pipe down. I started a MySpace account recently in an effort to cure my boredom while sitting at the reference desk waiting for someone to ask me where a book was. I figured if high-school kids had so much fun on it, then why couldn't I? Plus, it's my duty as a librarian to be informed about what people are doing at the library.

The first time I logged in to MySpace, I saw a picture of guys kissing, a friend whose profile said she was gay, which was news to me (at least now I know why she never would go out with me, which is better than that "I don't like to leave my cats alone" excuse), and an overweight girl with her legs ... actually I'd really rather not go into what she was doing with her legs—it was actually pretty frightening. I saw many other disturbing things, but I honestly can't say I saw anything very interesting, and yet I stayed for a full hour reading profiles of people that I, for the most part, had never met. I discovered in myself a voyeuristic fetish I never knew I had.

If you are a bored librarian like me, or just a bored person in general, then perhaps we can be friends; my user page is [www.myspace.com/scottdouglas](http://www.myspace.com/scottdouglas). If my profile says that I'm online, then perhaps that even means I'm at work waiting for someone to ask for a book. And if you have an odd or funny library story, or just like libraries, then join [groups.myspace.com/librarylovers](http://groups.myspace.com/librarylovers).

# Chapter 19

## Dispatch 19 (9/6/05)

### *Advice to Future Librarians Entering Graduate School*

Fall is here, which means a new batch of young wannabe librarians will be starting graduate school in just a few days. If you happen to be starting library school, then this dispatch is for you.

Avoid cataloging classes; they will be pointless.

In papers that you write, cite papers your professors have published.

Take an internship or practicum.

Ninety percent of what your teachers teach you is theory that does you no good in the workplace; do your best to forget it after you leave school.

Ask your teacher why a public library uses the Dewey cataloging system as opposed to LOC, then doodle for the next three hours while they explain it.

Buy a laptop and play FreeCell during lectures.

Join ALA. It will make you feel important.

Libraries don't do, librarians do.

Take online classes and have the cheap thrill of going to classes in the buff.

Two weeks working in a library will give you more experience than two years in graduate school.

Gain as much computer knowledge as humanly possible—this will put you ahead of so many other librarians.

Letters to the editor do not count as professional publications and will not impress the instructor.

I am sorry to say that you may find your stay in graduate school to be not very stimulating and quite a yawn, but the job that follows is quite the contrary.

If you ever want to vent your frustrations or need moral support, then by all means e-mail me.

# Chapter 20

## Dispatch 20 (11/3/05)

I think the first clue that the man was going to be a problem was when he said to me, "I want to know who took my generator—was it you?" This was actually the first thing he said to me. It wasn't just what he said or even the hostile way that he said it that made me know that this was going to be one of the conversations they didn't teach you how to handle in library school—it was everything about him. The way he moved, or rather fidgeted, told me right away that he had had the sort of breakfast that destroys brain cells.

I had never seen the man, but I knew right away who he was. The previous night we'd discovered that some people had been stashing their belongings behind the air-conditioning unit in back of the library. A polite note was left saying that if they didn't remove the items, the library would have to remove them for them. It was nothing personal—for liability reasons, people just can't do this.

I checked the back of the library to make sure everything was gone—it was—so I figured the problem had been solved.

It hadn't.

"It isn't right—that generator cost me 300 bucks, and someone is going to pay."

I apologized to the man and explained, "The library can't be responsible for belongings left behind."

The man became more agitated. "Then you know—you know where it was hidden. It was you. You took my generator."

I shook my head no and explained, "I saw it last night, and know a note was left for its owner to remove it from the property."

The man's eyes got bigger. He crossed his arms and nodded a bit psychotically, "I know your kind—don't think I don't. You think just because you have a job you can take from me." He paused and continued in a threatening way, "You're either going to give me back my generator or pay me. Otherwise, I'll call the police."

Even if the man had not appeared to be on drugs, I think I still would have been a little nervous—he wasn't bigger than me, but his appearance suggested the sort of man who liked to keep a knife in his pocket. Still, I did my best to hide any fear, and calmly explained, "Sir, I assure you that I did not take your generator. Maybe you should call the police and report it as stolen." I knew that he wouldn't call them, but I could always hope.

"Oh, don't think that I won't." He paused, then asked, insanely curious, "Where is your car parked?"

Plenty of patrons had asked me strange things, but this was the first who asked me where my car was parked. It was almost comical to look at the man, because he actually thought I was going to tell him. I struggled to come up with a reply, but the best I could muster was, "That's personal." What I meant to say was, "Sir, the fact that I work in a public library doesn't make me stupid, it just makes me poor. There's no way I'm going to tell you—a psychotic person who could very well have a knife in his pocket—where I have parked my car."

The man stood straighter, and actually, in his straightness, began to look even crazier. "It's in the parking lot, isn't it?"

*So now the man thinks he's Sherlock Holmes, I thought, amused. A car parked in a parking lot—who would have ever guessed!*

I didn't answer his question, which apparently was the answer the man was looking for. "I knew it—I'll find it. Don't think that I won't. And I bet that generator's in the trunk."

He left the library, but didn't leave the premises. I sent a co-worker out a few minutes later, who told me he was riding a bike in circles around the parking lot.

I don't think he found his generator, but, lucky for me, he got tired of looking for my car after two hours and left in time for me to go home.

# Chapter 21

## Dispatch 21 (3/2/06)

*FAQ: Library-Related Questions You Always Wanted to Ask but Never Had the Nerve*

*I want to check out the Kama Sutra, but I don't want the librarian who checks out the book to me to think I'm some kind of pervert. Do you think people are perverts when they check out those kinds of books?*

To be honest, the librarians checking out books frequently don't pay an incredible amount of attention to what they're checking out unless the person brings attention to themselves. For instance, I was checking out a book on abortion to a teenager once. The teen, who was a male, told me, "I'm not going to have an abortion or anything—it's for a report." I had not noticed he was checking out a book on abortion until he told me. If you're still paranoid, here are some tips: Don't wear bright clothing that makes you appear strange, because people are always interested in seeing what strange people are reading. Make casual conversation, so the person checking out the book isn't paying attention to what you're checking out. And, finally, hide the book in between some less embarrassing reading material (e.g., Tom Clancy, John Grisham, or Mary Higgins Clark).

*A librarian bent over to retrieve a book on the bottom of the bookshelf, and ... farted. I had to really control myself from not laughing hysterically, and ended up running off so the librarian didn't see me laughing. Was this the appropriate course of action?*

Laughter is always the best medicine. The librarian had no trouble holding in what they were feeling, so why should you?

*Why can't I look at porn in the library? Isn't it my right as a citizen?*

Look at yourself in the mirror. You're a disgusting creature if you honestly get some kind of kick from looking at nudies in a place full of

women, children, and—let's not forget—librarians. Have some decency, you freak.

*Have you ever had a government agent tell you to hand over a patron's record?*

No.

*If a librarian is mean to me and I call him/her on it, will he/she put fines on my record and make my life miserable?*

Librarians fantasize about doing such things, but to actually do so would go against the code. If a librarian breaks the librarian code, the head librarian (the same one who created J.K. Rowling) will have no choice but to kill the librarian in question Agatha Christie-style.

*Does the librarian like me?*

Probably not. It's nothing personal. Librarians aren't usually into people who spend time going to a library. Besides, are you really attracted to the librarian, or are you just attracted to the fact that they work at a library?

*I saw a librarian who was wrong. Should I tell him/her they are wrong?*

Absolutely not. You'd only end up embarrassing yourself. Librarians are never wrong—they know everything. If they say  $1+1=3$ , then they're right. In fact,  $1+1$  does equal 3; we only say 2 because many, many years ago someone asked a librarian what  $1+1$  equaled and the librarian said 2. It was the right answer then, but not anymore, because librarians have since concluded that the new answer is 3. Go ahead, tell your math teachers they're wrong.

*Do librarians drink, dance, and do things normal people would consider fun?*

Some do.

*Do you?*

I'm the designated driver. I did have a sip of wine at a wedding once when I was 11, however, but I spit it out. But boy, did it give me a buzz.

*Why are librarians so serious?*

It's just the mask we wear to intimidate people so they won't ask us questions. We hate showing off how smart we are.

*If librarians are so smart, why do they have to go to school to be librarians?*

It is true that librarians are naturally smart, but people won't believe this unless they see the sacred master's degree attached to their résumé.

*Is it true that they're making a sequel to The Librarian: Quest for the Spear?*

Sadly, yes.

*Will you watch it?*

Sadly, yes.

*What's a good April Fool's joke to play on someone who works at the library?*

A fine question. To play the best joke, you really need to work at a library or know someone who does. One excellent gag is to find someone who works at the library and has a teenage daughter, pull up the daughter's record, and reserve a half-dozen books on subjects like teen pregnancy, what to expect when you're expecting, and a book of what to name your newborn child. When the books arrive, show them to co-workers and spread nasty rumors. At the end of the day, tell the person that their daughter's books have arrived. Wait a day before you tell them it was a joke. If that's too mean, here's another good one: Most databases allow you to insert a note field in the patron's record where you can write messages to alert other workers if a patron was rude to you, lied to you, smelled like urine, etc. The purpose of this field is to keep track of a patron who isn't paying fines or has some sort of other repeating offense, but that doesn't mean you can't have a little fun with it. So, find a loyal friend who has a library card and put a note in his account that says something like, "If patron is wearing a red T-shirt and a Disney hat, he may try to kill you. If he asks you how many books he can check out, he is about to go crazy. Alert police immediately." Give your friend a red shirt and a Disney hat, tell him to go into the library, check out a book, and ask how many books he can check out. When the police arrive, tell him it was just a joke.

