

Being a Rural Librarian

The first issue (April 2007) of the quarterly *MLA-to-Z News-to-use-letter* of the Maine Library Association has John Clark's "**Ten ways to tell if you are a solo librarian**"
<http://mainelibraries.org/documents/newsletter/200704newsletter.pdf>

1. People in the checkout line hand you a reserve request written on the back of their grocery list.
2. People tell the town manager you work too much because they saw your car at the library after 9 P.M.
3. You stop at yard sales to buy movies for the library.
4. You have a network of fellow scavengers who save Coke, Pepsi and Powerade caps so you can redeem the points for more stuff for the library.
5. Your fingerprints are on every item in the library.
6. You debate weeding a title you just know cousin Emma will hate you for, but do it anyway.
7. You're on the delivery service, but drop off an ILL pouch in the next town after hours because you're going there anyway to do some grocery shopping.
8. You visit other libraries and the first place you go is their used book shelf.
9. There is a bigger library that has adopted you, and you have done the same for a smaller library.
10. You have done story hour while simultaneously checking out books and answering a reference question over the phone.

Perhaps some of you out there have others to add?

"You know you're a rural librarian if . . ."

"Please compile a list of the replies as they are so true, except we do not have flocks of sheep."
Jane Ellen Felchuk, JeFelchuk@njwt.lib.in.us

- . . . people bring by new babies AND pets to show the staff.
- . . . your bookmobile has had to wait for a flock of sheep to clear the road.
- . . . your bookmobile has mowed down a flock of guineas (They saw the sheep in time, but the guineas never had a chance).

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- . . . staff members know the grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins of the kid checking out books.
- . . . you know and call the owner when a dog wanders into the library.
- . . . staff members can walk to any store downtown during their break.
- . . . patrons bring you vegetables from their gardens.

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- . . . the books on raising goats, sheep and chickens circulated more than the books on fine arts and travel.
- . . . your patrons know what the Firefox books are.
- . . . you not only continue to circ VHS, you buy them at used books sales & yard sales because your patrons still want them.
- . . . people tie up their horse-wagons and buggies to the bike stand in front of your library (It's an Amish thing).
- . . . your patrons like you to place holds on titles for them - even before they know they want that book. (Proactive reader's advisory).
- . . . you are the town's copier service, fax service, UPS pickup spot, meeting room, community service outlet, internet cafe, and perhaps even the coffee shop (vending machine anyone?)
- . . . you can see trees, open spaces and livestock from your library's front door (mooooo).
- . . . you are The Community Center for your village or town.

Andrea Berstler
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- . . . you invite all the patrons in for hot soup and coffee when the power is off in neighborhoods during the winter.
- . . . people stop you in the grocery store (or dry cleaners, or restaurant, or...) to return books or make requests for books.
- . . . you have to drive at least 10 miles to buy a gallon of milk.
- . . . the children from summer reading bring their report cards in to show you and invite you to their graduations.
- . . . you know every kid on the high school football team by the kind of books they read when they were in summer reading.
- . . . you and all your staff cry when someone tells you of the passing of a long-time patron.
- . . . you have ever installed a water-heater or fixed a major appliance yourself, or with the help of a spouse, because you could not afford to call a repairman or the nearest one is more than an hour away.
- . . . patrons call and ask you to renew books and you don't have to ask their names because you recognize their voices.
- . . . the directions given to outreach staff involve turning next to the big barn with the red chickens in the yard.
- . . . you've ever had a patron drop off house plants for you to keep while they had an extended hospital stay.

Oh, this is fun!

Donna W. Howell
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- . . . your elevation is greater than your population.
- . . . when you get a phone call asking for the Reference desk, Acquisitions department, Overdues, Children's Services, ILL, etc., you say "I can help you with that."
- . . . you get stopped in the grocery store by people who tell you they have overdue books or fines, and want to take care of it right there next to the lettuce.
- . . . when people are looking for bars, they're not talking about their cell-phone!
(Without Foundations or major corporations (or even a Starbucks), maybe we've been overlooking an important source of funding: If we just had tip jars in bars....)

Margaret Miles
 Plumas County Library
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 (population: 20,000, area: size of Delaware)
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["If you get stopped in the grocery store by people who tell you they have overdue books or fines, and want to take care of it right there next to the lettuce (maybe this happens everywhere, or is this just me?)."]

It's not just you. At a graduation party this weekend, I told two moms about the summer reading program, and told a third to send her (already) bored high-schooler to the library to enjoy the new graphic novels the FOL funded. I get calls at home for renewals and reserves, and happily do it via my remote IPAC abilities (my spouse, not so happy about it.)

