

Library School - University of Ottawa, 1971-72

by Elizabeth (Betty) Deavy (2023)

In the summer of 1971, I decided to apply for admission to the program of Library Sciences at the University of Ottawa. I was inspired by several recent events - a Royal Bank Newsletter described what a librarian did in words that reminded me how much I had wanted to be a librarian twenty-four years earlier. A librarian acquired information and books and organized both so they could be found easily. A librarian also answered questions and helped people find information and books they needed. It sounded like a perfect occupation. Also, that spring I had helped distribute and collect forms for the 1971 Census of Canada and enjoyed receiving my first paycheck in 23 years. The final impetus was hearing that the library programs at both McGill and the University of Toronto were moving from a one-year Bachelor of Library Sciences program to a two-year Masters program. I knew it was very unlikely that I would be able to spend 2 years in either Toronto or Montreal.

The University of Ottawa had offered a post-graduate degree in Library Science since the 1930s. Ottawa had many libraries; as well as the public and university libraries there were corporate and federal government libraries. The National Library had opened its new building in 1968 and would soon employ more than a hundred librarians. Many of these librarians had gone to Ottawa U., some on a part time basis while working and taking 2 or 3 courses a year. However, there was a problem that had kept me from considering it before. It was not an "accredited" Library School. To be accredited a library school must be inspected by an accreditation board appointed by the American Library Association. Father Auguste-Marie Morisset, a Roman Catholic priest, had founded the Library School back in the 1930s after having gone to Columbia University for his BLS (Bachelor of Library Science). In 1948 he had returned to Columbia for his MLS (Master of Library Science). He was devoted to libraries; he hired the teachers, planned the courses, and purchased the books. By the time I decided to become a librarian he had spent almost forty years at his work. However, he had not managed to win American Library Association accreditation for his school. The year before I decided to enrol, the school, although still hugely influenced by Father Morisset, brought in a new director, Peter Havard-Williams from the College of Librarianship in Aberystwyth, Wales. He was a librarian with an international reputation who hired several new teachers and retired others and revised the course.

So, I was fortunate to have chosen this hopeful time to apply. I was fortunate also that my husband and my son were both supportive of my desire to become a librarian. Not having me at home every day doing the laundry, cleaning, and making meals would mean a large change for them. My daughter was already away from home in residence at the University of Toronto. All of them were very encouraging, so I sent off my application form along with a copy of my final marks at U of T back in 1947. By this time, it was the middle of summer 1971 and I was 43.

Soon I had a reply and an appointment for an interview with Father Morisset. He would assess my suitability for librarianship and my ability to follow a course in French. My knowledge of French was based on having taken it through high school and university twenty-four years earlier. Father Morisset, 71 at this time, a kindly looking man, smiling and friendly, spoke slowly and correctly and was easy to understand. So, I passed the French test. Then he said I should have applied in May. They were quite full, and it would be better if I went home and stayed with my little ones for another year. I said - "my daughter is in her last year at university, my son is in his last year in high school. The only little one at home is the dog." He decided to bend the rules and accept me. I spent an exciting few weeks getting ready. Were my clothes suitable? What books did I need? How would I get there each

day? It was agreed that my son would drive me, then take the car to school and return for me at the end of his classes. Since he loved having the car he didn't mind. I left instruction cards for him and my husband for using the washing machine, making tuna and salmon sandwiches, and three simple supper suggestions.

Finally, the first day of classes arrived. The Library School was on King Edward Avenue, south of Laurier Avenue on the corner of Osgoode St., a two-story red brick building. The School had an excellent library and study space on the main floor and classrooms and washrooms on the second floor. Across the street a temporary building was used as a student's lounge where cigarette smokers eagerly used their brief breaks between classes.

The first day the students all met together for a lecture from the Dean, Peter Havard-Williams. His subject was "International Librarianship" an area in which he had been very active and of which I knew nothing. However, we all listened very attentively because our first assignment was to write an essay on the subject. The idea of my first essay after so many years was daunting but it did prove to be a good introduction to the library and some of its indexes and periodicals. My son is an excellent typist and good at formatting, so with his help I was able to produce an essay that at least looked good.

