

# Good Happens

by Mary Whisner

I was amused by the flurry of messages on law-lib last August after Fritz Snyder asked for law librarians' pet peeves. Sharing peeves can help all of us cope with our sometimes frustrating and stressful jobs. Even better, there is the chance that a well-articulated peeve could lead to a positive change on the part of the peeve perpetrator. (*Editor's note: An edited compilation of the peeves appeared as "Law Librarians' Pet Peeves" in the December 1998 AALL Spectrum.*)

Nonetheless, after reading a string of pet peeves, I found I was feeling, well, peevisish. Is this all there is? Are our professional lives filled with nothing but unhelpful customer service representatives, pointless price increases, patrons who pull pages out of books, and pushy people who want complicated projects performed immediately? Doesn't anything *good* happen in law libraries?

Lacking an antonym for "peeve," I asked people to send me their pet "pets"—the people, things, and events that keep us coming back for more professional challenges. I was touched and heartened by the responses I received. I am pleased to share here some of the responses.

**We like to do research and provide service.** Joanne Dugan, from a firm in Portland, Maine, likes "the constant variety of issues I end up researching. The legal stuff is just the tip of the iceberg. I've become so much more aware of current events, business, technology, medicine, fishing and forestry (two major industries in Maine), and local history. And ... the best part is that I get to stop delving into this stuff once I've found the resources and don't actually have to read and analyze every word of a technical article on fertilizer runoff in Casco Bay!"

Faye Jones gets a kick out of "being able to respond 'Yes, we have that!' when a faculty member or student says, 'You probably don't have this but ...'" She also loves to see "the light in the eyes of a difficult faculty member when s/he realizes that we have the expertise to help, to be partners and problem-solvers, and that we actually love to help."

**We like the people we work with.** I'm with Ann Puckett when she says: "I have appreciated this profession

mostly for the people who practice it. Law librarians (and I think librarians in general) are smart, generous, reliable, informed, resourceful, creative, and funny. I can't imagine a group of people I'd have been happier spending the last 21 years with."

Rebekah Maxwell is grateful for "coworkers who cover my back when we're being shot at from all directions."

Pam Deemer values "cheerful, prompt and helpful systems people."

Note that, thanks to discussion lists like law-lib, sometimes the colleagues who help us out are not even in the same city. "My pet is this listserv and the people who generously give of their knowledge and experience to their colleagues!" adds Barbara Bailey.

**We like getting good service from publishers and other vendors.** Mary Margaret Serpento praises "publisher reps ... who don't take 'no' from their sales dept, and keep checking till they get an answer." She also thinks it's great to find "a new service who does it cheaper, more accurately, and with minimal learning curves for either side," and she likes "reliable, well-stocked and current WWW pages."

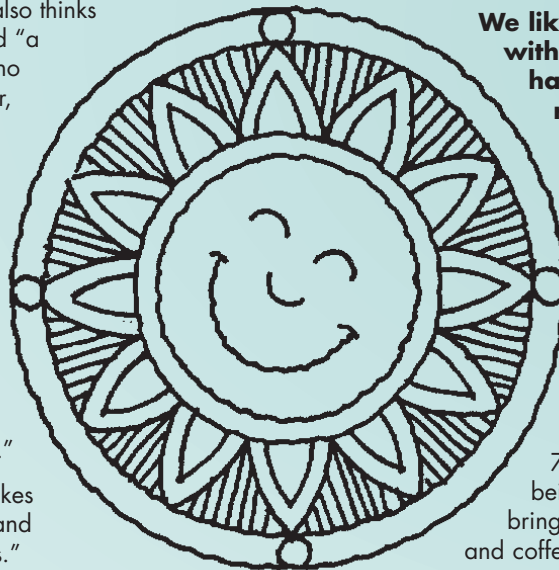
Pam Deemer likes "stable serial and loose leaf titles."

**We like patrons who are willing to learn and to engage in their own research.** My officemate, Nancy McMurrer, tells of a patron who was very reluctant to use the online catalog. The patron worked at the computer for a while then left. Later, she returned to the reference area, beaming, and spontaneously gave Nancy a hug because she was "so excited that she had done the search herself and found that computers need not be so daunting."

Joan Allen-Hart is impressed by "pro se patrons who have struggled to resolve their legal issues and all the procedural pitfalls that the system throws at them, yet ... are courteous when they request assistance, understand the difference between legal reference and legal advice, and take the few extra moments to say 'thank you.'" "Working in a very busy branch of a county law library," she notes that "these types of patrons are in the majority, thank goodness!"

Mary M. McCormick enjoys helping "the students who [ask] me to show them how I am going about finding the answer to a question for them, rather than just wanting the answer (and wanting it three minutes or less before their next class!)."

Bryan Carson writes that he likes the way he "can help the students and connect with them." He gives an example of a training session "in which the students were interested, asked intelligent questions, and made connections with what [he] was covering."



