

# THE ACCIDENTAL LIBRARIAN



*Tobie Garrick likes empowering library users*

**T**OBIE GARRICK, *Liaison Librarian at UNSW Canberra at the Australian Defence Force Academy*, talks about how she became a librarian and why she loves her work.

## WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM YOUR PAST AND CURRENT ROLES?

I've had some spectacular opportunities to do some pretty exciting things. While working as a library assistant at the Idaho State Historical Society Public Archives and Research Library in the US, I ended up co-writing a significant grant application to fund a digitisation project. Despite being well beyond my remit, this came about because I was there, I was capable and I was keen to get involved in the digital space. When the grant was funded, I became the project lead. Although I learned a lot by making some bad decisions (as well as some good ones) and not being entirely equipped at that point in my career to take this on, I did a pretty good job. I've learned that if you are in the right place at the right time and an opportunity arises that you want to take, you should seize it.

## WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOU MOST IN YOUR CAREER?

Dave, a uni friend of mine, gets the initial credit. While studying for my undergraduate degree he mentioned that he wanted to do a Master of Library and Information Science. At the time I was perplexed, but a few years

later I decided that it sounded like such a good idea that I'd do it myself. So wherever you are, Dave, thanks. After Dave, some incredible women in the profession who were mentors and examples to me and who were eternally supportive.

## WHAT SATISFIES YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

I had a great moment earlier this year when I worked with an undergraduate student who had done poorly on an assignment for one of his classes and decided he wanted to do better. He came to the reference desk asking how he should go about finding information for his next assignment. He had also been to the Academic Language and Learning Unit on campus – he was genuinely trying to take control of his own learning. I worked with him for quite some time, and he really took on board the things I had to share. He came back at the end of the semester to tell me that he got a distinction and was going into his final exam with a pass in the class. But the day I worked with him, I said to one of my colleagues: 'If I could do that, all day long, every day, I would love it'. Helping to empower someone to effectively seek, find and use information is core to why I became a librarian. It's such a big pay-off to me.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WHO IS JUST STARTING OUT AS A LIS PROFESSIONAL AND WHO WANTS TO WORK IN THE SAME FIELD AS YOU?

I still have a lot to learn. But a few things that have made a difference for me include working in a variety of jobs

to better understand how libraries work (even if you want to become an academic liaison librarian, knowing how to catalogue and circulate a book and having done those things is really useful). I'd also suggest participating on committees that help you to better understand the sector and – even more importantly – the organisations in which your library operates. And have confidence in your ability to do whatever job you are in, acquire the skills to justify that confidence and develop the self-awareness to acknowledge when you need to improve your skills.

### WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON QUESTION YOU GET ASKED ABOUT YOUR ROLE WHEN YOU TELL PEOPLE WHAT YOUR JOB IS?

'So you work for Defence?' (The answer to that: Not directly. My employer is UNSW Canberra).

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### IF YOU WERE STUCK ON A DESERT ISLAND, WHICH THREE BOOKS WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO HAVE WITH YOU?

Having formerly been a youth services librarian and now enjoying reading with my daughter at least as much – but probably more – than she does, I'd have to go with a

really complex *I Spy* book and something by Mo Willems (probably featuring Piggie and Gerald, because they are so funny). And for my inner teen, either a Sarah Dessen novel or the John Green and David Levithan novel *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*.

Those are my answers in the spirit of the question. But honestly and more practically, I'd probably rather have some kind of island survival manual, a blank but very thick notebook (assuming there are pens or pencils on this island with me), and a photo album with pics of my family and friends.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU TO BE A MEMBER OF ALIA?

I've only recently become a Member of ALIA, so I am still figuring out what it means to me to be a Member. I certainly feel that the Association is an advocate for me, my profession and libraries in general, and in turn, I believe that we as individuals should be our own advocates for these things. The professional development and networking opportunities through ALIA are beneficial. The reason you have a professional association is to help steer the direction of the profession into the future, and being a member of that association is one of the many ways to help you do that. 🌟

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