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My Life as an Action Figure

Nancy Pearl

Former Executive Director, Washington Center for the Book

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My Life as an Action Figure

by Nancy Pearl

Former Executive Director
of the Washington Center
for the Book

The Beginning

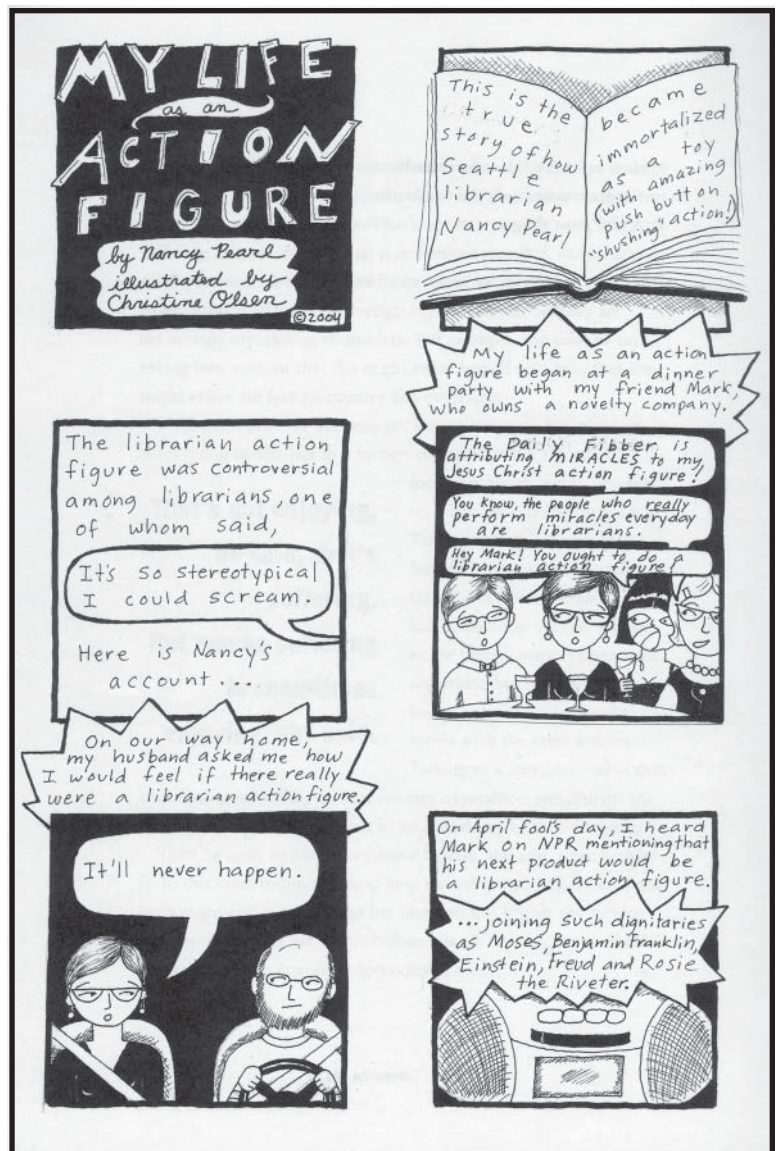
My life as an action figure actually began at a dinner party. Mark Pahlow, the owner of Accoutrements, Inc., a novelty company in the Pacific Northwest, was there. So were I and my husband, a patient and low-maintenance sort of guy. We were talking about a recent article in one of the supermarket tabloids, in which people were attributing miracles to the Jesus Action Figure, one of Mark's best selling items. Someone said, "But you know, the people who really perform miracles every day are librarians." And someone else said, "Mark, you ought to do a librarian action figure."

After we all picked ourselves off the floor (where we'd fallen because we'd been laughing so hard at the oxymoronic notion of putting the words *librarian* and *action figure* together in one sentence), someone else said, "Nancy never takes herself too seriously, she should be the model." Then the conversation turned in other directions.

On our way home, my husband asked me how I would feel if there really was a Librarian Action Figure (LAF) based on my likeness. I told him that it would never happen. "But if it did," I said, "what a hoot it would be, and how great for librarians to have their good work celebrated by a wide audience." "And," I added, "it would be a wonderful

opportunity to promote books, reading, and libraries," which is, after all, the mission of the Washington Center for the Book at the Seattle Public Library, of which I just happen to be the Executive Director. "Besides," I said again, (oh famous last words!) "it will never happen."

Time passed. One spring day, many many months later, Mark Pahlow was interviewed on the local National Public Radio affiliate and mentioned that the next product Accoutrements would bring out would be a Librarian Action Figure, joining



such dignitaries as Moses, Benjamin Franklin, Einstein, Freud, and Rosie the Riveter, and modeled on the station's own weekly book reviewer, librarian Nancy Pearl. This was all well and good, except that the show was on April Fools' Day, so no one, including me, knew how seriously to take his announcement.

