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Anneli Silvennoinen, Teacher-Librarian, Johannesburg, South Africa: A Day in Her Life

St. Mary's is an independent school in Johannesburg, South Africa, which has always been multiracial. It is one of the top academic schools in the country. The Web site address is <www.stmary.gp.school.za>. I have been the Head of the Resource Centre in the Senior School (grades 8-12) for nine years. I am a graduate teacher and graduate librarian. My qualifications are Bachelor of Arts and a Higher Diploma in Education from the University of the Witwatersrand, and a Bachelor of Bibliography and a Postgraduate Diploma in Specialized Education (School Library Sciences) from the University of South Africa. I am a full-time permanent member of staff. The school has employed a full-time qualified librarian since the early 1960s. Our school year is from January to December, which means that final examinations are always written in the heat of the African summer. There are 450 pupils in the Senior School. The school encourages resource-based teaching and learning and instills critical thinking and evaluative information skills in its pupils. Therefore, the well equipped Resource Centre is an integral part of the classroom.

The alarm sounds at 5:45 a.m., and I slowly wake and lie a while savoring the peace and quiet of the household before the chaos of the morning begins. I realize that during the night I have kicked off the light sheet used as a covering during the hot summer nights. All the windows have been wide open all night. I jump out of bed and open the curtains to a beautiful summer's morning with the sun in the east throwing a shimmer across the clear blue sky. I scamper to the kitchen in my bare feet and long T-shirt to switch on the kettle for a cup of coffee. My sons soon join me and we discuss "mom's taxi" arrangements for the day. The home then becomes a hive of activity as the three of us eat breakfast and get ready to leave for work, school, and university. It is so much quicker to dress in summer than in winter as I only need to slip on a sleeveless summer dress and my sandals. We must not leave later than 6:50 a.m., as otherwise the notorious Johannesburg early morning traffic will triple the travelling time to our destination. It takes me an hour every morning to get to St. Mary's, which is about 25 minutes longer than when there is no traffic. School starts very early here in South Africa, at 7:40 a.m., to take full advantage of the relative coolness before the searing heat of the midday sun.

The early mornings and the evenings are the best part of the day, and I amuse myself while battling with the traffic by listening to a funny radio program and noticing the people around me. Many, like myself, are still yawning in their cars and wishing they could have stayed in bed a little longer. I notice the streetside hawkers busily setting up their stalls at various points along the way. Some stalls consist only of a table loaded with fruit and

vegetables covered with an umbrella, whereas others are simple restaurants run from caravans. All of this contrasts with the quiet and sometimes majestic homes in the northern suburbs of this mammoth city. The traffic is even worse if robots (that is what we call traffic lights) are out of order or if there has been an accident. The traffic reports on the radio help us to avoid the worst of the congested areas. I am so lucky to work in an environment such as St. Mary's, as the spacious gardens are beautifully kept and at this time of the year the jacaranda trees create a haze of blue as a backdrop. Every South African student dreads the blooming of the jacarandas, as they are a national reminder that the end-of-year exams are looming and one has to get down to some serious work. I would hate to spend my days in the concrete jungle of central Johannesburg as so many office bound workers have to do. St. Mary's is a Rand Pioneer school, which means that it was one of the pioneering institutions of Johannesburg. One hundred years is really old in young Johannesburg and our school celebrated its 110th birthday in 1998. I always note how much more history there is in European cities. I park my car in the reserved bays for staff and head toward the Resource Centre, which is a beautiful modern building in the hub of the school. The main doors have already been opened by the Estate Manager at 7:00 a.m. to give pupils access to the foyer to return items, to the classroom area that houses the reference collection, and to the periodicals reading area. On my arrival, I open the main library section as this area is supervised for security reasons. This is where the expensive computer network is also housed. Our windows have security bars on them, and the entire centre is alarmed and connected to an instant-response security firm. One cannot take any chances with security in Johannesburg.

So on my arrival, there are already a number of early comers in the Centre using the reference works or waiting for the library to be opened. The pupils are all dressed in their summer uniforms, which consist of a cotton blue and white dress, white socks, and black shoes. The school bell rings, and it is time for the school to go to the hall for assembly. My phone rings; it is the secretary to tell me that an order of books has arrived for me and could the Library Assistant please collect the boxes from their offices? There are also a number of messages for me.

