

THE DUCHESS OF WINDSOR, TOM CRUISE, AND ME

by William Benemann

I'm sorry. I can't see a damn thing. The blizzard of paparazzi around the Law Library doors does it to me every morning. Flash. Pop. Flash. Pop. "Bill! Over here! Just one more, Bill!" This is truly the downside of being an academic law librarian, the penance one pays to that bitch goddess, Status.

And then, having been whisked in my private elevator (oak-paneled walls, white-gloved attendant) to my penthouse office (Golden Gate view, Mark Rothko paintings), what should I find lying on my aircraft carrier-sized desk but the October issue of the *AALL Spectrum*. Imagine my shock (the effrontery! the gall!) when I turn to page 36 and read, "It is my belief that what these few obfuscating academics are truly scared of is the loss of status, since that is all that is really important in academia. They think: If any Joe Blow can be a member of AALL, then what value is there to being a member?..." What value, indeed?

I took no stand on the messy membership debate in Baltimore. I was busy making a pilgrimage (on my knees, in basic black) to the childhood home of Wallis Warfield Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor (such style! such cheekbones!). After all, Muffy or Blaine or Whatever-Your-Name-Is—after all, *Gentle Reader*, they let just about anyone go to the AALL General Business Meetings these days. Why, just last summer I was saying to Princess Caroline—no, that was about the Casino at Monte Carlo, but *c'est la meme chose, n'est-ce pas?*

But to get back to that screed, that calumny, that—*Hard Copy* expose on the life of academic law librarians and our sordid grasping after status and opera tickets. Well, my dear, life just isn't fair, is it? It's all rather *Upstairs/Downstairs*, with academic law librarians upstairs and private law firm librarians downstairs. And county law librarians? Well, where would we be, I ask you, without the honest sweat and peasant grunts of our civil servants? In a pretty pickle, I'd say.

No, if you're interested in the *real* story, *mes enfants*, huddle closer. (What is that scent you're wearing? It smells like rotting microfiche...) Here's the scoop, the scuttlebutt, the Abercrombie beneath our Fitch: *it ain't true*. We may look like Corolyn Bissett Kennedy at meetings, but back home we're strictly Janet Reno.

Academic law librarians fill up the AALL membership rolls not out of an excess of ego but out of economic necessity. Certainly, chairing an SIS is a heady experience akin to being recognized as the Dalai Lama, but the grim reality is that we are required to be active in AALL in order to be promoted in an atmosphere that is thoroughly tainted with skepticism about our general worth. In our struggle to acquire parity with the faculty of our law schools, we have ended up with all the obligations and no key to the faculty washroom. Publish or perish, and don't forget to take out the trash.

Most of us are expected to pay (at least in part) out of our own pocket to attend AALL meetings. I think of it as

the modern equivalent of kissing the rod: we pay for the privilege of sitting on hard chairs in bone-chilling rooms listening to what we already know. And sometimes they have overhead transparencies. True, in many cases our salaries are higher than in other segments of law librarianship, but in order to keep our jobs we have to open our pocketbooks. Verily, the Law School giveth and the Law School taketh away.

And status? *Sacre merde!* If you think attorneys are a pain in the coccyx to deal with, imagine a creature that is half attorney/half university professor! Imagine spending five days a week and alternating weekends doing battle with these Spawn of Satan with their noses so high in the air they can snort L-1011s. Status? *Gott im Himmel!* Law professors treat us like we were blips on their LEXIS screens. Status? *Huevos rancheros!* If we were interested in status we wouldn't have gone into librarianship, and embarrassed Mummy and The Colonel so.

Obviously, the question of whether to open AALL membership to non-librarians is a complex one, certainly one worthy of much pondering and debate, but the discussion is not helped by casting aspersions on academic law librarians or questioning our motives in wanting to maintain the current membership regulations. Status grasping is not the game of choice at my library, nor do we have any particular interest in excluding Joe Blow. (By the way, is he from the *Philadelphio Blows*?)

And if you wander into the Halls of Academe, be prepared to be skewered by barbs of humor. Believe me, it's the only way we survive around here. And furthermore—[ring, ring]

Sorry. That was Tom Cruise on the phone. (Yes, I know, off to St. Moritz—again!) But let's do lunch. The Ritz-Carlton at 1:00? Love ya. Kiss, kiss.

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