

Courtroom 302: a Book Review and More

Jacqueline Cantwell, Brooklyn Supreme Court Library

I have just finished reading *Courtroom 302: A Year Behind the Scenes in an American Criminal Courthouse*. Steve Bogira. New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. The book has received good reviews; its evenhanded description of criminal cases processed in a single Cook County courtroom has been well received. For those only familiar with criminal trials and the drug trade through television police dramas, it will be a revelation. For public law librarians hired because of their familiarity with "diverse populations," Bogira's descriptions of shackled men and distraught families in court hallways will be depressingly familiar. What a law librarian will notice amidst the vivid descriptions of fetid lock-ups, police perjury, and impoverished neighborhoods is that the law library is never mentioned. Bogira's expose of the pressure to settle cases in an overburdened system explains why. The judges simply lack the time to reflect. They are evaluated by how quickly they clear dockets, not by how much justice they administer.

At the 2005 AALL conference seminar "May It Please the Court: Strategies for Discovering SRL Services Judges Crave," the survey of Montana and Minnesota judges revealed that two thirds of the judges did not have frequent access to a law librarian. The user group we are required to serve by statute, before attorneys or the public, is not demanding our services and, even worse, not missing us! Judges are clearing dockets without our help. What in the process makes us and our libraries unessential? Why do judges not need to question their work? The answer lies in the expectations of the court system and the power of judges.

Judges' actions are rarely challenged. They have absolute power and authority within the courtroom. They rule from what is presented to them; evidence that might complicate matters is omitted. The criminal justice system perpetuates injustice while clearing dockets.

We can contribute to the discussion of this social crisis by reviving the role of the library in society by drawing upon the words of Soledad Farreiro, director of the Chilean Library of Congress: "... our libraries have a duty to retrieve the original sense of the library as a place that takes care of government and citizens by maintaining the records of accountability, helping to build social networks, creating knowledge, and disclosing new worlds to citizens."

Bogira's writes in the tradition of the documentary: the observer whose outsider status and ability to leave gives him the chance to explore what society chooses to ignore. Bogira reveals the pressure on defendants and prosecutors to settle. Just on the opening day of the book, eleven hundred felony cases are scheduled to be heard in the courthouse. By concentrating on a single courtroom and its judge, Bogira is able to give the background to cases and personalities. Judge Locallo is hard working and respected by the bar. He is scholarly. He is ambitious. He works hard to process cases. Locallo is proud of the number of dispositions he oversaw the previous year, 1058, compared to 15 jury trials, 88 bench trials and 805 guilty pleas. Locallo rules to clear the docket, not to preserve rights. Locallo's actions are not reviewed or challenged. He has enormous power within the court room. He worries more about re-election than being over-ruled on appeal. Few cases go up on appeal, but elections occur regularly.

In the chapter "Defective Products," Bogira recounts the case of Dan Young, Jr. Young was originally imprisoned by Judge Durkin in 1994 and is now before Locallo for a retrial on the grounds that psychotropic medicine impaired his ability to stand trial. In the original trial, two psychiatrists and the director of the psychology department for Cook County courts stated that Young was too mentally retarded to knowingly waive his Miranda rights. Judge Durkin ruled that Young, a mentally retarded man with an IQ in the 50s, knowingly waived his Miranda rights. Bogira summarized Durkin's reasoning thus:

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Our librarian qualities of quiet competency and neutrality make us appear inconsequential, and with the automation of research skills in Lexis and Westlaw, unessential. Those two qualities, competency and neutrality, remind me of the tenets of classic book design where the type and layout are meant to be unobtrusive and supportive of the author's intent. A well-designed book is one you are not conscious of as you read-and I feel that we have incorporated that bookish trait into our own practice. Now with new demands arising from technology and social policy, we are being sidelined, just as books are.

Contributing to a public discussion will be difficult. We will have to develop new skills and insights. We will have to expand the aims of our research. Looking at the brochure for the 2005 American Society for Information Science and Technology, I see many workshop titles whose themes could help us in our work. We will have to become tougher and more compassionate; we will have to learn how to live our private values publicly.

In my daily work, I am inspired by attorneys who have been tested in the brutality of the world, but retain authority and nobility. The African-American attorneys who started working in the Civil Rights movement have a composure that gives the people around them the opportunity to be noble. Attorneys who survived combat during World War II and Korea and went to law on the GI bill share the same quality of honoring the individual before them. These attorneys inspire me to value my work and its potential to change the world. ■

Goodbye to Hall of Fame “Quarterback” Jean Holcomb

Rick Stroup, King County Law Library

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Fall is football time. Football, so we're told, is a game of numbers. Sometimes so is librarianship and ultimately life. On October 1st, 4,745 days after she first assumed the directorship of King County Law Library, Jean Holcomb climbed into a jeep with her son and left Seattle for North Carolina and a new chapter in her life. One jeep, one son and a 2,740 mile trip across 10 states to reach 34 acres of prime Carolina farm land. 34 acres with one creek, one tobacco barn, one tenant farmer and one spectacular view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. One cross-country trip to be reunited with one husband, one daughter and two grandchildren.

