



Profile: Gail Richardson
Acting Director, Online Services, Oakville Public Library, Oakville, Ontario

What was your first job ever?

At age 16, working the evening shift in a factory stuffing envelopes with the first big credit card - Chargex - remember that one? "cha-ching"

Describe your first job in libraries.

Information Assistant at the Halton Hills Public Library. Information desk shifts, database cleanup and maintenance for home-grown databases/web interfaces for genealogical research - birth, marriage and death notices, census material, newspaper articles from local newspapers, website design and maintenance, collection management. It is a fairly small library so it was "all hands on deck for all the jobs."

If you weren't a librarian/library worker, what would you be? Why?

Some sort of writer or editor. I love words as well as books and stories. I've always thought I might have enjoyed a career as a film editor. I have worked in publishing and have a good eye for what looks good on a page or a screen and I love detailed organization.

Who has been a big inspiration/influence on your library career?

Walter Lewis - Systems Librarian, now working on OurOntario
Brian Bell - Director, Allouette Canada

Name one person you admire (outside of libraries) and explain why.

Stephen Lewis, who works tirelessly and compassionately for the well-being of others less fortunate - and not for the glory.

What is the best part of your job?

Seeing colleagues excited when they discover how new technologies can enrich their experience at work and possibly at home too. And here I am speaking about not just any new technology that comes along but those that we have considered and found to be ones that will stay around and improve and be useful to us as librarians and for our customers. The raison d'etre for the profession stays the same, even when the tools change. Oh, and facilitating a book club at the library.

In terms of electronic resources, what is your favourite search interface and why?

Sadly, none of the commercial products on which we spend so many dollars and for which we need to do so much promotion and training because they are not intuitive or easy to use - and for which we receive NO meaningful statistics! Did 3,000 people click on the resource and then go away because it was too hard to use? Or did 3,000 people get the answer they needed? We have no way of knowing. My favourite search interface is that of BiblioCommons, a new interface to our online catalogue which we at OPL are beta-testing right now. It will soon be tested at more Ontario libraries, and also Edmonton Public library and libraries in British Columbia. A web 2.0 interface, BiblioCommons allows online catalogue users to review, rate, and find and interact with other users - a real "search and discovery" tool rather than the kludgy interface most of us have on an ILS that was always meant for librarians to find something on a shelf! BiblioCommons has worked hard to incorporate feedback from users and library staff during every step of development.

What was a great conference you attended and what made it great?

Access (fill in the year) and the OLA Superconferences are always terrific. I love Access because I find out about cutting-edge applications from all over the world - but OLA has got to be one of the best (if not THE best) professional organization conferences in the world. Thanks Larry and all of your dedicated staff - you're the best!

If you could say one thing to someone interested in a career in libraries, what would it be?

My bet would be that most librarians still go into the profession because they love books and reading. And that's good news. If that has now extended to include self-described "information junkies," those who live in cyberspace, and dedicated gamers, that's okay too. I think one of the best things about the profession (aside from the fact that someone PAYS ME TO READ - how cool is THAT!) is that my days are filled with information and stories that span a huge breadth of topics, issues, hobbies, etc. etc. I can be a specialist in one or more areas but know a little bit about a whole lot - or at least know how to find out something if I DON'T know. My lecturer in Entrepreneurial Librarianship (yes - that was the name of the course), Stan Skrzyszewski, once said - and I've never forgotten it - "Librarians either know how to do or find something, can teach themselves how to do or find something, or can figure out the best person to hire to find or do something - so all things are possible."