# Chapter 22

## Dispatch 22 (5/17/06)

### *Fun With Cutters*

I've always had the utmost esteem for Melvil Dewey—for his professional tendencies, that is, and not for his political views (he ardently approved of segregation and opposed women's rights)—and the classification system he crafted. How can you not admire a man who began working on a classification system at the age of 23, and started a magazine (*Library Journal*) and co-founded a professional organization (the American Library Association) at the age of 25? But there is one thing I've always hated the guy for: cutter numbers. (If a book's call number is 833.912 M31, then the cutter number would be "M31.") To be fair, good ol' Dewey didn't come up with this scheme of funky-looking numbers. (It was actually thought up by Charles Cutter, but it seems more fitting to blame it on Dewey, because who's actually heard of Cutter?)

As a library page, I always looked at the numbers and wondered where they came from; they seemed to make no logical sense, though I later learned that they actually follow a complicated system that most librarians don't even understand or know about. Fortunately, many public libraries (though few academic ones) are doing away with these cutter numbers, favoring instead the use of the author's last name and, sometimes, the year the book was published. It's not as accurate, but at least it's not confusing. For those who are stuck with searching book stacks full of those irritating cutter numbers, below is a field guide to make them a little less confusing.

In fiction, you might see several books that look something like this:

V584a

V584c

V584e

What does that mean? In this case, the "V" would be the first letter of the author's last name; the "584" would also refer, in coded fashion, to the author's name; and the "a," "c," and "e" would each refer to the title of the book. The purpose of this sort of cutter is to help a page shelve a book by author in alphabetical order according to the book's title.

Apparently, library pages are too stupid to read the title on the spine, so they need a confusing number to help them sort things out.

Now here comes something really fun. What if there is a book of criticism to accompany that book of fiction? That would look a little something like this:

G832Z-T54

Why? In this case, "G832" would represent the name of the fiction author whose work is being written about; "Z" would mean it's a work of criticism (make sure it's a capital Z or it might get a little embarrassing); and, finally, the "T54" would refer to the last name of the author of the book of criticism. One thing to point out, however: "G832" would actually be a work by John Grisham, which is quite ridiculous, because who writes criticism on that guy? As a sad side note, there are in fact books of criticism about that guy, and some have compared him to Dostoyevsky.

Sometimes you see a number sequence that goes something like this:

158.86-S16a

158.86-S168b

158.86-S17e

It makes logical sense that 168 is a greater number than 17, so why would you shelve 168 first? Because a librarian is always right. To the common man, this looks wrong, but to the librarian, this is right, because a librarian is never wrong. The more proper excuse they'll give is that cutter numbers are not read as a whole number; instead, they're read digit by digit. Sound dumb? It is.

I won't go into how to make your own cutter number, but if you're interested you can purchase the table here: [www.cuttertables.com](http://www.cuttertables.com)

And to all you catalogers out there who feel I have insulted you with this simplified version of your sacred cutter system, please, no nasty e-mails.

# Chapter 23

## Dispatch 23 (8/14/06)

When I first began these dispatches, I hinted that perhaps there might be observations about other libraries. Thus far I have done a bad job of this. Until now. Not long ago I came across a copy of the rules for a Paris library circa 1300. If you have always been curious about what libraries were like in Paris circa 1300, time-travel with me and read these rules of library conduct, which, if nothing else, will make you appreciate modern libraries a little more:

1. Robes and caps required.
2. No children or illiterates admitted.
3. Respectable learned men may enter if introduced by a member; their "valets" must remain outside.
4. Each member keeps his own key and loans it to no one.
5. Neither fire nor light permitted at any time.
6. No books issued without the permission of the society.
7. A book should be laid upon a desk only after the dust has been removed.
8. No writing in or other abuse of a book.
9. Whether writing or reading, no bothering of others by talking or walking.
10. Maximum silence, as would be appropriate to premises "sacred and august."
11. Condemned books are available to professors of theology only—for use in line of duty only.
12. The professor is not to read such works for curiosity, lest he be poisoned.
13. Violators of that restraint are to be reprimanded.

# Chapter 24

## Dispatch 24 (10/23/06)

I've seen bored librarians do everything from play FreeCell to read a book. I typically go to Wikipedia. When I visit the site on work time, I feel like I'm educating myself, which will help library patrons in the long run. It helps me feel not so guilty for getting paid over \$20 an hour for essentially doing nothing. Plus, it makes me look busy.

At some point in my infinite bored searches, I find myself reading about Casanova and I dream that one day I will join his ranks as the greatest librarian who ever lived. Sure, there are those who argue that there were other librarians who contributed more to the profession (people like Charles Cutter, Mary Fairchild, John Beckley, and Zenodotus ... people I'm sure most have never even heard of), or people who are more well known for having been librarians (people like Beverly Cleary, Madeleine L'Engle, Jorge Luis Borges, or Lewis Carroll). But when I think of famous librarians, I don't think of any of those people; I think of Casanova, because he makes the whole profession seem sexy. In truth, Casanova didn't really like being a librarian and didn't contribute anything to the profession. Still, he is the only librarian to have Heath Ledger play him in a movie, which has to count for something.

In my effort to become the greatest librarian since Casanova, I am enlisting the help of my fellow readers. I'm asking you all to please go to Wikipedia.org, type in "Scott Douglas," and invent my life. Tell the truth, tell a half-truth, tell what you think might be truth ... just make me look good. If that means saying I'm rumored to be courting Jessica Alba or, heck, even a Brokeback cowboy, then by all means say it. If Stephen Colbert can get people to write an entire Wiki entry on a word that didn't even exist until he said it, then surely you can do this. Many of you are probably reading this at work, and have nothing better to do, so here's an assignment to cure your boredom. And, if you are really bored, you

can go one step further and add an entry for the word I use to describe boredom at the reference desk: *referbored*.

Here are some of the Wiki topics/people I've read up on: Mills Ends Park, Micronation, the Principality of Sealand, D'oh!, Bill Gates's House, Weird Al, Death Erection, Dipendra of Nepal, John Wilmot (Second Earl of Rochester), Ilya Bryzgalov, Ed Gein, the Invisibles.

# Chapter 25

## Dispatch 25 (2/28/07)

### *Troubleshooting Library Computer Problems*

Problem: The USB won't go in.  
Solution: Take off the cap.

Problem: I don't see the cursor.  
Solution: Turn on the computer.

Problem 1.0: I need to e-mail this document.  
Solution 1.0: Open up your e-mail and send it as an attachment.

Problem 1.1: I don't have e-mail ... I just need to send it to them. Can't I do that?  
Solution 1.1: No.

Problem: I have a 100-page document that I need to print, but I have my own paper, so why do I still have to pay?  
Solution: Because trees can be cut down for free by some guy hoping to destroy the Amazon rainforest. Ink takes a little more effort.

Problem: The numbers won't type.  
Solution: Push down on the number-lock key.

Problem: The keyboard doesn't have elfish characters.  
Solution: Freak.

Problem: I cannot play Pogo.  
Solution: Have you tried a dating service? There really are better things to do with your time; sure, you're ugly, but there has to be someone desperate enough.

Problem: Where's the "any" key?

Solution: Type the following: I-D-I-O-T.

Problem: Your library won't let me into my Yahoo! mail.

Solution: Try typing it Y-A-H-O-O, not Y-A-H-O-A.

Problem: This ad tells me I have won an iPod Nano.

Solution: Go for the gold, and give them your Social Security number to claim your prize.

# Chapter 26

## Dispatch 26 (11/12/07)

I had mixed feelings when my manager asked me to go to the CLA (California Library Association) conference in Long Beach. I hate conferences because I hate people, but this wasn't just a library conference; this was the mother of all library conferences—only ALA's annual conference could top it.

For readers wondering what happens at a library conference (hint: there are no workshops on shushing people), I have created a detailed diary of my day below.

-----

**8:30 a.m.** I decide to be environmental and ride public transportation halfway. The station is in Compton.

**8:38 a.m.** On train. Realize it's probably not the smartest idea to be a white guy on a train in Compton. Begin to consider whom I will text first when I am mugged and beaten.

**8:39 a.m.** Remember that when I am mugged and beaten they will likely take my phone, so I don't really need to worry about whom I will text first.

**8:43 a.m.** I didn't know Rosa Parks had her own metro station. I wonder if she ever got a car. Make a mental note to Google this later.

**8:58 a.m.** Arrive in Long Beach. Acres of Books is walking distance from the convention center. Now I have somewhere to go when I sneak out early.

**9:10 a.m.** I got off a stop too early.

**9:15 a.m.** I haven't used a public restroom since that whole senator scandal. I'm being extra careful. I have an eerie feeling the guy next to me is going to try and play footsies.

**9:21 a.m.** Realize the first workshop is at 10:30, not 9 o'clock. Great.

**9:28 a.m.** So bored.

**10:33 a.m.** First workshop is underway. It's on Web 2.0. I hate that term.

**10:36 a.m.** Why do so many of the female librarians at this workshop look like men?

**10:38 a.m.** First person leaves. I am in the clear! Now I can leave and it won't be weird.

**10:41 a.m.** I really want to leave but I don't want it to be weird.

**10:42 a.m.** Decide to stay. People will stare if I leave, and I just don't have that kind of courage.

**11:01 a.m.** The second half of this lecture is *so* boring! Everyone is leaving. It wouldn't be weird or awkward now—everyone else is doing it.

