

The history and future of CLA according to me

Jennifer Richard

Editor

First off I'd like to send kudos to all the bloggers out there! I don't know how you do it. Twice a year when I sit down to write these editorial comments I marvel at how some can produce so much so quickly and often so thoughtfully. For me, I need the instant gratification of conversation to inspire and move forward with my ideas. I guess that's the E in my ENFJ personality, though some might say I could use a little more quiet reflection. As a volunteer editor of this journal, the work to get it published quietly nags at me all the time, with pangs of panic when I receive a message from a colleague or a request from a potential author. It's been an incredibly busy year for me, however that can't be an excuse. I'll apologize anyway, especially to those who I've taken way too long to get back to, and re-affirm my commitment to this journal; when I finally sit down and spend time working on the project, I still absolutely love it -- it's kind of like going to the gym, you dread and avoid it, but when you finally get around to going, you realize it's great and it's good for you.

Sometimes the panic comes while I'm reading status messages on facebook. I spend way too much time on facebook, but apparently it's not a complete waste because I seem to glean some inspiration from it, or I should say from them, meaning my friends. Pam Ryan, Su Cleyle, and Julie McKenna are the inspiring friends for this idea, but they are in no way responsible for what I am going to write. This history is according to me, and is based on my own personal experiences with CLA. The ideas about the future are not necessarily mine, in fact they are an amalgamation of ideas from many conversations during Partnership meetings and various library conferences over the last few years.

The History Part or Confessions of a Lapsed Member

My participation in the Canadian Library Association started off very early on in my professional career, as a volunteer on the Local Arrangements Committee for the annual conference in 1995. The 1996 conference was held in Halifax and I found myself in the unenviable position of fundraising coordinator with no experience, but lots of enthusiasm. Overall I recall this experience as being very positive. I met some wonderful colleagues and mentors such as Dr. Norman Horrocks, while serving on this committee. I think this must, in part, have led to my love of conference organizing and planning, but I also remember moments of sheer frustration. I think some of the frustration comes from organizing at a distance -- the right hand not knowing what the left was doing, or was allowed to do. A committee in one city, staffing and an office in another city, and an executive scattered all over the country, and finally varying levels of experience. In the end, as with most conferences, everything went off without a hitch, at least from the delegates' perspective. This was an exciting time for me as this was the first time I had ever participated on a national library level within my profession. I was also fortunate to present with Gwynneth Evans on my work serving international students. I also remember that it was at this conference where I had my first migraine headache. So I guess it's been a love/hate relationship with CLA. I, like my friend and colleague Elaine MacLean, am a self proclaimed association junkie. I love the

connections, the conversations, the knowledge, growth and friendships that happen through associations.

Ironically, my next direct experience with CLA came while I was on maternity leave with my first child. The University Librarian at Acadia and CLA Past President, Lorraine McQueen, was chair of the nominating committee for CLA in 2000 and asked if I would let my name stand in an election for Councillor at Large to round out the regional distribution of candidates. She assured me I wouldn't win. I did. Maybe I won because of my position statement included words like young professionals, outreach, relevance, and regionalism. As a reasonably new librarian, I believed the statements I made 9 years ago and I still do; I still think CLA needs real change. One of my very first impressions of CLA was that it was an old boys club; it just happened that there were a fair number of these boys disguised as women. So I'm back to the love/hate relationship again. I was lucky to be a volunteer for this association. It gave me opportunities to visit Winnipeg, Victoria, Toronto, and Ottawa. I expanded my professional affiliations, learned about Environmental scans and SWOT analyses, and got to work with smart, insightful colleagues, such as Michael Colborne from the Nova Scotia Provincial Library.

I learned a lot, but this was also a time of turmoil for the association. This was a time when the Executive wanted to make changes once again to the structure of the Council. There was a move to diminish the role of the divisions and remove them from the Council. Vickie Whitmell left CLA during my time on Council and I was very uncomfortable with how this had come about and with many of the things that were going on at this time. Most frustrating was that even though I was a councillor, I felt completely powerless in affecting any change in this association.

