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Joe's Report: AALL Annual Meeting & Conference

By Joe Gerken, University at Buffalo Law Library

When I look back on this year's AALL Annual Meeting, the highlight undoubtedly will be dinner with Morris Cohen. "With" is a bit of a misnomer. There were actually about twenty of us gathered at a nice Thai restaurant within walking distance of Fenway Park. Jim Milles, Director of the UB Law Library planned the get-together to enable current staff to dine with library "alumni." It was a festive event, and it was nice to see Charlie Finger, Dave Voisinet and other UB "alums." But I got to sit with Morris Cohen. It took until dessert before I was able to shed my apprehension. (Will I spill chicken curry on my tie? Will I knock over Prof. Cohen's wine glass?) I need not have worried. Morris and Gloria Cohen were most considerate and down to earth, taking an active interest in the goings-on at our law library, and catching up on news of contemporaries at UB.

I should probably explain. I came to law librarianship relatively late, having practiced law for many years. My last year of library school, I enrolled in a practicum that enabled me to work at the law library reference desk. The summer before the practicum, I read Cohen and Berring's *How to Find the Law* twice from cover to cover. I still use it frequently to get my bearings when confronted with a "stumper." Since that time, I have regarded Morris Cohen as one of the Greats in this profession. Thus, sitting next to him at the restaurant, and actually engaging in small talk, was equivalent to a baseball fanatic having a bite to eat with Babe Ruth.

There were, of course, other highlights in Boston. I was fortunate in having attended the training conference on Teaching Research in Academic Law Libraries (TRIAL), which was held immediately before AALL. This was a very productive session, involving simulations that refined our abilities with regard to everything from initially conceptualizing the over-all goals and approach of a legal research course, to drafting lesson plans, to engaging students in research activities during class time, and in out-of-class exercises. The faculty were very capable and committed, and the spirit of comradery which developed over the three-day session was quite inspirational. Much thanks to Lexis for sponsoring this valuable training event.

As usual, AALL itself was crammed with stimulating panel discussions and lectures. The most memorable, to me, was a session entitled "The Baghdad Biblio-Files" in which Kimberly Morris, formerly Head of Electronic Ser-



Joe Gerken and Friend

vices at the George Washington University Law Library described her experience working to rebuild three law libraries in Iraq, which had been devastated in the aftermath of the war. Ms. Morris's low-key presentation belied the almost-insuperable obstacles that she has faced, and the courage and persistence that she has brought to this heroic task.

A session on UCLA's Law Library Research Assistant Program seemed to provoke considerable post-session "brainstorming" among librarians at other institutions. As a Government Documents neophyte, I found the session on the Virtual Federal Depository Program to be an eye-opener. I wandered into the Call for Papers session out of curiosity, and was rewarded with engaging presentations, including a fascinating discussion of law reviews' requirement that cite checking be done "in paper" and a new look at ALA's response to the "library records" provisions in the USA Patriot Act.

Any AALL conference involves more than just "nose to the grindstone" activities. I spent the first few days at a bed-and-breakfast on Newberry Street, and was able to take early morning strolls in that charming and historic neighborhood. Our UB group took the Swan Boat ride, which was every bit as charming as Susan Dow and Marcia Zubrow had suggested. I also got to visit some excellent smaller art galleries, including one which featured a photo of John Kerry and John Lennon, taken at Union Square in New York. Just think: we could have had a president who had been friends with a Beatle. Oh well....

Last by not least, I got to meet law librarians from around the country and to renew acquaintances with

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librarians I had met previously at AALL. Inevitably, when this happens, I am re-energized by the professional enthusiasm of my colleagues, and reminded of why being a law librarian is such a nice way to earn a living.

Joe & Nancy attended the AALL Annual Meeting & Conference with grant funding support from ALLUNY. Each year, ALLUNY provides funds for its members to participate in national and international events. Have you applied for an ALLUNY grant? For more details, visit <http://www.aallnet.org/chapter/alluny/grants.html>

Photo of Joe Gerken and Mary Miller by Nancy Babb

