

# Yes, Ma'am

## Sessions in readers advisory service

Nancy Pearl, the world-renowned librarian from Seattle, enjoyed her 2005 visit to Australia for the Sydney Writers Festival so much that she wanted to return. Having been offered a role as an entertainer on a Holland America Cruise ship, Nancy took advantage of this opportunity and contacted the State Library of New South Wales to discuss the possibility of a further visit to Australia. Consequently Nancy returned to Sydney in December 2006 (on a cruise ship from Auckland) to conduct a series of readers' advisory workshops. As the visit occurred in the lead-up to Christmas, the workshops were limited to the State Libraries of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria. While in New South Wales, Nancy also trained public librarians in Dubbo.

Over 1000 public library staff across four states benefited from Nancy's reading experiences. Her session 'Yes M'am: Mood, Appeal and Motivation in providing excellent Readers Advisory Service' outlined new ways to offer great customer service. Nancy said library staff often experienced 'desk paralysis' and humorously demonstrated that reader advisory work is a dialogue between the reader and the staff member. Multiple options for the reader might be considered – some might want to be stretched by their reading, others will seek a more comforta-

ble experience while others will be unaware of their needs. Readers advisory services are definitely not about putting forth personal recommendations rather, it is all about the customer! The concept of a book having four entry doorways – story, character, setting and language – was discussed. Once these doorways are understood, the process of putting the right book in the right hands is simplified. Nancy encouraged library staff to read outside their comfort zone and continually learn from others.

'Keeping Book Clubs Happy and Healthy: Tips and Tricks' was a favourite session, especially with library staff who run book clubs. Much discussion and many questions were generated and it was a pleasure to hear the depth of Nancy's reading knowledge reflected in her responses.

Each state embraced Nancy's visit according to individual training and marketing requirements. In New South Wales, Nancy's sessions built onto the 'Rewarding Reading' training, a program currently being rolled out statewide that has helped revitalise reader advisory services. There was also a sellout event for the public. In South Australia, Nancy was the keynote speaker at the Crawford Awards for Library Innovation, held on the evening prior to a fully booked workshop attended by regional and metropolitan library staff.

The new State Library of Queensland building at South Bank was the venue for the library sector seminar, while a public event was hosted by Brisbane City Council Libraries at the new Brisbane Square library. As a lead-up to the visit, the State Library conducted an online book competition to determine the Top 10 Reads, which were announced by Nancy at the seminar.

In Victoria the sessions were presented by the State Library of Victoria and the Victorian Public Library Network as part of Statewide Public Library Development Projects' professional development seminar program to support Victorian public library staff.

Nancy Pearl's visit was widely supported by the State Libraries, the public library networks, the media and members of the public and proved to be an excellent example of interstate and intrastate co-operation. Many thanks to Ellen Forsyth from the State Library of New South Wales for co-ordinating Nancy's 2006 visit. From what we have heard, Nancy enjoyed this visit so much that she wants to return yet again.

#### Co contributors

State Libraries of New South Wales,  
Queensland, South Australia and Victoria



And everyone wanted a memento... (Image courtesy of State Library of Queensland)

#### Taking the next step...

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I would have to keep my head down for a couple of years and learn my craft according to the procedures and policies that were already laid out for me in the workplace, before I could be taken seriously as a professional. But in two days, the New Librarians' Symposium totally changed this outlook. Through the diverse program there were two strong messages that really struck home to me.

The first was that, as new librarians, our ideas are instrumental to innovation and new directions for the library industry. We

are in a progressive industry that needs to embrace new ideas to succeed. New librarians are in the best position to present these ideas, and we should not be afraid to revolutionise our workplace, whether by being early adopters of new technology, adapting to Web 2.0, implementing new frameworks for information literacy programs, or finding new ways to reach out to the community.

The other message that came through was that we are the future leaders of the industry, and now is the time to start thinking about leadership roles. We need to be adventurous, get outside of our comfort

zones, and develop our skills by taking on responsibilities that might seem to risk being somewhat out of our depth. And 'leadership' doesn't necessarily mean being at the top, but being influential in effecting change in the industry, and creating new vision and direction for our organisations.

The New Librarians' Symposium was an excellent introduction to the LIS community of ALIA. I returned from Sydney inspired by the knowledge that, as a new librarian, it's never too soon to make a difference, or to take a step into the unknown.

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