

# The Belly Dancing Librarian

by Amy  
Hale Janeke

## The Saga Begins...

The first time I attended an AALL Chapter meeting, I expected it to be informative but otherwise unremarkable. I didn't expect to end up belly dancing at an Arabic restaurant at 3:00 a.m. with a live Arabic band going full blast, but that's what happened. Here's the story.

When I was in law school, the associate director of the law library noticed that I was absolutely enthralled with shelving, ecstatic about filing CCH tax updates, and an almost obsessive organizer. She knew librarian talent when she saw it and encouraged me to go to library school and become a law librarian. To that end, she invited me to the annual meeting of the Southwest Association of Law Libraries (SWALL) in Houston, Texas.

I attended the first round of meetings and it was what I expected—informative, interesting, sedate. But at the wine and cheese reception afterwards, the real personalities of those "sedate" librarians came to light. I met many colorful characters, some of whom could drink anyone under the table, and others who could swear in five languages. These were my kind of people!!

I asked some of my new-found friends if they knew of any good Mediterranean places to eat. They said no, so I went to the yellow pages and found a place not too far away. Not only did they have Middle Eastern food, they also featured belly dancing! I mentioned this to the group and four of the five admitted that they had never eaten Middle Eastern food nor seen belly dancing, so they were up for a new experience. I had been taking belly dancing lessons for years and had even danced at a few restaurants, but decided not to share this information as I didn't expect to need my belly dancing skills. I do love Mediterranean food, so I was eager to go.

At the restaurant, I ordered several appetizers for the group as well as a round of ouzo. After one or two shots of this stuff, you tend to take on the

"I'm bulletproof, incredibly smart and talented" mindset, which makes for interesting conversations and entertainment.

After we'd gotten off to a jolly start, I noticed that we were the only people in the restaurant who didn't speak Arabic. This was a true cultural experience, especially when the live band started up. Now, for those of you who have never heard or do not appreciate Arabic music, it can sound "disconcerting." This is especially touching when you translate the lyrics and discover they are just like our county and western songs about love, loss, and the death of one's favorite pet (camels in this case).

We had more ouzo, which significantly increases one's appreciation of any kind of music. After the band got going, the belly dancer came out. She was passably good, and I began critiquing her performance for my table mates. They wanted to know how I knew so much about belly dancing, and after another round of ouzo, I 'fessed up. I was a secret belly dancer.

The belly dancer concluded her performance, and the Arabic bandleader invited the audience onto the dance floor for the next set. At least I think he did because the entire audience jumped up, rushed out onto the dance floor, and started shaking their booties. It could've been a very unusual fire drill, Arabic style.

My companions insisted that I demonstrate my dancing skills, so I got on the dance floor, too. Yes, I certainly blended in, being a 6'2" white girl with a "library tan" (i.e., pasty white). But I was belly dancing and the rest of the crowd was

dancing, so it didn't matter. I encouraged the other librarians to dance, but they protested that they didn't know how.

I demonstrated some basic moves, ordered more ouzo, and within five minutes almost everyone was on the dance floor.

One lady was doing the cha-cha from her days of lessons at the Arthur Miller Academy of Dance, and another lady was doing a modified aerobic workout, and the rest were just aerikin' it. But we were all grinning like crazy, dancing like banshees, the band was wailing, and we were having fun!

So much fun, in fact, that soon we were the only people left on the dance floor. We were having such a great time that we didn't even notice that fact nor did we notice the time. Until I glanced down at my watch and was sober enough to discern that it was 3:30 a.m.!!! We all had to be up at 7:00 a.m. I knew that was going to make for a long day. The band came to the end of the song, and I informed my woozy friends that we had to go.

We left the dance floor, much to the chagrin of the band. "No, no!! You are not leaving?!!!" the band leader called to us in broken English. "Yes, yes," I replied. "We are." He protested a bit more, but when he saw us put on our coats, he knew the dancing was over for the night. He and his band applauded for us, which was nice since they were

*(continued on page 30)*



## **The Belly Dancing Librarian** *continued from page 32*

---

the only other people in the restaurant besides the tired servers. I don't know if they were grateful for our appreciation of the music, or if they were grateful for the entertainment we must have provided for them, but we took a bow regardless.

We made our way back to the car and fell in. We were exhausted. We went back to the hotel, crawled into bed for a "nap," and then dragged ourselves to the 7:00 a.m. meeting. You could immediately tell

who had been at the restaurant the night before as we were the ones with bleary eyes who smelled a lot like black licorice. My mentor asked me how was my evening, and I told her that I did some good networking and had a great aerobic workout. Luckily, no one had an instant camera, so there was no evidence from the night in question.

I am still a belly dancer and I even teach at a local community center. I must say, though, that I had more fun that night

with my library friends than I ever had performing in a restaurant. Not every conference or Chapter meeting I've been to was as exciting, but I still get a great feeling when I see those friends again at meetings. I remember the fun, food, and my resolution not to ever drink that much ouzo ever again.

*During the day **Amy Hale Janeke** (ahale@sdcll.org) is a Reference Librarian at the San Diego County Public Law Library in La Mesa, California.*