In this segment we focus on some of our library paraprofessionals! We asked these most vital members of our library community to reveal how they feel about their work and what they do when they are away from the library. We hope you’ll enjoy getting to know them better.

Our Contributors:

- Ann Brooks
- Bethany Schatzke
- Carol Jestrab
Ann Brooks, ImagineIF Libraries (Columbia Falls)

(Ann Brooks works as Library Advisor in the Columbia Falls branch of ImagineIF Libraries. Here she is pictured surveying in the Silvertip System in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Photo by Carl Froslie.)

Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: I really enjoy working with our younger customers. I plan and run imaginative, educational, well thought out, and well attended storytimes for preschoolers. I am also part of a vibrant weekly after school program for elementary and middle schoolers.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: People are constantly surprised at how many families and school kids attend our programs. I’m glad they find out when they “happen” to be in the library at the right time. We are such a big part of so many lives.

Also, the work we do with young kids, while super fun, also helps them get ready for school. It prepares them with the drive, interest, and tools they need to begin to read independently. In addition they learn other school readiness skills like using scissors, counting, adding, subtracting, working as a team, waiting your turn, raising your hand, and even, on occasion, how to open milk cartons. All done in a fun, supportive environment.

With the school aged kids, we continue interacting with them in a positive manner (not always easy with middle schoolers) by providing fun, weird, STEAM activities once a week. My favorite part of working with this group is having them call us over to show us something they’ve done or discovered. A moment of wonder they need to share. And my favorite example of this was when a kid called out, “Dad!” to attract the attention of my supervisor. Warms my heart to think of it still. This is truly a library they feel comfortable in. This their “third place” after home and school.

Q: What do you enjoy when you’re not at the library?
A: Caving. Also hiking, camping, biking, or cross country skiing to go caving. I also love to work on houses, doing remodeling and carpentry to make homes more energy and space efficient. I’m working on my third small house now.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I’m sure it’s that I was hired here 16 years ago, yet look so young ha-ha.

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I am pretty pleased with my collaborative storytimes that bring the community together. As a county library housed in a city building, we work closely with the city. These fine people have brought the city's heavy equipment to our library for "Big Rigs", had us trick or treating up and down their hallways for "Costume Party" story times, invited 85 preschoolers to tour the fire hall, allowed us chalk painting outside on the building walls and sidewalks, and even hosted a free "Storytime Swim" where we read books in the public pool. Not just once, but these programs recur year after year. I love how that makes this small town feel so friendly.

Q: Can you tell us more about your photo?
A: Ann is wearing a PVC suit in the photo, above. She says “I have layers of fleece underneath too. This cave system is at about 7,000 feet elevation and is so extensive that there is constant wind whistling through the caves, equalizing the pressure differences between the many entrances—the entrances that aren’t plugged with snow, in August. The temperature underground is typically around 35 degrees F and there can be rivers, waterfalls, etc. So when the trip leaders suggested PVC suits, I listened. We spent a week last summer surveying sections of the caves. Getting into and out of the caves kept me warm, but surveying is slow
work, so keep[ing] warm was important. We are all members of the Northern Rocky Mountain Grotto. A complete Silvertip System survey will take years.”

An article on the caves in the Bob can be found at flatheadbeacon.com/2014/09/17/exploring-hidden-world-bob.

Bethany Schatzke, Rocky Mountain College

Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: I love the variety of duties I have, since there are only three full-time employees at our library. I get to do a little of everything and that keeps things interesting.

I am a huge fan (and promoter) of interlibrary loan. I think it is fantastic how this collaborative service expands the reach of the library. I have some library users who apologize as they request rather obscure titles, but I love the challenge. It is like an online treasure hunt. For me,
ILL is a keen example of how sharing resources maximizes the level of service we can all offer to our patrons.