I switch on the computer network and try to access the Internet as soon as possible to pick up my e-mail messages. The Internet is usually at its best before the United States wakes up, which is about noon our time. Thereafter, we note that it becomes much slower. The computer room starts to fill up with teachers and pupils at regular intervals throughout the day. This is where teaching incorporating computers and the Internet takes place. There is a constant stream of pupils to the library to access materials via the computerized OPAC as well as requests to use the CD-ROMs and the Internet. Teachers pop in to get the key to the video or slide stores, and others just wish to renew items or to book the various facilities. The morning newspa-

pers in both English and Afrikaans are delivered. I check that the display of Afrikaans teen novels is neat and replenish the stock as so many books have already been issued from the display.

The auditorium, which seats about 100 people, is full today as the grade 8 students are having a one-day workshop on study skills and how to prepare for examinations. The large-screen facility for TV, videos, slides, and computer screen is useful in presenting a multimedia production, which is done by the grade 8 teachers. The computer room is bustling with noise and activity as the English Department is working with their pupils on a social history topic about the Jazz Age as relating to their set book. This topic was discussed with the Teacher-Librarian at the planning stage, so all the relevant media is readily available to the girls and staff. However, information skills queries are referred to me all the time.

Pupils are using the classroom to watch the video *Schindler's List*. They have been given questions to answer on the film and are quietly taking notes while watching. A display of fiction dealing with World War II has been set up in the exhibition area to augment their knowledge. I am on hand to talk to interested girls about the books and to suggest alternatives if need be. The phone rings, and it is a colleague from Natal who is going to be visiting Johannesburg and would like to visit St. Mary's and talk to me about how we incorporate information skills across the curriculum. She had seen comments of mine on our listserv. We make an appointment for later in the week, and I make a reminder to myself to collect copies of current assignments from the relevant subject teachers.

I greet the kitchen staff who are bringing in cups and saucers and a plate of sandwiches and can hardly believe that it is almost 10:15 a.m., time for first break. The breaks are usually very busy for me, as that is when the pupils can come and browse the shelves and I can deal with any queries. The rest of the staff usually goes to the staffroom, but I make my coffee and eat my sandwiches on the run. The heat of the day is beginning to build up and the ceiling fans have been switched on in all the rooms. Every possible window and door is open. Girls can be seen sitting outside in the small atrium, reading or chatting. Throughout the school, the pupils are clustered in groups under trees and in other shady spots. The school tuckshop, which is staffed by the pupils' mothers, is very popular at breaks as teenage girls replenish their energies.

There is an international cricket match on today involving South Africa. Many girls have gravitated to the Resource Centre auditorium where I put on the TV at breaks on days such as today. I do not even have to watch the game to know how our boys are doing; I just listen to the cheers of joy or the moans of anguish that emanate from that part of the Centre. The issue desk is being manned by trained pupil library monitors, who are also training new monitors. They handle the facility bookings, sell paper for the printer, and help to cover and repair items. The Library Assistant continues to shelve the

never-ending stream of returned items. A teacher runs in, desperately in need of a picture of Thabo Mbeki and the copy of his opening speech in parliament for her next lesson. We begin to browse the South African search engines for this information.

The bell goes at the end of break, and the grade 8 students return to the auditorium. A new teacher has booked some time with me to go through the ASLA Teaching Information Skills CD-ROM with her to hone her skills. The geography teacher has brought a class to search for statistics to compare a developed country with a Third World country. The Internet and the OPAC are fully utilized, and the subject teacher and I are on hand to help with the synthesis and evaluation of information. The Teacher-Librarian from another independent school phones me to remind me about a meeting next week of the local school librarians and asks me to bring along any new ideas for our Web site. An expert will also be speaking to us about teen fiction. Next period, I am booked to speak about science fiction as a genre to the grade 10 students, who then have to choose a book to read as part of their set reading. The pupils really enjoy choosing their own set books and find these talks fascinating. The divinity teacher is showing a matric class (the final school-leaving year) a video about teenage pregnancy and birth that is pretty gruesome, but certainly achieves the desired effect. The video is discussed in great detail as part of life skills. The Zulu teacher pops in to collect a video that I ordered for her from the UK. We cannot help commenting on the incongruity of having to order a video about Zulu culture from overseas because it is not available in our own country.