**11:02 a.m.** It would be weird. I stay.

**10:05 a.m.** Please be almost over!

**11:40 a.m.** Lunch at Islands. Try to have a professional discussion.

**12:10 p.m.** Walk to the bay.

**12:25 p.m.** My impression of Long Beach? Where are all the long beaches?

**1:42 p.m.** Visit the job fair. After seeing the tables of various employers, consider the humor of being paid to look at the job booths of other employers. I hope no one saw me.

**1:57 p.m.** Why is it that every conference I go to has at least one guy wandering around like a lost European backpacker who hasn't slept or showered in days? Seriously, who takes a hiking backpack to a library conference?

**2:09 p.m.** Librarians are quite tacky. I've heard one loudly, and unapologetically, fart. Another picked his nose, and then seemed to admire the size of the booger. And, most pathetically, I saw a librarian at lunch crawling on the ground for food that fell (which he ate).

**2:17 p.m.** Next workshop is presented by a guy who claims to be a futurist. Futurist! It sounds like someone who didn't quite make it as a prophet.

**2:19 p.m.** This guy is sure proud of himself. Lecture summed up in one sentence: Be prepared for the future.

**2:20 p.m.** Look around the room and wonder if anyone actually pays the \$200 for this thing.

**2:43 p.m.** He seems to be very passionate about something, but I'm not paying attention, so I don't know what—must be inspiring, though. I'd like to pay attention, but I just remembered I still haven't watched the sequel to *Librarian: Quest for the Spear*—I'm really distracted by the thought.

**2:46 p.m.** Who would really know if I left early?

**2:47 p.m.** Someone would know.

**2:48 p.m.** I was kind of hoping the guy would talk more about gadgets of the future and not how bleak the library's future might be.

**3:40 p.m.** I am never going to get those hours back.

**3:51 p.m.** The next lecture is about wikis. It's the same stuff I heard in the morning.

**4:40 p.m.** They lost me at hello.

**5:01 p.m.** Finally going home!

Note: Some times and places have been changed, staggered, and/or exaggerated so as to make people believe that I did not sneak out early.

*For a photo diary of my trip to the CLA conference, visit [speak-quietly.blogspot.com](http://speak-quietly.blogspot.com).*

# Chapter 27

## Dispatch 27 (12/12/07)

### *Patron of the Week*

Some patrons you can just tell are going to be crazy. Clemens, a homeless man in drag who came into the library this week, saved me from guessing and told me right when he walked in: "My name's Clemens. I'm crazy and want to use a computer." To seal the deal, he extended his hand to shake.

If I'd been anywhere but the library, I would have shaken his hand and wondered what exactly he meant by "I'm crazy." At the library, however, saying you're crazy simply means you belong. What I couldn't, however, shake from my mind as I shook his hand was how exactly a homeless man in drag got the name Clemens.

As I signed him up for the Internet, he proudly explained, "I'm just visiting. I'm from hell." I thought about asking about the weather this time of year, but didn't want to extend the conversation any longer. "I'm from an artist community of hell called Los Angeles," he explained further. "I had a wild night last night. I got drunk, took some magic pills, and ended up in a prison down here. They just let me out. I probably should get an HIV test, because I'm pretty sure I screwed more than one person, and possibly a camel—but that might have just been the pills talking."

The man had just openly confessed that he might have had sex with a camel, and I didn't know what to say, so I said the first thing on my mind, "You can use computer No. 10."

He nodded, and then asked, "Can you tell me the name of the site that has pictures of every single person, dead or alive, and you can see them from every possible angle?" I almost directed him to the Homeland

Security website, but instead went the easy route and just said I didn't know what he was talking about.

For the next 30 minutes, the man sat in front of the computer but didn't actually use it. Instead, he watched everyone who walked by, and talked to anyone who would listen. After 30 minutes, he came to the desk once more and wanted directions back to Los Angeles on the bus. He didn't care what part of L.A.—any part of the city would do.

When he left, I smiled, and kind of hoped he would come back. A little bit of crazy is nice sometimes.

*Lost & Found*

Camouflage Batman hat

Spelling book (level 2)

Organic-yogurt container (empty)

Rubber ball (flattened)

*Jurassic Park* sports bottle

CD wallet (containing approximately 24 CDs, all classical except for one: Céline Dion)

# Chapter 28

## Dispatch 28 (3/3/08)

*U.S. News & World Report* recently selected librarian as one of the best careers for 2008. Were they right? I suppose it depends on whom you ask, but to help you decide I have compiled an objective list of the top reasons to be (or not to be) a librarian.

### *Ten reasons to be a librarian*

You totally get to classify things.

Where else are you going to ruin a person's day over a 20-cent fine?

The funky glasses make you easily mistaken for a hipster.

You can make up whatever you want and people will believe you just because you're a librarian.

You get first dibs on unclaimed items in the lost-and-found box.

You get to be in charge of buying furniture that is least likely to show a piss stain.

Playing Scrabble on the Internet can be considered "professional development."

The most stressful thing that happens is arguing with people over why they cannot view their favorite pornography website.

Get to spend two hours designing a sign that says the library will be closed for the holidays.

No one says anything when you fall asleep during a meeting.

*Ten reasons not to be a librarian*

Who wants to go to grad school for two years to learn theory you will never use?

Those little punk teenagers on skateboards.

People kind of expect you to know things.

If you know enough about how to find information to be a good librarian, you can definitely make more money doing something else.

People automatically assume that you have some weird fetish for cats.

People expect you to help them find things when you are not working just because you know how.

Some people think you are weird because you classify things in your house—like clothes and dishes.

Writing library policy can be about as fun as watching paint dry.

Every great idea you have is likely to get shot down as soon as someone says, "Let's form a committee to decide things."

At some point in your career, someone will, or will try to, physically assault you over something incredibly lame (like not giving him or her more time on the Internet).

# Chapter 29

## Dispatch 29 (5/27/08)

### *The Firemen*

I don't like calling 911. It makes a part of me feel like I can't handle situations. The only thing worse than calling 911 is calling 911 twice in one night.

### *Call No. 1*

A young patron reported a man on the floor in the restroom twitching. I investigated the restroom and saw there was indeed a man on the ground twitching with his shoes and socks off. He was not responsive. 911 was called, and firemen were immediately sent out. Female staff were alerted so they could primp themselves on account of firemen being in the building. Firemen went in the restroom, asked the man what was going on, and he explained he was just changing his socks. The man left quickly and refused examinations from the firemen.

### *Call No. 2*

When the page reported to me that a woman was sleeping and would not wake up, I was not alarmed. Some people are just deep sleepers. When I saw who the woman was (a regular who was known for wandering around the library mumbling incoherently), I figured she was just trying to avoid being asked to leave. I yelled that the library was closing and she would need to leave ... she didn't wake up; I banged on the chair and window next to her ... she didn't wake up; I nudged her leg ... she didn't wake up. I did all that I could for the woman, so I decided it was time to call 911.

I explained to the dispatcher that the woman was breathing but would not wake up. I added that her position may indicate that she'd had a stroke.

Female staff were alerted so they could primp themselves on account of the firemen being in the building.

The firemen arrived promptly and spent five minutes trying to wake the woman up. When she finally rose, she seemed a bit surprised at all the men surrounding her. She smiled, and appeared to be flirting. The firemen told her they wanted to take her to the hospital to get checked out, but she declined. She abruptly stood, straightened her shirt, wiped away the drool, and said she would be fine walking home.

She left the men and went outside the library for a smoke.

I was a bit disappointed. I wished neither of the patrons anything bad ... just that at least one of them would be taken away, so I didn't look like just a troublemaking librarian.

# Chapter 30

## Dispatch 30 (8/19/08)

### *The Library Brawl*

I've seen my share of fights in the library. Normally, it's sweaty spoiled kids involved in some sort of pushing match because of the comment So-and-So left on a MySpace page; occasionally, it's a bit more ridiculous and involves looking at someone the wrong way. But they are kids full of angst, and really I can do nothing more than laugh and wish I would have used my cell-phone camera to film it so I could put it on YouTube. But when two large adult women with children started going at it I had a hard time laughing it off, because that kind of stuff should be strictly kept caged on the set of *Jerry Springer*.

Regardless of how I felt about the scene, I am a librarian, and, though it is not in my job description, I must do my best to keep order. Upon arriving at the fracas, I was met by another peacekeeping librarian. The two large women were in each other's faces. I said something along the lines of "Ladies, let's please break it up." The other librarian took a much more passionate approach, saying, "Don't do this in front of your children." He made the better point, in retrospect, but, alas, it didn't matter, because neither woman heard us. They were too caught up in each other's faces to know that other people were talking.

I suspected it would be just angry talk mixed with the occasional swear word, but it got a bit more hostile when the slightly larger woman said, "Go ahead and hit me—I'm pregnant." I'm not sure what's worse—the fact that a pregnant woman was egging an angry woman into a brawl, or the fact that the angry woman actually did it. (Well, not a hit exactly, but a shove that heightened the entire ordeal.)

It was the shove heard around the library, because right after that a circle formed around the angry women; patrons came from all corners of the library to watch. Their eyes cried for fight. I expected the behavior

from teens, but adults? They were supposed to be helping us out, encouraging the women to break it up.

