

MOVING ON – or how I left a truly great job for extraordinary insecurity

by Lynn Andersen

[...but, first, some words from Progressive Librarian]

The Durland Alternatives Library: 15 Years of PLG Partnership

To this day, the Durland Alternatives Library (DAL), located on the campus of Cornell University in Ithaca NY, remains one of the America's most unique and radical libraries. Founded in 1973 through a generous endowment, it was dedicated to Cornell student Anne Carry Durland, who had recently drowned, as a living memorial by her parents Margaret and Lewis H. Durland. The intention of the gift was to further the concerns of community and ecology which were important to Ms. Durland in the heady days of the early 1970s.

What is most remarkable about this little library is that its sole purpose is to collect and provide access to the widest variety of contemporary issue-oriented resources from progressive and radical points of view. Surprisingly, many of these zines and tracts and start-up journals are unavailable in research and public libraries anywhere.

The essay that follows is by Lynn Anderson, who served as director of DAL from fall of 1991 through to the winter of 2012, a 21 year career of exceptional service. Interestingly, the year 1991 corresponds roughly with the formation of the Progressive Librarians Guild several years earlier, and the publication of the first Progressive Librarian (PL) in the summer of 1990.

In the summer of 1994, Cornell librarian and PLG co-founding member Peter McDonald, joined the board of the Durland Alternatives Library, a position he held both as board member and later chair through to 2007. Indeed, DAL was one of the first libraries in the United States to carry PL, and with McDonald on the board, and Lynn Anderson always the fierce advocate for partnerships between DAL and any number of progressive organizations, in 1999 the DAL board approved a partnership between the two organizations, committing annual funding in support of the printing costs of the journal.

*The first issue of our collaboration with the Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) rolled off the presses in fall 1999, as a double issue. Accompanying the main issue was a supplement entitled *Anarchism & Libraries*. The second joint issue came out at the end of June, 2000, and included an article on the Durland Alternatives Library and its mission to provide resources that give voice to underrepresented communities.*

With the help of DAL in publishing the Progressive Librarian, PLG was able to grow its financial base, which in turn provided funding for significant PLG programming at ALA conferences over the years including Winona LaDuke in 2000 at Chicago and Nicholson Baker in 2001.

In looking at the finances of the annual reports of the library, it looks like DAL stopped contributing to the publication of PL in 2008 when the massive downturn in the economy shrank its endowment significantly and the board again voted but this time to suspend the partnership in order to focus its dwindling resources on the core mission of the library.

One of the projects Lynn and the Alternatives Library were involved with over the years was a literacy project with the youth offenders at the MacCormick Secure Center outside Ithaca NY. These young males incarcerated here came from all walks of life, where sadly some were sentenced for life. It was therefore fitting that the cover of the double issue of PL (no. 19-20) in the Spring of 2002 was done by one of these talented inmates, a drawing in fact that served also as the cover art of the first chapbook of poetry by the residents of MacCormick. Several other books of their wonderful poetry followed over the years. This then is the brief story of this remarkable collaboration between PLG and DAL.

Therefore be it resolved, that the editors of the Progressive Librarian, and the Guild which it represents, wish here to thank Lynn Anderson formally for her long years of work assisting in the publication of the journal. Thanks also to the Board of the Durland Alternatives Library for its generosity and vision and to the almost ten years of a partnership that was both mutually supportive and collaborative for our two hard-scrabble organizations, allowing the journal to grow, PLG to thrive and the magnificent little DAL to publish this the most progressive scholarly journal on librarianship in the world.

The Durland Alternatives Library (DAL) was founded in 1973, during a time of social upheaval over the US involvement in Vietnam and the ongoing civil rights struggles for women, gays and lesbians, and minorities. It was a time of experimentation with different lifestyles and of challenges to the norms that had been so vigorously inculcated through the school system and societal pressures. What began as a collection of books on intentional communities, donated by Reverend Paul Gibbons, grew into a forum for the collection of materials and ideas that had the audacity to question the status quo. Through the generosity of Margaret and Louis Durland, the Anne Carry Durland Memorial Alternatives Library was officially established on the Cornell campus as an affiliate of the university and as a project of the not-for-profit organization, the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy (CRESP), now renamed the Center for Transformative Action (CTA).

While all this was happening in Ithaca, NY, I was doing my own experimenting with an alternative lifestyle, living in a cabin in the Catskill Mountains, about 125 miles from the Ithaca action, with a group of like-

minded people who were trying to figure out a more sustainable way of life. I could not have known it at the time, but as with many paths we choose in our lives, my choice to be a part of a community was a segment of the trajectory that would lead me to Ithaca and eventually to the Durland Alternatives Library. By the time I accepted the position as head of the library, I had a long-time understanding of the library collection which was a bigger, more organized version of my own personal collection. The DAL felt like home.

