

Junli Diao

## Inukshuks

### A librarian's narrative

**W**hen people think of Newfoundland and Labrador, they think of snow or nothing, but I think of Inukshuks. Inukshuks are the landmarks built with rocks by Inuit people on the treeless wild land. In the shape of human beings, Inukshuks are considered as signs of humanity to show the direction for new or lost travelers. Standing like a monument, they stick together, support each other, and protect each other as a unity. What is true about Inukshuks is also true about librarians working in Newfoundland and Labrador. Together they transform the landscape of libraries where one person could not govern the road. Together they succeed where they could fail alone.

In the summer of 2006, I graduated from McGill University with an MLIS. After having done some volunteer work in Toronto, I took my first librarian job working for the College of the North Atlantic, at the Happy Valley-Goose Bay campus in Labrador. Happy Valley-Goose Bay is a small town in central Labrador with a population of 8,000, and the college campus serves around 300 students. Separated by the Strait of Belle Isle from other 15 campuses on Newfoundland (island) but connected with the Labrador West campus by the unpaved 1,246-kilometer Trans-Labrador Highway, Happy Valley-Goose Bay is otherwise no different from many other “sunshine-sketches-of-a-little-town” in Canada, where people enjoy reading every corner of the newspaper and believe acquisitions could

make a college principal feel ashamed and flush himself down a toilet.

Labrador covers an area of 294,330 square kilometers but only has 26,364 inhabitants. Labrador is big and wild, but aesthetically raw and philosophically abstract to me. All I saw was the endless stunted spruce as soon as I stepped out of the college building. All I heard was my own breath while I was walking in the woods. All I felt was loneliness and isolation while I was gazing at stars sharply defined by the impenetrable darkness.

This unique geographic characteristic determines that each college campus library is managed by one librarian. Regardless of where the campus is located, mentoring a novice librarian or supporting a librarian new to Newfoundland and Labrador is the college library's tradition.

On my first day, I received a warm welcoming phone call from the college librarian, Ms. Cuff, at the Stephenville campus on Newfoundland. After Ms. Cuff learned that I was a new graduate from Toronto, she volunteered to fly to Labrador and mentor me for three days after she could get away from her own work in next month. This offer struck a chord in my heart. As a new graduate who just walked out of library school, I never thought my first job would

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be managing a library. My coursework and internship focused on the library technical services' aspect. At the beginning of my first job, it was overwhelming when I understood that I had to undertake the responsibilities of management and budgeting, collection development, library orientations and instructions, purchasing library supplies, cataloging and classification, and troubleshooting computers and printers. There was still so much I didn't know and so much I didn't have any practical knowledge of or experience with.

Before Ms. Cuff came to mentor me, the campus administrator, Bob Simmons, asked me to select new furniture for the library's new extension project. I had no idea how and where to start, an obvious fault of my university professors who never taught me better. Maybe they should consider a course teaching students how to select furniture for libraries. Ms. Cuff suggested that I should go to the website of Brodart, a major library facilities supplier. With her advice, I selected appropriate study tables, study carrels, computer notebooks, and projectors. She even spent a whole afternoon and helped me clean out the storage room where there were piles and piles of books that I had no idea whether they should be kept or discarded.

The three days of mentoring was brief, but it meant a lot more to me. Its value not only lay in the navigation, advice, guidance, and support she provided me, or the specific duties that she helped me accomplish. She showed me the map of how to do the right things right. This could not be measured by the length of time. I remembered, while Ms. Cuff and I were sitting in the front desk, that a student came to me and asked whether the library had some books about frogs. I typed "frog" as the keyword search under title and subject in the library's OPAC, and I did not get any hits. I was about to say, "Sorry, we don't have books about frogs."

Ms. Cuff kindly reminded, "Junli, we don't have any book particularly about frogs, but you may browse the stacks and find some biology books. Probably they have chapters written about frogs."

So I went to the stacks, opened a biology book, went through the table of contents, and I did find a chapter on frogs. I always assumed that librarians providing reference services should be like an encyclopedia. Her suggestion made me realize to make users walking into the library with a question walk out with a smile depends not only on how knowledgeable the librarian must be in the field, but also how deep the librarian knows the local library's collection. I also realized that the inclusion of tables of contents and summaries in MARC records would increase the possibility that the resources could be discovered by both internal and external library users.

