
SR-SIS Newsletter, vol. 7, no. 2 (Winter 1997)

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MIRABILE DICTU!

by Bruce Kleinschmidt, Editor

Prison Libraries

I had never given much thought to the subject of prison libraries until 1984, when I met Robert Vernon Bruce. I'd taken a job with a law firm in Dallas and Robert was the runner for the firm. Robert had a past. In 1964 he murdered his first wife while he was drunk.¹ He never denied that he had done this and he was ashamed of his act. Robert took a liking to me, in part because we share a name and he found me a good audience for his tales of prison life. And I suppose some of it was that I wasn't scared of him and I would actually be seen in public with him. He was the third convicted murderer I'd known in my life.²

But what was different about Robert was that 1) he was remorseful over what he had done, and 2) he used prison as a chance to better himself. He had gone to high school and then opened a small cement trucking business. But while he was still in jail, waiting to go to prison, something happened. He began to experience brutality like he'd never imagined existed. After he left the county jail in Dallas, his life turned even worse in the Texas prison system. And how did Robert react to this? Did he show a hot temper? No, he went to the library and he began to use his head. He used to relate "that he never forgot the day that he realized that the pen was mightier than the sword." It was the day he found out he had won a case for prisoner rights in the 5th Circuit.³ Robert went on to fight Mr. Estelle, the powerful director of the Texas Department of Corrections, and took on then Attorney General Mark White as well. What is amazing to me is to reread these decisions and see how much of this brutality was coded into shorthand such as "unspeakable acts." Robert became a great "writ writer"-- penning appeals and writs of habeas corpus for numerous inmates. Robert got to be such a thorn that he swore that Mark White let him out before Robert could get something to

the U.S. Supreme Court.

Robert got some religion in prison and quit drinking. He also learned something else in his life. He met and married a very nice Federal court reporter and they were very happy together in the years I knew them.

Whatever the circumstances, he left the Texas prisons better than he found them, all because he found his way to the library and someone showed him how to use the books.

Footnotes

1. Bruce v. State, 402 S.W.2d 919 (Tx. Crim. App. 1966).
2. All were in domestic violence cases. I testified against one, La Verne Sadler O'Bryan. If there ever was a clone of "Carmen," it was La Verne, who even worked in a cigarette factory. I'm the witness in the fifth paragraph after Point I at page 155 in O'Bryan v. Com., 634 S.W. 2d 153 (Ky. 1982). The AP gave the trial some great coverage and I enjoyed the limelight. The trial of an arsenic killer who then became the first woman to receive the death penalty in Kentucky was lurid. I also testified at her re-trial, where she got life.
3. Bruce v. Wade, 537 F.2d 850 (5th Cir. 1976). Yes, that is Henry Wade of "Roe v. Wade" fame.

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Prison Law Librarianship: A View from Inside

by Karen Westwood (Outreach Librarian, Law Library Service to Prisoners 1990-1996)

"What's it like in prison?" "Were you ever scared?" "Did you ever see _____ (fill in the blank with some locally notorious criminal)" These are the questions I got from the idly curious.

"Are you still helping criminals get out of jail?" "You're not helping those guys sue over salsa, are you?" These from skeptical acquaintances.

"How do you circulate materials to the prisons?" "What do you do when they ask you for legal advice?" "How in-depth do you go with the research?" ask my librarian friends.

First set of questions first. What it's like in prison for a librarian who visits a couple of institutions a week is an entirely different experience than that of the inmates who live there. You're better off asking someone who's lived in prison. I was rarely afraid in prison - most people like the librarian and recognize the service a librarian provides. Also, there are corrections officials all around - even in cases where an inmate became angry with me I generally felt secure. I did meet some locally notorious criminals - but for the most part I met people with addictions, people who'd made poor decisions, people who couldn't manage their anger; people who'd committed crimes that didn't make the evening news.

The second set of questions gets more interesting. Law librarians in prison are in a unique position. We provide information to inmates to use as they wish. In some cases, I believe that the information I provided helped someone get out sooner than he might have. Do I lose sleep over this? Never. The information I provided went to a court who made the final decision. If someone got out "early" it was because the original

sentence was too long. Am I helping them sue over salsa? A local news station ran a brief piece on frivolous inmate lawsuits and used an inmate's suit over salsa (I think he wanted chunkier salsa, but the details escape me now) as an example of what was wrong in Minnesota's prisons. Yes, I provided inmates with information on how to sue. I also provided them with information on what types of suits have been successful (haven't found a successful salsa suit yet). If the constitution guarantees a right of "meaningful access to the courts" as the Supreme Court stated in *Bounds v Smith* 430 U.S. 817 (1977) then prison law librarians can hold their heads high when providing inmates with legal information. We have to have enough confidence in prison officials (that they will avert most "salsa suits" before they are filed) and the courts (that they will dismiss "salsa suits" early on for lack of merit) that we give information freely to inmates and not fear that they will somehow misuse the information.

