

## Recruitment Lessons

### Grow Your Own Stellar Librarian

**An Interview with 2005 New York Times Librarian Award winner Susan Simpson, Albany County Public Library, Laramie, WY**

**Interview conducted by A.C. Hawley**

#### **What brought you to Librarianship?**

I was geographically bound (which meant job opportunities were limited), had worked in a library before, loved to read, and wanted to be in a service profession. I attended graduate school outside the state and returned home to find a job in our local public library. I have been here ever since, though the work place has changed considerably.

#### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

It's hard to identify just one aspect. I work with a great group of skilled, dedicated librarians and volunteers. I love working with the public. I like learning new skills—when I first came here over 25 years ago, there were no PCs. I like solving problems and making a difference in people's lives.

#### **Who nominated you for the NY Times Librarian Award?**

The president of our library foundation board.

#### **How was it for you to win the award?**

It was a surprise and an honor. I was humbled; many librarians in Wyoming provide great community service. When I went to New York and saw the photographs and heard the descriptions of other award winners' work, I was inspired.

#### **Were there any changes in your life from winning the award?**

I was heartened by people's pleasure and pride in the award for my sake and for the sakes of the library, Laramie and Albany County. My daily routine is unchanged, my responsibilities and challenges remain, but people remember the award and are still mentioning it to me ten months later. My life is enriched, not changed.

While in New York, I was able to go to the World Trade

### Take a Chance on Someone with Passion for the Work!

**An Interview with 2005 New York Times Librarian Award winner Steven G. Fullwood, Manuscripts Librarian, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, NY**

**Interview conducted by A.C. Hawley**

#### **What brought you to Librarianship?**

Like many people I know, I fell into librarianship. In 1992, I was poised to graduate with a BA in Communications and English from the University of Toledo. I had been offered an entry-level position as production assistant at a local television station. Having been an intern for that very station, I knew didn't like the job (in fact, I hated it), but at that point I had no other prospects. The very day I was going to be hired (the interview was a formality), my boss's wife went into labor, and as a result the interview was cancelled. I left the station and went to the local library where I discovered that there was a job opening for a children's librarian at the library I attended as a child. I immediately applied for the position, and although I didn't have strong background in children's literature, my energy and enthusiasm bowled over my interviewers (four serious women). I was hired, and for two and half years I served as a children's librarian.

I became the acting assistant manager six months before I started graduate school. Doing the job before I learned the theory of the field was interesting. It gave me insights some of my classmates lacked, and it also helped me understand the whys of cataloging, collection development, reference work, etc. My situation is not unique. While in graduate school, I sat among many non-degreed "librarians," people who had been performing as librarians, without the education or salary.

I love being a librarian. I live a life in the development, preservation and facilitation of information. My life essentially revolves around five activities. I process personal and organizational papers. I provide access to resources for research. I write books. I publish books. I write features and reviews for magazines and journals. Everything I do is interesting to me, and I strive

Center. To be there and acknowledge what had happened there was important to me.

**How did your library respond to your winning the award?**

They posted a big sign congratulating me and left it up for over a month. They put an ad in the paper. The *Boomerang*, our newspaper, put my color photograph on the front page above the fold with a long article; the wire services picked it up and ran it in Colorado and Montana newspapers. The board threw a party for me and over one hundred people came on a cold, snowy night. Colleagues drove 45 miles over a nasty pass. The Friends of the Library gave me Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*. My book group all signed a card and bought a small gift. Staff members sent emails or cards and hugged me. One gave me a Nancy Pearl librarian action figure.

**Did winning the award make your job as an administrator easier? In other words, was it easier to get the things that your library needed?**

I think elected officials were pleased, but I don't think the award affected funding. In fact, some requests were turned down or reduced. Wyoming is doing very well right now with oil and gas production, and in this last legislative session the state has given \$10 million to public and academic libraries. We have a great state-wide state system and good cooperation, and we will be offering downloadable eAudiobooks soon. It's been a good year, and Wyoming libraries do great work.

**Will librarians ever become obsolete?**

Nope. Readers' advisory, programming, and personal contact will never be obsolete.

**Are librarians paid enough? Should they be paid more?**

No. Of course.

The energy boom has allowed us to provide substantial raises for staff, but we know the boom won't last forever. Our state has a low tax rate and is tax averse; we have no income tax, for instance. I don't think that will change in the near future. Balancing funding for staffing with collections, building, and programs is an ongoing challenge.

**Are unions in libraries a good idea?**

I don't have enough experience to give an informed answer, but as I re-read this, I note that my inexperience doesn't stop me from giving an opinion. Wyoming is a right to work state. I know librarians who have worked in union libraries in other states. I know they were paid better, but I think they lack the flexibility a small nonunion library offers. Is the trade off worth it? From the staff's point of view, probably so.

everyday to do each activity better.

**What do you enjoy most about your job?**

Connecting people to information. I am also very excited about assisting in the preservation of black LGBT cultural materials and Hip-Hop history. In librarianship, the field is so large that you can do just about anything—or you can sit behind a desk and tell people to be quiet all day. It's really up to you. The field continues to offer me countless opportunities to develop as a professional, thinker and writer.

**Who nominated you for the NY Times Librarian Award?**

Ben Jones, an extremely talented artist who sees the value in what I do, in variety of ways. I am forever grateful for his kindness in nominating me.

**Did he tell you he they nominated you?**

Ben believes that the work I do at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is relevant to the various communities it serves, particularly the black LGBT community and the Hip-Hop community. I am the project director for the Black Gay and Lesbian Archive, an archive that documents the cultural activities of non-heterosexual people of African descent. I also serve as the project archivist for the Hip-Hop Archive, an archive that documents the development of Hip-Hop culture in the US and abroad.

**How was it for you to win the award?**

I was pleased. It's always nice to be recognized for the work I do.

**Were there any changes in your life from winning the award?**

Yes, there were. Getting the award brought attention to the projects I just described, and offers to speak at events.

**How did your library respond to your winning the award?**

They were pretty excited and happy for me.

**Will librarians ever become obsolete?**

No. Librarians assist in the preservation and facilitation of information for many people for many reasons. Despite the popular belief that everything can be found on the Internet, librarians are extremely valuable in navigating the thousands of resources that exist in various media. Librarians will only become obsolete through our own failure to advocate for our rights as professionals.

**Are librarians paid enough? Should they be paid more?**

Librarians are never paid enough. State aid is ever shrinking. There is a trend to erode the wages of all library workers. The workload never abates or shrinks, but staffing does. Still, many of my colleagues perform amazingly under these conditions, and frankly, they should not. Management sees that librarians can do the work despite staff shortages, which has led many administrators to believe they can cut and cut without any real repercussions. But there are repercussions, and unfortunately many librarians will not stand up to their

bosses for fear of being fired—and they fear with good reason. So the drama continues.

**Are unions in libraries a good idea?**

Strong labor unions are vital in protecting worker's rights. How else are workers going to get their fair share?

**We would love to have your [feedback](#) on these articles!**

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