We had another special lecture on publishing. Jack Brown, the head of the National Science Library (later called the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information - the library of the National Research Council) spoke on the explosion in the number of books and articles being published, especially in the scientific world and the new tools being developed to find them. With the beginning of the regular classes I met my fellow students. There were about sixty students, 1/3 English speaking and 2/3 French speaking. Most of the French were young, new graduates, while the majority of the Anglophones were in their 30's or older and turning to librarianship after some other occupation. We had nuns and priests, an ex United Church minister, teachers, government workers and one ex RCMP who was going to set up a forensic library after graduating. He had been in the bomb squad in Montreal during the FLQ crisis of 1970 and sought a quieter life in a library.

The two language groups divided themselves in the classroom, with the francophones sitting on the right side of the room and the Anglophones on the left side, joined by a few older francophone women who spoke English well. I was fascinated to meet a new group of people who seemed quite different from my Women's Institute friends in Navan. However, the first friend I made came from a familiar background. She was a young new graduate of Irish Canadian parents who lived on a farm near Wakefield. Callista Plunkett (later Kelly) was intelligent, hard working, tireless in pursuit of a fact she needed and cheerful. Another friend, Mary Aitken had been a schoolteacher in Northern Quebec when her husband was stationed there and was finishing a job she had with the famous Le Dain Commission on Drugs. It was winding down and she was able to do it on a part time basis. Later she would go on to become a lawyer. Mary was the student in the front row with the most questions to ask the teacher. Callista and I were impressed. We sat in the second row and listened.

The most important subjects on the curriculum at Ottawa U. were Cataloguing and Reference. Fortunately for me, I loved doing both. Cataloguing examined and described the book and prepared title, author, and subject cards so the library user could discover what book he needed and how to borrow it. Reference taught about the books and index files you could use to find the information a library user needed. There were indexes, dictionaries, biographies, bibliographies, and catalogues in every subject. They were all arranged on the shelf by a classification scheme which gave each type of book a place within its subject and each subject a letter of the alphabet and a number. Public libraries arranged their books by the Dewey decimal system but academic libraries and those with large,

complex collections used the Library of Congress system of classification. These subjects were taught throughout the year, as was library administration. Although much less time was devoted to it. The other subjects taken for half a year included subject headings, bibliography, audio visual media, computers, and the history of the book.

I very soon became absorbed into the life of the school. I had found my favourite seats in the classrooms. But I did have difficulty getting used to lining up between classes with the other females for the use of the two toilet stalls. I brought my lunch each day and usually ate it in one of the classrooms with Callista to avoid the smoke and noise of the students' lounge. She was boarding with an aunt and uncle just a couple of blocks from the school. Callista was a small person but ate a lot and ate very quickly. By the time I had eaten half a sandwich, she had finished her two sandwiches plus a piece of cake, a chocolate bar and was ready to eat her apple. Nearly fifty years later she is still a small person and still amazes me with her energy.

I had to stay and work in the library until 9:00 pm most weeknights to research and complete the many assignments we were given. As there were always ten or twelve other students doing the same thing, I could find several people interested in having supper at the Mexican Café, a block away or the University cafeteria. My son and husband were proving to be resourceful with their meals and my son picked me up many nights at 9:00.

I managed to take time out for my monthly Women's Institute meetings. I had given up the job of secretary treasurer but was still the Tweedsmuir History Convenor. I didn't add many stories to the History that year though. I also took time for the Ottawa Little Theatre each month, but I attended almost no concerts. Weekends were filled with cleaning, grocery shopping and cooking although my son got good at doing grocery shopping. However, I was enjoying everything I did at the Library School, as well as interacting with the other students. They all had different experiences to share, some had worked in libraries for years in clerical positions, one elderly nun wanted to upgrade her school library. Liba Blazek had escaped from Czechoslovakia and liked to paint; she smoked intensely during her breaks. I especially liked an older francophone woman, Irma Larouche, who had come from Lac St. Jean where they spoke a French that was difficult to understand. She was always anxious to have a conversation in either language to improve her English. Irma had straight black hair with bangs and was small enough to fit into teen age clothing which she loved. Her outfits each day were carefully chosen and notable. When I remember her, she is always wearing her yellow leather jacket, high black boots, and black leather cap. She brightened up the classroom and fitted in on both sides.

