

---

# Hubris, Heresy, and Hearsay

An Irreverent Look at (Perhaps) the Oldest Profession,  
or (as Eve said to Adam):

"Tell me again where you got that . . . I may want to use it later."

Gayle Ann Fishel, ENFP  
and  
Plummer Alston Jones, Jr., INFJ

---

The last decade has witnessed a growing national fascination for "understanding ourselves." Personality inventories and type indicators abound. Certainly librarians, with their passion for knowing, are not immune to the allure of these instruments, but thus far, science has failed to provide us with a model by which we can accurately gauge our professional temperaments.

Recognizing this shameful lacuna in the literature, we set about the arduous task of collecting data to support our *a priori* assumptions; this took longer than anticipated. We polled tens of subjects and devoted two dinners and a brunch to the careful tabulation of results. So, with apologies to Freud, Jung, and Isabel Briggs Myers, we offer here our own exposition of librarian personality types.

## The Scholar

(Library Director/Ph.D. Candidate)

"Dewey . . . or don't we?"

### Synopsis:

The most innocuous and inconspicuous of librarian types, these sage and solemn few are often mistaken for patrons and, consequently, ignored by the staffs they are appointed to administer. Believing that every setting is an opportunity for research, these scions of the insignificant work diligently to infuse their subordinates with enthusiasm for the world of ideas. Unfortunately for the scholar, most of the other, more pragmatic members of the staff are too busy dealing with issues like what to do with the library's thirty-fourth complete set of *Harvard Classics*, just donated by

the nephew of a trustee—or the fact that someone keeps throwing dead fish into the auto-book return on Friday nights.

Scholars lead lives of quiet dissipation. The first priority of the morning is uncovering the next page on their "Dissertation Abstract of the Day" desk calendar. No one calls. No one writes. Pinkerton does not return.

These undaunted drones are uniquely capable of dispatching burgeoning amounts of even the most tedious paper work with Herculean ease—but are often stymied by having to make the simplest decisions. As a case in point, Herman Glick, head librarian at the Arkansas *Extremely Technical Research Institute* (AETRI), *not* affiliated with the Arkansas *Extremely Technical Community College* (AETCC) system, was renowned for his ability to polish off the exhaustive HEGIS report over coffee and crullers. But, ten years ago, the indefatigable Glick was reduced to a quivering mass of gelatin when his library was offered first refusal on the Butterfly McQueen Papers. (At last report, Miss McQueen was still awaiting Glick's decision.)

Because he is married to his research endeavors, this Sisyphian monk notices little difference between his days at work and his evenings at home. His happiest hours are spent in the company of his portable microfiche lap reader, perusing his complete personal set of *The National Union Catalog of Pre-1956 Imprints*, while listening to a compact disc recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* on constant repeat.

### Collateral Professions:

- Preparer of family-group sheets for the dramatis personae in Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*
- Translator of Marcel Proust into Urdu . . . or intelligible French
- Toll collector on the New Jersey Turnpike

---

Gayle Ann Fishel (closet librarian) is an award-winning graphic designer and Director of Publications at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina. Plummer Alston Jones, Jr. (ambivalent administrator) is Head Librarian/Director of Learning Resources at Elon College in Elon College, North Carolina.

## The Anal Retentive

(Cataloger)

"Oh, sweet mystery of life—at last I've filed you!"

### Synopsis:

This is no Cutter-and-run librarian. Introspective, brooding and intense, these individuals burn with a need for fastidiousness that is unparalleled by any other professionals—save yoga instructors and certain Peugeot mechanics. They are driven to classify, quantify and qualify.

Even the most banal of items is not immune to the rites of copious categorization. Legend has it that one lonely cataloger in Bozeman, Montana, filled a warehouse four times the size of the New York City Port Authority Building with subject cards for a *Time-Life Books* guide to regrouting bathroom tile.

Catalogers live with the constant fear that some tic or aberration in their characters will cause them to err in the classification of an item, wholly disrupting the order and harmony of the universe. They are consequently jumpy and meticulous individuals, entirely committed to their belief that the mystery of existence can be plainly resolved on one side of a 3 x 5 card.