I am passionate about life-long and transformational learning. Since Rocky is a fairly small school I am able to develop some close relationships with our library users and share this passion with them. It is incredible to play a part in the growth and development of a student from incoming Freshman through graduation.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: I wish people knew how much money and time is involved in offering electronic resources. I get the impression that the average person thinks everything "online" should be cheap and easy....which is not the case.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: When I am not working I like to attend concerts (bluegrass and jam-rock, primarily) and spend as much time as possible in the great outdoors (hiking, camping, birding, swimming, bicycling, snowshoeing, walking, gardening and so on).

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I don’t own a cellphone or the internet. I absolutely enjoy all our technological advances (and they certainly make my job easier), but since I am surrounded by it all day at work I just want to unplug and relax when I get home.

Q: Can you tell us more about your photo?
A: I had the remarkable opportunity to work on a dinosaur dig this summer. Several years ago one of our Geology faculty put me in contact with a geologist who needed help tracking down some articles and theses to support his work on a paleontological excavation near Grass Range, MT. After several years as Dean's research assistant I was invited to the dig site so I could see for myself what they were working on and understand how critical my research help was to their project. I spent three days in the field, digging, hauling, and learning an awful lot about dinosaurs and geologic processes. I even found a few fossilized bone fragments. It was a truly remarkable experience and it wouldn't have happened without the library.

Carol Jestrab, MSU Billings Library
(Carol works as Circulation/Reserves Technician at the MSU Billings Library. Here she is celebrating her proudest library-related moment: receiving the Outstanding Library Support Staff of the Year Award at the 2015 Montana Library Association conference. Photo by Bob Jestrab.)

Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: The college students.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: I’m much more than the students’ supervisor. I am their pseudo Mom, counselor, nurse....

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: I enjoy doing my hobbies (Cricutting, crocheting, embroidering, gardening, biking).

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I have trained & supervised over 300 Library student employees over the past 37 years that I have worked in libraries. I hear from many of them around the holidays.

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I was awarded the 2015 MLA Outstanding Library Support Staff of the year.

Debbie Stewart, Great Falls Public Library
Debbie works as Reference Desk Library Specialist at the Great Falls Public Library. Here she is working with her bees. Photo by husband, Maury.

Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: My first thought was having access to new books! But I think I enjoy the book club I facilitate the most. I look forward to it each month, it is so wonderful to be able to share and talk about books you love with friends.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: I wish more people knew about all the services we provide, especially the technology; we offer help with electronic devices and computer literacy. Our library programs are free and available to the public. We have a new children's librarian who has set up some awesome new youth programs.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: I love to be outside, running, biking, skiing, gardening. We have the beautiful River's Edge Trail in Great Falls.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I am a bee-keeper. My husband and I have 6 hives with the most bee-utiful bees in town.
Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I am on my third round of library certification. I love to learn and I am thankful for the opportunity I have to enhance my skills and to have such wonderful mentors at the Great Falls Public Library.

Editorial comment from Alice:
Debbie has a lot to be proud of besides her certification. She started an adult coloring center in the nonfiction area and maintains it, she creates 3 nonfiction book displays every month using her sizeable creative talents to embellish them and leads a Montana author book club each month with home baked goodies that tie in with the month's book. She also maintains the display of free local brochures and maps and writes periodic book reviews for the local paper. Those are just the extras! Oh, and did I mention she is a notary?

Jennifer Desch, ImagineIF Libraries

(Jennifer works as Library Advisor for ImagineIF Libraries.)

Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: Filling up a customer's cup with the knowledge he/she was seeking and seeing him or her smile.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: A Library Advisor needs a little time to get the best researched knowledge; we don't have a magic wand.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: Being out in creation and enjoying nieces and nephews.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I like to work with tools, just don't like ladders.

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: Starting the process of making the color code go away on picture books.

Jessica Torgerson Lundin, MSU Billings Library
Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: That feeling when you help someone find exactly what they are looking for, especially when it's something they didn't know they were looking for.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: We've got more than just books going on around here.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: Running & knitting.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I seriously enjoy weightlifting.

