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AALL Spectrum

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from the editor

Nobody Expects the Spanish Inquisition

When faced with an unexpected problem, I often jumpstart my creative problem solving process with humor. A favorite source is the British comedy troupe Monty Python. In one skit set in the 1800s, a millworker reports a problem to the mistress. His incomprehensible explanation prompts her to question him. In frustration, he complains that he's just doing as told and didn't expect the Spanish Inquisition. Then, anachronistically, three cardinals burst through the door exclaiming, "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition" and proceed to mangle a recitation of the tools they used to terrorize Spain in the early 1500s.

I laughed when I first saw the skit in the 70s, and I chuckle still. It serves as a humorous cautionary tale and tension releaser so that I can respond creatively and effectively to the unexpected. Some recent surprises for me: a broken 8-foot square glass window in the library in the middle of the night; a staff lounge flooded from a clogged sewer line in the middle of the afternoon; and a woman convinced that someone in Oakland city government monitored and manipulated her search results to hide what she needed to find, not to mention that she could no longer copy and paste headnotes.

By Mark E. Estes

Of course, my solutions were not as funny as the Monty Python skit. There was no other damage or loss from the broken window—it was boarded up within two hours and replaced a week ahead of schedule. The clogged sewer was cleaned, the carpet dried and cleaned, loose tiles replaced, and already the flood fades into memory. I listened to the woman and assured her no one could know when she logged in to do research and that no governmental unit monitored the computers, then demonstrated how the copying and pasting *was* in fact getting all of the headnote. She seemed to accept my explanation (could it have been my calming voice?) and returned to her searching.

In the first two instances, I could do nothing except remain calm and let others do what they are trained to do. In the third, I focused on assuring the patron that her research was secure and provided a training activity. Although I admit I did recall Amy Hale-Janeke's story of a patron wearing an aluminum foil hat designed to thwart mindreading rays (her suggestion that he go back in time to get a written contract rather than the oral one he was trying to collect on seemed to satisfy him just fine), it didn't seem to apply.

Nonetheless, thinking of it made me smile to myself, which calmed me enough that I could deal effectively with the situation.

Responding to the unexpected requires vigilance. For example, when riding my motorcycle, my attention bounces around like that of a bobblehead doll—observing threats and opportunities from every direction and rechecking frequently to see what has changed. This kind of vigilant environmental scanning requires practice, intellectual discipline, and flexibility.

I practice it through physical activities like taking a motorcycle safety class, commuting to work by bicycle, physical exercise, walking the dog, and so on. I expand my knowledge of law librarianship by attending continuing education events and reading the professional literature. I find that even when the content is mostly familiar I still get some new ideas because my mind is freed from the usual pressure of routine activities. I hone my intellectual skills by reading widely about trends throughout the world, solving puzzles, and playing games (my new favorite is Bananagrams).

To help get you out of the usual routine, Nathan Rosen shares some lessons he's learned during his law library career (page 18); Judy Meadows and Kay Todd report on the American Legal Institute/American Bar Association Critical Issues Summit "Equipping Our Lawyers: Law School Education, Continuing Legal Education, and Legal Practice in the 21st Century" (page 16); Claire Germain shares examples of ways that librarians can create unique partnerships that benefit entire institutions (page 10); Mark Gediman takes an experienced look at the truisms of cost recovery (page 14); Lisa Smith-Butler demonstrates why "the 'M' word" is essential to libraries (page 7); and Ame Howard has advice for the next generation of law library managers (page 24).

Remember too, *Law Library Journal.* In addition to the transcript of the Members' Open Forum at the 2009 AALL Annual Meeting included in the fall issue, both the fall and winter issues have several other informative and provocative articles (such as Bernard Hibbitts' essay "The Technology of Law," which discusses how law students and lawyers need to better understand technology and its role in shaping law) to help you prepare for the Spanish Inquisition. ■

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