

# Once Upon A Time; or The First Twenty-Five Years of UCLA/GSLIS

By Betty Rosenberg

"Once upon a time" ... is there another way to begin a story? In a halcyon time before some of you were born and others were blissful infants, (some were learning their ABC's, though not from a horn book—perhaps from TV commercials?; others were signing up for their first public library card, and some had already given hostages to fortune), a school for librarians was created.

The founding wizard had one talismanic spell, four letters: B-O-O-K. Its power he freely gave to the apprentice librarians.

In those early days the apprentice librarians accepted for tutelage were expected to be young, eager, and dedicated to an ideal of service. Those who lyrically proclaimed a love of books were not discouraged, but there was an uneasy feeling that once the apprentices were exposed to the harsher world beyond the school, they would require more than the powers of the B-O-O-K spell. The wizard's chief assistant, a merry elf, suggested forebodings of the future when illiteracy in mathematical terms—being mathematically innumerative rather than merely literarily uncultured—might become a more critical hazard for the apprentices. But that was still in the incalculable future in those innocent days.

A quaint rule, unwritten but potent, was based on the belief that age thirty-five was a mystic number beyond which apprentices, particularly females, were no longer viable—fresh endeavors being doubtful and hazardous. Like many customs, it was notably dishonored. Entered among the first apprentices were several by whom thirty-five was recalled with nostalgia. Among them was a lady with hair of flame whose magic charms must have been potent not only to gain her entry but to cause her to remain with the school, becoming ever more cunning in its ploys. And magically the hair is still flame.

When the first hopeful coven was initially assembled for the school's dedication, it was exhorted by a master librarian (Paul Horgan, whose talk is printed as *One of the Quietest Things* for your reading) to think of their studies as "Library Arts" more than "Library Science," and he outlined "a philosophy of creative imprecision in the design and conduct of libraries," not the least radical being his suggestion to "let the patron go to the shelf, locate his book, and simply walk out with it and return it when he finished with it." (I did note in inception that this was a fairy tale.)

Of another time also was the apparel of the apprentices. Neatly gowned and hosed, often in high heels, the ladies were demure, while many of the gentlemen were graced with tie and coat. (When they had been interviewed they were pictures of elegance, a few with hat and gloves.) Not yet envisioned were jeans and shorts, tank tops and zories. Equally staid were the instructors then—notably enlivened by the marvelous hats worn by Frances Clark Sayers. The tradition of pant suits for the females and beards for the males was not yet dreamed of.

The apprentices were tutored in the time-honored arts and services. That the book might become an endangered species or artifact was not yet an alarming portent, and there were experiments in making papyrus from the freshly plucked plants and the opportunity to become craftsmen or printer's devils operating a hand printing press. The retrieval of learning and information was taught as inherently from books, with the librarian not only the intermediary between encyclopedic learning and the inquirer but expected to be full of information (miscellaneous and wonderful, trivial and profound). Surely all reference librarians woke early to read intensively the morning papers (even the NY Times on Sunday!)—the better to reinforce the belief that librarians know everything.

Because the magic word was "Book," a primary emphasis was in children's reading. Children then were expected to read books (librarians not yet hysterical about their ability to read at all) and the enchantress with the lilting Texas voice, Frances Clark Sayers, enslaved all hearers, confirming them in the band of the saved, as she told the ageless tales.

Nowhere was tradition more strong than in the apprentices' immersion in the mysteries of cataloging. Not that they were still being trained in the graceful library hand for the preparation of catalog cards, but they were provided with a manual typewriter—now an archaic instrument, for on the Ides of March of this year the last manual typewriter was issued from the factory and the factory shut down—and on these machines were prepared catalog cards, now also becoming a curiosity. Surely something ineffably important is lacking in the experience of those who have not typed catalog cards to have then returned emblazoned lavishly by Betty Baughman's red pencil. In cataloging, the apprentices were inducted into cabalistic mysteries—and many longed for Ariadne's thread to guide them—as with subtle and impeccable logic they were shown the philosophical history and organization of all learning by Seymour Lubetzky.

Pervasive was the traditional book, whether in its history and printing, in bibliography classes or the Printing Chapel with Andy Horn or in its publishing and acquisition by libraries. In those early days the paperback revolution was still more of the marketplace than of the library and the apprentices received only intimations

that paperbacks and Xerox copies and microforms were radically to change the book in the library, to say nothing of the incursion of the audiovisual.