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: My ability to remain flexible and innovative in this ever-changing library world. I can hardly think of a single process I do that has stayed the same in the last 10 years.
Kathleen Godfrey, Belgrade Community Library

( Kathleen works as Circulation Specialist for the Belgrade Community Library. )

Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: I love helping all sorts of people learn and grow through the amazing, free resources offered through libraries. I especially enjoy the challenge of obtaining hard-to-find books and seeing the surprise on a patron's face when they found out the library can get the item for them.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: I wish more people realized how many books, programs, databases, etc. are available to them for free through the library.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: I enjoy spending time with my family, reading my Bible and praying, being outdoors, messing around on the piano, and playing with and laughing at our cats and horses.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: Until just recently, I have worked as a Circulation Specialist, stable hand, and groundskeeper simultaneously. I also enjoy hunting with my brothers and dad.

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I am very privileged to be part of the staff of the 2015 Best Small Library in America.

Kathy Gurney, MSU Billings Library
Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: The variety and the people, every day is a new adventure.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: Actually our Library is very well known and used on our Campus, people really enjoy being in our Library and our staff.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: Travel, gardening, home improvement, and various crafts.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I really enjoy doing all sorts of crafts like quilting, scrapbooking, etc.

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I enjoy learning about all of the various Government agency websites and the information available to the public for free!
Leah R. Hammerquist, Missoula Public Library

(Leah works as Library & ILL Assistant at the Missoula Public Library.)

Q: **What do you enjoy most about working in a library?**
A: The diversity of the patrons we serve.

Q: **What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?**
A: How imperative librarians are to protecting digital privacy and ensuring access.

Q: **What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?**
A: Riding my bicycle. =)

Q: **What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?**
A: I was a hula dancer with Halau Ka Waikahe Lani Malie in Kalispell, MT for 11 years.

Q: **Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.**
A: I am on track to graduate with my MLIS from the University of Washington iSchool in June 2019!

Mallory Witham, North Lake County Public Library District
Mallory works as Administrative Assistant for the North Lake County Public Library District in Polson. Photo by Mary Barmeyer O'Brien.

Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: Serving the public and being part of a dynamic team.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: How many varied services we provide. How complex and detailed the work is.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: Reading, family, pets, nature, making jewelry, social time.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I play the flute, Native American flutes and collect musical instruments. I specifically collect handmade flutes as crafted by Troy De Rosche out of Hot Springs.

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I am still learning! I learn something new every single day.

Mary Ann George, Helena College UM

( Mary Ann works as Library Technician II at Helena College UM. )

Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: I enjoy my role in contributing to student success and assisting faculty and staff.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: I wish there was more recognition, support and information for Support Staff. We are a large part of the library community and our work is important. Ideally, it would be great if there was a specific mini conference (1 & 1/2 days) geared toward Support Staff/Paraprofessionals. Would also love to see an Interest Group for Paraprofessionals.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: Hike, cross country ski, read, kayak, participate in community service.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I am a double cancer survivor.
Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I have supervised/mentored many student workers who have gone on to continuing their education or starting careers. I am often the first boss many have had so I take that role very seriously.

Mikyla Veis, Missoula Public Library

Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: I enjoy the creative and problem-solving aspects of my job. I also enjoy engaging with every facet of the public, from the elderly, to the downtrodden, to children, to parents, to students, to professionals - and being able to treat everyone equally and with dignity and grace.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: My job is odd in that I do a lot of extra creative, clerical, and communicative work, so I’m not sure how much the public needs to know about my work specifically. Regarding the library, I wish the public was more aware how diverse our clientele is, and how diverse our services
are. In assisting with PR, it is my fundamental goal to raise the public's awareness of just these things.

Q: **What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?**  
A: Joking around with my husband, playing with my dog, cooking, home-improvement projects, reading, listening to music and stories, gardening, hiking, painting, visiting friends, finding beauty.

Q: **What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?**  
A: I have acted onstage in London. I have had dinner with Noam Chomsky. I love fake crab salad from the grocery store.

Q: **Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.**  
A: I assisted and helped to create innovative marketing for Missoula Public Library's informational campaign on the 2016 New Library Bond issue - which passed by a landslide. I am deeply excited by the new library project, as a staffer and as a citizen.