It all seemed to be in slow motion now. One woman was on her cell phone describing the scene to a friend, one of the women's children was begging his mother to stop, another librarian looked on hopelessly, and teens by the dozens were laughing the whole thing up.

I was certain someone had to be filming it for YouTube; it would be an Internet sensation: Brawl in the Library! If teens going at it got millions of hits, I could only imagine what adults (in a library, of all places) would get. I looked over the crowd to be certain 911 was being called, and I could see a third librarian doing his best to explain to the police dispatcher that, yes, two grown women were brawling in the library.

Pushing continued. Both women threatened to take it outside, as if it really made a difference where they fought. I found all of this a bit humorous—you can yell, swear, and push in the library, but fists could not come out unless you were outside. I did not dwell on the oddness of this then. Instead, I continued with the other librarian to try to get through to the women. I knew it wouldn't work, but I also knew that we had to at least make it seem like we were trying.

The pushing escalated until they were near the library's exit, and then, almost poetically, it stopped. Both women took a step back. We talked one woman into going into another part of the library to cool down, while the other woman stayed near the front.

Police arrived 10 minutes after the pushing fight. There was nothing more for me to do, so I went to dinner. Upon my return, I learned that absolutely nothing happened. Both women went home after explaining their story to the police. It was a good story, certainly worthy of a fight in front of their children. What was it? Well, in the line of people waiting to check out books, one woman cut in front of the other woman.

# Chapter 31

## Dispatch 31 (2/10/09)

### *People Who Come Into the Library That I Try to Avoid*

The young woman who mumbles that she is possessed by Satan and only he can take away her pain.

The guy with slimy hands who always wants to shake hands.

The man who says people keep touching him and that I need to do a better job of watching out for these people.

The woman who likes to call employees on the phone and talk dirty.

The man who calls asking for the "non-1-800" number for a company he saw on a TV infomercial.

The man who destroys a hardback book and then insists on replacing it with a paperback on a completely different subject.

The woman who brings in a list of 20 books and wants to reserve all of them but doesn't know how to use a computer.

The man who complains about the restroom not meeting his expectations.

The man who wants to sell the library air filters.

The woman who demands one-on-one computer instruction for her hour computer session.

The man who complains that people are watching what he writes in his e-mail.

The man who's convinced that the Mafia has infiltrated the local 7-Eleven.

# Chapter 32

## Dispatch 32 (6/12/09)

### *The Librarian: A Twitter Story*

Did final library sweep. It's empty and quiet. I miss the chaos already.  
*about 1 minute ago from web*

When people ask what I do at work, I can tell them I help mentally challenged people stalk celebrities. How can I not like this job?

*about 3 minutes ago from web*

A mentally challenged man just asked me for Ozzie Osbourne's mailing address.

*about 4 minutes ago from web*

I love the sound of computers shutting down at night.

*about 7 minutes ago from web*

Man wants to know where the VHS movies are. I can't believe people still have VHS.

*about 11 minutes ago from web*

Why are teenage girls so excited to read *A Child Called It*?

*about 13 minutes ago from web*

Man comes to desk to show me the book he found on the book sale shelf. He's so excited for the find. Says he'll sell it on eBay.

*about 16 minutes ago from web*

Diana never texts back; apparently she's not impressed with the observation.

*about 23 minutes ago from web*

Text Diana to tell her about the smell.

*about 25 minutes ago from web*

I think a man sprayed down the stall with cheap cologne to cover up the smell of his crap; it's hard to say which smells worse.

*about 26 minutes ago from web*

After I leave the computer room, a man runs to me and complains the men's room is out of toilet paper.

*about 29 minutes ago from web*

Page brags about all the things he is doing in college. Makes me feel both old and sad.

*about 30 minutes ago from web*

Battery on man's computer dies, and he has no choice but to leave.

*about 45 minutes ago from web*

Man doesn't want to leave. I tell man the class is over. He's trying to avoid leaving because he wants to watch the end of a YouTube video.

*about 47 minutes ago from web*

Help man find the image on a Nevada state quarter. He tells me it's the best class he's ever been to.

*about 52 minutes ago from web*

Man tells me at the end of class that he is sad because I didn't cover what he came here to learn: what image is on Nevada's quarter.

*about 53 minutes ago from web*

Proud grandpa blurts out, "Limewire! That's what my grandson uses!"

*about 1 hour ago from web*

Woman tells class they don't have to buy music/movies, because there's a free program called Limewire. Her son told her it wasn't illegal.

*about 1 hour ago from web*

Weird question #2: Is it possible to find a friend's social security number on the Internet?

*about 2 hours ago from web*

Man says computer turned off and he didn't do anything. Later admits he pushed the power button because he wanted to see what it would do.

*about 2 hours ago from web*

Guy mentions smart grandson again ... I'm pretty sure the grandson is illegally downloading computer programs; I don't tell man this.

*about 2 hours ago from web*

Weird question #1: Is it true the government keeps track of your e-mail to see if you don't pay taxes?

*about 2 hours ago from web*

Took five minutes, but one guy got in a "grandson is so computer smart" comment. Now the weird questions...

*about 2 hours ago from web*

I just know at least one person is going to mention their grandson. Guarantee it.

*about 2 hours ago from web*

About to start the class. About 20 people. Half look like beginners. At least two will definitely ask weird questions.

*about 2 hours ago from web*

I love this class ... people are always amazed by everything I show them. It's all new to them.

*about 2 hours ago from web*

Look at schedule to see what class I'm supposed to be teaching tonight. It's computer basics.

*about 2 hours ago from web*

Setting up room for computer class. I hate when people knock on the door and ask when the 6:30 computer class starts.

*about 2 hours ago from web*

Leaving for lunch.

*about 3 hours ago from web*

Half my time in this room is spent telling kids not to run. What is so appealing about running in a library?

*about 3 hours ago from web*

Find thirty-page book; mother asks if I'm sure there's nothing shorter.

*about 3 hours ago from web*

Mother asks for help finding the shortest book on her son's reading list.

*about 3 hours ago from web*

See boy leaving the library. I can't believe he's not taking me up on the airplane contest challenge.

*about 3 hours ago from web*

Boy wants book on how to make paper airplanes. I challenge him to a paper airplane contest.

*about 3 hours ago from web*

Man asks about the computer class. I forgot I was teaching a computer class tonight ... that usually makes the night go by quicker.

*about 3 hours ago from web*

Less than one hour until my dinner break.

*about 3 hours ago from web*

Two boys stand sadly near the computer room, waiting for story time to be over so they can play Internet games again.

*about 3 hours ago from web*

Small girl proudly shows me the crafts she made, and asks her mother if she gets to come to story time next week.

*about 4 hours ago from web*

Storyteller looks so tired. I'm glad I don't have to read stories anymore.

*about 4 hours ago from web*

Kids have started doing a craft in the middle of the kid's room.

*about 4 hours ago from web*

Girl asks for *Super Diaper Baby*. I thought she said *Supreme Killer Baby*.  
*about 4 hours ago from web*

I can't believe how many kids want to read *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*.  
*about 4 hours ago from web*

Hardly anyone ever comes to the desk during story time. I like this part of the day.

*about 5 hours ago from web*

Story time is starting. "Happy and We You Know It" is playing. I hate that song.

*about 5 hours ago from web*

Mother complains that she can't get on her MySpace page on the kids' computer. She's upset that it's only available on adult computers.

*about 5 hours ago from web*

Small boy is crying that his mom left him. Find mother checking out books. She yells at him for getting lost.

*about 5 hours ago from web*

Turns out it was sink water. Take boy to mother, who is on the adult side using Internet. Seems upset that I've bothered her.

*about 5 hours ago from web*

Child complains that a kid keeps splashing him with toilet water in the bathroom.

*about 5 hours ago from web*

Man wanders into the kids' room. Asked if he has a kid in the room, he says, "No. I'm just looking." Kicked him out.

*about 5 hours ago from web*

Patron wants help finding two books on kangaroos that add up to exactly 100 pages.

*about 6 hours ago from web*

Patron needs a 100-page book on kangaroos for his daughter. Show him some that comes close to 100 pages.

*about 6 hours ago from web*

Switch to kids' information desk.

*about 6 hours ago from web*

I don't like breaking up fights. One day one of those little punks are going to stab me.

*about 6 hours ago from web*

Fight didn't transpire. It appeared to be over an older guy with a tattoo on his head who was amused by the arguing.

*about 6 hours ago from web*

Patron just complained that two girls are about to fight in the park.  
This could be interesting.

*about 6 hours ago from web*

Staring blankly at the clock on the wall.

*about 6 hours ago from web*

Received a phone call asking if you needed a library card to check out books.

*about 6 hours ago from web*

Boy complains that vending machine took his money, but didn't give him candy. It's always taking money from kids.

*about 6 hours ago from web*

The find-a-job computer always entices me this time of day.

*about 6 hours ago from web*

The quiet room does indeed smell like pot, but I can't figure out who it's coming from.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Woman complains that the quiet zone smells like pot.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

The men's room is my least favorite place in the library.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Receive a complaint about the men's room being out of toilet paper; how is it humanly possible to go through a roll so quickly?

