

Excerpt from the Newsletter of the State, Court, and County Law Libraries Special Interest Section of the American Association of Law Libraries, v. 27, #2, Spring 2001:

Charley's Corner:

What, Me Worry?

by Charles R. Dyer, Director of Libraries, San Diego County Public Law Library

Nothing in this column represents the view of my Library or its Board of Trustees. These are just my personal opinions.

Just recently, I got a fortune in a fortune cookie that said, "You do not need to worry about the future." While I am sure the author of this little enigmatic gem meant it to be comforting, it wasn't. Indeed, it seems that to live the life of a public law library director automatically implies that one must worry. Let's see: There's the ever continuing need for more funds, the need for more and better space, the low salaries, the difficulty in recruiting, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. So perhaps it was a sign that my impending doom is nigh.

Of course, one could take the long view: Will anything I do mean anything in five hundred years, or perhaps even in a hundred years? How about thirty?

The next week, at the same small Chinese eatery, I got the following fortune: "You are going to make a great change." Choosing to avoid the issue of my own death that this one along with the first one implied, I decided that either something really good was going to happen to my library or I was going to be getting a new job. I have not been looking for a new job, but sometimes these things are foisted upon you.

As with most of the county law libraries in California, ours is going through a particularly hard financial time. Civil court filing fees are dropping once again, and I soon must present a budget to my board that may even call for closing one of our branches. We had recently taken the plunge and purchased a new automated library system—we are now becoming an Innovative user—and that has sucked up a lot of our fund balance. Will my timing be considered too bad? Perhaps, coupled with our revenue problems. The bearer of bad news often fares badly, so maybe I will be in line for a job change after all. (Actually, I have a very fair and intelligent board, so if you see me at the Placement Office in Minneapolis, you can rest assured that I deserve to be there.)

As I mulled over these messages from who knows where (I think the cookies are made in Los Angeles), with my wife teasing me over my angst, I get the news that Roberta Shaffer, former law librarian and current dean at the library school at my alma mater, Texas, is going to become the executive director of the Special Libraries Association. Roberta had recruited me for the advisory council for the library school, and I had recruited her for my program in Minneapolis. (That's "K-3: New Realities: Forward Thinkers Will Point the Way." Be there. It'll be worth it.) But Roberta will still be on the program. So that's not the problem.

As Legislation Committee chair for the Council of California County Law Librarians, I have been spending a lot of time lobbying in Sacramento, trying to get an appropriation from the State's General Fund. You may recall that California had a \$12 billion surplus until the State started buying electricity on behalf of the power companies. Everyone except the people who count have been telling me that all that work will be for naught. Lobbyists and legislators aren't quite so negative, surprisingly, but we will have to lower our sights, they say. Enough good news

to keep me busy lobbying; enough bad news to make us plan for cuts as well.

We are also about to have our Main Library remodeled. The county government (which is separate from us politically) was supposed to have contracted to have the work done last December, but there have been delays. So it may happen in August, and, of course, be scaled down a bit. Today, I went to a program on employing new technology in library buildings, so now I am aware of all the things we will have to take care of after the remodel in order to get things working because the county couldn't afford them in the first place.

Today, we also had a Staff Appreciation Luncheon, planned and paid for by the senior managers at our library. A good time was had by all. (Not bad, considering they are looking at a remodel on top of a new library system installation and perhaps a branch closing.) Then tomorrow I have to write up the agenda for the board meeting for our affiliated charitable foundation, before I leave town the next day, going back to Sacramento for another meeting. Next week, I have an out-of-town meeting on Monday and leave Tuesday for Austin for a couple days, for that advisory council and for Mother's Day. (Mom lives just outside of Austin. First time to see Pop since his heart attack and triple bypass. He's doing okay.)

In these times, I wonder if being a public law library director would make a good plot for another Survivor series.

To top off my running flirtation with angst, both existential and "librarial," I got another fortune cookie with another perplexing statement: "You are having a great dinning (*sic*) experience." At first I laughed, as I was sure that the word "dining" had simply been misspelled. Given the rather low-brow eatery I was in, calling it a great dining experience was also a bit nervy.

Upon returning to the office, I looked up "dinning," which is the participial form of the verb "din." It has two meanings: 1. To stun with deafening noise. 2. To impress by wearying repetition. Well, what do you know. I think the spelling is right after all.

So lately, I have been having a great dinning experience. So many things are coming my way all at once, both good and bad, and the good can often be as stressful as the bad.

Did I fail to mention that I am also getting physical therapy for my shoulder, and we got a new drummer for our little amateur band, and the librarian that I mentor is also going through some stressful times, and please don't ask about the in-laws. Of course, the worst was when GTE sold our cell phones lines to AT&T, and we had to get new phones. Imagine three days without voice mail. Thought I was going to die.

If any of this busy-ness sounds familiar to you, then perhaps you, too, are having a great dinning experience. What's the old Chinese curse: "May you live in interesting times."

By the way, my wife and I are bringing our fourteen-year-old and ten-year-old grandsons to Minneapolis with us. We thought we'd take them on a nice car trip this summer to get them away from the hustle and bustle of their busy lives. (Bought a new Jetta, with "Monsoon Sound," i.e., eight speakers.) They need some quality time, we said. Who am I fooling? They're the ones giving us some quality time. Maybe that's what that first fortune meant: We don't need to worry about our grandchildren. They'll do quite well. That would be a nice thing to know.

And maybe I can make a great change that lasts for many years, with a little quality time with the boys. And maybe, just maybe, my dinning experience will be no worse than the music I will have to suffer through on this car trip. Eight speakers!!! Egad.