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Rita Gibson, Montana State Law Library  
( *Rita works as Access Services Coordinator at the Montana State Law Library.* )

Q: **What do you enjoy most about working in a library?**  
A: Hardly a day goes by that I don't learn something.

Q: **What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?**  
A: I wish more people knew about us, that we have wonderful staff and resources to *help* them work out their legal dilemmas.

Q: **What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?**  
A: Being with those I love; researching, reading, needlework, herb growing.

Q: **What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?**  
A: I'm really a hermit at heart.

Q: **Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.**  
A: All the years I've been privileged to be a library tech, the stuff I've learned and shared, both professionally and personally, the variety/uniqueness of the folks I've been gifted to meet.
Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: I love resetting passwords, unjamming printers, and showing people how to convert a Word document to a PDF.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: I wish patrons knew what interlibrary loan was.

Q: What do you enjoy when you’re not at the library?
A: Camping, going out to eat with my fella, canoodling with my cats (Smitten and Oogie Boogie), traveling with my sister, reading, binge watching Netflix, partner yoga, and garage karaoke with my besties.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I want to perform on Broadway if only I can get over my debilitating stage fright and inability to carry a tune. Also, I’m fantastic at parallel parking but only on the right side of the road.
Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I collaborated with coworkers to write and put on a Murder Mystery Night for the students. It was hilarious and so. much. fun. #poordiego

Sarah Karbassi, Butte Silver Bow Public Library

( Sarah works as Library Associate in Reference at the Butte Silver Bow Public Library. )

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: I wish people knew how much of our work involves trying to lift people up that are in difficult circumstances. The mission of libraries in America has always involved supporting democracy by making ideas available to all, and now in the information age that means making internet access available to all. I know there is a stereotype floating around that the library is just a place for homeless people to check Facebook. And while many people who don't have internet at home (including those with no home) do use the library to access Facebook and other social media (which I don't really see the problem with), they are also using our computers to create resumes, search for jobs, connect with mental health resources and lots of other things that help them improve their lives and become more stable, better citizens.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: Cooking, Reading, Netflixing (we're verbing this now right?), Spending time with my family.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I'm studying Farsi so I can communicate with my tiny, adorable Mother-In-Law who lives with my husband and me.

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I was very proud when I got my State Library Certification. It isn't a MLIS, but maybe someday I can do that, too.
Sierra Benjamin, ImagineIF Libraries (Kalispell)

Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: Knowing I am making a positive difference in the community!

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: I can't just leave "when it's slow"--we're never slow! The library is a lively place.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: Reading, writing, art, nature, and Brazilian jiu-jitsu!

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I'm strange in every way :) I love manga and Japanese culture!

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: The other day, I helped catch us up completely on mail crates! They were all gone! Whooo-hoo!

Tim King, Livingston-Park County Public Library
Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: Coming up with programs, working with my groups and talking to people.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: Just the variety of things we offer. People miss out on some wonderful programs, if I do say so myself.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
Reading, game playing, spending time with family.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: I used to sing several nights a week in a bar.

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: The fact that I created and was given this job. The position did not exist until I created it.

Tony Edmundson, ImagineIF Libraries (Columbia Falls)
Q: What do you like most about working in a library?
A: Working with people. Their needs, their troubles, their dreams. We see it all here, and no stage boasts more the picture of what it means to be human.

Q: What do you wish more people knew about your library or the work you do?
A: That we are about people more than books.

Q: What do you enjoy when you're not at the library?
A: My family! My wife Chrystal is the best friend I could have ever asked for, and our darling daughter Salem is just amazing.

Q: What is something people may find surprising or unusual about you?
A: That when I look in the mirror I see a Khajiit warrior, bold and fierce.

Q: Describe something in your library career that you are proud of accomplishing.
A: I feel very fortunate to be involved in the training of new staff. Having started working at the library as a shelver, with little more than a passion for reading, I benefited from years of excellent training and professional mentorship. That I have a hand in selecting and training our new staff brings me a great deal of joy. I see it as not only an opportunity to pass along knowledge, but a chance to share my enthusiasm for libraries and the work we do.

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