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Spotlight on the Dynix–ALA-APA Award for Outstanding Promotion of the Salaries and Status of Library Workers



Jim Hill (jury), Maurice Freedman, Jack Blount (Dynix), Dorothy Morgan, Michele Leber (jury)

Award for Outstanding Achievement in Promoting Salaries and Status for Library Workers?

This year, two people were chosen by the jury to receive the first award, Maurice J. “Mitch” Freedman and Dorothy Morgan. We thought they deserved more space than we gave them in the coverage of the award in the [June issue](#) of *Library Worklife*, so this month, read about Mitch Freedman and how he got involved in the pay equity movement. Mitch Freedman will be in the Spotlight for this and the December issues. [Read Dorothy Morgan’s interview](#) from the October issue of *Library Worklife*.

Mitch, Part I.

LW: What was your thought when you found out you won the first Dynix–ALA-APA

MF: I was very pleased. It was gratifying to get such recognition from my peers. As nice as the cash was it was nowhere near as gratifying as seeing how the salaries issue was institutionalized in the form of the ALA-APA. It meant that all of the work that my task force, many others, and I did was not going to disappear with my becoming an ALA past president.

LW: Why did you choose better salaries as your Presidential Campaign focus?

MF: My entire career I have been concerned about the poor pay for people who work in libraries. It also troubled me deeply that the American Library Association’s major commitments and allocations of funds were dedicated to funding and promotion of libraries and library service and intellectual freedom, but not to advocacy for, protection of, and compensation for the people who worked in libraries.

I am all for the support of libraries, library services, and intellectual freedom, and always have been. But I always was frustrated with the Association’s lack of commitment to library workers. Two separate not-for profits were established for fundraising for intellectual freedom, i.e. the Freedom to Read Foundation, and for the defense of embattled library workers, i.e. the Leroy Merritt Fund.

Having been around at the time when each was established, I was deeply frustrated and angry that one had hundreds of thousands of dollars to work with (FTRF) and the other (Merritt) had a trivially small budget in comparison.

When I decided to run for President, my highest priority was to do something about the plight of the people who worked in libraries. The ALA President—at least for the two years as President-Elect and President—has an extraordinary ability to promote her/his agenda.

LW: Did it build on some of the initiatives of your predecessor presidents or ALA goals? John Berry’s focuses were equity of access, recruitment, and electronic participation for ALA members. Nancy Kranich focused on libraries and democracy, literacy, and the status of librarianship.

MF: Nancy Kranich's inclusion of the status of librarianship did initiate discussions within ALA that related to salaries. But it also encompassed certification, a non-issue for me. The only impact it had on my initiative had to do with the tax-exemption issue. It started the investigation by ALA of the tax-related issues pertaining to the advocacy for the compensation of its members—in general, advocating for anything that would specifically benefit to its members—by ALA.

After I was elected I had a great deal of conflict with ALA management on this issue. I wanted the advocacy for salaries within ALA. I believed that as an office within ALA that its ongoing funding and support had a much better chance of continuing indefinitely.

Once it was clear that ALA management, the ALA lawyer, and undoubtedly the Executive Board, too, all wanted the salaries efforts (along with certification) in a separate tax-exempt organization that would not jeopardize ALA's tax-exempt status, I decided that I would expend my efforts in advocating for salaries, establishing an office for this purpose, and ensuring ongoing funding for the office. Having been involved with ALA for close to four decades, I knew that my whole presidency could be wasted by fighting over where the office would be located rather than advocating for better salaries for library workers.

I made the pragmatic decision to let ALA put it in the ALA-APA, and I spent my presidency giving speeches and advocating for better salaries in 33 U.S. cities, 12 foreign countries, and in numerous articles and interviews. I did not waste the resources of the presidency fighting with ALA over a "process" issue.

LW: How did you get the world to recognize pay inequities in librarianship?

MF: I appointed a task force that ultimately was comprised of close to 30 people. Included were people from all types of libraries. The majority of members were *not* library directors. It also included liaisons from CILIP (Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals—formerly Great Britain's Library Association) and the Australian Library Association.