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Man wants to know my feelings on the president's stimulus package. Explain I cannot discuss opinions at work.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Woman wants to know why the library doesn't carry medical textbooks. Try to explain cost and demand are the major factors. She's not happy.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

A woman is using the libraries computer to watch *Toy Story*.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Went to help man; he didn't know the icon that said Internet was to open the Internet.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Man comes to the desk insisting that his computer does not have Internet.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

My day would be so much easier without all the complaints.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

A man complains about a woman using her phone loudly; it is the woman who complained about the man smelling.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Woman is back; says the man who smells is now talking on his cell phone. Return to man, but he is not on phone.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Woman just complained about a man who smells bad; went near man, but didn't smell anything. Suggest she sit somewhere else.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Just went outside to write down plate # of car in handicap space, but it is already gone.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Woman just told me to call the police because someone is parked in handicap w/o a sticker.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Patron wants to know why our computer won't let him log into e-mail. Ask what his e-mail address is. He can't remember.

*about 7 hours ago from web*

Comment to another librarian how overly dramatic the film version of *Twilight* was.

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Tell girl how long the hold list is for *New Moon* ... I remember when kids used to get emotional for *Harry Potter*. Times sure have changed.

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Diana text'd back telling me she misses me. It's nice to be missed.

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Why did I become a librarian? I really need something to happen today to reassure me.

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Text wife to tell her work is boring

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Person complains about the library being too loud ... I agree, but it's a library, what do they expect?

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Computer patron back again; he meant #10 in the teen room. Tell him room is for teens only; tells me he doesn't want computer anymore.

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Computer patron back; doesn't like computer he's assigned to. Asks to use computer #10.

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Ask patron not to talk on their cell phone. They explain that the cell phone designated area is too loud.

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Patron complains he can't log into computer. Reassign him to new computer.

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Informed walking to reference desk that the men's room is out of toilet paper. Change toilet paper.

*about 8 hours ago from web*

Check schedule at work to make sure I only work until six; turns out I work until nine. Hate when that happens.

*about 8 hours ago from web*

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*To see this story irregularly unfold, you can follow Scott's tweets @scott\_douglas*

# Chapter 33

## **Dispatch 33 (7/1/09)**

### *Not Posted Rules of the Library*

You can't talk loudly on your cell phone just because you saw someone else doing it.

If you need help on the computer, do not motion for staff to sit at your computer and say, "Just do it for me."

If you need help, or have a question, please refrain from grunting your request like a caveman. For example, if you need time on the computer, do not throw your card at staff and say, "Time." Instead, "May I please have more time on the computer" is a much politer approach, and will likely provide for a more pleasant interaction between you and staff.

Do not argue with staff over a \$0.20 fine; it makes you look cheap and is embarrassing for everyone.

Do not let your child pound on keyboards and throw the computer mouse, and then tell staff you can't do anything about it because he/she "just won't listen."

Do not ask to use the phone because it's an emergency, and then proceed to have a highly personal conversation with the person on the other end of the phone about that new rash.

You paying your taxes does not singlehandedly pay for the library, and furthermore you were in here last week asking about how you could hide money so you wouldn't have to pay taxes.

No, staff will not help you find games on the Internet.

Don't ask for help emailing your résumé as an attachment unless you have typed up the résumé. Furthermore, don't ask for help printing before you are ready to print. In all cases, it is best to ask your question(s) when you are ready to have the question(s) answered.

Staff has no interest in hearing your views on the president's stimulus package, nor anything else political.

Do not keep track of what kind of cars staff drives; this is both creepy and unnecessary – staff can keep track of their own cars just fine.

# Chapter 34

## Dispatch 34 (10/14/09)

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There is no humor in this month's dispatch. My apologies in advance. Your irregularly scheduled bits of odd library observations will return next week.

If you're still reading, then chances are you either like libraries or you Google'd library porn, and you're still hoping to find some hidden in the text below.

For the past year, the institutes that boldly sit as a cornerstone to every metro city and even most small towns have been threatened. Unlike police and fire protection, there are many who believe public libraries are a luxury and not a necessity to cities—people who believe when money is a bit harder to find, then you simply close the library doors for a couple days. I hope you are not one of them.

This dispatch is by no means political, but I want you to consider the message that many politicians are proposing to fix the economy, which is train the unemployed new skills; now consider how to train them without libraries. Community college and state universities are wonderful places, but not always ideal for the average laborer who just needs a lesson in how to use the Internet so they can even fill out the thousands of job applications that are exclusively online.

You're on the Internet and obviously know how to do at least some navigation. There is a huge percentage of Americans who don't even know how to use a mouse, and that's one of the millions of everyday people that the librarians in your cities serve. A part of every public librarian wishes their job consisted of sitting around all day reading and recommending books; the fact is most of our job is actually centered

around helping people open email accounts, create résumés, and attach résumés to e-mail.

Contrary to popular belief, the job of a librarian has absolutely nothing to do with books; the job of a librarian is to help people find information, and information comes in several different forms. It could be a student writing a term paper needing to know how to find information on the term *Volkerwanderung*, or who simply wants to find the name of the latest Grisham—but more than likely, at least in recent years, it's the unemployed worker needing information on how to write a résumé or find a job.

There are a lot of people who have been going into public libraries over the past few months, and have not noticed a huge change; most libraries have tried to keep the changes as transparent as possible—things like reducing hours of part-time staff, eliminating some of the less popular programs, not replacing librarians who have retired, or only ordering one copy of a bestseller instead of two. Some libraries have had to face more extreme measures.

Seattle's entire library system was closed for a week. Philadelphia posted notices at all locations stating that if the state legislature did not act on the city's budget request then all of its libraries would shut down on October 2, even after already reducing their service hours. Fortunately, just weeks before the scheduled closure, a resolution was reached to save the library—at least for this year.

These are just two of the extreme examples, but almost every library in the country is suffering from budget cuts, and they won't get better unless people voice their concerns; this year you'll probably see a lot less part-time staff wandering round the shelf to help you; next year you may stop seeing your library opened on weekends/evenings or even open at all. Several times a month, I read a story about a library system that has to cut back the number of hours they are opened to the public to save money.

Personally I have lost over 50% of my hours. But this dispatch isn't about me. Librarians can survive without libraries—we are a well-educated group and can do other things if need be. Libraries are vital and

sacred institutes, and the question you should be asking is, do you really want your city to go without one?

I keep reading articles that say something along the lines of "People flock to in times of economic crisis" and all I can think is, that's great if they can find a way to keep them open. It's true that people are coming in record numbers. In the fifteen years I have worked in libraries, I have never seen them busier. The problem is more and more people are coming in stressed and upset; they need jobs, they are on the verge of bankruptcy, and they need help—and libraries don't have the funding to help them. It's not uncommon to see every computer (over sixty) taken at my branch, and only one person to help everyone—on top of this there's usually a line several people deep of people who need non-computer help; obviously you cannot give people the help they deserve with this ratio. If you've been to a library lately, then you probably recognize this as a common tale.

If you don't believe me, then visit your local library and ask staff how the branch has been affected; I imagine they'll have a lot to tell you.

Libraries don't earn money for a city, but they do earn a city pride; they enrich lives; and most importantly, they help people get the skills they need to reenter the work force. In hard times, they shouldn't have limited service hours—they should have expanded services hours. When a person goes to a library to get help seeking employment, and they see a notice on the door that says that due to cutbacks the library is not open, it only adds to the persons frustration that there is no hope or places to go for the help that they need.

I'll stop the gloom here. At the very least, I hope you consider that your 20¢ fine may actually be helping provide better service, instead of demanding to see a supervisor because you feel it's unfair. Actually, how about you don't complain to anyone at the library—if you don't like the libraries service, then please complain to some public official that matters and ask them (beg them) to give libraries more funding, so they won't be the latest in a long list of libraries that just aren't making it, and have to cut back hours and close branches to stay afloat.

Spread the word. If you approve this dispatch (or even if you hate it, but you like libraries) then start a Twitter trend—just tweet #savethelibrary.

**Part 2**  
**Other Library Ramblings**

# Chapter 35

## Is Illiteracy So Bad? (The Morning News Edition)

Literacy's flaws are many and obvious: Reading can be boring, suggest ideas about how to destroy things, and give voice to people who shouldn't have one, in addition to a platform to voice that voice. But these are only surface issues—there are whole other arenas that are rarely discussed. For instance, literacy causes colds; case in point, I developed a horrible cold just hours after an entire night reading *Infinite Jest*. I also discovered a strange raging sexual lust when I read *All the Best, George Bush: My Life and Other Writings*, and though I'm actually a little embarrassed to say what happened after finishing *The Power and the Glory*, the itchy rashes in sensitive spots still have not gone away. If we simply give into the will of our hearts and stop reading, we will finally be able to establish the utopian world that great thinkers have been planning for centuries.

### A Bookless World With Lots of Extra Space

Bookstores and libraries take up lots of space. It's obvious if the world went illiterate, bookstores would become video/record stores and Starbucks outlets, but libraries are a different story. Closing a public library would mean thousands of displaced homeless people with no place to brush their teeth, millions of parents with no place to send their kids after school while they work, and worst of all, thousands and thousands of bitter unemployed librarians cluttering up social service offices with their sad tales of how they use to get paid to do nothing. Libraries, as useless as they are, cannot be turned into franchised retail venues, but that doesn't mean millions of city dollars must be spent to keep open buildings that, in an illiterate world, are useless. As it turns out, libraries can become useful again—if they are converted into more practical things.

