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I Was a Fashion Librarian

By [Ida Tomshinsky](#)

What does it take to be a “fashion librarian?” As I was doing my research to find a good and clear definition for the position, I sought the points of view of an information broker, online catalogs, fashion arbiters, John Bartlett, and even a fashion magazine. In the end, I was left with a choice to describe it in my own words how I worked and lived my life of being a fashion librarian.

Many years ago, my father inspired me to become a librarian. He was my role model for becoming a true fashion librarian. Today, he is my inspiration to share with others what I learned. For fifteen years, I was a fashion librarian. I was Director of the International Fine Arts College (IFAC) in Miami, FL. It was a small library with only 6,045 books. When I left what became the Art Institute's [Miami International University of Art & Design](#) in September of 2005, there were more than 23,000 books for Fashion Design, Fashion Merchandising and Accessory Design programs. We built the library collection for the academic programs and general studies. My goal was: if we offer a class, there should be books on the shelf for each class.



Communication Committee in the fashion classroom; from left to right: Erica Fleming, MIU President; Ida Tomshinsky, Director of Library Services and Programs; Luis, Mona, and Dr. Munez (seating) are faculty members

Later on, I started an outreach programs with book displays by topic, book fairs, etc. By keeping records of the reference questions from students, I learned about fashion designers' backgrounds, fashion economy, fashion shows, sewing and styling non-fiction literature. I subscribed to *W* magazine to learn the industry from the inside, and regularly read the *Womens Wear Daily* newspaper. It is important know what kind of research is assigned by faculty members and to be prepared for students' assignments. And of course, you have to know that [Donna Karan's](#) designs are one size bigger; that [Irving Penn](#) was one of the greatest fashion photographers; that [Marc Jacobs](#) is one of the fashion designers who made his fortune in his thirties; that Rene Ruiz, a fashion designer from Miami, is an alumni of the IFAC/MIU and a very rich man who helps the community with charity fashion shows. I was able to help the respectful instructors with their information needs and learn from them how better to help the freshmen students at the library orientation. The catalog is not special, but you have to hunt for the books throughout the university press catalogs. It is important to know your market.

My father was a great European tailor or, using the new international terminology, he was a fashion designer and his specialty was tailoring demi-seasonal and winter coats for women. Sometimes, he made and mended suits. He was in business from the end of the World War II (1945) until 1976, the year he

passed away. He was proud to own the professional identification card with the number #000000001 from his membership of the tailors' trade union of **Riga**, the capital of Latvia. The Baltic States have four seasons. The weather there creates a necessity to dress up in appropriate warm clothing, a coat with or without fur depending on the seasons. My father was very good at what he did. He worked in an "atelier" for women clientele. He was very popular among women in Riga's fashion society. Riga is an old medieval city with narrow streets. It was built in the twelfth century. The city is often called by poets and tourists "a little Paris" for its modern rhythms of style and fashion. The man-tailored coats designed by my father had a Scandinavian chic and were designed by a man for women who wore suits inspired by the **House of Chanel**, made infamous by Coco (Gabrielle Bonheur) Chanel, who died in 1971.

I absorbed both the business and glamour of fashion in my early childhood, growing up in a tailor's family. I had an idea of how to sew and make a garment to wear. I learned very early that less is more. Even today, I like to do my own knitted or crocheted cloth. I enjoy sharing my skills with people who want to learn these ever-in-style trends. For more than ten years I volunteered to teach knitting and crochet to students and my colleagues, faculty and staff members, during my lunch hours.

At the age of sixteen, I wanted to write. I had been considering education and journalism. Creative writing was my secret weapon, but I did not have a good portfolio for the entry exams, as the Latvian State University required. So my father, a women-beloved fashion designer, gave me lifelong advice that everywhere I go I would find a small library where I could work, and I would be able to make a living for myself and my family. I still remember his exact words, "Husbands do not like wives who travel a lot on behalf of their career opportunities." It was my father who helped me to choose my professional occupation. Thanks to my father, I became a librarian and have practiced in the field of librarianship for thirty-four years, combining both the teaching and writing skills. The survey of American Library Association (ALA) membership documents its demographics. According to the ALA statistical survey, I would be in the group of predominantly white women born between 1940 and 1959. Today, after being in library business for more than three decades, I completely understand what my father meant.

Six months ago I had to leave my adored work place. I now work for **ITT Technical Institute** and am learning to be a science and technology librarian. My colleagues at ITT did not have a professional librarian for some time. There are many challenges in my work place, and I am happy for new opportunities to expand my professional portfolio. I do not think it silly to change a job that I loved very much and I have shared my past success with the students and faculty.

I am writing a book about what it takes to be a fashion librarian to help other art institute librarians at institutions that are opening new fashion programs. You have to love what you do. Sometimes, your job becomes a part of your life. I left a part of my soul at the MIU of Art & Design.

Professional or Workaholic

Do You Work Too Much?

By Larry Nash White

My father recently passed away at age 61 and I was cleaning out his office when I began to notice some things.

My father was very proud of his career accomplishments (as I was proud of him); he had started out with very little and, in the American tradition, worked his way to success in his chosen profession. When asked, my father always defined and described himself using his career; never with the facts that he was a son, a husband, a father, or friend. My father worked 12–16 hours a day, 6–7 days a week, with few vacations. He was driven to succeed, and he felt he was deserving of the success he acquired.

I asked him a few years ago if he had any regrets and his only answer was that he wished he had spent more years as a dad, husband, or friend than a professional. He had missed too many of life's personal episodes in his pursuit of professional success. The worst part he noted was that no one thought that his efforts to

achieve so much professionally were wrong.

Even when he was a child, his parents, as many do, often told him that lots of hard work was good for him; it grew character and was expected. His professional work often exceeded expectations, and he was always rewarded at every turn, so there was never anyone who suggested that he might slow down and be a son, father, husband or friend more.

There are those of us in our profession, as with many others like my father, who devote their lives to their work. I am one now, just as my father was. You know our kind. We cannot leave our offices until: all of the paper has been removed from our desks; all of our email is returned, and all of the books are shelved. We have cancelled doctors' appointments and skipped class reunions or gatherings of friends in order to complete that all-important task, which is immediately replaced with a new task/priority the next day.

My father's experience and regrets soaked into me while I sat in his chair. His workaholicism contributed greatly to his early demise. I began to ask myself some questions and learned that I needed to make some changes because I am just like my father to the "t" and I did not want to make the same mistake he had made.

I have included below some of the statements I asked of myself. If you or someone you know can answer a majority of these questions in the affirmative, then you may be, or be in danger of becoming, a workaholic. Please speak to someone about finding some form of assistance in obtaining life and value outside of your career before it is too late.

- There are always time when I am sick and I feel that I still need to go to work anyway.
- I work more than I sleep.
- I routinely cancel appointments for the doctor or skip regular exercise and fitness programs.
- I find myself spending less time with my friends each year.
- I would like to have a special relationship with someone, but I am too busy.
- My hobby is my job.
- Many people advise me to slow down, take some time off, and relax.
- I always seem to be thinking about work.
- I frequently take work home with me to do later in the night.
- I feel more important at work than I do outside of work.
- I usually eat lunch at my desk and rarely venture outside or even off of my chair during the day unless forced.

I am beginning my efforts to be a recovering workaholic. While it has not always been easy so far to sit back and watch the world pass by without being at my desk, I have discovered that I really do like relaxing in my father's chair.

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We would love to have your [feedback](#) on these articles!

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