Virginia Roberts, Suttons Bay Bingham District Library, Michigan 49682, sbbdl@charterinternet.com]

- . . . you can walk to the post office to pick up an interlibrary loan and leave the library unattended.
- . . . there is no stop light in your county, which is roughly the size of Rhode Island.
- . . . you get mail addressed to "Library - P.O. Box" the lady at the P.O. Knows.
- . . . the highway snowplow stops by the library for audio books.
- . . . your town has three bars but no bank.

Jane Somerville
 Stanley Community Library
 Stanley, Idaho 83278
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- . . . folks drive their lawn mowers to the library (or tractors).

Carrie Cline
 McDonald County Library
 Pineville, Missouri 64856
carecline@yahoo.com

- . . . you are not only the town librarian but the town mayor (I met a woman who was librarian and mayor).

Joanna Smith
 Bernville Area Community Library
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. . . animal husbandry is the largest non-fiction section in your library.

David E. Fulkerson
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. . . your patrons call your house at 9:30 at night and they forgot to pick up an audio book for the trip they are leaving on the next day and can you please meet them.
. . . every child in town knows you as the library lady and soon the parents all call you that too.
. . . patrons leave books in your mailbox at home.
. . . people drop off and pick up clothes alterations, plants, flowers and other items for other people to pick up.
. . . you can stand at the library front door and point at the buildings of the post office, bank, courthouse, doctor's office and diners.
. . . you talk to patrons about their family for 10 minutes before you renew their materials over the phone.

Athalia Boroughs Taylor
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. . . the deer outside outnumber the people inside

Walter Lessun
Learning Resources and Instructional Technology Centers
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. . . the cutest dog came to visit last week.
(He and his sisters have been visiting since they were pups...oh, and the latest member of the greyhound rescue family had to go back because he attacked his "foster sister"....)

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. . . one of your patrons calls and asks you to bring the library ladder (a wooden one over 50 years old) and come to her house to put a baby robin back that fell out of its nest.
. . . you are shopping for groceries and people stop to request a book purchase or to renew their books when you get back to work. Oral requests, not written.
. . . you are digging weeds out around the parking lot when the library isn't open yet and passing library patrons stop to help.
. . . my husband hits all the yard sales and thrift stores to look for movies for the library.

Linda Dunham
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- . . . you troubleshoot for everyone in the community's computer problems, not just your own.
- . . . you loan your personal books out to supplement the library collection.
- . . . you repurpose computers until they are useless to the library, and then you repurpose them to another non-profit or family in need. . . .same with books. . . .and occasionally other fixtures.
- . . . you back up your school librarian, whose job is constantly in question, and is wearing far too many hats these days.
- . . . your Friends group is remodeling the library bathrooms...themselves, and the Board members help move shelving, wash windows, plant annuals, and paint walls.
- . . . you have volunteer maintenance folks.
- . . . people bring you lunch and dinner because they know on busy days you don't eat because meals are not on the schedule.
- . . . patrons subscribe to a periodical to ensure the library has it.
- . . . when school gets out, your patronage (and bathroom use) double (or triple) and you know everyone coming in (mostly).
- . . . you open early and stay open late when it is too hot for living outside and most people don't have air conditioning.
- . . . lost books are only found after the patron has paid for it or replaced it.
- . . . people call the library for the number to....anyone, anywhere in town.
- . . . the deer outside outnumber the people inside.
(Or geese, or ducks...and they should know better to chase the Swans out on the ICE!...or you see a fox run down the street after close and make a left at the corner of the library to go hunting.)

Virginia Roberts
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- . . . you can order free-range eggs at the circulation desk.
- . . . the only way some kids get to summer reading is to drive a school bus to a neighboring town and pick them up (because you are the school bus driver too).
- . . . the library has become the underground railroad for buying and selling of more mushrooms.
- . . . extra produce from people's gardens is left in bushel baskets inside the front door free for the taking.
- . . . you can knock on a patron's door and get the overdue books back yourself.

Louise W. Greene
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. . . your library closes for the annual town festival because all staff are marching in the parade and the library is the best viewing spot.

Susan Hill Pieper
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. . . your library is not within a major corporate donor's area of service thereby disqualifying you for their grants.

Jeff Hawkins
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. . . parents call to tell you "send John home, it's supper time"....and then call back 15 minutes later because that's how long it takes for him to walk home and John isn't there yet.