One possibility is a television center, where we can feed on five- or 10-minute slices of entertainment. Today's man is a creature on the go, so clips rather than whole shows would prevent wasting patrons' time, or worse, boring their minds. For instance, feeds might show all the various ways and reasons Homer has said 'D'oh' on *The Simpsons*, or slow-motion clips of characters being killed on *The Sopranos*. This center also solves cities' other big problem—what happens to our overpaid librarians in this new illiterate world? Obviously those with too much seniority to be fired would act as personal TV guides. And those unfortunate enough to finish their graduate degree in library science without getting a full-time job aren't necessarily out of luck. Many of these former aspiring librarians are also former aspiring children's librarians, which, as it happens, means they're perfectly prepared for a career in acting—they will likely be able to find jobs in Hollywood, as the ugly old hags in the background behind beautiful stars. The other librarians (the ones who did not aspire to be children's librarians) can take the jobs that no one wants in the library—these jobs include, but are not limited to, dressing up as favorite TV stars and entertaining the patrons, explaining to older patrons that times have changed so deal with the bookless world, and being the greeter at the door.

Former library buildings might also be refitted into community weightlifting centers. Everyone likes to stay fit, but no one likes to pay the high membership dues. Why not put the gyms out of business? It would boost everyone's morale. And librarians are, of course, known for their great physical strength, which they achieved by picking up and putting away the library-bound reference collection edition of the OED. They could be put to work as trainers. In larger former libraries, boxing rings can be installed and librarians can serve as spotters.

One last possibility for library buildings is one many libraries are already experimenting with: Stocking up on computers so patrons can search the Web for really neat graphics and games. This, like the TV center, would also benefit those overpaid librarians, who in this scenario would advise patrons on the best places on the Web to find games that are addicting but, of course, not challenging, because challenge would only add stress in a graphical world. To the literate, this task may seem meaningless and mundane, but to the illiterate, pictures and pretty graphics provide fulfillment. To help get rid of all the text on the Internet, and thus provide

more precise image matches, a U.N. council could be formed to investigate and solve the problem.

## **Everyday Life**

We mustn't, however, examine only the places that house books. Illiteracy is a very serious issue that should not be taken lightly. Words, we must admit to ourselves, are everywhere.

One of man's most sacred items, the computer, will have to be equipped for the illiterate mind. A computer keyboard with letters, for example, holds no value to an illiterate. Our new, more perfect world will need a Windings keyboard. The Windings keyboard, modeled after and inspired by the Wingdings font, will replace the letter on each key with a cute illustration. A formal greeting might therefore look like: :-). And a formal farewell might look like: :-|. Not only do these new communications save space, and, further, ink, but they will also be easier to remember. Many years ago, the mightiest, smartest men of them all—the cave-men—used signs and got along pretty well in life; we should not be so quick to mock this sort of communication as primitive.

And we cannot forget about television, which will be one of the leading devices in this graphical age. Of course there will be no need to have titles for TV shows. Graphics will be used instead. For crime dramas, there could be a couple engaging in something promiscuous while holding a gun and a badge. For half-hour situation comedies, there could be a couple engaging in something promiscuous while holding a cup of coffee. And for reality shows, there could be a man holding a camera and a handful of cash while filming a couple engaging in something promiscuous.

## **The Future is Near**

Now with no books or literacy we can finally eliminate language, at least language in the traditional sense. Hearing somebody speak in complete sentences will be confusing and hard to follow. When the world is surrounded by graphics, speaking in words seems inappropriate. Since it is impossible to speak in images, something else needs to be worked out.

At first it will be best to speak using chat room abbreviations; when you find yourself amused at something, you will smile and tell the person 'L-O-L' or when you are leaving you will say 'B-F-N.' A formal, romantic wedding proposal would look something like, 'W-Y-M-M?'

Abbreviations sound clumpy and will become quickly boring to the illiterate world. This is why people will eventually need to learn how to speak solely in rhyme. Rhyme is catchy. And for those who are horrible at rhyming, there is always song. Song is the most effective way to communicate, right next to rhyming. And even when you're saying hurtful things, they'll come out sounding pleasant and delightful, and probably no one will even notice that you're being mean.

I am quite aware that what I am saying seems to be a bit of an oxymoron, and that even writing it goes against all my principals as an illiteracy activist. Without using literacy, however, I will not be able to convey my message of illiteracy fully. For more information on how you can more fully prepare your home, town, and country for the illiterate world, you can read my forthcoming book *Illiterate Living for the Illiterate Man*, a 2,500-page illiteracy manual for better living.

Note to the reader: æßƆÆ¬§

æ=If

ß=Reading

Ɔ=This

Æ=You

¬=No/Not

§=Illiterate

# Chapter 36

## Is Illiteracy So Bad (Alternate Essay)

It will not be long until people are completely illiterate. People think more clearly graphically. Computers have taught us that. What I, and several other illiteracy advocates, have discovered is illiteracy is not such a bad idea. Recent studies have shown books and further literacy are not good. Besides being boring, reading can propose into our minds ways in which we can cause destruction to one another both physically and mentally. Not only that, but reading also gives foolish men not only a literary voice, but an arena of fans to voice his foolish voice. Clearly the worse of all literacy's woes is the harm it can do to the body. I developed a horrible stomach flu after reading *Gravity's Rainbow* to a group of elderly sick women at a convalescence home. Some will reason that this is merely coincidental, but evidence of further bodily harm inflicted by books will silence these skeptical voices. I have had strange raging sexual lust for the most inappropriate things ever since reading *Diplomacy* by Henry Kissinger, developed ingrown hair all over my body after reading *1984*, and, this is embarrassing to admit, I developed itchy rashes in sensitive spots after reading *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The question today is no longer whether or not literacy is a good thing for society to have—clearly it is bad. The question today is how to successfully implement illiteracy into society.

The clearest, most obstructive, obstacle to be overcome while making the illiterate switch is books. Lots and lots of books. Books are one of the biggest contaminators of all things illiterate. They clutter houses, bookstores, libraries, schools—and no illiterate likes them. Even illiterates, however, know that it is even more wasteful to simply burn them. There are many wonderful possibilities for the once useless book.

One possibility, one the environmentalists will no doubt appreciate, is recycling them. Books can be easily recycled and turned into cardboard

box homes for all the people displaced after losing their job in the publishing world. Books might also be recycled and turned into new, more conventional, DVD disc cases or even, barring a technology breakthrough, a paper television set. Recycling books will also do its part to boost the economy. It will create hundreds of new book recycling centers across the world, which will in turn employ hundreds of workers at each plant. It will also give children a new hobby. Each day they can go door to door offering to collect unwanted books, which they will take to the recycling center and earn \$0.36 a pound. A hundred John Grisham will get a kid \$36.00 to spend on video games.

Understandably, people will want to keep some of their books as relics of the past. It seems silly, however, to take up space on the CD and DVD case for a book. Why not be practical? Wear the book. Not only is this a wonderful fashion statement that all your friends will envy, but also books are durable and will hold up well in the wet season. Books also have an unmistakable aroma to them. Wearing older books will give your body an antique odor that will be the talk of the party. People will cheer when they smell you enter the room and say, "Well would you take a whiff of that! She's wearing a 1678 leather-bound—she must be a famous actress." While paperback books are best used as jackets and sweaters, hardback books can be specially cut and worn as shoes. Book shoes slide great on hardwood floors, and are perfect for dancing, kickboxing, and ballroom parties.

For poor families, who cannot afford to keep books as mere luxuries, there is the most practical solution of all—you can eat the book. For the religious zealous, it's Biblical—Ezekiel did it. For everyone else, it's just plain good. Books are loaded with essential vitamins and nutrients, and many are low fat (though you should be cautious of the biographies—especially the ones on Churchill). Books are best marinated with lemon juice and garlic pepper, and served at room temperature; overcooking books will result in a toughness in some of the pages. Books can also be boiled and mixed with honey mustard and mayonnaise for a delicious book salad. Novellas and short story collections make terrific desserts that are easy to make; just cut off the spine, rip out the copyright page, throw it in a bowl, top it with two scoops of ice cream and your done—it's that simple.

While books are pointless to the illiterate world, magazines are a different story. There are literally millions of magazines circulated across the world everyday. It would be shame and economic disaster to close all of them down. It is a bigger shame considering that most magazines have nothing to do with literacy and the very few that do can simply be reorganized to fit the illiterate world. Entertainment magazines, for instances, are 70% pictures and advertisements; these magazines just need to teach their writers how to shoot a picture and their done. Computer magazines are 80% graphs, charts, and illustrations; these magazines just need to hire illustrators. Literary journals will be most affected; editors for these journals should plan on seeking talented voice actors and putting the contents of the magazine on a CD. All other magazines and journals would benefit by sending subscribers coloring books.

Newspapers, like magazines, should not be shut down. They just need to be more conscious of what their readers want. Newspapers are paper hogs. Nobody likes what their doing to the environment—especially illiterates. If newspapers want to keep their subscribers they should condense the paper into four pages; page one will show photos of things happening across the nation; page two will show photos of things happening locally; page three will show sports photos (players on the winning team should be highlighted in the photo to indicate a win graphically); and page four will show screenshots from movies currently playing (grainy pictures for bad movies and sharp pictures for good movies).

And let's not forget the authors who have benefited financially from literacy. It would be an unfortunate thing to let the life of the author simply waste away. Even though their words have caused harm to many people over the years, they are still artist and should be treated as such. Writers who merely pretended to be authors by writing genre fiction such as legal thrillers, mysteries, and romances will finally be able to return to their real jobs of doctors, lawyers, politicians, and drug dealers. Authors who were born to write will need to use their creative abilities elsewhere. Joining Disney imaginers designing roller coasters and theme parks would be the best choice for authors, but there are other options. Hollywood, for example is always looking for talented people to write scripts for reality television shows, and t-shirt manufacturers always need new minds to come up with exciting gimmicky logos. Sadly, most writers are stubborn and they will see their only real choice is drinking

themselves into a coma state of conscious from which they will never return.