I suppose now, looking back, volunteering to chair the local arrangements committee for the 2002 conference hosted in Halifax, while I was a councillor and pregnant with a second baby, was an effort to feel in control again and make some kind of impact. It was a difficult conference, with no executive director to provide feedback or support, with the divisions unhappy about their influence in the conference programme being diminished and with the threat of more reorganization on the horizon; it was a very trying time for me and the migraines returned. I continued on the Council to finish up my term through my second maternity leave. Although I had given great thought to resigning, I didn't, but I had checked out, become disengaged. I called into teleconferences and I attended the meeting I was obligated to attend. I was completely disheartened, though I did maintain my membership.

The next chapter started in 2005 while I was Vice-President of the Atlantic Provinces Library Association and I went to my first Ontario Library Super Conference and Partnership Meeting, formerly PTLAC. I was so impressed with the offerings of the conference, both the quality and the quantity and the feeling of cooperation and collaboration around the Partnership table. It was organic, the lack of bylaws and rules allowed the creativity to flourish. Partnership was the perfect name because that's exactly what it was. The sole focus of this initiative was to work together to improve member benefits in each association.

It was here that I learned about the history between the provincial, regional and territorial library associations and CLA. I learned that before I had entered the profession, the provincial library associations were members of the CLA council. This new knowledge answered some questions for me. It explained on some level why CLA and the provincial associations didn't work together very effectively. Though I often wonder why former presidents of provincial associations that went on to become CLA presidents couldn't figure out a way to move forward and start working together, harnessing the power of the collective and the devotion to the local associations.

The Partnership boasted 8000 members, while CLA usually had only a quarter of that number. There were opportunities concerning issues of advocacy that everyone agrees are important, such as book rate and copyright. While I was President of APLA I wrote letters to the MPs and government officials on the issue of copyright and ended up finding our association name on petitions through Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) or other lobby groups, yet never been approached or contacted by CLA. It made no sense. I remember an incident regarding the book rate, where the Manitoba Library Association and concerned citizens from that province took action and CLA's response was that it was their (CLA's) job to handle this and basically for the regional association to wait and take their lead from them. We're all grownups, professionals in fact, and that kind of leadership was offensive and frustrating.

In 2007, from my vantage point, I saw that the provincial associations were the ones taking the lead on many issues. One issue I had become passionate about was open access, so I gave one final kick at the can to CLA and participated in the Open Access Task Force to develop a policy and position statement regarding open access. Although we had some of the leading librarians, including Heather Morrison and Andrew Waller, on this committee, the association fell short, in my estimation, by not accepting a full open access policy for CLA publications, while associations like BCLA and APLA had embraced this concept even in face of the possibility of reduced membership and reduced revenues. The argument being if you could get the publication for free, why would you join the association? Though CLA did accept many of the recommendations of the taskforce and did form an OA interest group, it wasn't enough for me and this was when I let my membership lapse. Even the good initiatives and programmes of CACUL, which was the primary reason I had kept my membership for many years, weren't enough and I finally gave up.

The Future Part or Call for Action

So here we are in 2010 and CLA is perhaps on the brink. After reading everything I've just written you might think I'd be happy, but I'm not because I have always wanted it to work. I've always wanted us to work together, leave the egos at the door. I don't think there has ever been a question that CLA is important and that a national body is needed to lead, lobby and advocate for libraries, all kinds of libraries. Do we need a CLA conference? Do we need divisions and committees? Do we need another publication that preaches to the choir? Maybe not. Do we need national campaigns on copyright, book rate, the value libraries bring to communities? Yes, without question. One example of a campaign of which many of you may be aware is the Ontario campaign for

Aboriginal libraries. The public service ads by prominent members of the aboriginal community are stellar; the production quality is outstanding; and as I watched these ads that premiered at the OLA conference, I kept saying "this should be a national campaign". This is the type of work CLA should be doing. The question or problem, is how do we co-ordinate and fund this level of organization? Unfortunately, I, myself, do not have the answer. CLA needs to start a dialogue with the National Library, all the many institutions across Canada, and the over 100 other library-related associations, in order to utilize the creativity, intelligence and passion of well over 10,000 individuals without a \$200 cost of membership; the resources gained from this kind of national collaboration would be priceless.

I encourage you to give your feedback to CLA by answering their [two questions](#), especially if you are NOT a member. This is such an important issue for our profession. I'd love to hear about your own experiences regarding CLA or library associations, as, I expect, would many of our readers, so I encourage you to add your comments to this editorial. Obviously everyone's experiences are different, but I hope that sharing mine will inspire you to think, write, and act.

Jennifer Richard is a fervent supporter and non-member of the Canadian Library Association.