This proclivity for superfluous repetition makes catalog librarians the most desired of partners for games like whist and Trivial Pursuit, but the least desired partners at any social function other than a bris or a bone marrow transplant. They are profoundly interested in the minutiae of almost anything. A cataloger will always be the one most likely to know absorbing bits of information like what "One-Hour Martinizing" actually means, or how many polyps Ronald Reagan had removed from his colon during his presidency (*nota bene*: 15).

These biblio-lemurs are so ardent in their pursuit of in-depth subject analysis that they are frequently oblivious to significant changes in their work environments. One such librarian in Flint, Michigan, was so absorbed by his delineation of relevant subject headings for twenty-eight new volumes of incunabula, that he failed to notice his midtown library branch had been closed and converted into a Chicken Delight franchise. (Patrons of this branch, by the way, were later heard to comment on the remarkable similarity between the incunabula and the cole slaw served there.) A sleepless cataloger doesn't simply count sheep, he classifies them; for example, "one Merino lamb, two Karakul rams, three Romney March ewes, etc., etc." "Thankfully," according to one insom-

niac, "there are over four hundred breeds with sufficient information to promote their classification according to distinctive productive traits. It's a comfort to know that we can all confront sleeplessness with impunity."

### Collateral Professions:

- Seam-ripper
- Quality Assurance Supervisor in a tortellini factory
- Bassoonist (or proficient on any double-reed family instrument)

---

## Catalogers pursue infinite accessibility with the same fervor and zeal employed by knights tracking the Holy Grail.

---

### The Omniscient Prognosticator

(Circulation Librarian)

"Les gens n'ont pas de pain . . . and we need the numbers."

### Synopsis:

In an era of budget cuts and fiscal restraint, many libraries owe their very existence to these titans of tabulation. Pragmatic and prophetic, these "Cassandras of Circulation" forge ahead with their dogged determination to anticipate the inchoate needs of the people. Some carry this to unusual extremes. One inner-city Los Angeles librarian was so intent on her mission to make the collection relevant to the needs of the community that she bought large quantities of rubber hose and bicycle chain at discount prices, and later, cut these into serviceable lengths upon patron request.

With their deep-seated conviction that a hearty dose of social responsibility can easily translate into user statistics, Omniscient Prognosticators are responsible for the development of landmark innovations in outreach programming. Sybil Ornstein, a circulation librarian in Duluth, Minnesota, noticed that her city boasted a large population of persons suffering from multiple personality dysfunction. "I found that by extending special borrowing privileges to this group," reported Ornstein, "that I could issue as many as twelve library cards to a single patron." In the same vein, inventive librarians in urban centers with large numbers of homeless residents have installed Murphy beds in the aisles of the least

trafficked ranges of their collections, such as the 020.92's or the Z720's (biographical sketches of librarians), bound backfiles of *Chemical Abstracts*, or the collected works of Theodore Dreiser.

#### **Collateral Professions:**

- College admissions director
- Sunday School bus-ministry driver
- Merchandising magnate for BIG LOTS stores

#### **The Commandant**

(Reference/Special Collections Librarians)

*"Lassen Sie ihnen Kuchen essen . . . but not in the library."*

#### **Synopsis:**

The ideological antithesis of the Omniscient Prognosticator, . . . Frequently sporting volatile dispositions, these librarians have been known to resort to quasi-military methods to safeguard their inviolate arsenals of volumes deemed worthy of the designation: "REFERENCE."

---

### **. . . the Commandant is less concerned with user satisfaction than with the integrity of the collection.**

---

We are reminded of the strange case of Helga Hildebrandt of (where else?) Berlin, Pennsylvania. When asked by a patron for information regarding the organization and preservation of a monstrous home-video collection, Hildebrandt reached immediately for her dog-eared desk copy of *Archival Moving Image Materials: A Cataloging Manual*, only to find that "some untutored Philistine" had not only permitted its circulation, but had actually allowed the volume to leave the premises "subject to call." Frau Hildebrandt, in a fit of righteous indignation, held the entire circulation staff at gunpoint until the name, Social Security number, and address of nearest living relative of the borrower were revealed.

