Profile: Robert G. Thomas

Research Services Librarian
University of Regina Library

Describe your early background.

I grew up in Pickering, Ontario east of Toronto. I did my undergraduate degree in Sociology and History at Brock University (St. Catharines, Ontario) and postgraduate degrees at McMaster (MA, Work & Society, 2002) and a TESL certificate at Woodsworth College at the University of Toronto.

What (or who) influenced you to pursue a career in libraries?

I've always loved academia and the pursuit of knowledge, and of course I have always loved books so it seemed like a natural fit.

Where are you working now, and what do you like best about your current job?

I presently work as Research Sciences Librarian for a variety of social sciences subjects. I do a mixture of liaison work (meeting faculty members and assisting students) as well as collections for my area, and I take part in collegial decision making at the library.

I am also President of the Saskatchewan Library Association where I work with a team of my peers from across the library profession to support and advocate for libraries from across the province.

What is your most memorable library experience?

Many of the interactions that I have with students are quite ephemeral. They will come for help with an assignment or two, and then that is about it for our interactions. There are however other students who come repeatedly over their time at university, and I can definitely see an improvement in their ability to search and use information during this period. I hope that my assistance has been part of this increased awareness and use of information literacy skills.

Name one person you admire, and explain why.

Winston Churchill. After a short period of success early in life, he eventually was seen as a bit of a maverick and an outsider who wanted to do things that were both radical and dangerous. Some of the most famous people in history are people who thought
outside the box of what was considered acceptable. They abhorred groupthink. Too many times in our organizations people come to think too much alike and we don’t realize it until someone challenges us with a different perspective. As Burke is reputed to have said: “where everyone thinks the same, no one thinks very much.”

What do you do for recreation?

I enjoy bicycling and hiking (although the latter is difficult in southern Saskatchewan!) I like to visit towns and cities where I have never been, to practice being a flâneur (no itinerary, no map). Next stop is the Finger Lakes region of New York State this fall.

Name an interesting book or article you’ve read recently. What appealed to you about it?

I have been reading Robert Greene’s books on leadership. His books are an eclectic selection of stories about leadership and strategy through examining the history of generals, politicians, artists and so forth. They appeal to me both because I have always had a great interest in history as story and because the books illustrate various ways that successful leaders have managed change and created an environment where success was possible.

Is there anything else you’d like to mention that might interest Partnership readers?

Volunteer. We should make the best of every day to make the world a better place, and the best way to do this is to team up with others. Joining an association or similar organization can be a great way to accomplish things that we would never be able to do individually. In addition they are great places to learn how to better work with other people successfully.

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

I was co-chair of the Workshop for Instruction in Library Use (2011) which took place in Regina. This was the 40th anniversary conference and was the first time we had ever held it in Saskatchewan. There were approximately 125 registrants. It took a lot of work, but by building a strong team we were able to pull this off very successfully. I started in this role after working as a librarian for only two months, so I found it challenging but in the end a very educational experience.

What issues do you think will have a big impact on libraries in the next few years?

In urban public libraries I believe that there will be a continuation of the trends we have seen over the last two decades: an increasing use of electronic documents and integration of services, such as what we have done in Saskatchewan with the
Saskatchewan Information and Library Services Consortium (SILS) and the Multitype Library Board. Libraries will become ever more central to their communities. Small town libraries will continue to face a difficult battle to prove the relevance of their services to various stakeholders (a battle that is far from lost). In terms of the postsecondary system, I believe that there will be a much larger integration of information literacy into the university's curriculum and mandate of the library.

**If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go?**

I have traveled a lot within Western Europe and even lived in France for three years, yet there are so many more places that I would like to see there, including the Balkans, Greece, Spain and Portugal.