Madam Librarian
brown.patricia.m@gmail.com

. . . families see you out in public and ask you why your not at the library.
. . . patrons call you at home to ask if you have a particular item in the collection and if you do if you will save it for them for the next day.
. . . the parents of teens ask you to give their kids a ride home so they can stay for programming

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. . . you are the one who cleans up the poop left by the pet a patron brought in to show off.
. . . you have a set of tools for repairs (or spouse willing to act as unpaid maintenance person - mine decided sleeping with me was not enough compensation).
. . . you have taken a reserve request and/or reference question while in the bathroom of the local American Legion post.
. . . you are called a patron's "personal reading advisor" (That is what my feed store owner calls me).

Jane Ellen Felchuk
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You know you're a rural librarian when - Kansas additions

- . . . UPS delivers to your home because the library is closed.
- . . . you're stopped at the Casey's in a near-by town and asked if you have such and such book.

Diane Bott, Bison Community Library, Bison, Kansas

- . . . you have a newborn baby goat in your office at the library because it was rejected by its mother, and you are bottle feeding it.
- . . . you are late to work because you had to drop animals off at the sale barn.
- . . . you need to leave early to take your kids and their livestock to the 4-H weigh in.
- . . . you come to work with chicken poop somewhere on your person.

Shelly Huelsman

- . . . a patron had to pay for a damaged book because it fell in the sheep dip.

Susan Moyer

- . . . you stay open when the electricity is out because people will be in for books to read until the power is back on.
- . . . it doesn't surprise you when the reason for power outage is because a combine took out a telephone pole.
- . . . the book is dirty "because I was reading it in the field while I was waiting on . . ." makes perfect sense to you.
- . . . you suggest checking the trucks and tractors for that missing audiobook CD.

Mary Hester, Barton County Community College Library, Great Bend, Kansas

- . . . your first reference question is from a 4-H member asking how long to leave a rooster with hens before what he wants to happen happens

Melanie Miller, Hays Public Library, Hays, Kansas

- . . . the regular library person forgot that it was her day to work, so an 8th grader who volunteers on Saturdays went looking for a key to open the library and run it.

Kim, Sabetha, Kansas

. . . the state library consultant is asked to run the library for a few minutes because the librarian is the only one on duty and a patron called needing help canning beans.

Roy Bird, State Library of Kansas, Topeka, Kansas

. . . staff members know the grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins of the kid checking out books.

. . . a dog wanders into the library and you call the owner.

. . . staff members can walk to any store downtown during their break.

. . . patrons bring you vegetables from their gardens.

Roger Carswell, Southeast Kansas Library System, Iola, Kansas

. . . you are late to work because the railroad crossing was blocked by railroad cars moving forward and back again while switching to the grain elevator tracks (this can take 20 minutes or more!).

Judy Burgess, Abilene Public Library, Abilene, Kansas

. . . patrons use your car as a bookdrop, within a 60 mile radius of the library.

Eunice

. . . you are late for work and kids knock on your front door and ask you why you are not at the library.

Barbara Langston, Courtland and Formoso Libraries, Courtland and Formoso, Kansas

. . . people run out to their cars and return books to you when you are grocery store.

. . . you come home to find book donations on your front porch.

. . . patrons ask you to bring books they have on hold to meetings and baseball games.

. . . patrons come to your house when the library is closed and ask to check out a book because they don't have anything to read.

Alice Smith, Carbondale City Library, Carbondale, Kansas 66414

. . . you slow down on the way to the library for a parade of field mice running across a gravel road. There were about 15 to 20 of them.

Wendy Morlan, Pleasanton Lincoln Public Library, Pleasanton, Kansas

. . . a patron comes in and says "I want to read that book by that author that I liked last year..."
and you know just what book they are referring too...

Elizabeth Trigg, Osawatomie Public Library, Osawatomie, Kansas

. . . someone asks directions to a person's house without having the address and the library
employee tells them the correct way to get there.

Denise Smith

. . . your patrons arrive by 4-wheeler, tractor or lawn mower.

Samantha Kennedy, Hepler City Library, Hepler, Kansas

. . . your patrons see you coming in your vehicle & hold their returns out their car window for
you to grab as you pass by.

Stef Arbuckle, Weir Public Library, Weir, Kansas

. . . your director wants to have a "living display" for National Dairy Month and bring in a cow to
show the college kids. Then when she says "Because who's milked a cow before?" and all
3 of the other staff members chuckle and raise their hands.

