



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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***“Now is an amazing time to be a librarian. The technologies available to us are changing so quickly along with the tools our patrons are using to learn, communicate and build community online.”***

-Meredith Farkas,  
“Balancing the Online Life,” from *American Libraries*, January 2007

Every month I receive *American Libraries*, the magazine of the American Library Association (ALA), and *Public Libraries*, from the Public Library Association (PLA). Despite any resolve I have to read both of them all the way through, I usually end up browsing and reading the articles that catch my attention. Each issue is packed with a range of topics, using columns, feature articles and shorter pieces to educate and entertain librarians of all kinds.

Technology is one of the biggest issues. “Balancing the Online Life” is the cover story for the latest (January 2007) issue of *American Libraries*, and starting in February 2007, the author, Meredith Farkas, will be writing a regular column called “Technology in Practice.” The column will share success stories of libraries, large and small, which have done “truly innovative things with technology.”

In her piece, Farkas gives an overview of some of the ways librarians are using the

latest technology for themselves and their public. She mentions web spaces, games, audio and video productions, and blogs, which she defines as “essentially a web journal where an individual can easily post content about any subject and allow people to comment on what they’ve written.”

That same issue includes, too, a dining guide to Seattle, since this month’s ALA mid-winter conference will be held there; and a piece called “These Lavish Edifices” - excerpts from a 1933 journal by then 25-year-old Catherine Marsh of Halifax, West Yorkshire. It is fascinating to read this young librarian’s impressions of the American libraries she visited. There is even the 1933 version of modern technology - “an ingenious contrivance for obtaining books from other departments,” which consists of putting a call slip into a machine, ringing a bell, and receiving the book as it is “shot forth from a kind of lift.”

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Since the format for *Public Libraries* doesn't include a featured cover story, the front of the November/December issue shows instead a peaceful winter scene – a cabin in the woods, snow on the roof, ground and trees, and the illuminated profile of a reader inside near the window. It is enough to prod those of us who think there is never enough time to simply read into picking up a book and heading for the nearest forest.

Like *American Libraries*, *Public Libraries* also looks at technology. A column called “Internet Spotlight” explores “Internet and Web topics relevant to librarians in the public library sector.” Susan G. Waxter wrote the one in this issue, and it is a summary of the Baltimore County public library users’ survey. The results of the survey were not surprising, as is noted by the author, but include two particularly interesting facts: 20.5 % of the respondents

said they do not have access to a computer anywhere else; and, the two most popular activities on the computers are browsing the Internet and reading or writing e-mail.

In addition, this issue examines using collection agencies to retrieve long-overdue materials and fines; an interview with Brian Michael Bendis, an American comic book artist; and Michael Garrett Farrelly’s young adult column about poetry and teens. A wonderful aspect to the *Public Libraries* articles is the accompanying information about the books each author is currently reading. For instance, Farrelly, a Youth Services Librarian and graphic novelist in Chicago, is reading: *Slippage*, by Harlan Ellison; *Never Let Me Go*, by Kazuo Ishiguro; *Pirate Utopias* by Peter Lamborn Wilson; and, *The Grass Harp* by Truman Capote. Four books at once: now that is a librarian with whom I can identify.

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