The Commandant has her spiritual counterpart in that most mercurial of mercenaries: the Special Collections Librarian. Bred to embrace the axiom that every item, no matter how farcical or inutile, has intrinsic, archival merit, these guardians of garish gestalt patrol their whited sepulchres with maniacal fervor and intensity. Nothing illustrates this penchant for preservation more plainly than the celebrated crusade of Iowa librarian, Homer Skridlow.

When the Donna del Lago Chapter of the East Dubuque Knights of Columbus donated a rare collection of fiberglass baptismal fonts to its founding public library system, officials there were faced with the unhappy prospect of refusing the gift because of "space and staffing limitations." These impediments notwithstanding, special collections librarian Skridlow pledged himself to champion the homeless artifacts. Converting his modest Winnebago into an archival annex, Skridlow retrieved the items and created the world's first mobile special collection. Every afternoon (and on alternate Saturdays), East Dubuque residents were permitted to board the tiny coach and, after a thorough sterility gown-up, view the fonts in all their backlit splendor.

This kind of unselfish dedication to the preservation of *un-memorabilia* is the credo of the Commandant. Addressing a recent summit of special collections and reference librarians at their Center for Tactics and Retaliatory Practices in Bucharest, Boris Boesendorfer, chairman of the Subcommittee on User Containment, summarized the mission of the group: "Let there be no misunderstanding. We are no milk-and-water librarians! Our purpose is not to give the people what they want—it is to give them what they *deserve!*"

#### **Collateral Professions:**

- Telephone dominatrix (all major credit cards accepted)
- Division of Motor Vehicles clerk
- Coach of a Japanese women's volleyball team

#### **The Entrepreneur**

(Acquisitions Librarian)

*"Ask, send cash, check or purchase order, and it shall be given unto you."*

#### **Synopsis:**

Energetic, punctilious, and always eager to meet a challenge head on, these impresarios of inventory leave no stone unturned in their quest to satisfy the eclectic and often unreasonable requests of their user groups. Since they are responsible for locating and purchasing such a tremendous variety of items, these prima donnas of purchasing will frequently resort to unorthodox methods of locating suppliers. One acquisitions librarian in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was so devoted to the pursuit of competitive pricing that she programmed her VCR constantly to monitor the cable shop-at-home network.

Each evening after work, she would fast-forward through the day's wares, keeping a keen eye

out for bargains. "You'd be surprised at what you can pick up if you're religious about watching those shows," she pointed out. "Once I nabbed a mint condition set of the 1768-71 *Britannica*, reduced for quick sale along with two sets of steak knives and a black velvet painting of Elvis. I got the whole lot for \$22.95—and arranged for delayed billing!"

An equally zealous purchasing agent for a small, conservatively budgeted library system in Bangor, Maine, required all suppliers to complete exhaustive 846-page vendor surveys and required annual urinalysis and polygraph tests for sales representatives. This same servant of Cerberus admonished serial librarians to stop ordering any periodicals whose titles begin "Journal of" or "American Journal of" because, "we have a plethora of these already, and it does not behoove us to endorse the publisher's want of creativity in assigning titles."

Because business acumen and fiscal finesse are their stock-in-trade, Entrepreneurs are sometimes guilty of translating their successes into personal profits. Elsie Horvath, an acquisitions librarian in Carrington, North Dakota, was so exasperated by wholesalers constantly returning her order forms with notes reading: "Contact us when you all get a paved road, hear?"—that she took matters into her own capable hands. Horvath enrolled in a nearby Ryder Truck Driving Academy, and was soon piloting her own rig across the Great Northern Plains en route to the untapped treasures of Ann Arbor and Englewood Cliffs. It didn't stop there . . .

The enterprising Horvath, who soon realized that other small libraries in her state shared the same concerns about the expense and timeliness of shipments, resolved to market her customized, overnight freight service to the residents of Fargo, Minot, Grand Forks, and Bismarck. Soon Horvath was able to retire from her library job altogether, and today, the legends "Hire a Horvath" and "Elsie Delivers" are emblazoned on barns throughout the tri-state area.

#### **Collateral Professions:**

- Strip miner
- Spiritual advisor
- Bookie

### **The Missionary**

(Children's/Outreach Librarians)

"Suffer the little children to come unto me . . . but quietly, and in groups of manageable size."

