

DEPARTMENTS / DÉPARTEMENTS

Editor's message

Well, here it is: my last message as editor of JCHLA / JABSC. I have to say the time went so quickly that I hardly remember how it was spent. I have enjoyed this experience so very much, and it has taught me a great deal about the publishing industry, about the professional practice of librarianship, and most of all, about my own ability to handle frustration.

Frustration has, from time to time, been unavoidable in the process of producing a journal in the virtual environment. Because of the Internet, a situation that would have previously been unworkable (having an editor who produces the journal from half way around the world) has been made unremarkable. Geographic barriers no longer exist. What I and, I think, the CHLA / ABSC board, didn't count on were the infrastructure and cultural barriers we encountered during my tenure as editor.

For example, the work week in the Middle East does not correspond to the North American one. We work Saturday to Wednesday. You work Monday to Friday. This left us with only a 3-day window to communicate with each other. During the Holy Month of Ramadan (due to start in mid-October), many here are fasting, and the work day is further reduced to 4–6 hours. That's a mighty small window of opportunity.

Technological infrastructure is fairly good in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), but I have just returned from a 4-day workshop on collection development in Beirut where conditions are less sophisticated. During the workshop, held at a major hotel in the heart of the city, electricity was periodically cut off, plunging the workshop attendees into pitch darkness and abruptly shutting down the presenter's microphone and PowerPoint presentation. This happened every day, with amazing regularity. We never did manage to establish an Internet connection during the sessions. The local librarians remained unfazed, maintained a great sense of humour, and kept an upbeat outlook.

A tour of Notre Dame University in Beirut, graciously led by their staff librarians, highlighted some of the excellent work that is going on there. The library is small, housed in a building that was purpose-built as a library, but constructed

without consulting librarians. As a result, the ventilation system had to be completely reconstructed, as the air exchange was not removing humidity from the building and materials were being badly damaged. Only two offices were included in the plan (for a three-storey library staffed by many more than two people!). These defects have apparently been remedied and the library has some of the most spectacular views I've ever seen — perched on top of a mountain overlooking lush green valleys and the sparkling blue Mediterranean — so I think everything has come out right in the end. Certainly their library service seems to function extremely well, although I can't get used to the idea of closed stacks. They say it works, but I'm not so sure. Our own stacks at the UAE National Medical Library are open. I can't imagine them any other way.

While in Beirut, I also met a librarian from the new Weill Cornell Medical College in Doha, Qatar. In contrast to conditions at the workshop, their technological infrastructure is so good that their library is completely virtual. They have one print journal subscription and a tiny book collection! They have made the conscious decision to keep their collection almost completely online. We've begun to move into a more virtual environment as well. Since our library is divided, with one side for males and one for females, online resources are more cost effective and provide enhanced access for users. We now have a proxy server, purchased since I arrived and allowing off-campus access, and e-access has cut costs by removing the necessity of buying two copies of everything.

I am continuing to enjoy my time in the Middle East. I learn something every day that I am sure will be of value to me. I have also enjoyed my time as editor of JCHLA / JABSC. The challenges we faced during this process were made so much easier by my colleagues on the editorial team, Andrea Hodgson and Rebecca Zakoor (I owe them a "thank you" so big it stretches from here to Canada!), the CHLA / ABSC board, and you, the authors and readers of the journal. Thank you all.

Karen Neves

Editor, JCHLA / JABSC

Al Ain, United Arab Emirates