Heidi Blackburn, Technology Center, K-State at Salina, Kansas

You know you're a rural librarian when - Tennessee additions

. . . any time you go into town to shop or run errands, four or more people ask you to renew their books, or place something on hold for them.

Judith Cutright
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Or hand you a big stack of books to take back to the library for them!

Kim Hicks
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. . . laptop users ask if they can access the Wi-fi from the front porch rocking chairs. (even a small log cabin library likes to keep up with the times)

Janet Walker
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. . . you call to tell a patron his/her book is in, but they might not answer because the phone is in the barn! (true story, honest)

. . . you have to request patrons not to spit tobacco in the trash cans.

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. . . children at church ask you to unlock the library so they can get their favorite movie.
. . . people call you at home to see if you have a book on a certain subject that their child needs for a report.
. . . people give you money for a book memorial at church.
. . . the sack boy at the grocery store asks when his books are due.

Nancy Canada
Chester County Library
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. . . someone comes into your library and says "you know that book with the red cover by that author I like so well" and you know what books she is asking for.

Janice Bobo
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. . . someone comes into your library and says "you know that book from yesterday and it was a very big over size book. And they don't know the author of the book.

Felita Martin
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. . . when you go out to grab something to eat, you are asked to fix and diagnose a computer and printer problem there on the spot. I guess part of the enjoyment of being a really rural librarian.

Joyce A. James
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. . . on your way home, you have to deliver books to some of the patrons that couldn't make it into the library, because they were working in the fields or the weather was not good and they could not walk to the library.. True.

Kathy Tucker
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. . . you know the name of every person who comes in the library. Not just their name, but the whole family, as well and their dog and cat. And you know what church they attend. And they ask you to pick out their books for them because, "You know what I like."

Nancy Green
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. . . a customer gets angry because the book on CD won't play in his DVD player!

Connie McSwain
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. . . a child at Wal Mart says "Look Mama, it's the Library lady!"

Liz Cooper
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- . . . you have to walk the long way around the library in the morning to avoid the skunk by the front door.
- . . . you're still considered a newcomer after you have been the library director for five years.
- . . . there are no dentists or optometrists in your county that are on the insurance plan offered by your parent institution.
- . . . patrons think you have a parking problem if they can't find a parking space within 20 feet of the library.
- . . . no local HVAC technician can repair your system because it is larger and more sophisticated than anything they have ever worked on.

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Coming from Publib

"It's the most entertaining thread we have had on Publib since Hydrox."

Carolyn Rawles-Heiser, Carolyn.Rawles-Heiser@ci.corvallis.or.us

"Please, somebody, save this thread and publish it in The Best of Publib someday; it's delightful."

Judith Turner, turnermalibmba@yahoo.com

You know you're a rural librarian if . . .

. . . your genealogy materials are rarely used because everyone knows each other and their family history.

Doris Lively
Grant Parish Library
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. . . you're new to the library and are given directions to the Smiths' house that include, "Turn right at the corner where Mrs. Jones's aunt used to live." (You don't know Mrs. Jones, let alone her aunt.)

Nann Blaine Hilyard
Zion, Illinois
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. . . you get to work in the morning and the bunnies scatter from the parking lot as you pull in. *(And not only do the bunnies scatter when you pull into the parking lot in the morning, you can watch them chasing each other through and around the trees when you go out at lunch time (as they were today). They looked like they were having such a good time!)*

Carol E. Leckie
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. . . you're late to work because you were stuck behind a tractor - or a combine.

. . . when you're not home, the UPS man knows to drop off your package at the library.

. . . you are happy to adjust employees' schedules around their county fair competitions.

. . . your whole area's Internet connection goes down because a farmer's horse dies. (The farmer used a backhoe to dig a hole for burial and accidentally cut a cable in the process.)

Laura Hayden
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- . . . a boy's book is overdue and his excuse is because his mother kept him at the hospital day after day while she was sitting with her brother who had had a log run through his stomach. (The man lived. EMS confirmed the story.)
- . . . a man walks in with a shoe box in his hands, asks for the Readers' Advisor, takes the top off the box and says, "Can you help me identify this (very much alive) snake? I've never seen one like this around here." (True story.)

Phalbe Henriksen
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[That happened at the Hedberg Public Library in Janesville, WI, pop. about 65,000! - but the kids who brought it in had it in a plastic ice cream bucket. Maybe a box is more rural.

