

# Doing something of value

Alex Byrne, Northern Territory University

**W**hy am I a librarian? A very good question — is it perhaps the last refuge of the dilettante?

Interest in nature and design led me into engineering but I found working in a public service engineering environment stultifying. Af-

ter a period of travel and working in a variety of jobs, including some involvement in the establishment of a community information centre, a friend said 'You've always liked books — why don't you become a librarian?'

So I went to the State Li-

brary of South Australia and looked up a book. I must have been typeset! I was fortunate to study librarianship at the then Canberra College of Advanced Education under the guidance of John Balnaves. While his style did not suit all, I was inspired to engage with the great ideas which underlie librarianship: the principles of access to information. Emerging technologies were beginning to provide opportunities to manage and access information in novel ways, to respond to individual and community needs. Emphasis on access was expanding the roles of libraries and archives.

Working as a reference librarian, and subsequently managing services, has given me great satisfaction, a feeling that I do something important, something of social value. My bosses and other mentors guided and inspired me but, above all, gave me the opportunity both to make mistakes and to extend myself. They set a high standard to emulate when I came to direct a library and now a division which includes library, information technology, media, multimedia, open learning, distance education, services in remote communities and a community radio station!

In a university, the focus of the library is, of course, on helping the students and researchers of today and on developing collections and other resources for the future. It provides the foundations for scholarship and for teaching: it draws on many skills, human, bibliographic, managerial and, increasingly, technological. It allows me to engage with knowledge across many disciplines and is endlessly fascinating.

So, why am I a librarian? Because I got lucky! ■



**This month** we celebrate careers in library and information science.

A number of 'personal-ity pieces' appear throughout this issue giving just a taste of the types of careers available in the sector. There are, of course, many other interesting and challenging roles librarians play today.

The second part of the feature looks at ways to make the most of your career. We profile just a few of the mentoring schemes available to ALIA members. As you will see, not all mentoring schemes are the same. If your branches' scheme is not included, contact your branch council for details — or better yet, get them to write an article and we will include it in a future issue of *inCite*.

To finish off the feature we have asked current library and information science students to give us feedback on why they decided on a career in this sector. You will find their comments throughout this issue of *inCite*.

## A whole new world

Brenda McConchie, AIMA Training and Consultancy Services

**E**ntirely by accident is the way you could describe how I began working in libraries. I was a teacher in a high school in Darwin, in 1972 and wanted to have more relevant teaching resources to use with my students. A colleague recommended that I do a course in teacher librarianship and learn how to make my own! During that course, partly run by Doreen Goodman, a whole new world opened up to me and I have been hooked on libraries and information management ever since.

My career reads like a library mix and match — school libraries, a joint use library, school library consultant, special library, information management, library and records management consultant and trainer. I guess the key to all of these library moves has been to learn more and meet the various challenges — the school library in Darwin was severely damaged by Cyclone Tracey; as a school library consultant I encountered the big picture for the first time and chaired the board of a national information service; the special library was about quality service delivery, broadening the base of the library to electronic document management and records management; and AIMA is about providing a service to the entire profession in Australia and New Zealand.

If I had to identify a highlight it would be moving from a school library where I was so flat-out dealing with the day-to-day library activities that I hardly had time to think; to moving to a consultancy role where I was exposed to another world of strategic planning, national networking and leading-edge organisational development techniques. It was here that I really began to feel that I had something to offer the profession at large. Another highlight was undoubtedly working in a large government department where I was able to work with library staff who were prepared to push the edges of a special library service using the latest technology. It was for this work that I was awarded the Public Service Medal in 1994 and it was the staff who helped me do it.

Today, from my position at AIMA, I have been lucky enough to work in all types of libraries in Australia and I have developed a vision for a profession which understands its role in an industry with a major contribution to make to the economic and social value of this country. I make the distinction between the profession and the industry because as a service provider to libraries and librarians, I am seeing more and more the need for us to make sure we have in place an infrastructure which models those used successfully in other industries, and which provides us with the mechanisms for articulating our value to our customers, based on exemplary business practice. ■