Ross' Rave: McLibrary

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From a distance she looks stately. The fashion frame and unhurried gait of a woman of years and old money. A leashed Yorkie strains, slightly bored, on its leash. Looking more closely, it's easy to spot the stains and rips in her tweed skirt. A broken zipper held with a rusting safety pin. Red pilled angora beret, oversized lens-less glasses, and well-worn tiny leather shoes.

Norma Desmond.

On a good day, Sadie rings my bell four or five times a day.

"I can't get this song out of my head," she says apologetically. "Do you know it? The fascinating witches and their scintillating stitches?"

I tell her it sounds familiar.

"I'm sorry to bother you. You're a good man, Charlie Brown." She weaves unsteadily back to her door. Dog reluctantly in tow. Moments later, she's back. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

Last week I climbed her balcony, jimmied the slider, and found her on the couch. 911. Twelve hours later, she's still in the ER. Stroke and a slight heart attack. No relatives, 85, mostly blind, moderate dementia.

"I just want to sleep," she slurs. "Can you please just get me something and let me sleep?"

Ironically, Congress' health care reform legislation snaked its way toward the Senate this same week. The House Resolution is over 2,000 pages. The Senate's is a little over 600. The U.S. Constitution is 4. On the news, a flabby faced white man, tells the camera the bill is full of pork. Later, a grieving husband tearfully explains how his insurance company denied a claim for his wife's cancer medicine, but offered her hospice coverage instead.

At the Reference Desk, I get a text IM:

  Patron: Do u know sum websites 4 con issues on health?

  Librarian: Hi. Thanks for your message and question. I'm happy to help.

  Patron: :)

  Librarian: Tell me more about what you would like find today.

  Patron: We hafta do a powerpoint on an issue and I am doing the part on the cons.

  Librarian: Go on.

  Patron: And when I type in "cons" it doesn't work.

Where do I even begin with this? She's probably texting from the Starbucks upstairs. The students are edgy because of tuition increases, fewer sections, and reduced library hours. They're planning to refuse to leave when the building closes at 5. Stay all night. "We need the Library open!" they chant. The next day we extend the hours. Coincidence. There are about 20,000 students enrolled. About a dozen are in the Library.

  Librarian: You are looking for some information on some facet of health care and specifically focusing on negative aspects. Is that right?

The cursor blinks back at me.

While I wait, I read a report from Margaret Hodge, Minister of Culture, Media and Sport (UK) on the modernization of public libraries. It's a small collection of pieces by people in the know about such things, and is called, "Empower, Inform, Enrich." [Not to be confused with the theme of Equifax's 2009 Conference "Inform > Enrich > Empower." Coincidence.] Here are some of the juicy, and completely out of context, morsels:

- "More than half the population never use a library; many non-users are potentially new consumers. Their perceptions and attitudes need to be understood, locally and nationally, and used to drive change." Roy Clare, Museums, Libraries and Archives (UK)

When Dr. Helen Caldicott was asked about voter apathy in America, she said it was a blessing. "Would you really want all those morons to vote? The government and media keep you fat and stupid." I see that. I live in California, a state currently in the throes of a major existential crisis, due in no small part due to the bevy of "popular" ballot proposals. Excuse me, but do I really want the mob driving change in an institution as important as libraries?

- "Upgrading the universal consumer library experience is key – physical libraries need to be a nice place to spend time in, with facilities that any leisure destination would have with coffee shops and loos…" Amanda Ridout, Advisory Council on Libraries

We need to "upgrade" (from beta?) the "universal" (aka, white) "consumer" (Sorry Karl Marx; it seems like your time in the British Library didn't pan out) "library experience" (Your call is important to us). Libraries are now a "leisure destination" (like water parks and roller coasters). No books, apparently, but a place for a Frappuccino™ and a pee.

- "The number of students using the library there [University of South Florida] rose by a staggering 145,000 a year following the opening of Starbucks and the library is once again the hub of campus life." Darcy Willson-Rymer, Managing Director, Starbucks UK & Ireland

It isn't the library that's a hub of campus life. It's a library building with couches and wifi and caffeine. A student union annex with some books.

Patron: Yeah. Like how we spend all this money on AIDS.

Librarian: And you consider this a negative (a "con")?

Patron: Y

Librarian: I read last week that HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death for black women (including African American women) aged 25–34 years.

Patron: Are you gonna help me?

Librarian: I thought I was?

Patron has left chat.

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I stop at the hospital on my way home from work.

"I'm here to see how Sadie is doing," I tell the nurse in the ICU.

"Oh. Didn't they call you?"

In Summary…

As library work and workplaces continue to evolve, we will no doubt be called upon to continue to work collaboratively to reach our goals. Although teamwork can be engaging and exciting, it can also be very complex and challenging as we seek to manage people, projects, and resources. Fortunately, technology tools such as those discussed in this two-part series have been developed to facilitate teamwork and help us to collaborate more efficiently and effectively.