The institutes and people hit the hardest by the illiteracy will not be publishers and authors. The institutes hit hardest will be bookstores and libraries. Both take up lots of unnecessary space, and both need to be reckoned with. Anyone with even the least bit of observation skill can see that most bookstores are sixty percent DVD, CDs, and coffee. If bookstores simply remove their books and expand their audio, video, and caffeine selections, then the problem would be solved.

Public libraries are more problematic than bookstores. Converting their entire collection to audio and video would be costly. And closing libraries would mean thousands of homeless men and women would have no place to brush their teeth and comb their hair, parents would have no place to send their kids after school while they're still at work, and the worse evil of them all—librarians—thousands and thousands of angry, bitter, unemployed librarians cluttering into the social service offices telling their sad tales of how they used to get paid good money to sit around a desk doing absolutely nothing. Libraries, as useless as they are, cannot be closed, but that does not mean the city has to keep spending millions of dollars to keep them open simply to appease a few patrons.

It seems the most obvious possibility for libraries is the television center. Here, patrons can be fed five or ten-minute slices of entertainment. The modern man is a man on the go, so clips, instead of entire shows, will give patrons the appropriate amount of humor before they need to go again. These clips might, for instances, show all the various ways Kenny has died on *South Park*, or slow motion clips from war movies showing people being killed. Television centers also solves another problem—what is to be done with all the overpaid librarians in the illiterate world? Librarians with too much seniority to be fired will serve as personal TV guides. The poor people who finished their graduate degrees right as the world went illiterate are not necessarily out of luck. Many will be able to use this degree to help get their foot in the door at other jobs—like modeling, motorbike racing, and dog grooming. Those who still aspire to work in former library buildings will have to fight off competition by performing all the TV center jobs that no one else wants to do; such as, dressing up like cartoon characters and dancing around the

curb in front of the TV center to attract patrons, or helping older patrons figure out ways to deal with the changing times of society.

Cities might also consider turning their libraries into community weightlifting and fitness centers. People constantly complain about wanting to stay fit, but not wanting to pay the high membership fees of gyms. What better way to boost morale than to put high cost fitness centers out of business? It is a proven fact that librarians have great physical strength from all the years of picking up and putting away oversize books and dictionaries. Finally librarians have a chance to show off their strength by serving as trainers in the new gyms. Larger city libraries can also install boxing rings where librarians will be spotters. And being financially conscientious, cities can save money by making weights out of books. This will also give patrons hip things to say; such as, "I can bench the entire Shakespeare collection." During step aerobic classes, patrons can tie books to their ankles for added workout pleasure.

Several libraries have already begun to experiment with computers in the library. Why not go the next steps? Fill the entire library with computers that patrons can use to search for really swell graphics and games. Librarians, in this scenario, can consult with patrons on the best places to go on the web and find games and pictures. Techno savvy librarians can also build programs that help patrons find what their looking for on the web graphically, and eliminates the need for typing in words to get to web pages.

Of course, as in any utopia society, there are holdouts. There are always holdouts. They will whine and say illiteracy is wrong. Some will be former illiterates themselves who have learned to read just to be different. They are not bad people. They are confused people, and they cannot be ignored. They are dangerous and sometimes contagious. A special bureau will need to be formed by the United Nations to track them down. Once found, they will be sent to a secluded island in South East Asia that was formally used for leopard people. On this island, illiteracy experts will force them to read legal thrillers, political thrillers, thriller thrillers, biographies of Jennifer Love Hewitt, and any other book that displays the art of bad writing. They will be forced to read bad writing in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening. While they sleep, speakers will blare out Ronald Regan lyrically reading *Left Behind*. When book lovers confess that they cannot stand to read another book again,

and begin throwing-up at the mere sight of them, they will be sent home to work as coal miners.

There are also those people who will be upset with illiteracy simply because they find the act of reading leisurely. There are very few of these people, but they still need to be accounted for. Giving them other hobbies will help take care of this. Possibilities include weightlifting, learning magic tricks, and card shuffling.

Even for the majority of people—the ones who never found the act of reading at all leisurely—admit that reading was sometimes nice. A perfect example of this is while flying on an airplane when the flight attendant says it's time to put away the portable DVD player, because it's time to takeoff or land. What does one do? Cards are also out of the question because that darn tray has to be up. Sitting in the seat resting is absolutely boring. What now? This is the perfect time to thumb wrestle with the person in the seat next to you. Thumb wrestling is a wonderful conversation starter and it gives circulation to your hand.

All is well and good now for the librarians and the authors and even the books, but what about the people? How can they prepare their lives for the change of illiteracy? Words are everywhere: on signs, in TV guides, on keyboards. There's no escaping words—unless we replace them.

Many of man's most sacred objects are not compatible with illiteracy. The computer, for instance, is graphical in many places, but lacking in others. A computer keyboard has no value to the illiterate mind. The keyboard, therefore, will work best by replacing the keys with the Wingdings font. On the Wingdings keyboard, the 'A' key will become the 'd' key, the 'S' key will become the 'h' key, the 'D' will become the 'I' key, etc. To say hello in an email or chat room, one will hit the 'C' key, and likewise, to say goodbye, one would hit the 'L' key. To check the arrival time of an airplane, one would hit the 'Q' key. To write in an email "the teleconference will be videotaped," one will simply key in the ".," ""," and "9" keys. It's that simple, and it's easy to remember. It saves space, saves time, and it saves ink (and, parenthetically speaking, ink has been getting quite expensive in recent years). Many years ago, the caveman used this form of communication, and they seemed to get along pretty

well in life. If disco and top hats have come back retro, then why can't caveman talk?

The television cannot be overlooked in this careful analysis of the illiterate world. One of the most popular features on any cable or satellite device is the ability to see what the television show is about, or at the very least what the name of the show is. The time has come for television shows and cable/satellite providers to embrace the graphical world.

There really is no need for titles. Most people call shows by using a one sentence description, like, "that show with the gay guys," or "the one with girls that jump up and down on the trampoline," or sometimes, "I don't remember what it's about, but it's funny." To help viewers better associate with the show, graphics should be used. For crime dramas there could be an illustration of a couple engaging in something promiscuous while holding a gun and a badge. For half-hour situation comedies, there could be an illustration of a couple engaging in something promiscuous while holding a cup of latte. And for reality shows, there could be a void of nothingness, because reality shows aren't really about anything and a void of nothingness would best illustrate this idea.

Titles and names will also have to be changed in the illiterate world. Street names, for example, will be too confusing. They can be easily replaced, however, with symbols. Thus, when giving your friend directions to your house, you will say, "Get off at the smiley face exit, turn right on triangle, and left on square—it's the fourth house on the right." Symbols might also be different colors. Colors could replace number streets (first street, second street, third street, etc). Everyone would know that if they past a blue street, then a yellow street, green would obviously be next since mixing blue and yellow makes green. Other titles and names, such as the ones that are on boxes of macaroni or deli sliced ham, can simply be removed. If there needs to be a name to help a person distinguish what it is their about to eat, then it's best not to eat it.

Illiteracy in the school system will also prove to be instrumental in the growth of man. Illiteracy in high school has been problematic in the past, but that is only because administrators weren't properly trained in how to teach it. Studies have proven time and time again that students hate reading and studying. By giving them movies to watch on World War Two, the Depression, Civil Rights, and the Civil War students will be not

only entertained, but they'll have their homework completed in half the time; this will give them more time to go to parties, get drunk, do drugs, engage in sexual orgies, and steal—things homework typically doesn't give kids the time or energy to do. Many kids have been left feeling isolated and confused in the past, this is largely do to homework not giving them enough time to just be kids and engage in normal kiddy orgies. Literature classes have the potential for being hardest hit by illiteracy, but can easily be converted into film classes. Most teachers have understood that kids are, by and large, illiterate and assigned books that have been turned into movies. Converting into film classes will give students a chance to be rewarded for what they're already doing—watching movies.

When mankind has fully disposed literacy from society, it will be time to take it a step further: eliminate language. Language in the traditional sense that is. Once man has evolved and adapted to the illiterate society, hearing a person speak in complete sentence will be confusing and hard to follow. It seems inappropriate to use words in such a way, when the world is operating graphically. If a person could speak in graphics, then the problem would be solved, but man of course cannot yet do such a feat, and so something else must be worked out. People who use chat rooms on a regular basis already have a good idea of what needs to be done, but to all the non-chat users let me spell it out: abbreviations. To tell someone "excuse me for jumping in," you would simply say politely "E-M-F-J-I." To tell someone the discussion has been a "complete waste of time," simply say frustrated "C-W-O-T." To tell someone, "I think you have pretty eyes, and I think I love you," simply say romantically, "I-T-Y-H-P-E-&I-T-I-L-Y." The ampersand will of course be tricky at first for some people, but it's easy once you get the hang of it.

