



Jan Richards

ALIA President

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Board members welcome your comments and feedback. Please feel free to contact a Board member at any time.

Email: feedback@alia.org.au with your comments.

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Do you find that you've begun to think in blog bytes? Increasingly I seem to view every event and encounter as potential fodder for a blog entry or a Frontline article. Then there's Twitter! I suspect I'm a little too verbose to tweet effectively (I never have been any good at those "in 25 words or less" competitions, even when the prize is dinner with Johnny Depp).

This Frontline had its genesis while I was dawdling around the garden in a philosophical mood. It occurred to me that my garden is a potted history of my life; pots and sculptures which have moved with us from house to house, "growing" gifts to mark special occasions, holiday buys, and plants grown from cuttings donated by family and friends. One which falls into the latter category is a yellow flowered perennial of unknown name whose ancestor was given to me many years ago by one of my earliest mentors, Margaret McDonald. The sight of it invariably reminds me of her and the invaluable truths she taught me. Not, I suspect, that Miss McDonald would have thought of herself as a mentor; if pressed perhaps a role model. And this of course begs the question 'what is mentoring'?

Ann Rolfe-Flett in *Mentoring in Australia* (2002) defines it as "an alliance of two people that creates a space for dialogue that results in reflection, action, and learning for both". She continues, "mentoring happens in all organisations whether it is fostered as a development strategy, allowed or encouraged as an informal process or takes place as an activity that occurs below the consciousness of individuals. People are always learning from others, adopting modelled behaviours and attitudes, and absorbing the culture and perceived values of the organisation through their personal interactions with co-workers."

There are a number of formal mentoring opportunities in our profession. Probably the best known is the Aurora Library Leadership Institute which is held annually at Thredbo Alpine Village, NSW, usually in February. Described on the Aurora website as a "once in a lifetime invitation to personal and professional growth", the Institute is led by Becky Schreiber and John Shannon of Schreiber Shannon Associates, who have facilitated all the Aurora Institutes since its inception in 1995.

John and Becky are assisted by nine mentors from Australia and New Zealand who act as facilitators, guides, sounding boards, and role models, and work closely with participants throughout the Institute. I was first invited to be an Aurora mentor in 2007 and arrived as a 'newbie' in concert with ALIA Vice-President Graham Black. We mustn't have been too dreadful as we were asked back in 2008, an opportunity we relished. It is wonderful to be able to give back to the profession.

Participants are warned that the Institute is a demanding, challenging, and exciting experience. That applies to mentors as well. If we look back at Rolfe's definition, this process is very much a learning experience for all concerned where assumptions are constantly challenged. I regularly look back at the notes I made in the participants' workbook and, comparing the two years, I can track my own changed direction.

It has given me real pleasure to reconnect with many of the Aurorans I met at Thredbo during my time on the ALIA Board and to track their progress. Last week I was delighted to receive a message from a young colleague who had applied for, and won a great new position. She wrote "I wouldn't have got this job without my experience volunteering with ALIA, and I wouldn't have got involved with ALIA without attending Aurora!! So within two years of Thredbo I've increased my salary by \$12 000 and am now in a middle-management position! It really does prove the ALIA Email signature line 'ALIA membership: an investment in your professional future'".

Information about the 2010 Institute will be available on the website in the near future. I urge you to give it some serious consideration; could it be the step that makes a difference to you? <http://www.alia.org.au/~aurora/index.html>

Tania Barry from Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service and Kerrie Burn from Southern Cross University have been announced as the successful applicants in the ALIA Research Mentoring Program. This is a new initiative which provides the recipients with the opportunity to receive expert coaching and guidance as they undertake a research project on a selected library or information issue. If you haven't already done so, read ALIA Board member Helen Partridge's report in the August edition of *inCite*. Congratulations to Kerrie and Tania (Aurora Alumni).

In life most of my mentoring experience has fallen into the role model category and I suspect that is true for most of us. Some of those who have had the most profound influence on me have been from outside of the library sector; it's a matter of being alert to the skills and attitudes you come across in life and adapting those to your own needs. Conversely I believe that it's critical to recognise the role we play in nurturing and developing our colleagues by modelling positive attributes and taking the time to listen and explain. I urge you to think about the people who have made a difference in your professional life. Each of their contributions may be small but they piece together to be the individual you've become.

As you read this the ALIA Public Libraries Summit will be six weeks in the past and we're progressing the outcomes. The message came as no surprise, the manner and strength of its delivery did – it was clear from the formal proceedings and the informal feedback during the breaks that delegates expected ALIA to pick up the ball and run with it, which is just what we're doing! For a fuller description of the day, read the article on the Summit in this edition or go to the Summit webpage <http://www.alia.org.au/summit09/>

Right now it's my ALIA-rostered time to Twitter so I'm off to agonise over how to say something meaningful in 140 characters or less!

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