Reflections from LIT's Jim Cubit on his retirement from Lake Forest College

Good times with Jim at Lake Forest College

Wow! Twenty-two years! Where did the time go? I've been asked to share a few of my memories for this issue of BiblioFiles, so here goes...

I came to Lake Forest College in 1996 to be the College Librarian. At that time, the library was a cramped and rather dingy place. The print collections had taken over so much space that there were few good places left for students to study. There were a few unattractive carrels scattered around the periphery of the building and a few more tucked in among the book stacks. There was also one large room, called the Lincoln Room, where several tables and 30-35 seats were the hangout of a very small number of "regulars." I quickly learned that while students used the library, most came only to get the information they needed, then they'd leave to work in other places on campus.

Fortunately, renovating and expanding the library was a priority for the College, and work began on that project about five years after I arrived. The opportunity to play a role in the renovation and expansion of the library was certainly one of the most rewarding experiences of my time at Lake Forest College. I still smile when I walk out of my office and see the library bustling with activity. It was a challenging project because we didn't move library services out of the building during construction. The LIT staff worked very hard to find creative ways to provide library service during construction and students were very forgiving of the disruptions that occurred during the staged project. The end result was well worth it, and it's great to see that the building is still used as heavily by our students as it was when it opened 14 years ago.

Other memories! I have plenty! In 1999, Napster and the rapid adoption of peer-to-peer file sharing caught colleges and universities by surprise. Suddenly, our bandwidth was saturated by students who were downloading and sharing (illegally, I might add) free music. Our T-1 connection to the internet (which provided smoking download speeds of 1.54 Mbps) was pegged, especially at night when students were most apt to be downloading music. Our feeble attempts to discourage the use of Napster were fruitless. We quickly added an additional T-1 line, which was also immediately saturated. We eventually got ahead of the bandwidth demand and Napster slowly fell out of favor. But, while Napster shut down in 2001, file sharing did not, and the wide-spread use of streaming video today gives credence to the adage that you can never have too much money or too much bandwidth. In the age of Wi-Fi, that adage is more appropriate than ever. By the way, today we have a 2 Gbps connection to the internet!

I came to Lake Forest College from a college library in New England, where there was little cooperation among academic libraries. I remember being impressed, and apprised to this day, the cooperative resource sharing system that academic and research libraries have created in Illinois. CARLI (more specifically its predeces- sor, ILCSO), has been a model of library cooperation that other consortia around the country have since emulated. Our students and faculty benefit tremendously from CARLI. Patrons of our library have the opportunity to search the collections of and borrow material from over 130 libraries throughout the state. The consortium's aggregated buying power also makes it possible for us to subscribe to electronic resources that we would otherwise not be able to afford. CARLI also offers affordable—and excellent—staff development and training programs for our library staff. We're very fortunate to have this resource here in Illinois.

There are, of course, so many other things that I could reflect on including the purchase and implementation of CMDS (the early version of Jenzabar and My.lakeforest.edu), Campus Pipeline (which led to the introduction of Moodle), smart classrooms, computer labs, moving email to the cloud, a new telephone system... yes, a lot happens in 22 years.

Most of all, though, I appreciate the people with whom I've worked—the great team in the Office of Library and Information Technology, faculty, staff, and, of course, our students. It's been an honor to have been a part of Lake Forest College for these past two-plus decades, and I look forward to following its future successes.

The Cubit files: get the lowdown on Jim

Favorite local brewpub: Tighthead in Mundelein. Bozacki's, also in Mundelein, is a close second.

Favorite regional beer: Almost anything by Three Floyds.

Favorite guitar/mandolin shop: Elderly Instruments in Lansing, IL. Also Guitar Works in Evanston.

Go-to place to eat in Chicago: Frontera Grill and Girl and the Goat.

Best play seen in the past year: Goodman's recent production of "Enemy of the People."

Journey of a lifetime: The Alaska Highway. We've been casually looking for a gently-used conversion van (a VW van would be awesome) to take the trip in.

Most miles ridden on your bike in a single day: I think around 95. I've never done a century, which puts me in the wimp category as far as some of my cycling friends are concerned.

Favorite bike route or trail in the area: I love the route I take when I bike to work. It's a 15-mile ride from my house to campus on trails that go through the Liberty Prairie Reserve to the Des Plaines River trail, Northshore Trail, and into Lake Forest on the Robert McClyr Trail. My favorite road to ride is Hunt Club Road north into Wisconsin. There's some nice cycling in southern Wisconsin.

Book that has impacted you the most: If I can only choose one, it would have to be Aldo Leopold's, "A Sand County Almanac."


Most enduring LIT memory: The library building project process was a lot of fun. The day of the library dedication is also a fun memory. But what will really stick with us is how staff in LIT and across the College—pulled together—whenever there was a crisis that affected the campus. The response to the recent power outage we experienced is a great example of how people from all parts of the College are willing to go above and beyond to make things work during challenging times. We have a special group here of students, faculty and staff.

What you'll miss most about LIT after you leave: Our students and my colleagues.

First plans for retirement: To come back and work in the job I was originally hired to do in 1996—Director of the Library (at least for a while). After that, some work with the organic farm at Prairie Crossing, Prairie restoration (including our yard), more bicycling, travel, and possibly volunteer work with an adult literacy program.

Advice you have for your successor: You've probably already figured this out, but Lake Forest College is a special place to work. You have a great staff and supportive colleagues throughout the campus. Enjoy all that this place has to offer you.