Patty Wanninger, ITG Midwest Account Manager, patty.wanninger@gmail.com]

[I have answered the live snake question too. "We found this in the basement and think it might be a baby rattlesnake." (It wasn't. But I have never looked at a box of candy in quite the same way since.)

Melissa Norton, Bridgton, ME, dragynsnap@yahoo.com]

[That happened to me once, too. A guy brought me a live green snake in a ziplock bag and asked me to identify it. He'd been carrying it around in the baggie most of the day. I identified it for him, and he gave it to me. I took it home and let it go in my garden. They eat the bad bugs, you know!

I also had a woman take the lid off a McDonald's coffee cup one day a couple of summers ago and dump the weirdest looking bug I'd ever seen in my entire life on the desk. I had to call our Ag Extension office to find out it was a completely harmless caterpillar called a Hickory Horned Devil.

So I now view all McDonald's coffee cups with great suspicion!

Heather Holley-Hall, Alamance County Public Libraries, Graham, NC, hhall@alamancelibraries.org]

- . . . you can correctly identify the farm implements you see on the road & the owners.
- . . . you carry bits of paper in your pocket when going to the grocery store, etc., because you know someone will request a book, or have a question.
- . . . you check out and take books to an elderly client because she kinda, sorta threaten to tell your Dad if you didn't.

(All actually happened.)

Glenda Pate
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- . . . a firefighter stops a young vandal from damaging your vehicle by saying "No, that car belongs to one of the librarians."

Lisa Prolman
Greenfield Public Library
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(I stole this - it's actually "You know you go to a country church if..." - but it still works.)

. . . the only time you lock your car is in the summer, and that's so that people won't leave bags of squash in it.

Kit Ward-Crixell
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. . . when delivery people bring packages to the library, not your home, irrespective of what the address says.

Debra, a former rural librarian
deisert@att.net

Or your husband's packages!

Ann Perrigo
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[I can so relate to this one! A while back a package addressed to me at home was accidentally delivered to the local School Board offices (not close to either my house or office). Rather than calling FedEx to pick up the package and redeliver it to the correct address, someone at the School Board knew who I was and where I worked, called the library and got our delivery driver to come pick it up. Boy, was I surprised when he brought it in and I realized how lucky I was, in this case, to live in a semi-rural area.

But this thread also brings up the issues that arise when a rural area becomes more suburban and it's no longer possible to know everyone in your community. We have branches in our system where people never carried their library cards because they expected the staff to know them. Of course when you have substitutes, hire new staff, move people around, they don't all share the same knowledge even though the patrons somehow expect that.

Vicki Nesting, St. Charles Parish Library, Luling, Louisiana, vnestin@bellsouth.net]

. . . your library has a hitchin' post.

Carly M. Wiggins
Grabill Branch
Allen County Public Library
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[From some deep, dark recess in my memory, I remember that some town, probably my hometown of Wilmington, NC, had a law on the books for a long time that businesses had to provide hitching posts. Parking meters were considered to meet that requirement, so no one considered it worth the time to strike the law off the record.

Phalbe Henriksen, Alexander County Library, Taylorsville, North Carolina phenriksen@embarqmail.com]

. . . your library has a watering trough. Though no longer being used.

Darla Wegener
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. . . the grandfather across the street is your security system (True!)
. . . you list the names of probable readers next to every book you order (in the order of their VIP standing or watch out!), and if there aren't enough possible readers you won't be ordering it. (Sadly, also true)
. . . you know every card-holder by name, and could take a stab at age and ancestry for two generations in either direction.
. . . when you walk to work (because you CAN), every car stops to ask if you need a ride and what happened to your car?

Katie Kraushaar - who is really, really enjoying this thread!
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. . . you refuse to issue a card to Billy Bob Jr. because the picture ID he brought in is his father's, and you know this because you know where both he and his father live, and the address on the driver's license is the father's.

John Wylder
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. . . a patron asks to trade you either a dozen eggs or a freshly baked pie in lieu of paying a fine.

Lisa Guidarini
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. . . the two books enjoying the highest checkout in the library are *The Chicken Health Book* and *How to do Your Own Divorce in Texas*
. . . a perfectly valid reason for calling off work is "my road is flooded out again."

Brad Thomas

Or, in the winter, "I can't get out of my driveway" due to the snow.

Laura Hayden
Beaufort Branch Library
Beaufort, South Carolina 29902
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- . . . everybody knows you have not been walking very well, and one night, as you leave and head for your car, a PU going the other way stops and just sits there until you are in your car then goes on their way. And the Chief of police lets you park in a no parking spot while you are at work in the library.
- . . . you are afraid to open the door because the skunk on the porch makes you nervous.

