

# Librarian in pyjamas



**Geraldine  
Barkworth**

**Bold Women Big Ideas**

**M**argie Anderson is a librarian who married a librarian. A strong advocate and role model for the library profession, she's described as positive, vigilant and feisty. She adds she's also pigheaded, has unrealistic expectations and needs to chill out more. Margie tells Geraldine Barkworth how wearing pyjamas 24 hours a day becomes a bonus when you've got your priorities right.

### **How do you work out your personal priorities?**

I sound really corny – but I think you have a responsibility in life to try to do your best at things and to take responsibility for your involvement in life. I tell my kids 'You don't have to be the best – but I want to see you try your best.' I measure success by what makes me and the people I care about happy. It's not always the traditional markers of success. (Mind you I do enjoy a few of the benefits of a good job and a steady income!) I am not a competitive person when it comes to competing against others (my results on the sports field show this), but I have to say I have always set a pretty high standard for myself and I don't like to let others or myself down.

I used to have the attitude that you just have to work harder if there is something you want. But I've learnt that sometimes, things are just beyond your control. You have to accept, grieve, work out what it is you can control and then get on with it.

My family knows they will always be my top priority – so they are also happy to help me keep my work commitments. We are a multi-tasking team in the Anderson household.

### **What do you currently do for a crust?**

I'm a teacher at Victoria University, Department of Library and Cultural Studies. I teach several classes a week for students who are enrolled in the Diploma of Library Studies (Library Technician). The subjects vary each year – this year I am teaching aspects of OH&S in the library industry along with multimedia and web design. I also teach off-campus students who access the material via the web.

I'm the ALIA Local Liaison Officer for Victoria. My role is to provide an interface between the members in Victoria and the staff at ALIA National Office in Canberra. I am the first point of contact for local members. I attend local ALIA meetings and events and help develop national programs in response to the needs of Victorian members.

A typical work day at home for me might include an ALIA teleconference (while bathing Elias), online research, assisting a student by phone, marking assignments (while cooking dinner) and e-mailing at 1:00am.

### **What's the highlight of your career so far?**

Building up the Melbourne office of The One Umbrella from just me to the most successful recruitment agency in Victoria for the library and records industry was pretty cool!

The first time I ever did any training – for Ferntree Computer Corporation – I just loved the feeling of being in front of the class. I just knew I couldn't let go of that feeling of standing in the spotlight, and it led me on to teaching library technicians.

### **What gives you a sense of passion and purpose?**

My kids – they are amazing!

Whatever job I have had I have always been passionate about it – I figure if you are not passionate about your job then you better fix it or move on to something else. Over the past few years I have been involved with people with disabilities and I'm appalled at the lack of available services. One of my major life goals is to make a visible improvement in this area.

### **You have a busy life. How do you balance work and home commitments?**

I don't get the balance right all the time – I have a tendency to take on too much and then be swamped. I have worked from home for more than 10 years so the lines between work and home life have become pretty blurred. My kids think that having a mum who takes work calls while she cooks tea is normal.

I get creative about when I work. If going to the school sports day means I then have to work from 9:00pm to midnight later, then so be it. I remember writing a report for ALIA earlier this year from next to the pool at the Melbourne Aquatic Centre. The Australian Commonwealth Games team was training behind me and my kids were swimming in the pool in front of me – and I managed to get the report in on time.

I have had great employers who have been really supportive of my arrangements. But the flip side of that is that I work hard to keep my commitments to them. So if I take on a work project then I get it finished, no questions. I have found that employers trust me to juggle my family and work because they know when work really needs to be done I won't let them down.

The family/work split has needed a lot more refining since Elias was born. He is about to turn 3 and has spent about 14 months in total in hospital. He has very complex medical issues and disabilities, requiring specialised care at home. This has meant that we as a family, and the people my husband and I work with, have had to pull hard together to meet everyone's needs. I have to say the generosity of spirit of our work colleagues and their understanding

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has been amazing. Great people really come through for you when your back is to the wall.

#### **What's it like being married to a fellow librarian?**

It's great being able to share industry small talk and to understand in detail about what your partner is experiencing at work – but I have to say it could get pretty obsessive if we let it, not to mention pretty boring! My husband, (Craig Anderson, Director, Library RMIT University) and I met because we were working in the same industry – so having that common ground is a big part of our relationship and our lives.

And let's face it – if I weren't married to a librarian I would never have gotten to spend my honeymoon with 26 000 other librarians at an international librarianship conference. Fancy missing out on that!

#### **Double librarians at the dinner table – how does that influence your kids?**

Totally. Books and reading are a huge part of their lives. Craig reads to the boys every night. When Elias was really small and was in hospital Craig would sit next to his humidicrib and read to him through the portholes. Jonas went to his first ALIA meeting at 6 weeks and his first international library conference at 6 months. He was the youngest ever member of the Library committee at his school – enough said really.

#### **Has there ever been any career competition between you and your husband?**

When we first got together, both Craig and I were working in similar roles for competing library automation companies, so we were competing for customers. We had to develop really strict rules about what went on at work and what went on at home. Because of privacy and business advantage there were many topics we just didn't discuss. Some days we couldn't even answer the question 'What did you do at work today, honey?' It wasn't hard to stick to the rules because our jobs depended on it.

Later on, when I worked in recruiting, I would often know personal information about people in the industry that I just never shared with Craig and likewise as a manager he often knows about people or events in the industry that he needs to keep confidential. We have a lot of respect for what we need to not tell each other! But if it is not confidential – then we gossip like anyone else in the same industry.

There has never been too much competition between us over career success or demands – we have developed very different roles. My priority is

to balance my work role with motherhood. Craig works full-time and that has its own juggling demands. We have always been very good at trying to work the demands of one person's job around the needs of the other. So for instance when I got the chance to take on a great role, for a while Craig changed his work commitments so he could take on some of our childcare whilst I was working. Inevitably some nights we both want to go to the same function or meeting and we have to toss a coin to see who goes and who stays home but we are comfortable with that.

#### **As a former library recruiter and teacher of library students, what are your top tips on getting a job?**

Be *enthusiastic*. Attitude is everything. Employers want to see people who are motivated, good problem solvers, have pride in their work, take responsibility and are enjoyable to be around. Be inquisitive – want to learn new things and take on new roles just for the thrill of it.

Be *proactive* and always look ahead. Keep your eye out for a job or role that might come up in the future or a chance to learn a new skill that you might be able to use down the track.

Look at all the *skills* and attributes you have acquired across all aspects of your life and think about how you could best use them in a professional role. Take some risks and apply for jobs outside your normal area if you think you have the skills to take on the role.

Build up your professional *networks*. Get out there and meet as many people as you can in the profession and learn as much about the industry as possible. Make the most of your ALIA membership by learning from others.

#### **What do you see as the most transferable skills of librarianship?**

The ability to seek out information. It's the skill that sets us apart and is the most valuable. Whatever your role in life, professional or personal, if you can get the information you need to solve the problems that you face, then you are in a winning situation. The ability to seek, sort and synthesise will take you a long way.

#### **If you could have more of one thing in your life, what would it be?**

Days at the beach and time with my boys who are growing up so quickly.

*Margie can be contacted at [margie.anderson@alia.org.au](mailto:margie.anderson@alia.org.au).*



*Margie Anderson with her family, husband Craig, and sons Jonas and Elias*

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*Geraldine Barkworth is a transformative career coach who works with library professionals who struggle with work/life balance. Obtain her free LIS ezine by contacting her [geraldine@boldwomenbigideas.com.au](mailto:geraldine@boldwomenbigideas.com.au) or 02 6685 1917.*

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