The teachers were interesting too. Although Father Morisset didn't teach, he was often in the library and seemed to know each student individually. He'd stop at my desk to ask how I was doing and give me little pieces of advice. I remember one was "Don't look for a book by its colour." It took me some time to understand its meaning and realize its usefulness. Libraries usually rebind reference books to make them sturdier. A series that comes out annually can change its colour in the middle of a run. One of the former teachers was a fixture in the library. She could always be found bent over a large open book of Subject Headings. (These were exhaustive lists of approved subjects that had to be applied to a book to assist a library user in finding it in the catalogue.) Father Morisset always stopped for a few words with her. Bizarrely, he had kept her on as a teacher of subject headings long after Alzheimer's had removed her ability to teach. Students of the previous year spoke of having to learn on their own while she sat quietly at her desk at the front of the room slowly turning the pages of the large book of Subject Headings.

Father Wallace was an older priest who taught the History of the Book, which included papermaking and printing. He was a long-time teacher with the school who was both competent and interesting. I enjoyed his lectures on ancient libraries, the making of manuscripts and the art of bookbinding. He took the class on a visit to the library of St. Paul's Theological University where we were allowed to

examine some very old books and manuscripts and see primitive book binding tools in operation.

Professor Tanguay, the Reference teacher was new to the school. He was an excellent teacher, in his thirties, attractive and able to keep the attention of the whole class, not an easy thing to do as the term progressed. The school had been described as bilingual and I had worried about not being able to follow the teaching, but, in fact, most of the courses were taught in English. The younger francophone students began to protest the inequality. Professor Tanguay, through his personality and the importance of the new reference tools he was describing kept everyone's interest. These bibliographies, indexes and directories were essential in finding information in the days before Google and the Internet were available. He also emphasized the importance of non-library sources, especially the telephone, advice I found extremely useful.

Library administration, an important course, was a failure for our class. The teacher, an older woman who shall be nameless, had taught the course in the past. The content was rudimentary, and the teaching was totally in English. A small group of francophones soon showed their displeasure. They kept on talking to each other while the teacher spoke and even turned their seats away from her. One young man who sat opposite Callista and me seemed to be the ringleader. He liked to undo his pants during class and usually sat there with his zipper undone until the end of the class. All this disruption was distracting for the rest of the students, especially as the teacher proved helpless to control the situation and often ended up in tears. I dreaded this class.

We were all happy when it was time to break for the Christmas holidays. Callista was going back to her family's big farmhouse near Wakefield where she remembered when she and her brother and sisters were little and had gone to bed on Christmas Eve. Their father would run around the outside of the house and up on the roof with sleigh bells. They knew Santa and his reindeer had come. Before the break we had to write a lengthy cataloguing exam and to get our results we had to go individually to the professor's office. When I got there, students were lined up in the narrow hallway in front of his door. Many people were apprehensive about the results, and we watched each person's face as they came out. Most were non-committal but not Irma. She was smiling and quite pleased with her results. Then it was my turn. To my relief the professor said I had done very well and gave me 100. So, I too was smiling and said I was quite pleased. I don't remember our cataloguing teacher's name, but he was an Eastern European and spoke with an accent. He was a middle-aged serious man who taught his subject well and was respected by the students. It came as a shock during the Christmas holidays to hear that he had been struck by a car at the corner of Nicholas and Rideau while attempting to cross, about five o'clock in the evening. His injuries were very serious, and he was never able to return to teaching.

The Christmas holidays at home brought their own stress. In the past I was used to doing lots of entertaining and Christmas baking, mince meat pies, tourtières, Christmas stollen and lots of kinds of cookies. And there was the necessity to shop for Christmas gifts. This year there was one week before Christmas to do everything. The low point came on a Saturday morning shopping expedition to Ottawa with my daughter. I was trying to find suitable gifts for everyone at the last minute when suddenly it all seemed impossible. I sat down on a bench in the shopping mall and started to cry, feeling very sorry for myself. My daughter was upset and tried to reassure me that we could do it. Finally, I dried my tears, and we finished our shopping. Christmas managed to go quite well after all. We got the tree and the house decorated. Our friends Doris, Henrietta and Edlow came on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day our turkey was as large as ever. So, we all enjoyed Christmas, although there were fewer presents and not so many kinds of cookies. I enjoyed having some time to spend with my dog Pierre, our white standard poodle who was nine then and who missed having me at home every day although he still went driving in the truck with my husband.

