

An Exaltation of Larks, an Exchange of Librarians

Get the inside scoop on the semi-legendary Orr/Kelly switcheroo

by Laura Orr

I could easily make this an ode to Salem, Oregon, and Willamette University, both of which I fell in love with during my visit, or I could write about how two reference librarians exchanged jobs for four months. I suspect you would all rather I do the latter, but you will have to forgive me for lapsing periodically, in some wistful asides, into the former.

Would you, in the midst of a dusty, filthy, interminable library renovation project, desert your colleagues for a small gem of a library with nary a mote of plaster dust? Would you leave behind a 6x6 cubicle of an office, so deep underground that you have to phone above for a weather report before beginning the long trek to the surface, and exchange for it a spacious one with a wall of windows? Would you give up the joys of an East Coast hot, humid, and polluted August, September, and October, for the gorgeous hot, dry (believe it!) summer days and cool nights of the Pacific Northwest? Would you give up a splendid New England Fall for the damp and gloomy late October and November of that same Pacific Northwest?

You darn tootin' I would.

The Scheme is Hatched

After eight years at Yale, it was time to make a change. But I do love my job and wasn't ready to leave for good, so in the Fall of 1998, Tim Kelly (Reference Librarian at the Willamette University Law Library) and I exchanged jobs.

It had all started very simply. I went to my boss (Blair Kauffman) in February 1998, and told him that 1) I needed to get away

for a while, and 2) I needed to be in Oregon (family reasons). I had a few ideas—a leave of absence, family medical leave, etc.—but Blair immediately suggested an exchange. Within minutes he was on the phone to Oregon law school library directors (there are three) and by the end of the day, resumes were being faxed. Dick Breen (Library Director at Willamette) was willing; he had an equally game reference librarian; and by the end of the week, the exchange was set.

This exchange was to be for an entire semester, though a number of us have been talking about whether that is the ideal length of time. For me and Tim, and Willamette and Yale, it was, but I think it may depend on why you want the exchange. But don't underestimate the power of fate. The exchange for me was originally just a means to an end (i.e., spending time with family) and four months seemed such a long time to be away from home. Instead, I fell in love with Salem, with Willamette University, and with the law library staff, and in December felt I was leaving a place that had become dearer to me than my other home of eight years.

Cf. Ecclesiastes

A fall semester exchange, rather than a spring or one of shorter duration, may present some difficulties you would rather avoid. But, it also has advantages and rewards. Fall is difficult because that is when many law school libraries have their most intensive legal research activity—i.e., first year law student research training. Unless the visiting librarian has had a



Majestic sequoias—see if you can guess whether this is Yale or Willamette.

chance to learn the library, the collection, the legal research and writing instructors, and all the other legal instruction protocol, the early weeks of the visit can be stressful not only for the visitor but also for the permanent staff who have to pick up the slack. But the advantages are that the visitor is thrown head-first into the life of the law school, which is mighty exhilarating, and is able to befriend many of the first year students who are learning about the library at the same breakneck pace as the visitor is.

For the months before the exchange, Tim and I traded stories and details about what the other was getting into. And on one of my frequent visits to Oregon, I was able to visit the library and meet some of the library staff. So in mid-August, I started working at Willamette (its academic year starts about three weeks before Yale's) and in early September Tim started, sight unseen, at Yale.

Settling In

The adjustment to a new job and city was probably much easier for me than for Tim. Not only did I have family in Oregon (in Portland and in Salem), but a move from a university with a large graduate and professional school population to one that is, law and business schools notwithstanding, essentially a small liberal arts college with no graduate school, is much easier than the other way around.



Imbibing and schmoozing with Willamette University library and computer staff. (The author is second from the left.)

Due to its size and user friendliness (students and teaching really do take top priority), Willamette was able with little difficulty to meet with aplomb any challenge I presented as a visiting librarian.

For Tim, the move to East Coast frenzy, grit, and ultra-sophistication (or pretensions thereto) from the communitarian, relaxed, outdoorsy Pacific Northwest—where going home in the evening and weekends with family and friends and the great outdoors were presumed normal—in addition to the fact that Yale and New Haven had an atypically turbulent fall season, called for a temperament that could remain calm in the face of madness. Tim luckily has such a temperament.

Not everything that could go wrong, or right, on an exchange is predictable, but compared to visiting abroad, a short term domestic relocation is fairly uncomplicated.

Housing: the easiest method is to exchange houses, but that isn't always possible. My husband didn't come with me, so Tim and I made our own housing arrangements after we arrived in our new cities. He found a sublet and I found university housing. We didn't plan this ahead of time, but that decision depends on how dangerously you want to live (I seldom make hotel reservations ahead of time when on vacation either) and the housing market where you will be living. New Haven and Salem are very much alike in many ways. (Of course while in Salem I missed good pizza, and now back at home I miss Freddie's, Trader Joe's, the gorgeous Willamette campus, my new and very dear Salem friends, our weekly beer and schmooze gatherings, the Salem public library, the golden man atop the state capitol, seeing the governor at lunch in the Willamette University cafeteria, rainbows every other day, Portland, Silver Falls hikes with my sister, ... sigh).

