

BCLA's New ED: Allow me to introduce myself...

By Errin Morrison

Hello everyone! Some of you may remember me from the BC Library Trustees Association; some of you may know me from the Port Moody Public Library Board; and a handful of you may even recall me from Dalhousie's School of Library and Information Studies (now the School of Information Management).

I come to the Executive Directorship of BCLA with a solid background in non-profit work and a good knowledge of the ins and outs of government, having spent five years working for the Union of BC Municipalities before making the leap back to the library sector. I'm from BC. And when I say that, I mean I'm from all over BC – I've lived in Quesnel, Tofino, Chilliwack, Victoria, Invermere, Summerland, Penticton, Vancouver, New Westminster, and now Port Moody.

I went to university in Montreal, Victoria and Halifax; and in between degrees I spent a season on the ski hill and then made the requisite trip to Japan to teach English for a year. I'm returning to work after spending the past year at home with my little ones – Jack and Wesley – and after all the late nights and long days of caring for the boys, I feel I'm up to pretty much any challenge coming my way...

Challenging times

And I know there will be challenges. Non-profits have taken a heavy hit during this economic downturn and many are struggling just to survive. It's a time of re-assessment and re-organization for many, and BCLA is certainly not exempt from the general concerns facing most associations. What it does have is a strong community of members, an excellent board, and a committed staff to see it through these difficult times.

As interim ED, it is my job to steward us through the coming year – continuing the good work that is already underway in strengthening the association and helping us get to a point of renewed stability from which to plan for the next 100 years.

Many thanks

I am following in some pretty big footsteps, and I thank both Alane Wilson and Michael Burris for their dedicated service to the association before me. Alane is thankfully still very much involved in BCLA, having taken on Conference Coordination for the 2011 Centennial Celebration in Victoria next April. She is an invaluable resource and a delightful person and I'm happy to be sharing BCLA duties with her over the coming months.



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And where would we be without Allie Douglas? I feel we are all in very good hands with her at the administrative helm of this association. She is a wealth of institutional knowledge and I have not yet come close to stumping her with any of my questions...and there have been a few! And my thanks, as well, to Rita Avigdor, our other long-serving and very valuable staff member. She keeps us in line financially – efficiently and from afar – which is no mean feat in my estimation. I am in good company, which is a comforting thing to know coming into a new position.

A privilege to serve

I'd like to conclude with a little story that gets to the heart of why I'm involved with libraries – and why I consider it a privilege to be serving all of BC's libraries, library personnel and library advocates on the occasion of BCLA's 100th anniversary.

I ran into an old friend a few weeks ago in the concourse of the VPL's main branch. He is not a long-time library user and we don't know each other through libraries. He's an actor and he was at the library to pick up a concordance to the works of Shakespeare, which had been put on hold for him.

He was on his way out with his book and was just so incredibly impressed by the beautiful library building, the unbelievable range of materials available to him "all for free!" and most of all by the friendly and capable library staff. He said he "felt like a VIP."

He was greeted with a smile and politely directed to the book in question – set aside and reserved especially for him. He couldn't stop going on about the experience...his tone was light, but it was obvious that a world was opening up to him and I felt both inspired to be witnessing it and proud to be playing my own small part in that world.

On behalf of my friend and all the other British Columbians who have discovered (or have yet to discover) their libraries – big, small, public, academic, special, and otherwise – thank you for your commitment to literacy, lifelong learning, and making the world of information accessible and available to all. Libraries truly do make the world a better place.

Errin Morrison is BCLA's new Executive Director.