Before leaving this distant period, note should be made of the School's most enduring tradition, established in the first year. Parties. I doubt that any later party equalled the exuberance, and destructiveness, of the first. Apprentice librarians seemingly are all fabulous cooks. We thought at one time of making this ability an entrance requirement but that was really unnecessary as it seems inborn in the breed. Eating, drinking, and reading: the defining attributes of librarians. One class (1971) even published a cookbook—*Special Collections*.

Another pleasant tradition emerged early—Romance bloomed. Fortunately the enamoured pairs managed to turn dewey eyes on books as well as each other.

Parties and Romance persisted from the Pastoral period to the present. Human nature—joyous, ornery, unregenerate—is a pleasant constant.

In the fifth year of the School came a wizard who beamed a benignly bright blue eye on the School and began to weave spells to bring the School and its mentors, reluctantly fascinated, into the twentieth century and to prepare for the twenty-first. Numerical literacy became not only desirable but necessary. (Well, library schools might seem a trifle laggard: a recent book—*A Calculating People: the Spread of Numeracy in Early America*, by Patricia Cline Cohen—notes that Yale made knowledge of arithmetic a requirement for admission in 1745 and Princeton in 1760, though Harvard held out until 1802. Algebra and geometry were reserved for upper classmen.) A new language became required—computer language—for a mechanical magic was not given to librarians. (It is salutary to remember how recently this new binary magic appeared and how miraculously quickly its manifestations increased and became pervasive: a bare fifteen years before the School's inception—firmly based in the magic of B-O-O-K remember—there existed one only of these magical instruments (the computer) in the land, but when the School began there were about 1,000, and when the blue-eyed wizard appeared, there were about 30,000, and now there are some five to six million. Surely all of you now have this magic at hand, at home, or on your work desk, or anticipate adding this magic capability as soon as possible. Who can be without a word processor, or even one's own personal robot? (Ah, the days when Special Librarians coded information on edge-punched cards, and skillfully worked a knitting needle to have fall out those with the desired words—even, were one a wily magician, those that evoked the either/or neither/nor relationship.) New charms (codes?) became urgently useful—all much more intricate than the B-O-O-K charm: Information, Documentation, Research, Communication, Systems, Automation, Management. While the first apprentices could serenely contemplate mastering the spells inherent in less than a dozen competencies or courses, the current apprentice is proffered over seventy. Indeed by the twelfth year of the School, the spells necessary to mastering the magic had become so specialized as to demand two years in place of the one for the apprenticeship. Then by the sixteenth year of the School, it seemed necessary to train more master magicians, with their exposure to strange intricacies spread over several more years.

Thus in a little less than a generation, the world of librarians and their libraries has expanded and altered to the bewilderment of many, the amazement of others, and the delight of the adept. Whether it is recognizably the world the School prepared to serve twenty-five years ago may be questioned, but not seriously. The rites of magic have been modified. The librarian as master wizard uses some traditional and some new spells (methodologies) undreamed of twenty-five years ago, but is still the most promising personification of the conciliation of Sir C.P. Snow's *Two Cultures*. Perhaps not the Renaissance man who happily combined, without hesitation or doubt, being a Humanist and a Philosopher/Scientist. Perhaps the more homely figure: the librarian who reads detective novels and science fiction and fantasy. As an aside, amidst all those momentous/portentous developments, there remained in the School a persistent strain of—what shall we call it?—triviality, nonsense, a feeling that entertainment and laughter are necessary to the spirit. So not only do the staff read mystery and detective stories and science fiction and fantasy (as do the apprentices when pressures allow), but we've had a graduate with a published detective novel—Geoff Miller—*The Black Glove*—and one with a Harlequin Superromance—Joanna Jordan, pseudonym of a prestigious librarian—*Never Say Farewell*, having a background of rare books and bookstores—and another couple are writing romances, one a Regency. Our Dean, once a devoted reader of SF and Hal Boroko, still writes reviews of SF on occasion. So librarians read for pleasure and a few even write for pleasure readers and the B-O-O-K co-exists cosily with Systems.

Twenty-five years of change and turmoil and yet the new spells and the old are melding. Who would hazard guesses at the next twenty-five, landing in the twenty-first century?

The world of fairy is always the world of truth, so the future is simple when reduced to fairy tale terms: and the Humanist and the Scientist embrace and lie down together and live happily ever after—I hope.