But what of the numbers that Jean left behind? Branch libraries designed and constructed: 1. Earthquakes endured: 1. Necessary library moves supervised and survived: 2. Attempts by ignorant third parties to move the library quashed: 3. Library floods fjorded: 4. Successful increases to library funding sources: 5. Library interns mentored and set free to do good work in the world: 17. Average number of pages sent to Law Library Trustees in preparation for their monthly study sessions: 35. Hours spent preparing to testify on behalf of law library legislation: 5,460 or 28 times the number of hours it took Neil Armstrong to fly to and from the moon. Miles traveled between Seattle and Olympia in support and defense of law library legislation: 11,700, or nearly half the circumference of the Earth. Funds raised in support of the Library's first capital campaign: \$51,000. Pro Se litigants whose visits to library were made demonstrably better by her management: 390,000. “Bus thoughts” about creative ways to improve the library's services: 1,451,388 (not including similar “airplane thoughts” pondered while flying to and from AALL meetings or “elevator thoughts” considered during courthouse elevator trips). Fat-free Peppermint Patties consumed to keep the fires of inspiration burning: classified. Grey hairs generated during 13 years of diligent and dedicated law library management: far too many.

Fall is football time but football, so we're also told, is not everything. Nor are the sums we derive when we count the “achievement beans” of our professional careers. Impressive as

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they are, the numbers that Jean has left behind will never adequately describe the positive influence she has had on King County Law Library, the practice of law librarianship in Seattle and her profession as a whole. Those who worked with her for even a short period of time will recall her always-upbeat attitude, her steadfast professionalism and her parade of power cardigans. Those of us who worked with her during the ups and downs of life in a public law library that was and is always trying to improve itself will recall with fondness her unshakable belief in the good that public law libraries can do, a tenacity that is the envy even of pit bulls and gila monsters, and her uncanny ability to not only see the light at the end of any tunnel but to help those around her see it, too. King County Law Library was desperately in need of leadership and direction when she came and through her outstanding stewardship is now one of the strongest public law libraries in the State and is respected by its patrons and other libraries alike for its commitment to quality library service.

Jean, as you read this - hopefully sitting comfortably in your favorite armchair with a beverage of choice and a blank legal pad close at hand - know that the staff and the trustees of King County Law Library will be forever grateful for your leadership and the contributions you made during your tenure. We wish you all the best in your North Carolina endeavors and look forward to your return to Seattle in June to teach the Law Library Administration class. We will eat Ryan's Famous Teriyaki Salmon, enjoy Rita K.'s to-die-for pie and reminisce about the good 'ol days.



Jean with surprise party attendees Charley Dyer and Roberta (Bert) Monroe.



Jean with the cake at her Farewell Party on Wednesday, September 7th.



King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert (I), Council Chair Larry Phillips and KCLL Board Chair Judge Catherine Shaffer present Jean with a Certificate of Appreciation.

The Back Page

Member News

Do you have member news? Have you recently moved, started a new job or gone back to school? Is your library starting a new campaign, launching a new web page or moving to a new building? Send in your news items now!

King County Law Library welcomes **Marcus Hochstetler** as the new director. He is also currently serving as Secretary/Treasurer of SCCLL. Look for a profile of Marcus in the next issue of *SCCLL News*.



View from Your Library

I have noticed that sometimes as librarians, we are entirely too serious. Humor is often a vitally needed ingredient in getting through challenging times. I would like to dedicate this column of *SCCLL News* to bringing a smile to our collective faces.

As such, I'm asking members to send in funny stories, anecdotes, etc. about working in our type of library. For example, I often chuckle when I read the back page of *Spectrum* and see the gorgeous views from libraries around the country. I wonder, what vista would we pick? Perhaps the King County Jail or the homeless shelter across the street?

Entries should be short enough to fit in this space and you're welcome to remain anonymous. If you're a fan of the Red Green Show on PBS, you'll understand when I say "We're all in this together."

-Kim Ositis, *SCCLL News* Editor



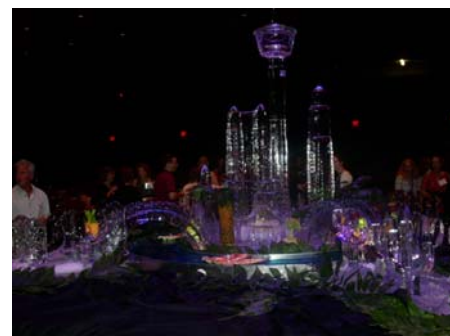
Photos from the 2005 AALL Annual Meeting



Bidders looking at items for the Silent Auction at the SCCLL Business Meeting.



The new members of the SCCLL Executive Board are sworn in.



This amazing ice sculpture of the San Antonio Riverwalk was the centerpiece of the West party.

SCCLL Discussion Group

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To send a message to everyone on the list, send e-mail to: sccll-sis@aallnet.org