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Letter to Timothy Coggins regarding the Southeastern Law Librarian, October 22, 1987

Hazel Johnson

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October 22, 1987

Timothy Coggins
University of N Carolina Law Library
Van Hecke, Wettach Bldg. 064A
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Dear Tim:

As promised, and by the deadline, (I hope) is the President's column. It would be just fine with me for this to be somewhere besides the front page. Mary should be having some program information for you and Bill should be able to give you local arrangements, but you may have to bug them both. Also, we should have the scholarship form in this issue. Claire is usually pretty good about this stuff, but again, a reminder may be needed.

I hope you've spoken with Cheryl and Randal about the problems of the late mailing. It's really hard to write timely things and do announcements if the newsletter is going to go out so late. (You can tell them I said so.) If this is going to be a continuing problem I don't have any problems with getting Board approval to pay for the printing and using a commercial printer closer to you.

Let me know if you need anything else from me. Thanks for everything.

Sincerely,

Hazel L. Johnson
Law Librarian
President, SEAALL
From The President

A recent article in American Libraries addressed itself to the image of librarians, concluding that librarianship is a "wimpy" profession (Should we be flattered or offended to share the category with the Vice President of the United States?) The author aims most of his criticisms at ALA, but as librarians, I think we all suffer when one of our own throws stones (the author is a library school professor). Among his criteria for the "Wimp-o-Meter" are individuals who "fill shopping bags full of exhibit brochures which have probably already been received at home, and then mail the stuff back to the library"; who "think having a non-librarian as Librarian of Congress is an okay idea"; and who "cannot enjoy a meal unless an author speaks."

The article made me wonder how all this image consciousness got started anyway? Is it a carryover of librarian as a traditionally female job and therefore to be held in lower esteem? or the all too familiar scenario of the library budget being the first to be reduced and the librarian taking this action as a personal insult? Regardless of the historical background of our "wimpiness", every day you can find individual library users providing glowing testimonials on the priceless assistance given them by individual librarians. Do we take these compliments to heart and go on doing what we do best, or do we continue gnashing our teeth and wishing everyone thought as well of us? Usually the latter I'm afraid.

While I think any overt examples of librarian put-downs should be corrected if possible. I also think a lot of talented people waste a lot of breath and paper chastizing the rest of the world about our image. Lawyers are considered arrogant and egotistical. Doctors are greedy, but you don't read in the ABA Journal or JAMA that these two groups don't like their negative images and really want everyone to think better of them. They just keep doing what they do best. Could it be they are more secure and have more confidence in what they are doing? Why? Aren't we good at what we do? Obviously our services are needed or our employers wouldn't have hired us and our patrons wouldn't seek us out. So let's get on with doing what we do best and stop worrying about image. Along the way maybe our image will change one patron or one employer at a time and we can cherish those moments when someone says "Wow, you're not like any librarian I ever met before."