Kathleen McCorkle
sedanlib@terraworld.net

- . . . a woman comes into the library holding a paper cup and you don't throw her out because the cup keeps her from spitting tobacco juice in the planters.
- . . . a kid tries to pay his library fine with eggs and you refuse because you don't have any eggs in the drawer to make change with.
- . . . your in-demand magazines are *Field and Stream*, *Successful Farming*, *American Rifleman*, and *Farm Journal*.
- . . . you have a list of legislators taped to your reference desk, but you can name all the U.S. Representatives for your state.
- . . . you have to phone anybody in your state library association, you have a choice of two area codes.
- . . . your license plates have either a cowboy, a fish or a vegetable on them.
- . . . there are two seasons: Hunting and Fishing.
- . . . the most-borrowed volume is the *Ball Blue Book* (a guide to canning).
- . . . there is one college football team for the entire state, and it may as well be for the entire planet.

Mike McGrorty
Backwage@aol.com

[In Wyoming, we have the cowboy on our plates, and on our quarters.

"Representatives" implies that there's more than one.

Only one area code, and not a single city of more than 60,000.

I have run into our Governor at the auto parts store. Believe it or not, his hobby is restoring old sheepherder's wagons. (They're actually really cool.)

Susan Mark, SMARK@state.wy.us]

. . . "there's a <mountain lion, grizzly bear, porcupine -- various wild animals> on my porch and I can't get out." (Fortunately this has never happened to me as I live in Great Falls -- but it has in outlying environs.)

Marla Wilckens
Great Falls Public Library
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. . . patrons are personally affronted if you ask to see their library card at checkout.

Melissa Mannon
Archives and Information Consulting Services
Bedford, New Hampshire
melissa@mannon.org

We're not rural, but one of our libraries in an outlying desert area of Phoenix often has wild animals, insects, and reptiles wander around and in the building. A friend who works there told me they had a customer who was chased by a wild boar. The customer was holding a bucket of KFC and refused to put it down, even though a giant wild animal with sharp teeth was chasing her down.

Terry Ann Lawler
Palo Verde Library
Phoenix Arizona 85031
terry.lawler@phoenix.gov

. . . you cannot open the library's dumpster because a bear was jumping on it and smashed the top.
. . . you have chipmunks living the ceiling of the library eating the wiring.
(both true stories from another library I worked in).

Carolyn Rawles-Heiser
Corvallis-Benton County Public Library
Corvallis, Oregon 97330
Carolyn.Rawles-Heiser@ci.corvallis.or.us

. . . every other patron asks about your mama - by name.

Kevin Cherry
Office of Library Services
Institute of Museum and Library Services
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. . . the turkey at the front door is a REAL turkey, not a politician.

George Hazelton
Henry County Public Library System
McDonough, Georgia 30252
grhazelton@mail.henry.public.lib.ga.us

- . . . when you're at the grocery store during the day on a weekday and the 5 year old in front of you in line whispers in her mom's ear to ask if the library is closed.
- . . . when the UPS man delivers your home computer to your husband at work, after stopping in to ask you where you'd like it delivered. (We sure missed Dave when he retired!)
- . . . when you run into your UPS man at the high school football game even though he lives in another community.
- . . . when you ask a patron applying for a library their phone number, they rattle off the last four digits (sadly we now have to dial the area code but natives or long timers still rattle off just the last four digits).
- . . . you get a call at home on a Sunday to your unlisted (for personal reasons) phone number telling you the book drop's overflowing and it's raining.
- . . . you go to lunch and a patron hands you a book and asks if you can return it for her.
- . . . you get complaints about staff when you're at the roller rink in the next town with your son.

I loved working in a rural library.

Mary J. Soucie
Three Rivers Library District
Channahon Illinois 60410
leftlibrarian@gmail.com

My parents were in town and fell by the library to take me to dinner after work, and a little girl came in to get a library card. We charged for outside-the-city cards, \$2 for kids. The little dear had saved up \$1.90, and her mom didn't have any money on her, but I gave her the card anyway, and told her to bring in the extra dime next time she had one. She checked out a couple books and left happy. After I locked up, my dad told me that not only had I told the mother that I trusted her and her child but that that mother would tell everybody she knew that I had. The little one came in a week or so later with the dime, too, so she was good for it.

Kathleen Stipek
Alachua County Library District
401 East University Avenue
Gainesville, Florida 32601
kstipek@aclib.us

- . . . a patron has to pay for books he accidentally shot while shooting at the possum he notices in his living room. He missed the possum, but nailed the stack of books!

