

EEI... ENERGISE, ENTHUSE, INSPIRE

EEI gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinator Lesa Maclean at maclean.lesa@gmail.com

MY HERO IN THE LIBRARY (NO CAPE REQUIRED)

Two of the criteria against which a Research Higher Degree at CQ University student is judged are that the candidate must demonstrate that they have produced "a body of work that has made a significant original contribution to the knowledge of a subject area" and have demonstrated "knowledge of the research topic and the discipline(s) it embraces". These goals cannot be reached without a range of support mechanisms including academic supervisors, chocolate, family, friends, the stoic spouse, and perhaps most importantly, library and information professionals.

When I selected my thesis topic, the decision was based on a long-standing love of crime fiction and fond memories of escaping into books such as Dorothy L. Sayers' *Strong Poison*

(1930) and Agatha Christie's *The Body in the Library* (1942). When I embarked on my doctoral studies it soon became very apparent that there are many more heroes than bodies in libraries, both around Australia and around the world.

The librarians from my university library were always on hand to provide advice and training and arrange for the delivery of items on a long list of interlibrary loan requests. Public library staff also assisted me during the early stages of my research when they coerced often recalcitrant microfilm readers and printers into action as I scrolled through hundreds of metres of film. These professionals never said they were too busy to help and they never asked me to leave on those hot days when I wanted to work in a space with air-conditioning and natural light.

I was very fortunate that, two years before I completed my degree, I found myself working at a library. My new colleagues patiently answered my questions, taught me to make the most out of databases, helped me find obscure references to support some of my arguments and proofread passages that I was having difficulty with (they also made some very fabulous wine recommendations when times were tough). More importantly, their enthusiasm for my project never wavered, even when I experienced a loss of confidence.

The librarians at the Manuscripts and Archives Division at the New York Public Library facilitated access to that library's Edgar Allan Poe Collection. This beautiful suite of letters, photographs, manuscripts and ephemera provided a wonderful insight into the world of one of my favourite writers. The collection also includes a number of personal items, including one

of Poe's calling cards, an ivory Chinese puzzle and a lock of his hair. These unique items were carefully laid out on a table for me while protective mats and small pillows were arranged to support the more fragile objects within the collection.

One librarian went to the main reading room and brought back a variety of critical texts on Poe's life and work to provide context to some of the items that I was viewing. Another librarian brought in a newspaper for my husband to read (his interest in my research having waned slightly after I tried to show him the hair of a man who has been dead for over 150 years).

Another excursion in search of original materials led me to the British Library. After navigating a maze of paperwork and reading rooms I found myself sitting at a table holding a first edition of Matthias MacDonnell Bodkin's classic work about Dora Myrl.

There were occasions when it was not possible to travel to a library to review a particular text. For example, very few first printings of Harlan P. Halsey's novel *The Lady Detective* (1880), published under the pseudonym Old Sleuth, survive today but one of the remaining copies of this story about Kate Goelet resides at the Kent State University Libraries. As I was unable to go to Ohio, one of the Rare Books librarians digitised and sent through to me the pages that I needed for my review of early female protagonists in crime fiction.

These, and the many other library and information professionals with whom I have worked over the last five years, do not fit the stereotype of a traditional superhero. They do not deploy superpowers, wear capes, or wield weapons - they do something much more important. They facilitate access to information. The women and men who so generously gave me their time and shared their knowledge are, collectively, my 'Librarian Hero'.

Rachel Franks
crimefictionwriter@gmail.com



Rachel Franks recently completed her PhD at CQUniversity, Rockhampton. Her thesis explored representations of class, gender and ethical questions attendant on the act of murder in Australian crime fiction. Rachel is now studying for a Master of Information Studies (Librarianship) at the University of Canberra. Follow her on Twitter (@cfwriter).

*Crime fiction and library fan,
Rachel Franks*