The heat begins to build up, and pupils and teachers begin to wilt. The air is dry and we all wish that it would rain to cool things down, but the sky remains cloudless and the sun, which is now directly overhead, beats down relentlessly on our world. We are reminded of the film *Heat and Dust* with the swirling ceiling fans and the heat shimmer in the air and just above the ground. Shoes feel so hot on our feet although our soles would be burned if we walked on the brick paving or the concrete outside with our bare feet. There are numerous drinking fountains in the gardens, and girls pause at these to have a drink before going on to the next class. The tennis courts are just outside the Centre, and it sometimes amazes me how the girls manage to play tennis in this heat. Sometimes I even kick off my sandals under my desk while working in my office.

The second break is from 12.30 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. During this time, the other staff retreat to the staffroom to eat their lunch, but I mostly remain in the Centre. It is so hot that often I do not even feel like eating anything besides tropical fruits such as watermelon, paw paw, and sweet melon that I bring from home and that are deliciously juicy and refreshing after a morning in the fridge. A very excited group of 11 girls is meeting me in the Centre to discuss the final arrangements for their school tour to Finland over Christmas. I am taking them to Lapland, beyond the Arctic Circle. This is

fantastic for these South African girls who have never seen the snow or experienced Arctic temperatures, skiing, husky dog sleigh-riding, 24 hours of darkness, or seen a reindeer. My relatives in Finland think that I am mad to show these girls Finland at its worst time of the year, but as I explained to them, "You cannot sell summer to a South African." The girls are all busy reading up about Lapland and have even mastered a few sentences in the Finnish language. They are also taking traditional South African gifts with them, things such as biltong (dried salted meat), dried fruit sweets, glace fruit, mebos, wine, droe wors (dried sausage), as well as books and videos about our country. Meanwhile, the School Hall adjacent to the Centre resounds with the beat of African music as six girls practice a dance routine from the play *Sarafina* for their drama exams. The African girls have a phenomenal sense of rhythm, and the different cultures of our "Rainbow Nation" can only be enriched by each other. On the other side of the Centre is the music department, from where one can hear the school's marimba band practicing. All of this is contrasted by the serious reciting of a Shakespearean monologue by a lone individual in the seminar room. Add to this the cries and cheers of the cricket audience in the auditorium.

The bell rings for the start of the last two periods of the day. The heat is quite unbearable, as the temperature is now well over 30 degrees Celsius. Someone has spotted a rain cloud. It is usually the hottest just before a storm breaks. The Maintenance Department has arrived to hang the framed pictures of President Mandela's visit to our school. We wish to make this a pupil-oriented Resource Centre, and therefore hang pictures of important events depicting the pupils at their various activities in the library. At this moment, I can catch my breath for a while and unpack the latest consignment of new books that have arrived. There are numerous books, which have been requested by the pupils, and I make a point of adding them to the collection immediately so that I can call the girls concerned. The pupil Head Librarian has also arrived to do duty during a free period. She assists with getting overdue items returned and constantly reminds the defaulters to do so. She also checks that new monitors are being properly trained and tries to ensure that they remain motivated to give of their best. I also have time to glance at what the various listservs have to offer today. Art pupils have come in to look for ideas and pictures for their paintings and the matric girls are busy researching interesting topics for their final matric English orals. These topics range from a wide variety such as the interpretation of dreams, to UFOs, autism, carnivorous plants, toxic shock syndrome, smoking, unexplained mysteries, and anything else that may catch the interest of the examiner. These speeches are often presented with multimedia aids, and the girls need assistance in preparing those as well.

