Profile: Robin Featherstone

Research Librarian
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Describe your early background.

I lived on Vancouver Island until my teens with a family of book-lovers. I went to McGill to study English Literature and then to Dalhousie for my MLIS.

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

I worked for an independent bookstore after I finished my BA. I really enjoyed helping customers and hunting for hard-to-find titles. I also sold books at regular meetings of our local Children's Literature Roundtable where I made friends with librarians who encouraged me to apply to library school.

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

I'm working for the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Alberta for ARCHE (Alberta Research Centre for Health Evidence). We produce mostly evidence syntheses, although we also do methodology research and some clinical trials. The best thing about working in a research team is collaborating with health professionals to develop new knowledge. It's a really inspiring place to work.

What is your most memorable library experience?

All medical librarians remember their first rush request. Mine happened when I was working alone at night as an intern at Dalhousie’s Health Sciences Library. I received a call from the emergency department in New Brunswick. A surgeon urgently needed to review images of procedures to repair chainsaw injuries to the jaw and face. I experienced a huge adrenaline rush as I ran around the library pulling the most gruesome images from our collection. The idea that I was helping someone who was about to perform surgery inspired me to run even faster!

Name one person you admire, and explain why.

William Osler. Medical librarians like me owe so much to him. He was not only a famous doctor but also a bibliophile and a supporter of libraries and librarians. He was even one of the founders of the Medical Library Association.
What do you do for recreation?

My favourite pastime is shooting pool. It’s an incredibly Zen activity to lose yourself in a game. You have to learn to let your mind relax to see the angles on the table. I’ve been playing pool since I was about five or six. Good luck trying to find a pool cue for a child! I remember my father had to cut one down to size on his table saw.

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

I’m currently addicted to *Saga* by Brian K. Vaughan. It’s a graphic novel series about a warring planet and its moon, and two soldiers from opposing forces who fall in love and escape across the galaxy. The writing and the artwork (Fiona Staples) are amazing. I love that the possibilities with this series are endless—I hope it never ends.

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

Well, I guess just to be inspired by the name *Partnership*. I’m very lucky to get to collaborate with doctors and nurses and public health officials and emergency managers. Whatever we do, we do it better together.

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

In 2006 I was selected for the National Library of Medicine's (NLM's) Associate Fellowship Program which only accepts a few applicants each year. I’m still benefiting from the professional connections and the learning opportunities I gained from being an NLM fellow. I would encourage any library school graduate who is interested in health sciences to apply.

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

Over the next few years, I think librarians will be challenged to develop professional roles outside of the library environment. Librarians aren’t just about library buildings!

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

I would go to Easter Island to see the moai.