#### **Synopsis:**

While most of us live out our lives trying to put as much distance as possible between ourselves and our childhoods, there is a select group of professionals who dedicate themselves to helping others preserve, prolong, and cherish their youth. Believing that the home lives of the youngsters they serve are every bit as steeped in harsh

---

## **Because of their professional and mental myopia, children's librarians have much in common with their counterparts in Outreach and Media Services.**

---

reality as last week's episode of *The Cosby Show*, these paragons of prepubescence can usually be found in some brightly colored corner of the library, busily creating bulletin boards on proper dental hygiene, or directing quiet, monosyllabic admonitions toward the vagrant who has just urinated into the aquarium.

Among the most highly trained and versatile of all librarians, the Missionary is accomplished in areas as wide ranging as storytelling, puppeteering, playing the autoharp, and organizing street gangs into basketball teams. Unfortunately, these pert and plucky Pollyannas are not always esteemed by their caustic colleagues. When Ginnie Mae Bond of Blounts Creek, North Carolina, was invited by the library board to make a report on the dramatic success of her pilot project to extend storyhour services to serial killers, she responded enthusiastically by delivering a six and one-half hour flannel-board presentation.

Five hours into her report, four of the board members had hurled themselves from windows of the eighth-floor meeting room, while two hysterical others threatened to hold Ginnie Mae down and force her to drink grape Kool-Aid laced with cyanide if she continued. Refusing to be dismayed and quite used to disruption, Ginnie Mae calmly

ignored their puerile complaints and proceeded with her presentation. Only when she had concluded her report and invited the audience to join with her in singing a rousing chorus of "We Are the World" did Ginnie Mae notice that the remaining board members had taken the cyanide themselves, and now lay scattered about the room on crushed piles of vanilla wafers.

All of these types share an impassioned belief in the universal relevance of the services they offer, and all are persuaded that their ventures combine to improve the overall quality of life on the planet. Only the most brutish among us would deign to suggest that driving sixty-five miles to deliver the large-print edition of recipes from the kitchen of Jim Valvano is anything less than an appropriate use of tax dollars, or that libraries *should* invest in laserdisc copies of such hallmarks of American cinema as *Teenwolf* and *Shanghai Surprise*. Fortunately, these arbiters of kitsch will ensure that the needs of the community are always anticipated by the libraries that serve them.

#### Collateral Professions:

- Float designer for the "Tournament of Roses" parades
- Cruise director
- Vice President, The

For more information about personality types (coming soon to a library near you), and your complimentary "sterility gown-up" tee shirt, send a SASE and a twenty-five dollar non-refundable processing fee to the authors. Allow six to eight months for delivery, slightly longer in New Jersey.

## Southern Harmony

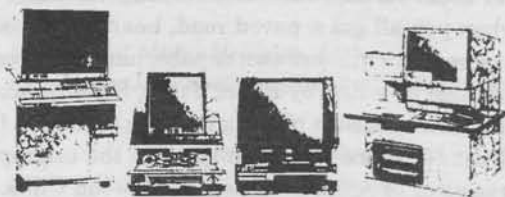
Libraries in Tune for the Future

SELA/TLA Conference  
Opryland Hotel  
Nashville, Tennessee  
December 4-8, 1990



## Southeastern Microfilm, Inc.

### AND MINOLTA. TWO ORGANIZATIONS THAT CAN HELP YOU GET ORGANIZED.



#### EQUIPMENT

We're Southeastern Microfilm, Inc. and we can help you reduce your filespace by 90% or more, help make your record keeping more organized and your staff more efficient.

Our micrographics professionals can help you select the right tools from a whole range of advanced Minolta micrographic equipment. They can tailor a system to meet your needs exactly.

Southeastern Microfilm, Inc. is the most complete micrographics dealer in North Carolina, offering advanced production services, a complete line of equipment and supplies and total customer support services.



ONLY FROM THE MIND  
OF MINOLTA

#### SERVICE

### WE HAVE A LOT OF MICROGRAPHIC SOLUTIONS LOOKING FOR PROBLEMS.

Asheville • Charlotte • Greensboro • Greenville • Raleigh  
1-800-532-0217