The final school bell rings at 2:10 p.m., and the afternoon is filled with extracurricular activities such as sports and various clubs for the pupils. I run the Photography Club, and we have a fully functional darkroom in the

Centre. The photography girls arrive for their training session. One of the girls is mounting an exhibition of her work on nature photography. I am learning all about digital photography so that we can introduce it to the girls in future. The biology teacher pops in to discuss a possible assignment on ecology for which they will need various resources for the identification of South African flora and fauna. While I am talking to her, I also make a backup of the whole computer system. The Debating Society is busy in the auditorium, and one of the girls rushes into the reference section to find a suitable quotation. The drama teacher is busy with the Internet, assessing various sites for which I gave her the addresses earlier in the week. The computer room is full of girls doing their homework or assignment topics. A few girls are busy in the classroom section working on homework while they wait for their sports session to begin. Suddenly we hear thunder and the light turns duller outside. We can smell the moisture in the air. A few drops of rain fall. Now there is lightning as well. We have one of the highest incidences of lightning in the world. Suddenly the skies open, and a deluge of rain cools everyone's fevered brow. Afternoon tea with slices of chocolate cake is brought to the Centre for the staff. The tea is refreshing and the rain is most welcome. Why must it always rain at home time, just as we have to leave and go outside? We are not in the habit of carrying raincoats or umbrellas as when it rains, it usually only does so for about half an hour. We tend to just stand in a protected place and patiently wait for it to end. Even if you do get wet, the sun dries you off in no time. The rains have abated, cooling the heat of the day, and I wend my way home. By leaving at 4:00 p.m. I miss the traffic, which mostly begins at 5:00 p.m. I kick off my sandals as soon as I get home. The summer evenings and nights are the best. The huge, orange orb of the sun sets at 8:00 p.m., and at midnight friends and I are still sitting outside in sleeveless dresses sipping a chilled South African wine. Another day has come to an end in Johannesburg.

The day that I have described is a fairly typical one in the Resource Centre as we are very busy. St. Mary's is a well-established academic school with excellent standards of learning and teaching. Most of our pupils leave school to go to university, either nationally or internationally. The criterion for admission is an entrance examination. St. Mary's is renowned for its excellence in all spheres-academic, sporting, and cultural. The Resource Centre is an integral part of the school and gets full support from staff and pupils. We incorporate information and research skills in all subjects, and teachers plan their assignments in conjunction with the Teacher-Librarian. My role in the school is that of the information specialist. I am the only one in this position, which at times can be lonely. But I belong to numerous school library associations, both national and international, and am in contact with colleagues in the field via listservs and e-mail. I also subscribe to publications such as *Access*, *Emergency Librarian*, and *School Librarian* to keep up to date

with international trends. I was awarded an Overseas Visitorship by the Independent Schools Council in 1998 to visit schools in Europe. This made me realize that our standards compare well with those internationally and that, even though the countries were different, the issues involved were alike. Everywhere I went, I heard complaints about not enough technical support regarding technology, lack of time for proper training on the technology, and the isolation of the teacher-librarian on the school campus. South Africa is presently undergoing a difficult phase of transition in its history with problems such as a weak currency, bad economy, crime, and poverty. I find that the price of books and media is very high here because of the exchange rate, our listserv is like a struggling baby compared with those in the US and Australia, and we do not have a school library publication of our own such as the above-mentioned countries do. We rely a lot on material from overseas. I sometimes wonder how we ever managed before the Internet and e-mail. We have a lot of good South African authors, but they are not marketed well inside or outside our country. We often find it difficult to access the latest information on South Africa itself due to limited buying population, but specific South African search engines are a help. Information about the Afrikaans or Zulu languages is difficult to find on the Internet. I am sure that with time this situation will improve as people become aware of the gaps. We would appreciate more videos and items dealing with our indigenous languages, especially Zulu, which is taught at the school. Multiculturalism is an important aspect in our society, and we are aware of this when building collections or teaching. The teacher-librarian in an independent school is treated as a professional, and he or she does all the library professional tasks. I have the autonomy to order books without being limited by red tape, and in this way I am able to respond well to information needs as they become apparent. The future for me is very exciting, as I feel that with the incorporation of modern technology, the teacher-librarian's position has been enhanced not only by using computer programs to administer the more mundane duties of the library, but also by being included more in the teaching sphere with resource-based learning. I am one of the teacher-librarians in the country who is at the forefront of incorporating the Internet as an information source at schools and teaching information skills across the curriculum. I have run numerous workshops for colleagues in this field and presented papers at national conferences. My day is mostly unscheduled as I respond to needs as they arrive. This also means that no two days are ever the same. Three people are employed in our Centre: myself as the full-time graduate professional, one full-time library clerk/assistant, and one part-time ex-teacher.

"When you educate a man you educate an individual; when you educate a woman you educate a whole family" Charles D. McIver.