How do you administer a legal reference service in prison? That's basically what my librarian friends were getting at. Essentially the same way you would anywhere else. Have consistent policies, provide excellent reference service and develop a professional working relationship with your clientele. I was pleased to read Bruce's introduction to this issue. After six years as a circuit-riding prison law librarian, I never heard from any of my former inmates how they were doing. I certainly understood that - after all, who would want to remember prison and the people you met there? But I worked for six years hoping that I was making an impact on people like Bruce's friend. And I worked those six years confident that providing professional legal reference service in prison benefits the inmate and the society to which nearly all inmates return.

So if you ever end up providing law library service to inmates in jail or prison, expect a lot of questions. And expect to find some of your answers through AALL and the Social Responsibilities SIS. The education sessions I've attended at AALL meetings through the years have kept me up to speed in law librarianship and helped me improve my skills as a librarian. The Social Responsibilities SIS through its two publications "Directory: Law Libraries Providing Services to Prisoners" and "Recommended Collections for Prisons and Other Institutions" provided me with guidance and referrals when I needed them most. But most importantly, the opportunity to speak with fellow librarians who have experience in prison law library service has been a great asset to me. Prison law librarians are a small group and prisons are a challenging environment to work in - but with a clear understanding of the goals of providing information, and with the support of AALL and the Social Responsibilities SIS it can be the most rewarding and exciting type of library to work in.

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The AIDS Memorial Quilt: Remembering Their Names

On October 11-13, 1996, over a beautiful fall weekend in Washington, D.C., over one and a half million people saw the AIDS Memorial Quilt displayed in its entirety. Originally created as an attempt to put human faces and human emotions behind the staggering statistics, the Quilt has grown into 40,000 panels of glorious color and endless creativity. It spread from the Washington Monument to the White House -- the size of four football fields. And yet, amazingly enough, it represents only a quarter of those that have died of AIDS in this country.

I had the good fortune to attend this display. My partner, Alan Sizemore, is the Co-Chair for the Bay Area Chapter of the Names Project, the organization responsible for the quilt. Over the last few years in working with the Names Project, I have seen the tremendous power of the Quilt -- how it can teach people about the disease, bring people together and help to heal those in pain. I thought that it would be overwhelming, seeing it all spread out as far as the eye could see, and of course, it was. But it was also a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the lives of people. Some of the panels are very playful, others are stark and somber. Some who visited talked in whispers, as though they were visiting a church, and others found it soothing - as though they had just visited with a loved one they hadn't seen in a long time. One of my fondest memories of the recent display was seeing a new mother who had lost her brother to AIDS plop her newborn baby down on her brother's panel as a way of introducing him to the uncle he would never know. The baby was smiling and laughing the way babies do, and it made those of us who shared in the moment cry. Far from being sad, it made us realize that there is a connectedness that comes through in the Quilt. To read letters that loved ones have written to those they've lost, to see the pictures, to hear the stories -- it makes it all real in a powerful way. The statistics come alive.

I had mentioned to several law librarian friends that I was going to be in D.C. for the weekend, and many had asked that I look up friends and family that had panels there. Coincidentally, several panels were for law librarians themselves. As I walked around the display, it hit me: AALL should have a panel to remember our members who have died. We have lost at least four members that I know of, perhaps even more. Many corporations and associations are represented there, and I think this would be a really moving way of demonstrating how AIDS has affected each and every one of us on some level.

I would like to propose that the panel have the name of our organization, and the names of the members we have lost, with additional room for members to write their thoughts and remembrances of those individuals. We could request this panel every year (once you turn it in, you have to formally request the panel for displays) and have it on display in the Activities area of the Exhibit Hall as a way of reminding our members that AALL has been affected by AIDS.

The members that I know of that have died of AIDS are:

- Martin Borelli
- Willis Davis
- Brian Polley
- Warren Rosemarin

I plan on beginning the panel shortly, with the goal of having it completed by the Annual Meeting. I welcome your comments and suggestions, and if you know of any other members that have succumbed to the disease, please let me know ASAP.

The AALL panel for the AIDS Memorial Quilt will be a living tribute to the memory of our colleagues who have died of the disease, and I hope you support this ongoing project.

Michael Saint-Onge
cbsfo@well.com

(Editor's note-- Michael M. White holds a special place for many of our members.)

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Bylaws Proposal/Vote

The AALL Executive Committee has given us permission to vote on using a ballot which is included in the Newsletter, rather than mailing out separate ballots. This will require a vote of the SIS during the July Annual Meeting.

