

Drinking from the Firehose — The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

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I originally thought this column would be about my continuing woes with the handling of e-journals and/or would connect somehow to the tragedy of that “other woman” whose name sounds like **Katina**. (Whether or not **ALA** will have its summer conference in New Orleans in 2006 I don’t know, but perhaps we’ll hear something by the time you read this.)

Change has become a word that means nothing anymore, because we hear it so often. With every other breath these days, in fact.

This has been an amazing year of change for me. The major change is the new library building in which I am now working. After years of dreaming of, talking about and planning for a new library building, **Appalachian State University** actually has a new library. In 2000, the citizens of North Carolina passed a bond referendum that infused the state’s university system with money for building projects and the **Carol Grotnes Belk Library and Information Commons** was conceived. Its birth, after a gestation of several years, occurred this

spring. The labor and delivery was hard and complex, but successful. The good news: beautiful, flexible and useful space, room for growth, and the challenge of providing popular new services. The not so great news: constant tweaking the leftovers on the punch list — for example, convincing engineers and contractors that Special Collections really needs separate HVAC systems that actually work, that back-of-house spaces like Technical Services really do need secure doors that lock; and that public services staff who work in the new building really do need training on how to operate and maintain the myriad of new security and support systems that make the building operational. It will all get done in time.

I have a beautiful new office, with new furniture. I have 20 boxes of “stuff” yet unpacked, and considering I threw away at least that much prior to moving, I am confident I can probably get rid of half again more when I find the time to haul the boxes out of storage.

It was amazing that my coworkers and I were able to stop almost all meaningful work for close to a month during the actual move, and then resume it in a strange but lovely new place, and the world did not come to an end. Students and faculty were inconvenienced to be sure during that period in May and June when they could not check out books or study in the library, but since it was a slow time of the year, they survived it and so did we.

The move went incredibly well. Most of the headaches involved change, of course. Especially the last minute kind, but then, we discovered that almost everything we thought we “knew” and everything we thought we “planned,” changed. Then it changed again. And after awhile, nothing surprised us.

Of course, one of the reasons that moving the physical library was not that much of an inconvenience was that so many of our resources are now online. The library Website, the online catalog and the databases and other resources did not stop working at all, or hardly at all, and certainly no more than they ever did before the move or since. The IT cutover probably went better than anything, although there were moments of concern and a few sleepless nights for those involved.

But now that we are settled in our new digs, I haven’t stopped thinking about change. Now we have other issues with which to grapple. The new building challenges us everyday to remember that we envisioned the future when we planned this building and now that future is here.

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So in my little realm of the library we are faced with:

- Completing the transition to a new interface of our online system (it was always in the plan but it is finally happening)
- Reviewing vendors, work flows and staffing
- Reprioritizing the importance of certain tasks
- Struggling with the onslaught of more and more e-journals and their attendant complexities
- Considering services we never dreamed of in the past

Another change in my life occurred this year when I celebrated the passing of my 50th birthday. I am half a century old. As I reflect on this, I realize that the more things change, the more they stay the same. In other words, the older you get, the less change surprises you.

With that in mind, I cannot help but make comment on the recent death of a beloved col-

league who knew this better than anyone. **Lyman Newlin** passed from our world in September, and what a marvelous repertoire of memories and experiences he shared with us during his lifetime. The span of his career was vast and deep. I know that the **25th Charleston Conference** will celebrate **Lyman**, and we will miss him terribly. Who will ring the bell for us to come back to the main room after the break? Who will we watch for not to run us over in his motorized cart, while waving his cane? **Papa Lyman** was such a part of the fabric of our professional lives. This is truly a turning point in history, not having **Lyman** with us at conferences and in the pages of *Against the Grain* and elsewhere and everywhere. He would occasionally call me out of the blue, asking for an interpretation of some esoteric thing he read somewhere; on some point he assumed I might be knowledgeable. Sometimes I had no idea what he was talking about; sometimes I was able to help him understand the thing he found puzzling. Hearing from him was always a delight, and always, it made me feel special. If my life turns out to be half as rich as that of **Lyman Newlin's**, I will be truly blessed. 🍷