Shortly after New Years we started back to classes again. Cataloguing and Reference continued but there were some new courses to look forward to - bibliography, audio visual media, government publications, and computers. Because of the accident to our cataloguing professor, new arrangements had to be made to teach his subject. The class was divided into smaller groups of about 10 and a post graduate student who commuted from Montreal (an attractive young woman) was hired to supervise the work of the groups. We were given several books each week and had to prepare author, title, and subject cards for each. For at least forty years now this information has been printed on the back of a book's title page, cataloguing done by the large national institutions such as the National Library of Canada and Library of Congress, in cooperation with the publishers. More recently this same information is available on-line for libraries to import into their own catalogues so individual libraries no longer have to do cataloguing for most of their books.

One morning in January I arrived at the Library School to find a large notice on the door. Classes had been cancelled for the day because of the death and funeral of a student. It was the young man who had been the ringleader of the class disturbances. We were surprised to read in the newspaper that he had killed himself. When we saw him, he had always seemed happy, laughing, and talking with his friends. He had celebrated his twenty fifth birthday at a restaurant with his friends in Hull, then gone alone to a park where he shot himself. His body was found in the snow the next day. I think the atmosphere in the class changed somewhat after his death. The division between the two groups seemed less clear. The year was moving on and everyone was concentrating on finishing assignments.

We had a serious distraction or impediment in our classes during the second term. In January the university began excavating a huge new Faculty of Law building right behind our Library School. The sounds and tremors were heard and felt in the classrooms throughout the rest of the winter and spring, adding to the stress and tension of the year. The sound of pile-drivers alternated with blasting signals.

We began Bibliography this term, also with Professor Tanguay, a subject which helped me get my first job. The assignment for the course was to prepare a bibliography on a subject of our choice. I chose an artist, Paolo Veronese because I knew I would enjoy the research. First, we had to set the limits of the work, then use reference guides to find appropriate catalogues and indexes to search. If possible, we had to see the actual books and articles chosen. This meant visiting art libraries and collections - in my case - a pleasant task. There were strict rules to be followed in the presentation of information in a bibliography - the facts given in a certain order, everything with correct capitalization, spacing and punctuation. This was another occasion when I was grateful for my son's typing ability. A course in research methods complimented the bibliography course. It emphasized the importance of noticing the source of any information and the steps that you took to find it so that you or someone using your work could retrace the steps if necessary.

Audio Visual Tools was the only course I remember being taught totally in French although it was still possible to ask questions and reply in English. We learned the value of films, slides and recordings in finding and presenting information. Our main assignment was to prepare a presentation on a topic of our choice using audio-visual tools. I chose bird watching and prepared a demonstration of teaching bird identification using pictures, slides and recordings of birdcalls and songs. Luckily, I already had quite a lot of material on the subject.

The final course I remember was on computers taught by Missy Hillman, who later became a colleague and friend at the National Library. It was 1972 and there were no personal computers, only large main frame computers that filled a room. I'm not sure what Missy's qualifications were beyond an American library science degree, but she had confidence. She took us to see the impressive main frame computer at the University of Ottawa (which looked like a giant metal box) and taught us some

basic lessons on how it stored and located information. She also taught about the use of punched cards of which I've forgotten everything. I think they passed from use very soon after.

Punched Card - Hollerith Card - IBM Card

It is a piece of stiff paper that contains digital information represented by the presence or absence of holes in predefined positions. Their history dates back to the 18th century when they were used by French weavers to control their textile looms. A German, Herman Hollerith was inspired to invent a punched card as a medium for recording data that could be read by a machine. He used it on data from the U. S. Census. They were also the inspiration for player pianos and fairground organs. Hollerith's company became one of four that joined to form IBM. Early digital computers used punched cards as the primary medium for the input of both computer programs and data. Their use was widespread until 1965 when the invention of cheaper magnetic tape made them obsolete although still used by a few systems.

Twenty-one years later when I retired from the National Library in 1993, most of the staff had only dumb computers that couldn't search the Internet but were used for email, producing documents, and playing games. It wasn't until 1996 when I returned to work for six months at the Library of Parliament that I was first able to search the Internet – an amazingly helpful tool.