Using abbreviations has some setbacks, and society will learn them quickly. The obvious set back is the sound and flow. Abbreviations are clumpy sounding and when used at any length will be boring. To correct this setback, people will need to speak completely in rhyme. Rhyme is catchy. Rhyme is not messy. Rhyme can make even my aunty Bessie sound a little less testy. Some people simply cannot, will not, should not—rhyme. That's okay too, because when rhyming fails, then there is always song. Song is the most effective way to communicate next to rhyming. In some situations, song can be even more effective then rhyming. When your about to tell someone that you hate them and you wish

they would hurry up and die, rhyme can sound a little too gangster and hurt the persons feelings worse. Song, however, makes even the worst sounding news seem pleasant and delightful. If a prison warden told the parents in song that their son the murderer had just been executed by firing squat, the parents would shout with joy—unless of course the prison warden was off key, which is exactly why song delivery is everything when giving bad news.

Sadly even in this magical graphical utopia, there has to be some thinking, as even graphics require thinking. And sadly this, like literacy, wasted too much time. Perhaps one day our emotions will be injected into us and we won't have to think on our own at all. In our comatose state, where even memories of happy times are irrelevant, there will be no thoughts, no feelings, and no beliefs. We will vegetate and have no worries and be perfect. It will make the illiterate utopia seem as no utopia at all. But that fine day has yet to come, and for now we must settle for graphics.

Note to the reader: dahnIf

Writing = d

this = a

essay = h

is = n

in fact = I

an oxymoron = f

# Chapter 37

## Suspect

When the patron told me members of the international community were watching her because she had knowledge of secret documents in the government's possession, and not to be surprised if federal investigators soon questioned me, I knew it was going to be an interesting night.

Working in a public library, I have come across a number of strange things and an even larger number of strange people.

The patron, a plump middle-aged woman with dirty hair but a surprisingly refreshing perfume, came into the library like anyone else. At first glance, one would never suspect her of being who she turned out to be. She spoke coherently and seemed courteous. She had the typical grandmother looks, and was very polite and friendly.

She went to her assigned computer, and I believed that would be it – she'd do whatever it was she needed to do. I was wrong. Five minutes later she came to me and said that something was wrong with the printer. I checked it out and indeed it hadn't printed her job. I apologized and asked her to print it again.

"It's no use," she finally told me. "They're just hacking into the computer – like they always do. They steal everything that I want to print. I don't know why they want this stuff anyway."

I didn't know then who "they" were, but I assured her that they weren't.

She quickly rebuked me.

"You don't know how they are. They're good. And they're always doing this to me. They're all over the library – look around. Whenever someone wipes their head. That's one of them – they're speaking in code."

It was hot and many people were wiping sweat from their brows. In fact, I believed the woman herself had wiped her head a few times.

She did not speak loudly, but she spoke loud enough that anyone nearby could easily hear the conversation with little effort. The listeners included the men she undoubtedly believed were talking in code.

I persuaded her to print again and stood with her at the print station to make sure she did everything right. As we waited for her document to come on the screen, a pregnant woman soon stood behind us, waiting to print her own document. The older woman turned and became hostile, saying to the pregnant woman, "I know what you're doing. You're suspect. Everyone is suspect."

She then pointed at the pregnant woman: "This woman here has been watching what I've been doing since she got here. And the stomach's not fooling me – they probably hired her just because she's pregnant. But she's still suspect."

The pregnant woman backed away slowly and I did my best to apologize to her with my eyes.

The older woman looked at a small boy, who was wandering around the library with his mother, and said, "They've been training kids for years now. They used to only use them in other countries. But now they're using them in the U.S.; have been for at least two years."

It took us two more tries to get her documents to print. I saw them disappear from my print screen with my own eyes. When, at last, they printed, she switched her focus from hacked computers to the copy machine. She needed to make multiple copies of her document to, in her words, "be safe." She was able to recognize a national conspiracy against her. But she was not able to work the library's very basic copy machine.

She said the copy machine was slow and wanted to know who the library's vendor was. When I told her, she laughed to herself, then said:

"I'm not surprised. They are funded by our government. They make copies of everything Xeroxed on their copiers, and forward it to analysis at the NSA. Every time a copy is made, it's stored on a tiny chip inside the copier."

She looked quickly around the library and said in an almost incoherent whisper, "I'll show you where the chip is if you want to see it."

I was curious, but didn't want the woman to think that I was taking her too seriously, so I declined the offer.

She nodded understandingly and said, "It's better you don't know where it is anyway."

She had more theories. The whole idea of religion of Islam was founded by a secret society of world leaders – George Washington and almost every other president had been in the group. So were Napoleon and Hitler. World War II was thought up during a game of poker between Churchill and Hitler. She went on to tell me why she came to the library. "I'd do it at home. But it's too dangerous, so I had to come here."

Her face became sad.

"And I had to leave my dog – my poor dog – in the car. It's their fault that my poor dog is suffering in my hot car. And I can't roll my windows down because they'll take him. They have before."

I thought about that poor dog's suffering as I watched her leave the library, then wait at the bus stop and get on the bus. There was no dog in a car. That settled it; I could be satisfied that the woman was simply paranoid and crazy.

Then two young men with army buzzed heads and crisply ironed white T-shirts walked by and quietly said, pointing at the bus, "Let's go."

Everyone was "suspect" to the woman, and I imagined she had left believing I was innocent, but nonetheless would have to give an interview of what she said to me to the secret agents upon her departure.

## Aimee Bender is Evil: An Opposing Viewpoint

Some years ago, while I was just a young lad in library school, I came across a story called “Quiet Please” (read it here: <http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0798/bender/sstory1.html>) by Aimee Bender. The story was published in GQ and later in the short story collection *The Girl in the Flammable Skirt*.

She was quite the talk of town among critics at the time who were calling her the post-modern Kafka. While critics were praising her, I, and many librarians, were mocking her for that story.

The story is about a librarian having a series of graphic sexual encounters in the break room with various patrons, and concludes with the librarian being paraded through the library like a sexual queen of sorts.

The story explored a now popular cliché that librarians are desperate sexual predators hungry to have sexual encounters in the break room. Bender’s allegations are completely untrue, unfounded, and uncalled for. Nonetheless, Bender’s story has seriously hampered the creditability of librarians and the serious nature of their job.

For the record, I have never witnessed or heard of such encounters happening in a library, and further have concluded that Aimee Bender is evil for ever making the claims. Public librarians are nice people, but sexual addicts they are not.

Now law librarians—that’s a whole different can of beans—they can be wild animals when provoked.

# Chapter 39

## **Nicholson Baker Is a Big Fat Idiot**

### Nicholson Baker Is a Big Fat Idiot

If you go to graduate school to get a degree in library science, you're bound to come across figures in the literary circle that really pissed off a librarian, and your entire two years in graduate school will be at times misery because of this literary figure.

There was only one when I was in school. Nicholson Baker. There are few people who can stand alone in a sentence by being both the noun and verb—good ole Nick is one of these people.

The curse of Nicholson Baker apparently all started in 1996, when Baker wrote an article called “The Author vs. the Library” for the *New Yorker* (volume 72). The article attacked the way the San Francisco Public Library was discarding many of its older books.

I have not read the article, I do not care what the article has to say, and indirectly I don't hold anything against Baker (although I still cringe when I hear his name and silently curse him for the horrors the name put me through in graduate school).

To this very day, many librarians have remained bitter and outraged with Nicholson Baker; in fact many faculty members at San Jose State's library science department will probably be willing to argue about Baker and book preservation at the mere drop of his name.

# Chapter 40

## Things That Pop Into My Head While Bored At the Reference Desk

Why doesn't everyone wear their socks inside out?

How did I end up here?

Does Apple really not have the capability to create a iPod Touch with bigger storage? Or perhaps it's just all part of there marketing plan? Get them to buy this, then the bigger one comes out in six months. I'm sorry, Apple, but you are not the anti-corporate enviornment you try to make us believe. You are no better the Microsoft. And at least Bill Gates gives money to charity... what have you been doing with yours, Steve?

Is Warren Buffets kids not at all upset that he didn't leave them any money?

Why don't they just call it a computer center? And if people want books they can go to the bookstore. People who read statistically have more money then people who sit on their butts all day playing computer poker, and checking out the personal ads on Craigslist.

Does anyone who wears a tennis shoe play tennis? Everyone who walked into today wearing them does not look like the tennis-type.

I think I'd rather have a jury by professional jury person (someone who gets paid to sit on a case (like a career)), and not a jury by peers.

Were any of the Golden Girls fetching in their younger days?

I think that movie *The Holiday* is making Americans try and be British and say, "I'm going to have holiday at my boyfriends home." It just sounds stupid when some American chap says it.

Why does it always sound dirtier when a British person talks about sex?

I don't really miss TV now that it's on strike.

How the heck is J.D. Salinger still alive? Has anyone check in on his home lately?

Who will be the next American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature? I'm guessing DeLillo, but I'm hoping it's Pynchon.

Visit [www.scottdouglas.org](http://www.scottdouglas.org) and [www.disturbedchristians.com](http://www.disturbedchristians.com) for further ramblings.

### **From the same author on Feedbooks**

The Gospel According to Mark (The 140 Bible Translation) (2010)  
This project began as a way to communicate the message of the Bible in a language that spoke to a generation obsessed with text messaging. Does it replace the Bible? No. If anything, I hope it encourages people to actually crack open a Bible and read it. If you have never read the Bible or it's been a while, then I hope this gives you a refresher.

For the next year, I will be tweeting the New Testament. The plan is then to move on to the Old.

You can follow this project live by visiting [www.twitter.com/The140Bible](http://www.twitter.com/The140Bible) (@The140Bible), or by visiting [www.The140Bible.com](http://www.The140Bible.com).



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