

Crisis in Librarianship: *The Editor's Perspective*

by Frances Bryant Bradburn

The decision to devote a special issue to the crisis in librarianship was fraught with peril. North Carolina librarianship in crisis? Surely not! This is the state whose State Library, in conjunction with its public libraries, recently has been featured as the prototype for the successful evolution from print into the networked electronic environment in a study funded by OCLC, researched and reported by Charles R. McClure, et. al., and released on July 1, 1992, entitled "Public Libraries and the INTERNET/NREN: New Challenges, New Opportunities." This is the state that sports three major academic research libraries; the state whose school library media program is the envy of the nation. In this environment, how could eighteen individuals, albeit representative of all types of libraries, have the audacity to suggest that we, of all professions, in North Carolina, of all states, could possibly be in crisis?

Individual examples abound. NCLA President Janet Freeman highlights several throughout her President's Column. She touches only the iceberg's tip. Authors from school, public, and academic librarianship direct our attention to crises within individual libraries and the profession in general. These authors do not simply point out the problems. Rather, they suggest theories for thought and strategies for change that will allow us — and, yes, encourage us — to grow and evolve into a viable profession for the twenty-first century.

It is tempting to allow the crises to speak for themselves—the crisis of image; the crisis of a coalitionless profession; the crisis of rigid, outdated thinking; the crisis of the service-to-all-with-all mentality. Yet central to each of these issues is the crisis of personal and professional values. As Kenneth Marks states in his article, "Libraries: No Longer Free of Fee," "Perhaps one of the reasons that libraries are not valued is due to our inability to establish a value for our own activities."

Marks is referring specifically to monetary value. I suggest, however, that the crisis is far more than financial; it revolves around how we value ourselves both as individuals and as a profession. Ours is a profession that constantly fights the sour-faced, bun and brown shoes stereotype. It is a profession that annually fights inane battles for small

budget increases for materials that are vital to the very survival of the institutions they support. It is a profession — we are the individuals — who will attempt to provide the same level of service that was possible two years ago when our libraries had more staff members, fewer patrons, more money, and no CD-ROMs! We hesitate to deface the image of libraries as it is included in "the American flag, motherhood, and apple pie" syndrome. But even mothers strike; Mrs. Fields advertises!

Why is it that we find our own self-promotion so difficult? Why are we as a profession — as professionals — not worth our own support? Last year the Executive Board of NCLA debated with some acrimony the cost of funding library "commercials" featuring Atlantic Coast Conference athletes and concluding with the tag, "Stay in school, use your library, and read." To be sure, a six thousand dollar investment was required, the request was hurriedly compiled, and a less rosy financial picture was beginning to surface. But these facts pale when one considers the public relations coup the previous year's spots had been and the next year's promised to be. The ACC itself estimates that millions of potential library users watched those public service announcements across the state, throughout the South, even in other parts of the United States. And these ads did not specify college libraries, school media centers, or public libraries. No, *all* the bases were covered; it was a marketing masterpiece. Mrs. Field would have been proud. And yet, by approving only half the request, NCLA demurred.

Why are we unable to see our own value, market our own self-worth? We cannot wait for our savior; Armageddon may appear before the Ascension. We must nurture our risk-takers, not stone them; cultivate our visionaries, not gag them. And we must recognize that there is power in numbers. We need only decide how we choose to use that power. We can use our financial resources to educate ourselves and our clientele, potential and present-day. We can use our intelligence and first-line defense of information to market ourselves individually and professionally, making ourselves totally indispensable to our targeted communities. Or we can become an incredibly powerful collective "chicken little" whose sky collapses around us leaving all the world, not just ourselves, the lesser for our fears and timidity.