In the following years, when I pursued my career path as a cataloging and metadata librarian, creating enriched and comprehensive bibliographical description and giving users a complete description of the resources became one of my cataloging principles. When the world of information is increasingly fragmented and precisely segregated by specific subjects, comprehensiveness and completeness of resources description might help cross boundaries defined by specificity and precision in the system. I believed that Charles Cutter's *Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalogue*—"The convenience of the public is always to be set before the ease of the cataloger"<sup>1</sup>—will be rediscovered and re-evaluated more and more in this digital era.

Librarians' Professional Development Days was a major event in the College of the North Atlantic. This event was initiated and organized by Ms. Cuff. When all the librarians from different campuses were gathered together in spring time at the Stephenville campus on Newfoundland, it was an opportunity for librarians to match voices with faces after they communicated with each other for long on the phone or through emails. Workflow training, computer software training, and lectures and workshops by guest speakers helped us rejuvenate professional skills. Dance parties and barbecues helped us recharge batteries. They knew that tomorrow they would not be so close as today,

but they were together no matter where. Together, they were like rocks in an Inukshuk, counting on each other and supporting each other as a team. No one was left behind.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay was a starting point of my career. To grow better as a librarian, I must experience more. One year later I resigned, and I received a small Inukshuk sculpture from the college as a gift. Every time

I look at this sculpture, it reminds me of a place called Labrador, where Inukshuks show the way. Once there, always in my blood.

## Note

1. Charles A. Cutter, *Rules for a Printed Dictionary Catalogue* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876). *↗*

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(“Access to research and Sci-Hub,” continues from page 88)

March 11, 2016, <https://svpow.com/2016/03/11/thought-experiment-2-what-will-happen-if-sci-hub-fails/> and James Heathers, “Why Sci-Hub Will Win,” *Medium*, May 2, 2016, <https://medium.com/@jamesheathers/why-sci-hub-will-win-595b53aae9fa#.t5zewr2vy>.

2. For examples of pieces denouncing Sci-Hub, see: Angela Cochran, “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to OA,” *The Scholarly Kitchen*, February 25, 2016, <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2016/02/25/a-funny-thing-happened-on-the-way-to-oa/> and Rick Anderson, “Sci-Hub and Academic Identity Theft: An Open Letter to University Faculty Everywhere,” *The Scholarly Kitchen*, May 19, 2016, <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2016/05/19/sci-hub-and-academic-identity-theft-an-open-letter-to-university-faculty-everywhere/>.

3. John Bohannon, “Who’s Downloading Pirated Papers? Everyone,” *Science Magazine*, April 2016.

4. Marcus Banks, “Sci-Hub: What It Is and Why It Matters,” *American Libraries*, May 2016.

5. Amy Buckland to ALA ScholComm mailing list, August 23, 2016, <http://lists.ala.org/sympa/arc/scholcomm/2016-08/msg00067.html>.

6. Rick Anderson to ALA ScholComm mailing list, August 23, 2016 <http://lists.ala.org/sympa/arc/scholcomm/2016-08/msg00069.html>.

7. Ernesto Priego, “Signal, Not Solution: Notes on Why Sci-Hub is not Opening Access,” *The Winnower*, February 2016.

8. Balazs Bodo, “Pirates in the Library:

An Inquiry into the Guerilla Open Access Movement” (paper presented at the annual workshop on the International Society for the History and Theory of Intellectual Property, Glasgow, United Kingdom, July 6-8, 2016).

9. “Honor Code,” Davidson College, <https://www.davidson.edu/about/distinctly-davidson/honor-code>.

10. Sarah Crissinger, “Access to Research, Sci-Hub, and the Honor Code: Ethical Dilemmas” (panel, Davidson College, Davidson, NC, September 22, 2016), [www.slideshare.net/crissinger2010/access-to-research-scihub-and-the-honor-code-ethical-dilemmas-69960557](http://www.slideshare.net/crissinger2010/access-to-research-scihub-and-the-honor-code-ethical-dilemmas-69960557).

11. For more context on this interactions, see: Scott Jaschik, “Supporting Sci-Hub vs. explaining Sci-Hub,” *Inside Higher Education*, August 8, 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/08/letter-publishers-group-adds-debate-over-sci-hub-and-librarians-who-study-it>.

12. “Statement of Purpose,” Davidson College, <https://www.davidson.edu/about/statement-of-purpose>.

13. James Heathers addresses this idea in more depth in his blog post, “Why Sci-Hub Will Win.” He suggests that illegal sharing happens all of the time, through scholarly networks and Twitter. Sci-Hub simply makes it more convenient and efficient.

14. Balazs Bodo, “Pirates in the Library: An Inquiry into the Guerilla Open Access Movement.”

15. *Inside Higher Education*, March 23, 2016, <http://ihenow.com/20aE1ng>. *↗*