

FROM THE NEW LIBRARIAN

I was asked by longtime editor JoAnne Lehman to write a column for this issue of *Feminist Collections*, introducing myself as the new Gender & Women's Studies Librarian for the University of Wisconsin System. As you know, my esteemed predecessor, Phyllis Holman Weisbard, retired last summer after holding this position for twenty-two years. So of course I wanted to oblige, but I hemmed and hawed for weeks about where to begin...until it dawned on me to start at the beginning. And that beginning for me was a pencil.

That's right, a *pencil*: a purple one, to be exact, with a white eraser. I received this pencil at the table of the UW System's Women's Studies Librarian at the 27th Annual UW System Women's Studies Conference in 2002. It was the first time I had presented at an academic conference. As an undergraduate at Carroll College (albeit a "non-traditional," single-mothering one, with a full-time job and four-year-old son), I was there to provide a student's perspective of embodiment and the use of visual imagery to teach gender. I was so excited and honored to be on the panel with three of my most respected Carroll professors, Drs. Lori Duin Kelly, Kimberly Redding, and Barb King.

I was studying history and women's studies at Carroll at the time, determined to finally finish my Bachelor's degree. After Carroll, I planned to earn advanced degrees at UW-Madison and become a professor of history and/or women's studies. Before I could take that path, however, I was offered a full-time support staff position in Carroll's Todd Wehr Memorial Library. Like most librarians will say,

I was a voracious reader and loved books and libraries. Despite this, I had never thought of pursuing librarianship as a career until I began working in the library at Carroll in 2003. After graduating from Carroll that year, I immediately began pursuing my MLIS at UW-Milwaukee, completing it in 2006.

But this story is about a pencil...



Back in 2002 at the conference, after I nervously presented my humble student's opinion, I was meandering around the tables and came upon one at which I was given this purple pencil with the white eraser. I took the pencil and read the printing on the side: "Visit the UW Women's Studies Librarian," with the URL of the office's website.

Women's Studies Librarian? I had no idea there was such a thing! What a fantastic job! To combine women's studies and books?? While still having no designs on librarianship, I walked away with that pencil and kept it for many years. I went to that website, followed Phyllis's posts on email lists of which we were both a part, took notice of the events we both attended, and read the publications of the Office of the Women's Studies Librarian.

In 2013, I was shocked to see that after twenty-two years, Phyllis Holman Weisbard was retiring. I must have looked at the job description posted by the search committee for hiring her successor, but I didn't seriously consider applying. By this time I had

spent eleven happy, fruitful years at the Carroll Library. I was serving as the Interim Associate Director and enjoying being Diversity Librarian — a position I had created with my former director six years earlier — and I had many amazing partnerships with colleagues around the campus and community.

Two weeks later, though, a Carroll alumna with whom I wasn't familiar contacted me on Facebook. She encouraged me to apply for the position of Gender & Women's Studies Librarian, insisting that while it would be a vast change from Carroll, the position would be a perfect fit for me. I was so taken aback at this gesture that I had to apply. I was nervous and thrilled when I received a request for a phone interview and then an in-person interview.

Because it had all unfolded so auspiciously, I decided to go through the interview process being as transparent as possible. I thought, "If they see the real me and think that I am a fit, then it is meant to be!" So while I was uncertain whether or not it was the right thing to do, I shared with the search committee the story of the purple pencil and the message from the unknown student, both of which had made such a big impact on me.

I cannot adequately express how ecstatic I was to be offered this position. While it was difficult to leave Carroll, a place full of people and experiences so important to my professional, academic, and personal development, I knew I had to jump at the opportunity for this, my dream job. It was serendipity.

