

# A Lifelong Career in Library Science

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AT THE AGE OF TWELVE (12), WHEN PROMPTED BY my primary school teacher to write about what I wanted to do when I left school, I wrote a two-page essay on what was my dream job: that of a flight attendant. Fast forward thirty-nine (39) years later and that essay would read quite differently if I were to write it today, as it would describe my lifelong career as a librarian. A far cry from what looked then like the glamorous world of a flight attendant, librarianship has been every bit as exciting and far more rewarding than what seemed then to be a fabulous career crisscrossing the globe.

My path toward librarianship started in the 1980s when I enrolled for the undergraduate degree in the Faculty of Humanities and Education at The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine Campus in my native country, Trinidad and Tobago. It became more focused when I commenced my postgraduate degree in Library and Information Studies in 1993, again in the Faculty of Humanities and Education (FHE), this time at the UWI Mona Campus in Jamaica. This training blossomed into a passion for my profession that led to appointments in the United States and the Caribbean; leadership roles in local, regional, and international library associations; scholarship and research that has contributed to documenting the history of Caribbean libraries; and led to the publication of a two-volume guide on social media tools and mobile apps for libraries across the globe. In brief, my career as a librarian has been fulfilling and exciting and has allowed me to make a valuable contribution to the development of the region in a sector that is key to its growth. In today's modern, technologically-driven societies, libraries no longer function as brick and mortar storehouses of information but are perceived as innovative, dynamic

organisations that facilitate discovery of print and electronic resources, preserve and provide access to our rich Caribbean heritage collections and support a plethora of technology-driven services to all segments of our society. In short, in an age where it is understood that knowledge is power, libraries stand at the very centre of Caribbean societies' continued quest to improve the lives of their citizens.

Like many careers defined by passion and commitment, this path has not been an easy one. At the UWI, St. Augustine Campus, I registered as a part-time student and also held a full-time job as a library assistant in a public library. My day would begin at the library; at the appointed time, I would leave to 'catch' a taxi or bus, travel to the UWI campus, attend classes and then return to work to complete the rest of my shift. A gruelling schedule to undertake for four successive years, but achievable due to the infrastructure put in place by the UWI administration and supported by faculty to facilitate part-time students. Of course, the cooperation of my employer at the time was also key.

I embarked on this demanding journey in pursuit of an undergraduate degree in history to fulfil an inner craving to traverse the world as viewed through the lenses of knowledgeable lecturers, study the mysteries of early civilizations, review the history of indigenous populations in dispersed geographic regions and explore the intricacies of Caribbean political, economic and social structures. As occurs at Mona, programmes at the FHE, St. Augustine offer students the flexibility to undertake a minor in another faculty. I chose to take a minor in social sciences, and explored subject areas – politics, sociology and anthropology – which would further enhance my educational experience. It was in one of my courses taken in the humanities, however, that I was presented with a unique, once in a lifetime opportunity, when award winning Trinidadian novelist, Earl Lovelace, read and critiqued my first fledgling attempts at creative writing. Under his tutelage, my poorly crafted short stories were honed to perfection, perfection which resulted in my receiving the faculty award for creative writing.

The writing skills I acquired in that creative writing class and the confidence afforded by the winning of the faculty prize, jumpstarted an award-winning career as an author and supported the mandated scholarly activities as academic librarian. To date, I have maintained a successful track record of original research

and publishing, presenting my research in books, book chapters, journal articles, conference presentations and blogs. Two noteworthy publications in this regard are an edited work on Caribbean libraries in the twenty-first century and a two-volume guide on social media tools and mobile apps in libraries.

After attaining my undergraduate degree with upper second class honours, I could have easily taken a job as a teacher in a secondary school of choice, but I had other ideas, built on a dream and on-the-job experience as a library assistant. I decided to travel to the Mona campus in Jamaica to read for a Masters degree in Library and Information Studies. This seminal degree, required for a professional career in librarianship, had at its core, courses designed to help students move seamlessly and with alacrity as generalists or specialists into their chosen library type, whether public, academic or specialist library.

As diligent as I was in my studies, university life was not only about academic work. At St. Augustine, there were ample opportunities to engage in activities outside the classroom, including my favourites, debating club and cataloguing the library collection of a history professor. On Thursday afternoons, there was 'liming', Trini style, in the undercroft and on Friday nights, eating areas were magically transformed into live discotheques, blasting music of all genres with added entertainment in the form of karaoke and dance competitions. At Mona, as a residential student I was able to partake fully and enjoy all that campus life offered. I attended special literary lectures, campus concerts – I even saw Beenie Man perform early in his career – and watched as an enthralled bystander when the Prince of Wales visited the campus in 1993. Added to this were daily morning treks around the campus Ring Road, carnival Jamaican style, and impromptu visits to the north coast arranged by an active Trini students' association.

Today there are no regrets. At the culmination of my postgraduate studies, the Department of Library and Information Studies at Mona awarded me the prestigious Dorothy Collings award for outstanding postgraduate work; in 2012 the department presented me with the Librarian of the Decades award. These signal honours from my alma mater were further proof that I had chosen the career path that was right for me. Pursuing an undergraduate degree in the humanities and a Masters degree in Library and Information Studies provided the foundation that has allowed me to function as a productive citizen of the

Caribbean and as a well-rounded librarian, capable of working effectively in different types of libraries and archives anywhere in the world. I have worked in university libraries in Bellingham, Washington, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and at The University of the West Indies in Jamaica and in Trinidad and Tobago.

In an ever-changing world where modes of education are constantly evolving and present new opportunities and challenges, I am of the firm opinion that my career successes are closely aligned with my academic choices as an undergraduate and postgraduate student in the Faculty of Humanities and Education at the UWI. These academic choices laid the professional foundation required to gain entry into the real world of work and engage in a lifelong career spanning over twenty-two years in librarianship. The UWI has moulded me into the ideal graduate: a leader, a critical and creative thinker, innovative and entrepreneurial in outlook, dedicated to becoming a lifelong, self-motivated learner.