Jacque Gage
Barton County Library
Lamar, Missouri 64759
jgage@bartoncountylibrary.com

When I was young in Maine we only had to dial the last 4 digits

When I was young in Massachusetts the number of rings indicated who on the party line was getting a call. When my mother finished some of her conversations she'd say "Did everyone get that?" ...and you'd hear click! click! as the other two families on the party line quickly hung up their phones.

Here in our suburban libraries, bunnies gambol in the backyard, next to Route 287 and deer ramble through. Up the road wild turkeys keep people pinned in their cars at the 9/11 Memorial. Fortunately, the local black bears haven't come to charge out Corduroy yet.

Sara Weissman
Morris County Library
Whippany New Jersey 07981
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. . . you wouldn't dream of planning any sort of library program during Hunting Season!!

Beth Baker
Dickinson County Library
Iron Mountain, Michigan Yooperland (Michigan's Upper Peninsula)
beth@dcl-lib.org>

. . . when you see cows out in the road, you know whose they are, and offer to help get them back in. (after taking off my good shoes and putting on a ratty pair of shoes.)

Glenda Pate
Cedar County Library
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gpate@cedarcountylibrary.org

. . . when a tree falls down during a storm and is blocking the road to the highway, you don't need to worry about being late to work - in a few minutes someone with a chainsaw in their truck will come along and cut up the tree.

Diedre Conkling
Lincoln County Library District
Newport, Oregon 97365
diedre08@gmail.com

I have resisted this thread, but...

I once filled out a report on rural libraries that asked how far it was to the nearest city of 25,000 (limited to cities within the state). The answer for our library was 380 miles. Another library in our system was even further away, nearly 500 miles. Luckily for us, we were on the state border and only had a trip of 100 miles to get to a decent shopping mall in a neighboring state. Was this in one of the wide open Western states? Nope - Michigan.

Andy Barnett
McMillan Memorial Library
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Hi, Andy --

Can't be done, this thread is too good to resist and it's almost Friday. The reason, imo, if we look back a few hundred years, our forebears lived in a near, if not entirely, rural environments. I think humans are hard-wired to live in smaller communities which may be why we keep turning out cities into undesirable places.

Back to your comments about Michigan - no possibility that the nearest large city could have been in Ontario? There's Michigan and there's the UP where Superior or Duluth are probably the best choice. In Lower Michigan coming across by ferry boat would have made Green Bay or Sheboygan possibilities. Too bad Cornelius Vanderbilt got out of the steamship business to pursue his railroad interests or we might still have steamers on the Lake. It would be so nice to go east without paying the steep charges of the modern ferry monopolies or circumnavigating Chicago and its 'burbs.

Wisconsin Rapids is in a very pretty part of the state but it's also pretty remote. Isn't the best shopping mall/multiplex complex the Fox Valley, outside of Appleton?

I understand Hibachi Joe's in Steven's Point is no more but one of these days I want to get back to Marshfield. There's a coffee place on the main street, not far from the RR tracks, where the proprietor assured me the Jamaica Blue Mountain beans would return. I haven't had a chance to check back since 2007, though.

Judy Turner
Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin
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Reactions to the Kansas responses . . .

" . you are late to work because the railroad crossing was blocked by railroad cars moving forward and back again while switching to the grain elevator tracks (this can take 20 minutes or more!."

Chris cited this example, but living just outside Chicago in an old railroad town, I can top it. We almost routinely have backups at train crossings in Blue Island, sometimes lasting upwards of two+ hours while the trains are juggled around in the CSX yards. There are multiple routes converging in Blue Island and many crossings on major streets. Used to be that the police could ticket trains that blocked streets for longer than an hour, but the Illinois State legislature, in its infinite wisdom, passed a law in favor of the railroads so now the towns have no recourse. And I am just talking freight trains here; we also have several commuter line crossings, but they're usually limited to 5 minutes or so.

Everyone's favorite reason for lateness going anywhere: ...there was a train!

Lynne S. Ingersoll
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This is absolutely wonderful! My first reaction was to wonder if knowing all your patrons means they don't yell at your staff across the circulation desk and throw the book at you because they have a 50 cent fine. While we may not have a parade of field mice, we do have parades of Canadian geese crossing the roads with their babies. Not too long ago I watched a man get out of his car and try to shoo them along. The gander took off after him and chased him around his car. I laughed so hard that I almost had an embarrassing accident in my car.