The task force did an extraordinary job in promoting better salaries and compensation for library workers in numerous ways—training, workshops, public speaking, and print and web-based publications (including building a web site with outstanding resources on salary and compensation issues for library workers)—that got the message out. Margaret Myers wrote most of, and pulled together the contributions of others, the *Advocating for Better Salaries and Pay Equity Toolkit*. The Toolkit is an invaluable document that is filled with information, FAQs, data, and much more, all of which puts in each library worker's hands virtually all of what they need to plan an advocacy campaign for better salaries and overall compensation.

In addition to the work of the task force, as noted above, I did an enormous amount of public speaking on the issue in virtually every library venue imaginable.

I also wrote commentaries in *American Libraries* for all of the issues published during my presidency, many of which focused on salaries.

The combination of the website, the toolkit, and these latter two efforts promoted worldwide understanding of this issue.

I should note that wherever I spoke overseas (as well as in the U.S.) library workers all suffered from inequitable pay and did not receive compensation comparable with others in different fields with similar credentials and experience. What I tried to do everywhere I spoke was to provide some inspiration, energy, and empowerment to library workers to do something or to do more to improve their compensation.

I should note that I will be more than happy to spend my retirement speaking about or doing workshops on salaries at state and regional meetings. Just ask...

LW: What are some of the barriers we might not know about and how did you navigate around them?

The chief barriers were probably three. One was the inertia and fear of change of numerous members. The second was the reluctance of some to encourage the creation of a unit that would encourage library staff to advocate for raises, conceivably in opposition to their management. The third barrier was from those who were concerned about the financing of the APA. Fortunately through the strenuous efforts of Keith Michael Fiels and advocates for the APA, funding was found to keep the ALA-APA going for at least a few years.

LW: What advice would you give a director trying to increase salaries for staff?

MF: I suggest that the director begin by getting a copy of the Toolkit, and see one of my commentaries in *American Libraries* that can be found in the bibliography (link to bottom). That commentary spells out a three-point program that will be the “roadmap” for improved salaries and compensation.

First the director must educate the Board (or whatever body that is responsible for library policy) about the issue, and then get the Board to approve a policy of comparable worth compensation. This costs the library nothing other than the commitment itself.

Second, there must be a comparable worth study done for all of people in comparable positions in terms of credentials, experience, and responsibility working in non-library fields in your region. Since library workers tend to be underpaid almost everywhere, it usually will be disadvantageous to compare your library’s salaries to other libraries’ salaries. The one exception tends to be school librarians who are part of teachers’ union bargaining units—in all such instances I am familiar with, the school librarians are paid a lot better than the children’s librarians and most, if not all, of the public library staff, including the director.

Third, with the data in hand, the director can then go to the Board with a plan for bringing the library’s staff compensation that is comparable to that of people doing comparable work in other fields. The plan can work to achieve the comparability in one year, two years, or more. The main thing is that there should be an ongoing commitment by the Board to pay something *each year* toward achieving the comparable worth goal for library staff.

LW: What situations and/or people give you hope that positive change will come?

MF: The only thing that gives me hope is Abraham Lincoln’s maxim that “you can’t fool all of the people all of the time.” Ultimately, American’s working people—the lower and middle class—will recognize that they voted against their interests and needs. The country is deeply in debt and it will get much more so; there have been outrageous tax cuts for the rich; and government and especially social services—such as support for localities when disaster strikes, viz. New Orleans and FEMA—have been cutback dramatically, in part to support the war in Iraq, and in part because the current administration is basically opposed to the government having a social service responsibility to the American people.

I have to believe that Lincoln was right, and things will be change. But the financial damage done to America in terms of the enormous debt that has been created, and the horrific damage to the nation’s social fabric caused by the displacement of resources from social and other government services to the war in Iraq will make the rectification of our current situation a long-time process.

With New Orleans-Katrina thrown into the mix, I fear that it will be much worse for everyone other than the very rich before it begins to get better.

Next month: How to get involved in the pay equity movement in libraries, and Mitch’s life after retirement.

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