Transportation: A car exchange is up to you. I don't have a car here, and don't need one. I didn't need one in Salem (I rented one or borrowed my sister's). I walk to work here in New Haven and walked to work in Salem.

Budget: We did not complicate matters by using leaves of absence, research leaves, or the like; Yale continued to pay my salary and Willamette paid Tim's. All the credit for this simplified exchange has to go to our library directors, whose common sense and confidence in the mutual benefits of the exchange led them

to make sensible and uncomplicated decisions. Cost of living differences between the cities should be considered. For me, though I suspect not for Tim, it was a cheaper being on the exchange than being at home. Connecticut is an expensive place, and East Coast amusements, such as New York City, are generally much more expensive than Pacific Northwest amusements (unless you plan to fly to Alaska, Hawaii, or the Far East on a regular basis).

Mail: this might be the most aggravating part of the exchange, though not an unmanageable one. Both at home and

at work, the (snail) mailbox fills up at an alarming rate. Home can be the biggest problem, as is the case whether the absence is a couple of days or for a few months. Luckily I have good friends and good neighbors who kept an eye on my mailbox. I didn't want to forward my mail (my sister did that during a six-month sabbatical a year ago and is still living with the nightmare of missing, or suddenly appearing, checks, bills, etc.), but that might be the best option. My husband also helped, but he doesn't live full time in

continued on page 19

Librarian Exchange—the Directors' Views

from S. Blair Kauffman, Director of the Law Library and Professor of Law, Yale University

Based on Yale-Willamette experience exchanging reference librarians Laura Orr and Tim Kelly for one semester, I have nothing but good things to say about librarian exchanges and encourage more law libraries and librarians to develop and participate in similar opportunities. I am sure others at Yale agree with me on this score, and we are all ready to do more exchanges!

So, where did this idea come from? At Yale, our experience working with library student interns taught us just how invigorating fresh faces on the staff can be to the entire enterprise. Librarians get jazzed showing the newcomers how things work (or don't work) around here, and questions help us rethink our policies and procedures. Why not take this one step further and bring in full fledged, experienced professionals, while giving one of our own an opportunity to learn something new from another institution? We'd sent some of our librarians off to other libraries in the past, basically to do long-term consulting (Dan Wade comes to mind), and we'd accepted professionals at a later time to work here as a part of the exchange, but the Laura-Tim exchange was the first simultaneous one we tried.

Faculty visit at other institutions routinely, so why not librarians? The exchange model is different from the typical faculty visit, but the benefits are similar, in that the visit enriches the professional lives of those who directly participate as well as the staff members at the participating institutions. We got a great reference librarian to spend a semester with us and share his knowledge and unique experience, and afterwards got a happy reference librarian back from Willamette with a broader perspective on the world of law librarianship. This was a winning proposition all the way around.

It might be argued that the exchange works best on the reference front—of course that's how this one was done—but we'd be willing to try it in other arenas as well. Also, we'd be willing to try exchanges with non-academic institutions and even publishers. The toughest part is getting participants on both ends who are willing and employers who recognize the benefits. We think it's an idea that works and should be encouraged.

from Dick Breen, Law Librarian and Professor of Law, Willamette University

Every library has a personality which is reflective of its facility, collection, policies, procedures, and staff attitudes. An exchange provides an opportunity to share experiences, compare ideas and see one's world anew through the looking glass. All it takes is curiosity, an active mind, and an adventuresome spirit.

New Haven so he couldn't take care of the whole job. I arranged to pay most of my bills by phone, and that helped a great deal. At work, I was at the mercy of co-workers, who had plenty of their own mail to deal with. But between them, Tim, and our library administrative office, everything worked out beautifully and I got anything of importance (which by the way is very little when you come down to it).

E-mail: We both kept our "home school" e-mail addresses, but also got new ones after we arrived at our new libraries. Though this meant checking two e-mail systems regularly, it was very helpful for keeping up with news, students, and faculty back at our home libraries, and having an e-mail account on the new school's network made the transition to a new library much easier than it would have been without being wired into their

e-mail communications. It was very helpful to have telnet-friendly e-mail services at both schools. I could check my e-mail from just about anywhere.

University IDs: This will of course vary from one university to another. Willamette University is a small, and an efficient, institution so getting a temporary ID for me was a simple matter. And at Willamette, the ID gave one free transportation on the city's bus system and discounts at Eddie Bauer stores. Yale wasn't so flexible, but Tim's insouciance and the law library's relative informality saw him through the obstacles.

Miscellaneous: The exchange was not just an opportunity to work in another library, but also a chance for travel and visits to old friends, mine in Oregon and Tim's in New York City. Though we share few interests, on key matters we saw eye

to eye (so to speak—for those of you who know us, Tim is 6'4" and I am 5"). For example, we are both vegetarians so we were able to describe the perils and perks of veggie life in our respective home towns.

It doesn't take much to exchange jobs. In fact, it is so easy that early in the process of planning this one, I told my boss, who has for a long time encouraged exchanges, "Boy, now I know how easy this is, you're not going to see much of me anymore!" All you need are willing librarians, decisive and courageous library directors, and patient and good humored colleagues. That's not asking too much, is it?

Laura Orr (*laura.orr@yale.edu*) is Reference Librarian at Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Library in New Haven, Connecticut.