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An Introduction to the Special Issue on Paths to Copyright Librarianship

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Abstract

As adults, conversations about work and careers are standard. Copyright librarianship is a unique field and inevitably people ask, “How did you get into that?” Like many folks, I have an origin story that belies the smooth arc we all imagine. I had been thinking about my journey, and wondering how others came to this work. Could they point to a moment or person that helped them along the way? Might my and others’ stories be insightful or beneficial to others? The stories in this issue are all different and compelling. Read on and learn the varied ways lawyers and librarians became copyright librarians.

Keywords: Careers, copyright librarianship

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As adults, conversations about work and careers are standard. Copyright librarianship is a unique field and inevitably people ask, “How did you get into *that*?” Like many folks, I have an origin story that belies the smooth arc we may imagine for our career. I had been thinking about my journey, and wondering how others came to this work. Could they point to a moment or person that helped them along the way? Might my and others’ stories be insightful or beneficial to others? The stories that follow are all different and compelling. I will share briefly about how I got into copyright librarianship and encourage you read on to hear from my colleagues.

When I graduated from law school, I was sure that I would go into intellectual property (IP) law, well, copyright law specifically. But I also knew I would be going back to my hometown of Chicago, where, at the time, IP work was not as plentiful as say, New York or Los Angeles. So, I went to work for a small firm where I worked with three close law school classmates (this was the best part of working at the firm). One day, though, I had the revelation that litigation was NOT what I wanted to do. I eventually moved on to do contract legal work. Contract work pays well and is flexible. I spent lots of time reviewing discovery documents, there were rewards for reviewing quickly and efficiently. A few years into contract work, a friend, Ayana Haaruun, reached out and asked if I would be interested in stepping in while she was on leave at her job. She worked at the historic *Chicago Defender* newspaper as the rights and permissions manager for their archive. She suggested that since I had a law degree, this might be of interest. The work sounded appealing, and I figured it would be cool to switch things up for a bit. I ended up at the job for almost four years.

During my time as the archive/copyright manager at the *Defender*, I met many academics, archivists, and librarians. Every now and then, someone would ask if I would consider going to library school. I would explain that I had thought about it, but I felt the time has passed for that dream. One very particular archivist, from the Black Metropolis Research Consortium, Tamar Evangelestia-Dougherty (now director of the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives), was especially persistent, telling me that I could be a copyright librarian (what even was that?). We had developed a rapport and often chatted when she came to the archive. She even mentioned that I could do work like her mentor, Peter Hirtle (creator of the [Cornell Copyright and the Public Domain chart](#)), providing copyright resources and information in libraries. She arranged for me to chat with Peter, and I thought his job was interesting. Coincidentally, around the same time, I heard Melissa Levine on a call discussing her career at the University of Michigan. She explained her path and it resonated with me so much, that I called her later. She was open and shared

information about her journey. Much like my conversation with Peter, I was intrigued, but still not convinced that I should attend library school. I continued chatting with Tamar who continued expressing that copyright librarianship was right for me. Once, exasperated with her insistence that I needed to go to library school, I told her “If you find a way for me to go for free, I’ll go.” I figured that would end the discussion. As I now know, it was a challenge that no information professional worth their salt could resist. Tamar, of course, found a way for me to go practically for free.

My plan was to continue working at the newspaper and pursue my library degree online. My course changed after I was laid off. I decided to finish the degree as quickly as possible and return to contract work, with an eventual goal to find a library job. The connections I made with Tamar, Peter, and Melissa proved fruitful as they all sent me opportunities at academic libraries. Tamar sent a job that I knew there was no way I would get. I was not qualified, I was not done with my library degree, and I did not have any experience in libraries or formally teaching on copyright. Tamar, true to form, insisted I apply anyway. I did and I got the job! I worked at Ohio State University for eight years first as the Program Director for Copyright Services, then as a faculty member as the Copyright Services Librarian. I am now the Program Director for Scholarly Communication and Information Policy at Yale University Library, where I am responsible for the scholarly communication program, providing information and resources on using and creating copyrighted materials and managing license review for electronic resources. All my work experiences, even contract work, have helped me to get to the position I have now.

In this special issue of the *Journal of Copyright in Education & Librarianship*, you will learn how some people got started or developed their careers in copyright librarianship, whether it was through the encouragement or mentoring of another librarian, taking advantage of an opportunity, or realizing the need for coverage in this area at their library. Please read on and learn more about how lawyers and librarians alike came to copyright librarianship and how their journeys shape their work and who they are as library professionals and institutional copyright officers.