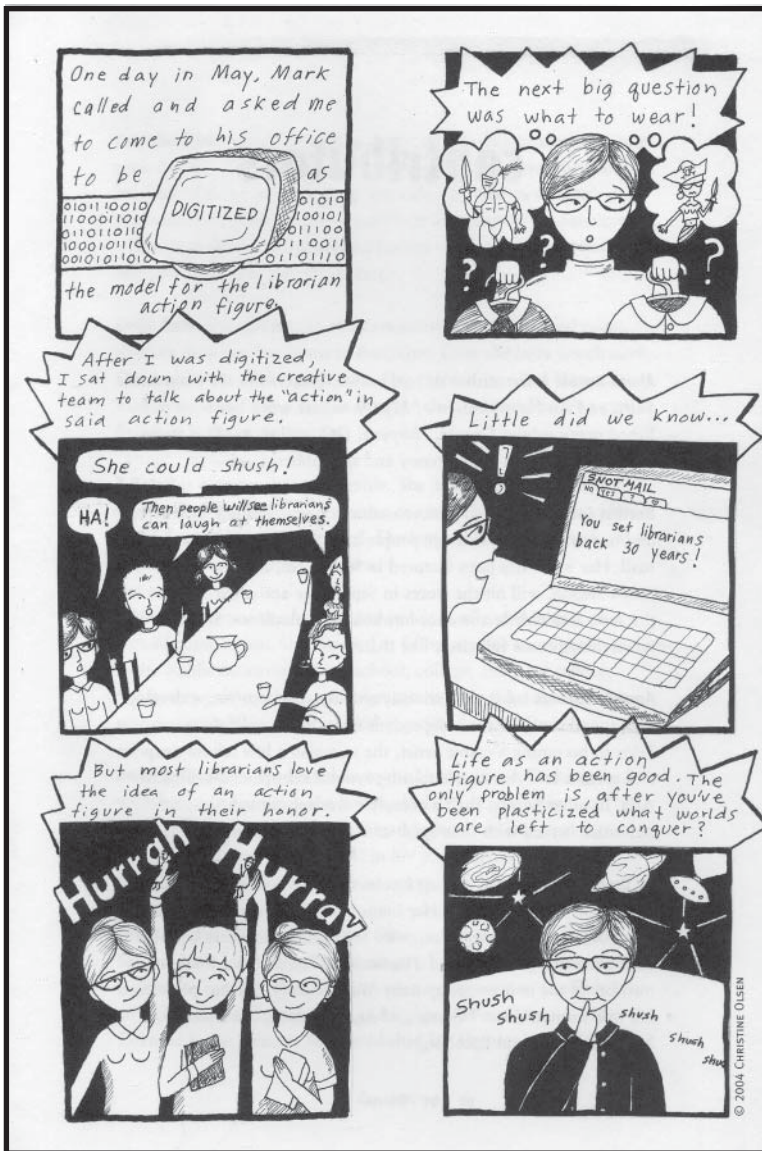
Time passed, although not quite so much time, and in May Mark called and asked me to set up a time to come to their offices and be digitized. Hot diggety dog!

The next big question was what

to wear. Because I had several important speaking engagements coming up I splurged and went to the Eileen Fisher store and bought not only the most beautiful, but also the most expensive clothes I had ever purchased: a wool skirt, turtle-neck sweater, and long cardigan in a beautiful heathery-grayish blue. They looked great on me; I decided to wear them to be photographed in. (Big mistake. On the basis of my own experience, I can declare without fear of contradiction that Eileen Fisher's classic clothes just don't translate

into plastic well. Part of what I had to live with, once the LAF came out, was accusations about how dowdy I looked, or rather, how dowdy the LAF looked. I always get the two confused!)

Once the photos were taken, I got to sit down with the creative team at Accoutrements and talk about what action the figure should be doing, and what the accessories should be. Hands down really, there was no discussion, and everyone agreed the stereotypes that most people associate with librarians are that they wear their hair in buns and say *shush* a lot. (Remember the scene in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* when Audrey Hepburn gets shushed at the New York Public Library?) We all thought that having the librarian make a shushing motion



Action Figure


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would set a tone for the LAF that would let the world see that librarians are not uptight and don't take themselves and their profession too seriously; we can laugh at ourselves.

Little did we know that there would be people who wouldn't see the humor, or the fondness with which the LAF was conceived and produced. It's hard to imagine that anyone looking at the packaging, which is basically a huge tribute to librarians and reading, could possibly be offended, but as I now know, there's no predicting people's response. I actually got two unsigned e-mails from people saying that I had set the profession back 30 years! But in all of my recent travels around the country to promote my new book, *Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every*

Mood, Moment, and Reason, and in the many e-mails, letters and phone calls I have received, the vast majority of librarians love the idea of an action figure in their honor.

The end

My (brief) life as an action figure has generally been good. The only problem seems to be that now I don't quite know what to aspire to next. After you've been plasticized, what worlds are left to conquer? 

Nancy Pearl is the author of *Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every Mood, Moment, and Reason*, and its companion, with all new books and categories, *More Book Lust*, due out in May 2005.

Laughing

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hidden treasure nonetheless. Maybe part of the therapeutic value in this *find* was using a hammer to beat the cabinet open. Remember, there is a physical component to humor after all.

Looking on the bright side

Some would argue that sarcastic humor doesn't belong in the workplace. In the midst of the recovery effort some of us were in the trenches, squeezing cockroaches out of folders, and were covered with mud. Other staff members opted to stay clean. A mud-covered colleague encouraged me to hug one of our pristinely clean coworkers. I still regret passing up

that opportunity, but just the thought still makes me laugh. When our humor resources were at their lowest we would pull out the sarcasm and point out the bright side of this disaster; no more cataloging backlog!

In writing this article I asked my fellow workers what we were laughing at during those difficult times and they all agree—a whole lot of nothing. Clearly, we just knew that we had to use humor to work through the disaster. Recovery efforts at the Hamilton Library continue and let's hope each of us involved in the effort continues to retain and use our sense of humor during this challenging time. 