Sometime during the second term we were taken on a visit to the National Library of Canada. Later we heard of other Library Schools who visited Yale & Harvard Libraries, Columbia, The New York Public Library, the United Nations Library and Bell Research Library but I was impressed by seeing behind the scenes at our own National Library. In 1972 it was still (except for the Research and Development Division) all housed in the new building on Wellington Street that had been opened in 1968 by Lester Pearson. We were impressed by the Italian marble in the lobby, the grand staircase going up to the fourth floor, the Henry Moore sculpture and the beautiful, engraved glass panels by John Hutton. The Public Archives as it was called then shared the building. Now they are a single institution, Library and Archives Canada. We divided into groups and were taken to various working areas. Two stood out in my mind. The cataloguing division on the fourth floor occupied one vast open room covering the whole west half of the building. It was a bright well-lit space full of desks where what seemed like countless individual cataloguers sat each with piles of books on their desk busily working. Although I had enjoyed learning cataloguing, the sight reinforced my preference for reference work. The second area we visited was also on the fourth floor, a small space presided over by the rare books librarian, Joyce Banks. Joyce was responsible for locating, negotiating, and purchasing rare books for the National Library. They were usually published before 1867 and concerned some facet of our country's history. Joyce described interesting books she had found and various rare book dealers who also searched for appropriate books on her behalf. Fortunately, at that period there was still money available. Joyce, in her bright orange blouse, full of enthusiasm and enjoyment in her job improved my opinion of a job at the National Library. When later in the year we received recruiting forms from the federal government asking us to list our preference for departments to work in I listed the National Library along with the National Gallery. Many of the students had an interview with a pleasant young woman from the National Library but only two were hired – Irma and a young francophone man.

Finally, in May we finished our last essays and reports and prepared for our final exams. Some students were busy photocopying every bit of information they thought might be useful. I was studying every evening in the library. Finally, the exams were finished but before the course was complete each student had to do "practical work" for two weeks at an actual library. You could choose the library if you knew one willing to accept you or you could work at a library chosen and assigned by the Library School. I chose the latter way and was assigned to work in the library of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

The Department was housed in one of the downtown office buildings and the Chief Librarian was Elaine Harrington, a bright young woman who headed a well-run library with a staff of about sixteen people. Elaine introduced me to everyone on the staff and arranged for me to spend some time in every area so that I could learn about the various tasks and try some of them. I had learned about the rules for filing library cards but here I spent time filing two or three boxes. Even though that wouldn't be my job it would make it easier for me to find information in the future and to be aware of the errors that people might make. I also got to work on some of the requests for interlibrary loans received from departmental staff. They sometimes couldn't be found because of insufficient or incorrect information on the request form. Library staff worked on these to discover what was missing or wrong. I remember being given a request with an author and title, but no trace of a book could be found. However, at the end of the title was written "etc.". I began to wonder if the "etc." could possibly be the name of a magazine. It was, and I was able to find the article and realized that nothing was too unusual to be a title.

My two weeks of practice work flew past and there was nothing left to do but wait for the day our results would be posted at the University. When the results were posted I was relieved and happy to see my name as well as most of my friends and acquaintances among the successful students. On a pleasant June afternoon, the students gathered at the University in caps and gowns and with our families and friends for the graduation ceremony. It seemed much less nerve wracking to me than I remembered the graduation at U of T, twenty-four years earlier. However, when they got to my name as the degrees were being handed out, the speaker announced that Elizabeth Deavy had been awarded the University Governor's Gold Medal for Library Science. I was astounded and probably stumbled through my thanks. My fellow students were equally astounded as none of us had heard of such a medal. As one person said to me later, "If I had known there was a gold medal, I would have tried harder."

University Governor's Gold Medal for Library Science



A few of us had supper together at Nates, a favourite Jewish delicatessen and restaurant on Rideau Street. Husbands and wives joined us for a pleasant celebration at the end of our eventful year.



Although my year was happy, successful, and useful, for the Library School it proved to be the final class. Sadly, it didn't reopen in the fall. Dean Havard-Williams left. Later he would start a successful Library School and National Library in Botswana. It was rumoured that he and the Board of Governors of the university had been unable to agree on necessary restructuring. So, I felt doubly grateful that I had decided to go when I did and very sorry to think of Father Morisset's lovely library unused. He continued to be a presence until his nineties at the main library which has been named after him.

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