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Candidate Biographies

Karen Westwood

Firm Librarian Lockridge, Grindal, Nauen & Holstein
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Education

- B.A. - Political Science - University of Minnesota/Twin Cities - 1983
- M.S. - Library & Information Science - University of Illinois/Urbana-Champaign - 1987

Work History

- 1987-1990 Reference Librarian in University and Public Libraries
- 1990-1996 Outreach Librarian - Law Library Service to Prisoners, Minnesota State Law Library
- 1996-Present Firm Librarian - Lockridge, Grindal, Nauen & Holstein (formerly Schatz, Paquin, Lockridge, Grindal & Holstein)

Publications and Presentations

- "Lights! Camera! Action!," American Libraries 27 (January 1997): 43-45.
- "Prison Law Librarianship: A Lesson in Service for All Librarians," American Libraries 25 (February 1994): 152-54.
- "Passing the Word Behind Bars: Legal Information and the Prisoner - Meeting the Challenge," AALL Annual Meeting, San Francisco, July 22, 1992.

Association Memberships

- AALL Member 1990-Present
 - Publications Policy Committee 1994-1996
 - Social Responsibilities SIS - Secretary/Treasurer 1994-1996
- Minnesota Assoc. of Law Libraries 1990-Present

- Public Relations Committee Chair 1994-Present

When I joined AALL in 1990 I sought out the SIS most related to my work as a circuit-riding prison law librarian. When I became a law firm librarian last year I never considered dropping my SR-SIS membership. However; many of my firm librarian colleagues don't see the relevance of SR-SIS to their work. As I see it, the challenge for SR-SIS is to become more visible to the AALL membership at large. I don't think we should mount a big recruiting campaign - I do think we need to be more pro-active in publicizing the work we do. How can we challenge AALL members on issues of social justice without alienating them? That is the question I would hope to address as chair of the SIS.

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From the Chair

As I write this column, already past my deadline, I realize how time constraints make it difficult for librarians to take an active role in professional organizations. Very few items on my Social Responsibilities check list for this year have been checked off as completed. Yet, the focus of this column is to encourage everyone to take a more active role in the SIS. We need people to help with programming ideas for the Anaheim conference. We need new blood to strengthen the SIS. We need an editor for next year's newsletter. We need Web Weavers to work on our web page, and most importantly, we need to identify the future leaders of the SIS.

One way to encourage this participation is through dialog. Meeting once a year or reading three issues of a newsletter, does not develop much of a relationship between members. I would like to begin this dialog on the sr-sis discussion list. In other areas of my life, discussion lists have become a gathering place for people around the world. Discussion lists provide a way for people to interact when they have time, they can be informal ... and they can be fun!! To date, there has been little discussion on the SR-SIS list, and there are 44 subscribers, enough to make some chatting possible! I want to encourage you to subscribe, introduce yourself and perhaps share your concerns and hopes regarding the SIS and the concept of social responsibilities in the law library profession.

To subscribe to SR-SIS send an email to listproc@law.wuacc.edu (leave the subject line blank) and type the following command in the body of your message:

subscribe SR-SIS [first and last name]

Example: subscribe SR-SIS John Doe

To send a message to everyone on the list use the address:
SR-SIS@law.wuacc.edu (be sure to use a descriptive subject line).

I hope to be hearing from many of you on the list in the days and weeks to come. And please contact me by email (pamjadi@scuacc.scu.edu) or phone (408- 554-5320 or mail (Heafey Law Library, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA 95053) if you would

be interested in working on any of the projects mentioned above.

I would also like to mention that the AALL Executive Council has approved the inclusion of election ballots in the SIS newsletters. This will allow SISs to save the expense of a separate mailing. The use of the newsletter for the SR-SIS ballot will be voted on at the SR-SIS business meeting. (Maybe this could be our first discussion list topic.)

Prano Amjadi

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Bruce,

I just had a chance to sit down and read my latest issue of the SIS Newsletter, and I wanted to congratulate you on another great issue (note sent 28 Oct. 1996).

I do have one comment, however, on your note related to the Educational Round Up for Baltimore. I sat on the AALL Program Selection Committee as an official observer in preparation for my taking over as chair for Anaheim (EEK!) and while your math is correct, there are 13 SISs and 55 program slots, you are forgetting that SISs aren't the only ones that make program suggestions: Committees (including the Committee on Diversity, Copyright, Publications Policy, etc.), chapters and individuals also make proposals. Simple division, then, which would result in the Social Responsibilities getting four programs approved instead of three, is not really accurate. Just thought that you should know that the committee had a very tough job, as they received almost three times more proposals than we had slots available. The Social Responsibilities SIS should be congratulated on submitting some fine proposals, and having three programs accepted is a great accomplishment.

Thanks, Mike Saint-Onge

*Comments to: [Rebecca Alexander](#)
Last updated 29 October 1999*