June Garner
Kathryn Wesley

I met June Garner when I started working in a staff position at Mississippi State University in 1992. A few years later, I went to library school, focused on serials, and then got my current job as a serials cataloger at Clemson University. Naturally, I joined NASIG right off the bat, and started going to conferences. June and I got reacquainted at the conferences and, starting with San Antonio 2 in 2001, we’ve been roommates almost every year since. Sadly, that tradition ends this year, because June retired in January. So this profile is dedicated to my good friend and longtime NASIG roomie.

Most of us in librarianship and scholarly communication don’t grow up thinking that’s what we want to do with our lives, but June was an exception. Her ambition to become a librarian began in elementary school, when a “wonderful public librarian” gave June her first library “job,” allowing her to check books in and out. This first mentor also talked to her about books and fostered her love of reading. June was hooked. She pursued her interest by volunteering as a student assistant at her middle and high school libraries. Upon graduation, she got her first honest-to-goodness library job at a public library 45 miles away. This was, she notes, a “big deal in the late 70s.” (Remember the oil embargo?)

June went on to undergraduate studies at Purdue. She majored in education, but only because there was a program for school librarians. She never doubted that an MLS was in her future. She went on to graduate school at Michigan, planning to work in public libraries. After taking the core curriculum, June fell in love with cataloging. She says, “I had an excellent professor who knew the then newly-published AACR2 by memory. I relished the challenges to catalog the most obscure items she had for us in cataloging lab. All of the rules made sense and I felt very comfortable with all of those rules guiding me along. My reference classes, on the other hand, were a struggle to get through.” So cataloging it would be. She was still planning on a career in public libraries, but her husband got a job at Texas Tech, and the only cataloging job she could find was at the law school library. At TTU, she cataloged everything, including loose-leaf services and serials. When June and her husband moved on to Mississippi State, there was a serials cataloging position open. She got the job, and once again became enamored. Not just cataloging, but serials cataloging.

NASIG was born when June was at Texas Tech. She joined, but was involved with the American Association of Law Librarians, so didn’t really participate. When she moved to MSU in 1987, her supervisor told her how great the conferences were. June also had a research interest in serial pricing issues at the time and, she says, “NASIG was THE conference to attend.” She was a little tentative about volunteering for committee work, but took the plunge, and once again was hooked. Since then, she’s done a lot of volunteering for NASIG, but says her most rewarding role was the first time she co-chaired a committee, which was PPC for Denver in 2006.
I asked June what kept her at Mississippi State for so many years. She says she’s always had great support and mentoring there, plus opportunities to take on responsibilities like major projects early on in her career. These factors also ultimately prepared her to make the transition from rank-and-file cataloger to cataloging coordinator. She elaborated further on some of MSU’s rewards:

It has been exciting to work with younger catalogers and to share in their enthusiasm for the process of cataloging. There are always new projects to plan and staff to train, and that has helped me to stay alert and eager to look ahead for the next assignment to come along. I take pride in the work that the department has accomplished and the role that I have played in the development of a quality OPAC. With all of that, it is difficult to think of changing jobs when all you need is in one place.

A lot has changed with libraries and cataloging since the start of her career, and I asked June to reflect on that. The biggest changes, she says, have involved technology and automation. She explains, “It took us from sharing OCLC terminals, key punch cards, filing cards in the public card catalog, and using little irons to attach spine labels to having powerful desktop computers and having our cataloging typos out there for everyone to see in the OPAC.” But we’ve also seen changes in what we catalog and how: “It certainly is easier/harder to catalog e-resources and government documents when you get records from a MARC record provider.” Finally, she mentions the advent of RDA, but goes on to say she’ll be retiring before that happens. One senses, perhaps, a little bit of glee about that.

And what does June do for fun? She likes to play tennis, read, watch movies, work jigsaw puzzles, and knit. But mostly she loves to travel. And what are some of her favorite places:

I have been blessed to be able to travel as much as I do. I have to say that Antarctica was fabulous, and a place I thought I would never get to visit. Alaska, Peru, and French Polynesia, though, are also on top of my list as favorite destinations. Greece and Turkey are memorable, as that was the first major trip I took with my husband Rick.

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Any bad travel experiences? There must have been one at some time, she says, but it just provides an opportunity to laugh.

Finally, I asked June for her thoughts about retirement. Are her co-workers were biting their nails about her impending departure? And what directions will her life be taking now? She’s a little nervous, but mostly excited. She’s thankful to be young and healthy enough to experience and learn new things. Furthermore, she says, “It will be fantastic to spend more time with Rick.
and to stop our weekend commutes (Starkville, MS, to Little Rock, AR, or vice versa for fifteen years).” She thinks her colleagues will miss her, but has confidence in their experience and abilities, and knows they will carry on. And as for the future?:

I have great plans in mind for retirement. Time will tell if I actually accomplish the things on my wish list. I plan to travel (our first trip post-retirement is to Italy) and to learn something new. To paraphrase Mark Twain, I intend to sail away from the safe harbor and explore, dream, and discover. I’d like to try my hand at woodworking and gardening, to take cooking, art, and dance classes, and to volunteer somewhere, maybe at the Clinton Foundation, Heifer International, the Little Rock Zoo, or the local public library.

Sounds like a plan. Sail on, JG. I’ll miss you.