When I was hired in October, 1991, the staff who had preceded me, had moved the library from its original location in Anabel Taylor Hall, to a larger and better lighted room that allowed for expansion and better organization of the collection. Luckily for me, though the head librarian had already left his position and moved out of town, two staff remained to help me through the transition. Jackie Stahl spent two weeks showing me the basics before leaving to take a job with New Society Publishers, and David Elliott stayed on as my assistant for a number of years and was an incredible support as we experimented with different programs and changes to the collection. I inherited a great advisory board made up of librarians and community members who were open-minded and supportive of me, the library, and the possibilities for programming that I was hoping to implement. Over the years, the board changed, always attracting creative and dynamic people to help create and implement a variety of programs and policies that expanded the work of the DAL. All that the library was able to accomplish during the years I was in charge happened because of the strength of its advisory board and the close ties to the greater organization, CRESA, then CTA, a long-time force for social change and justice through its many and varied projects.

My final 6 months as library director was spent putting all the archives of library programs and activities in chronological order and organizing the material for my final annual report, 2011, which is a 20 year history of the work and people who were part of it – staff, advisory board, patrons, programs, collaborations and affiliations, the highlight of which was becoming part of the public library consortium, the Finger Lakes Library System. Details of library activities are included in the annual reports, so I won't take up space here repeating what is available on the library website—www.alternativeslibrary.org—newly conceived, designed and implemented by the new DAL Director, Ryan Clover-Owens and friends. To see the 2011 and other annual reports, just click on the About the Library link and scroll down to the chronological list.

There have been a couple of stand-out, special collaborations that have been meaningful to the work of the DAL, and, though they do appear in the reports, I would like to mention three here. The first is the long-time collaboration with the Progressive Librarian's Guild and the inspiration I have gotten through knowing that there are so many progressive thinkers and doers active in libraries across the country. In addition to the people of PLG, I have been grateful for a chance to express some of my thoughts on

the DAL and its programs through the *Progressive Librarian*, in particular, the prison programs which are dear to my heart and have been such an important part of our work over the last 10 years. That leads me to the second collaboration – the DAL work over the years to support enrichment and educational programs for incarcerated youth and its counterpart for adult prisoners, Prisoner Express, conceived and run by Gary Fine, my long time co-worker and Assistant Director of the library. And last but not least, the 1996, DAL twinning with the Bibliotheque Ousmane Sembene* du Yoff (BOSY), through the UNESCO United Nations Network of Associated Libraries, continues to be an important partnership between the DAL and the community library in Yoff, Senegal, West Africa. Throughout the years, the library has supported many programs, but those mentioned above have been on the top of my list of wildly satisfying and rewarding.

So, here it is, 20 years later, and I am both reflecting on an incredibly fun, exciting and challenging time as well as looking forward to the 21st century possibilities that will direct the DAL in the future. You may well ask why anyone would leave such a great job—and, for me, it really was the best job imaginable. The answer is quite simple. My hopes and dreams for the future of the library did not include me. I felt it was time to find the next DAL director, someone who was inspired by the collection and possibilities for the future of the library, and who had the media and technology savvy to move the library into the digital world while still having a deep appreciation for the value of the print collection and other archival materials reflecting the many important social movements that had taken place locally, nationally and globally over the past half century. While I saw the need for someone to expand the programs and function of the library, I clearly knew that it was not me. The time had come to step aside and open up to change and new possibilities, a whole new world of alternatives.

Over the years, I have often been asked what makes the DAL an alternatives library. The good news is that what was once considered alternatives when the library was created, like ecology, sustainable living, gay rights, traditional healing, organic agriculture, diversity, etc., are the new normal. The rest of the good news is that the term alternatives continues to function in the DAL as a challenge to seek out and provide a forum for new ideas, philosophies, and materials—the stuff that is on the edge, exciting, daring to defy the dictates of the status quo. Ryan Clover-Owens is the perfect person to do the work ahead. That is obvious from the new website which reflects his social conscience and work. The truly valuable alternative aspect of the DAL is that it provides a place to explore the less widely heard yet equally important answers to the pressing issues of the times. That has been Ryan's life work, long before coming to the Durland Alternatives Library. He embodies the spirit of the place, and the physical and collection changes he has already implemented in the DAL feel really good to me when I go there as a patron, now that I actually have time to relax more, read more, and take in the wealth of the collection from a whole new perspective. Beyond that, you can find me in the garden, in

the forest and in the mountains. I wish every one of you the joy and peace that I feel in starting this next phase of my life and absolutely not knowing where it will lead.

** Only because I am writing to librarians, do I take this opportunity to set the record straight. For some bizarre reason, publishers and cataloguers continue to record the books and films of Ousmane Sembene by reversing his name to Sembene Ousmane. Ousmane Sembene himself never corrected this mistake, in fact, found it amusing. Speaking as a librarian, it drives me nuts. Ousmane is a common first name in West Africa, never a last name. So enough with the cultural imperialism.*