**We like to be treated with respect and to have our expertise recognized.** Lisa B. Hayes's "pets" include an attorneys who "make their kids greet you as 'Mr./Mrs.'" who works WITH Daddy/Mommy" and "the brand new associate who asks for a refresher course in research at 7:00 a.m. to avoid being 'caught' and brings Egg McMuffins and coffee with him!"

**We like to have the library included in tours.** Joan Jarosek, from a Dallas firm, is pleased when attorneys bring recruits to the library and introduce the librarians with: "they know EVERYTHING; they are the most important people to know in the office." Remarks like that make librarians "feel our efforts are recognized and appreciated!"

Similarly, Nanna Frye, from a court library in San Diego, says it always made her day when the Clerk of Court introduced her to visitors as "Librarian Extraordinaire."

**We enjoy making connections with the people who use our libraries.** Heidi Weston Heller enjoys talking to "people who ask a reference question, then get curious about our profession and ask lots of questions about it." Joanne Dugan finds it rewarding to change "people's attitudes towards libraries and librarians. Hearing that someone has spoken highly of the library in a section meeting or seminar is enough to keep me smiling all day!"

Rebekah Maxwell has fun with "law students who drop in just to chat and those who invite us to go to lunch with them."

Jennifer Stephens' pet is "the attorney who pops by once a day to discuss our favorite subject: computer technology."

As Kay Collins writes, the connections can extend beyond the library: "When my cat, Sidney Reilly, died last April, the attorneys and support staff sent \$74 to Anti-Cruelty in his memory. They all recognized how much Sidney meant to me, and it helped a lot."

**Finally, we like to be thanked.** Laurie Claywell's pets are "The summer associates who, after interrupting you every 10 minutes for 10 weeks during the summer, send you a thank you card at the end."

Lynn Connor Merring applauds "the associate who brings bagels to the library staff to thank them for making him/her look good."

Nina Porcella says: "I get thanked on a pretty regular basis for information provided. I get thank you cards from the firm and grateful secretaries right after 'National Library Week' and I get a gift here and there from grateful summer associates."

"My favorite 'Pet' (besides my rabbit Zeppo) is when a 2L or 3L comes up to me and thanks me for teaching them research when they were a 1L—especially when they say that they were glad I taught them how to use the books, since they were precluded from using CALR at their summer jobs," says Karen S. Beck.

Many people wrote about receiving chocolate, cookies, and other treats. In the words of one: "I find this profession very rewarding, albeit fattening." On a bigger scale, Ann Puckett tells of a law professor who "tithed" to the library: "Every time he got paid for an article or book, he gave one-tenth of his check to the library, with the direction that it be used for a party. Our parties were famous throughout the school. What great PR for us! He couldn't do his work without the library, and he wanted others to know that."

Terry Psarras writes of "a summer clerk who once brought me a flower in a vase, before she left for the summer, as a way of saying thanks." (As I write this, in mid-December, our Reference Office sports a poinsettia, courtesy of one of our professors whose research projects often challenge our ingenuity.)

Much as we all like candy or flowers, what we really value is the thanks:

"Cookies and things are nice but a heartfelt thank you means just as much!"  
—Kathy Carlson

"The professor who thanks librarians by name in the dedication of his/her book or article."—Pam Deemer

"The professor who comes by with the finished product, along with another word of thanks for your help, so you can see just how and where all your hard research was used."—Nancy McMurrer

"My all time #1—the attorney who stops by my office shares with me that they won the case and thanks me for my research help .... [The attorneys in the public defenders office where I work] are always calm—never lose their temper (unlike what I've seen in private civil practice!) and always say

thanks. I consider myself very fortunate to work with such a great bunch of very good attorneys. It's a pleasure to work with those who appreciate the work you do and include you in the victories."—Karen Mahnk

For my part, I would like to thank the many librarians who shared their pet "pets" with me—I enjoyed all the comments, even though space precluded including all of them! The following gave me permission to quote them in this article: Joan Allen-Hart, San Diego County Public Law Library; Barbara

Bailey, Waring Cox, Memphis; Karen S. Beck, Boston College; Kathy Carlson, Wyoming State Law Library; Bryan M. Carson, Hamline University; Laurie A. Claywell, Kaufman & Canoles, Norfolk; Kay Collins, U.S. Railroad Retirement Board, Chicago; Pam Deemer, Emory University; Joanne Dugan, Pierce Atwood, Portland, Maine; Nanna K. Frye, California Court of Appeal, San Diego; Heidi Weston Heller, University of Pennsylvania; Joan Jarosek, Jones Day Reavis & Pogue, Dallas; Faye Jones, Hastings College; Karen Mahnk, State of Florida Public Defender, Miami; Rebekah Maxwell, University of South Carolina; Mary M. McCormick, Florida State University; Nancy McMurrer, University of Washington; Lynn Connor Merring, Kelley Dye & Warren LLP, Los Angeles; Nina Porcella, Laughlin Falbo Levy & Moresi LLP, San Francisco; Ann Puckett, University of Georgia.

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