



INSIDE OUTSIDE?

Outside Denhams Beach, South Coast NSW.

What's it like to be a librarian yet no longer work *in* a library? It's great, and for many reasons: independence, variety, flexibility and professional satisfaction.

Let's consider each of these in turn. First, independence. While it's liberating to be your own boss, it's also intimidating to realise that free as you may be, unless there are people working in libraries who are interested in what you have learned from your own experience, *and who are prepared to pay you for your advice*, then the bills will not get paid. Without customers, we have no livelihood. Just like it is for people who work in libraries: without customers there are no jobs.

Variety. The main components of our business are consultancy, training, and editing and indexing, and the proportion each contributes to the whole varies from year to year. The characteristics of each element are quite different. Consultancy, surprise, surprise, involves a good deal of consultation – meeting with people, listening to, defining and researching their issues, then offering options for service improvements. Training involves extensive preparation, delivery and evaluation. Training and consulting involve travel, but editing and indexing are office-only activities, usually involving lots of screen-staring and deadlines that are fixed to publishing schedules.

Flexibility comes from having some influence on the mix of work we take on, although timetables have so often been determined by our customers that we've long ago given up the distinction between work days and weekends. This is not necessarily a bad thing. We can take a break when others are at work, and visit places such as the one in the picture as the sun comes up and

the beach is deserted. Sometimes we feel this change of setting is essential therapy at the end of a six month strategic planning project, or a two day rush job back of book index, but really, in these hyper-connected days, the office is where we are.

Professional satisfaction comes from the usual sources: knowing that an assignment has been done well, receiving complimentary feedback from participants in a training program, getting a printed credit for a precise and concise index, enjoying dinner with new friends from the customer's project team at the end of a politically tricky project – and, naturally, being paid. Such rewards are not exclusive to librarians outside libraries; most are also available to librarians inside libraries.

Working for libraries from the outside is not *all* that different from working for libraries from the inside. Customer focus and being as good at your job as you can be – knowing how you can make a difference - are essential qualities. ALIA helps with both. Certified Professional status lets our customers and your employers know that we're serious about the currency of our knowledge in a field where the pace of change is dictated by the information technology juggernaut. Being involved in ALIA activities, and in our case, also being members of the American Library Association, the Special Libraries Association and the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers, allows us think global and act local, and benefit from the personal networks which sustain all library people with a pulse.

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Libraries Alive!