And so, I began this amazing journey in October 2013, spending time with Phyllis during my first few weeks

on the job. She is such a wealth of knowledge and experience! I kept hearing from others how difficult it would be for me to fill such big shoes...not a real confidence-builder! All kidding aside, though, everyone has been extremely supportive and kind during this major life transition and for this, I will always be grateful — to my colleagues at Carroll, especially the library staff and my mentor and former director, Lelan McLemore; to Lori, Kimberly, and Barb, who were stalwart feminist role models; to my family, friends, and girlfriend, who have been more patient than anyone could expect; and

to that “unknown” alumna...who is also named Karla, and for whom, after I accepted the position, I bought a cup of coffee as a small gesture of my enormous gratitude. I learned an amazing lesson in believing in oneself from all of you. Thank you, also, to the staff of the General Library System at Madison and especially to the most amazing employees a librarian could work with: JoAnne, Linda, Lachrista, Bess, Mel, and Emily.

In considering what to write for this piece, I went back to the introductory column Phyllis wrote for *FC* in Fall 1991. I can relate to her expres-

sions of excitement and inspiration as she looked ahead to the challenges and opportunities of this position. I must express gratitude to her for continuing to share her time and wisdom with me, for building this office and position into the force for change that it is, and for, as she aptly put it in her final column in the Winter–Spring 2013 issue of *FC*, passing on to me “the opportunity to have the best job in women’s studies librarianship — and in [our] view, in librarianship as a whole.”

Karla J. Strand
February 24, 2014



Staffing the GWS Librarian's booth at NWSA 2013, Cincinnati, OH

FROM THE EDITORS

As you may know, the UW Gender and Women's Studies Librarian is also a named co-editor of *Feminist Collections*, in a role that is generally more advisory than hands-on. This column is most often drafted by the hands-on editor (yours truly), but sometimes by the librarian, and sometimes it's jointly written. In this issue, our new librarian — Karla J. Strand — introduces herself in a separate piece (see pp. ii–iii), and I'll do my usual thing here.

First, I want to welcome Karla to the office — in print! It is wonderful to have her here at the helm, and I'm looking forward to years of collaboration, laughter, and creative problem-solving. I'm already inspired by her enthusiasm for reference inquiries and her facility with budget spreadsheets! I'm also fascinated by Karla's work about and in South Africa, and eager to know more about that.

Another new staff member, Lachrista Greco, recently came on board as our publications associate. Lachrista, who has a master's degree in gender and women's studies, has already produced an issue of *Feminist Periodicals* for us and is nearly done with another. Soon she'll be managing our subscription database and coordinating bulk mailings as well.

Two new-to-us undergraduates also joined the crew this year: Mel Dombek and Emily Wessing are doing great work under the guidance of library & information studies graduate student Bess Beck. And we're privileged to have an intern this semester from our Department of Gender & Women's Studies: Claire

Vriezen, a senior double-majoring in GWS and biochemistry, is heading up our social media efforts. Claire most recently created a Tumblr presence for us (see uwgwslibrarian.tumblr.com) and is populating it this month with posts about some of the folks featured in the 17-volume reference work *Women in World History*. You are welcome to come in and use that set, by the way, any time our office is open!

Production of this *FC* issue was delayed during our months of major transition. Many thanks to our authors for patiently waiting to see their reviews edited and published, and to you, our readers, for waiting to see their work — we promise it will have been worth it! This issue looks at a number of women artists, from comic genius and UW assistant professor of interdisciplinary creativity (what a great job title!!) Lynda Barry to Beat

poet Diane di Prima; reviews a film about girls in India engaged in two seemingly opposite training programs; and a lot more. I want to comment about one article in particular:

In the review essay beginning on page 4, Dianna Hunter looks at a “messy and complicated business,” reviewing two books that both promote animal advocacy (or “loving animals,” as one author puts it) and support carnivorousism. These books speak to my own struggles, as I not only eat meat, but have also raised animals to be food — an endeavor that has generated much soul-searching. But it should, after all. Most of us, especially here in the U.S., would do well to be more mindful of where our food comes from, and how.

JoAnne Lehman
March 21, 2014



Colony-raised rabbits on a Wisconsin urban farm