Interview with Clint Chamberlain, the 2016 Merriman Award Winner

Please start by describing your current position and how you’ve been involved with serials?

My current title is educational resource support officer, which makes me feel as if I should be wearing a uniform with epaulets. Title aside, I’m basically the head of Technical Services for the Dallas County Community College District. There are seven colleges within the district, each with its own library; some of the colleges have satellite campuses with their own libraries as well. We have a centralized tech services operation for all of them. I got my start on this path to technical services years ago prior to going to library school, but I didn’t really discover my love for serials until 1997 or so in the Boston University (BU) School of Theology Library, where I was a student worker while working on a graduate degree in archaeology.

What initially led you to NASIG and why you continue to stay involved?

It was while I was working with serials at the BU School of Theology Library that two friends and former coworkers, Beverley Geer and Bea Caraway, encouraged me to apply for one of the student travel grants. They were both involved in NASIG at the time; I think Beverley was currently the president or the past president. I applied and was lucky enough to be selected for one of the travel grants, which took me to the conference in San Diego, where I met some folks who are now friends for life. I continued to be involved through my time as a serials librarian and into roles in which I am not directly involved with managing serials or e-resources, but I manage folks who do work directly with serials and e-resources – I like to stay involved with NASIG so that I can remain current on issues of concern to the staff I manage.

What prompted you to apply for the Merriman award?

In a nutshell, I really wanted to go to UKSG again. I’d been fortunate enough to have presented there once, ten years ago, with Jill Emery and Dana Walker. It was an excellent conference, and I wanted to experience it again.

How did you react when you found out that you were the recipient?

I was thrilled. Then I immediately went into a panic because I realized that my passport had recently expired and I had only a few weeks in which to get it renewed. Fortunately passport renewal is a lot faster these days than it used to be.

What were your first impressions of the UKSG conference?

I felt very well cared-for as an award winner. On the day the folks with UKSG were told that I had been selected as the recipient of the award, they contacted me and made sure I had everything I needed to make my hotel reservations and begin planning for the conference. Then, when I got there, the hospitality was wonderful. Everyone I met and spoke with was so kind and welcoming. The members of the Education Subcommittee invited me to dinner the night before the conference started, but I wasn’t able to attend due to having already made dinner plans with a friend; even so, it was nice to know that they were looking out for a
newcomer like me. That set the tone for the rest of the conference.

How do you think the experience of attending the UKSG will affect your career?

I’m not sure. I do know that after I attended UKSG ten years ago, it opened my eyes to the different ways in which our colleagues in other countries work together to solve problems, and it made me aware of some of the great things that have come out of the UK in terms of dealing with scholarly communication issues. Although the community college setting I’m in doesn’t lend itself to much work with those same issues, it’s inspiring to see what’s going on in the wider world of scholarly communication in all its forms.

How was the UKSG conference different from the NASIG conferences that you’ve attended?

One thing that stood out at UKSG were the sessions focused on research (e.g., on user behavior and user experience; use of hard and soft metrics in library decision-making) and what might be called, for lack of a better term, theory (the psychogeography of libraries). Whereas, in my experience, a lot of NASIG sessions are more about day-to-day practical or hands-on stuff that attendees can replicate at their home libraries. It also seemed like there may have been more sessions at UKSG focused on scholarly communication issues, which I know NASIG is actively encouraging as well.

What was your favorite UKSG session and why was it your favorite?

It’s hard to pick a favorite because there were so many good sessions. One that particularly stands out in my memory was the first plenary session, which was presented by Ann Rossiter, the executive director of SCONUL. It was entitled “Managing relationships between libraries and publishers for greater impact.” Her presentation identified key areas in which effective collaboration between librarians and publishers could effectively change the landscape of scholarly communication for the better, and I left there with a lot of food for thought.

What are the differences between the two organizations, USKG and NASIG?

The two organizations are obviously similar in many ways, but one thing I noticed and liked a lot about UKSG is the presence and active participation of so many vendors and publishers.

For those who might be interested in going to UKSG and perhaps applying for the Merriman award, what advice would you give them?

DO IT. Seriously. The application process is simple and straightforward. If you’re not selected, all you’ve lost is a bit of your time that was spent completing the application form, but if you are selected, you’ll have a fantastic experience.