Profile

The master librarian: Lucretia McClure

During the several decades that I've been associated with librarians and have been one myself, I've been fortunate to know a number who have truly mastered the profession. There are about ten master librarians on my list. The only person who fits all the criteria I have identified for the master librarian is my friend and colleague, Lucretia McClure.

You may have your own list of master librarians. You may have made your list by using a more scientific approach than I. I first made the list, then asked myself, "What do all these people have in common?" When I use the term master librarian hereafter, you can substitute the name Lucretia McClure, for she is the person I am talking about.

Master librarians perform those tasks that other librarians perform, but there are additional activities in which they engage. First and foremost, the master librarian demonstrates a love of books, knowledge, and ideas. The master librarian has a thirst for knowledge from many fields, which can only be quenched by partaking of copious amounts of the outpourings of many books and journals.

My second criterion is that master librarians have contributed to the literature the legacy of their most thoughtful pursuits. One of the well-trod paths of lifelong learning is writing. Writing clearly about what has never been described before is scholarship of the highest order of magnitude. A master librarian contributes information of substance to the literature.

Master librarians also serve as mentors, either directly or indirectly. Frequently, they do not know they are serving as role models. A young, inexperienced librarian may read their every published word, listen to their every utterance at meetings, and watch their interaction with colleagues and others.

My next criterion for master librarians is that they have a high degree of enthusiasm for information technology. Master librarians do not jump on every technological bandwagon that passes by. Rather, they use technology to make the work of both librarian and user easier and more creative. They are also secure in the knowledge that neither the library nor the librarian will disappear because of this technology. The master librarian knows that technology is handmaiden to information, not the other way around.

In a letter I received from Hal Bloomquist shortly before his death, he responded to a question about the most important personal characteristics a librarian should have. His answer was basic character, integrity, and a genuine desire to be of service. These I would adopt from Bloomquist as personality traits of the master librarian. An additional trait I would add is humility.

Lucretia McClure is a master librarian. She is one of the few remaining doyens of medical librarianship. Having become an endangered species, they are quickly disappearing.

Lucretia's career has been one of service to her institution and a number of professional organizations—local, regional, national, and international. She has probably taught more continuing education courses for the Medical Library Association than any other member. She has served on boards, committees, task forces, and advisory bodies. She has written and been a spokesperson to express her profession's and her own point of view.

Her service has been rendered with integrity, basic character, and a true willingness to serve. When asked to serve, her answers have always been "yes." "I'm too busy" are not words in her vocabulary. Sometimes her service required true grit. The only time she's ever been sick during her entire career was when I booked a room for her at a very modest hotel in Chicago. The MLA Board, as boards of directors are wont to do on occasion, had issued austerity guidelines on travel. So I chose an appropriately cheap hotel. Mrs. McClure claims that by my requiring her to stay in that hotel, she was exposed to and contracted Legionnaires' disease.

I could give you a further tour of her C.V., but the fact that she meets the criteria of my master librarian—however personal and idiosyncratic they may be—makes that unnecessary. It is appropriate to say a few words about the one remaining personality trait, humility. While this is probably the most important quality of all, it is the one in which many of my master librarians fall short. The master librarian is anxious to find and to share information with others, to help others, to provide service, to be cast in the role of servant. It is the very rare and extraordinary individual who realizes that ego reduction is more to be prized than ego inflation. Lucretia McClure's life and work have been dedicated to that principle.

It is my prediction that she will take all the qualities of the master librarian with her into retirement to continue to serve society in many important ways.

Raymond A. Palmer
American Association of Immunologists
Bethesda, Maryland