It could be funny to compare incidents to urban and/or suburban library settings.

Dianne Harmon
Joliet Public Library
Joliet, Illinois
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A rural library is . . .

Sometimes in a farming community so small and rural that the town no longer has a school and does not have a post office, bank, bar, grocery store, or gas station(most farmers have their own gas delivered and everyone else goes to the next biggest town miles away) but does have a library, a grain elevator, and, if you are lucky, a church.

Rose M. Chenoweth
Alliance Library System
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You know you're working in an urban library when:

There is a very loud explosion just outside the building and nobody flinches.

You have patrons who have been shot, died of overdoses, given birth or conceived children, all in your library.

You know all the cheap brands of fortified wine, malt liquor and where they are sold.

You can tell by look or smell what a patron has been smoking.

Your library has an "armed intruder" protocol.

You don't walk to your car alone, day or night.

You have kids who virtually live in your library because it is one of the few safe places to go, and even safer than home.

You realize that there are many degrees of homelessness.

Every day quite a few people use your lavatory as a bathhouse.

You have become quite used to interrupting men who are enjoying safe sex with themselves.

You know better than to wake a sleeping patron.

You know exactly how to dispose of dirty diapers, used prophylactics, suspicious packages and drug kits.

The only dog you haven't discovered in a backpack is an Irish Wolfhound.

You have been cussed out in every major European and Asian language or dialect--at least that you can identify.

There are at least three very poor and neglected children that you would steal away with if nobody could find out.

You have given money to somebody because they needed to eat.

You can give turn-by-turn directions to any spot within five miles, and you know where the buses stop, and have the train schedule memorized.

And you still love the place.

Mike McGrorty
Backwage@aol.com

Pub Lib adds –

Date: Wed, 17 Jun 2009 12:37:04 -0400

Subject: [Publib] Re: You know you're a rural librarian if... and one other question

I really enjoyed reading these and some of them even apply at our library. We are a semi-rural public library. In a small city of 20,000 or so we are surrounded by a lot of small towns and farms. I was sharing these with other staff members when one of them told me her rural library story. The Town Supervisor of a small neighboring town called her here to get permission to dig up the road in front of her in-laws (now deceased) place. It seems he found out she worked here by talking to the librarian in their town who knew her and the family.

On another note, does anyone have a form they could e-mail me that has to do with permission to post someone's picture to Facebook? We just started our own Facebook page and want to be able to put patron's pictures on with their permission. I know someone must have this already and I just don't want to recreate the wheel. Thanks for helping.

Colleen Pelletier, Librarian
Plattsburgh Public Library
Plattsburgh, New York 12901
pelletierc@cityofplattsburgh-ny.gov

Date: Wed, 17 Jun 2009 10:48:43 -0700

Subject: [Publib] RE: You know you're a rural/urban librarian if...

Don't you think these would be great "Unshelved" strips?? Both sides would make for a fun book!

Corinne Dickman
Spanish Springs Library
Sparks, Nevada 89436
CDickman@washoecounty.us
www.washoe.lib.nv.us

Date: Wed, 17 Jun 2009 14:10:16 -0400
Subject: RE: [Publib] RE: You know you're a rural/urban librarian if...

When a new librarian is introduced to patrons he or she is asked, "Now, Who are your people?"

When FEMA requests that the bookmobile notify people at scheduled stops in low-lying areas they need to evacuate within 24 hours.

When you have a waiting list of people who have asked to harvest the pecans from the trees in the library yard.

When you are locally known as one of "the folks down to the librey."

Dusty Gres
Ochopee Regional Library System
Vidalia, Georgia 30474
gresd@ochoopeelibrary.org
<http://www.ochoopeelibrary.org>

Date: Wed, 17 Jun 2009 13:21:32 -0500
From: Nann Blaine Hilyard <nbhilyard@zblibrary.org>
Subject: RE: [Publib] RE: You know you're a rural/urban librarian if...

Dusty's fourth point reminded me of another true story: YKYARL "when you are introduced as 'our librarian.'"

Nann
@ZBPL in northeasternmost Illinois

Date: Wed, 17 Jun 2009 14:25:25 -0400
From: Sharon Foster <>
Subject: Re: [Publib] RE: You know you're a rural/urban librarian if...

I just started a new job as the technology librarian in a town of 5200, and several of my friends (who live in a town of 80,000) asked me if I were "the" librarian.

Sharon M. Foster, JD, MLS
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<http://www.vsa-software.com/mlsportfolio/>