Sparkling, dancing tongues of fire

Bing-Shan Fazio, Print Resources
EVOLUTION OF THE CHINESE CHARACTER FOR “FIRE”

3:30pm. A pipe connector on a ten-inch pipe in the new fire suppression system fails, spewing thousands of gallons of water into the newly remodeled basement of Zimmerman Library. Zimmerman evacuated and power turned off. Rockefeller’s Cleaning Co. crews work.
I learned about the fire in an unusual way. I was serving on a jury at the end of April in 2006. The judge had warned us to avoid the media in case our felony case was discussed. During the weekend of the fire, I did my best to avoid hearing or reading the local news and so didn’t hear about the fire right away. I was also a bit preoccupied that weekend because I had my 50th birthday the day before the fire.

When I returned to jury duty on Monday, some jury members, knowing I was a librarian at UNM, asked for details about the fire. There I was, wondering which library had burned, how much damage had been done, and whether or not anyone had been injured. Since by then we were in deliberation and therefore sequestered, I didn’t have access to any newspapers, the television, or even a cell phone. It was a challenge to stay focused on the trial.

I think I’ll always remember this peculiar confluence of events: the Zimmerman fire, my 50th birthday, and being sequestered in Albuquerque’s federal courthouse.

Russ Cole
Nighttime Shelving Supervisor, Zimmerman Library

My son Neil seemed to react to the fire pretty well initially. It wasn’t until some months later that he took out this big bright red piece of construction paper and drew a very nice picture of Zimmerman … then handed it to me saying, “Here’s a picture of Zimmerman burning.” Since then he hasn’t really seemed to focus on it. We were able to come in over the semester break when we checked the book drop and watched them carpet the circulation area, with all our stuff piled outside. Then, one of the first times he was with me after that for a long enough time, he sat down and drew a detailed picture of my new desk area. I don’t know if that was him processing it or not. Oh, and he and I keep our bikes in the bike room, so we couldn’t bike ride for months until they finally let us get them. That was right before the asbestos abatement between the mailroom and circulation.

Nearly one year later … acknowledge our struggles. Honor our spirit. Celebrate our triumphs. And remember.

April 13, 2007 3:16 a.m.
sec 6 to east side and begins moving Congressional Records from closed stack area to center of B1 (temporary move) and Serial Set up to 1364-1

When I rode my bike to work that day, past the yellow crime-scene tape that surrounded the north parking lot, the smell of smoke was powerful. The sense of dèjá vu began to slide into something more like shock. I have been working at UNM since the fall of 1991, since I was a young pup fresh out of my undergraduate days in Indiana. All of my library jobs to this point have involved to some degree the care and feeding of print serials—a dying art, I guess. I thought about how I would feel if I were my science journals that had gone up in smoke. Zimmerman may not be my “home” library, but nonetheless I have spent plenty of time in the stacks on all floors for my own coursework—and of course to borrow a lot of books. I have also spent a great deal of time in the basement, working with all of the technical services people whose offices were near those periodical stacks. Zimmerman has been part of my life for many years now.

As soon as I saw Fran Wilkinson on Monday morning, I offered to help with fire recovery in any way that I could. I thought that maybe my experiences with the recovery after the CSEL flood as well as my ability to deal with periodicals might be useful. At this point, no one knew the extent of the damage, or when any salvage efforts would begin. As the first post-fire week went on, and we—all of us—still didn’t have access to the building or really any knowledge of the extent of the damage, or when any salvage efforts would begin. I won’t go into any detail here, as we’ve recorded that information elsewhere. We knew it was critical to get a plan for getting the remaining contents packed up and out of the basement. I wasn’t going to go into any detail here, as we’ve recorded that information elsewhere. We knew it was critical to get a plan for getting the remaining contents packed up and out of the basement.

As we walked north and I saw the gaping hole in the center of those northeast stacks, where burnt volumes and twisted shelving had already been removed, I understood what all that debris on the tarp had been. I remember going through a series of emotions, as the shock and sorrow began to be replaced with a lot of anger. I know that almost a year later we didn’t have an official report on the cause of the fire. But standing in that damaged basement, it was impossible not to know that a violent act had occurred that Sunday night. The sight took my breath away for a moment, almost like a physical blow. I hadn’t known what to expect in the basement, but somehow this wasn’t exactly what I had prepared myself for. I think the next thing out of my mouth was probably something brilliant, like “Oh, shit.” It was clear that this had been a major fire, and I kept thinking to myself how hard it actually is to set a bound volume on fire. All those crazed bigots who want to ban books from public libraries have an official report on the cause of the fire. But standing in that damaged basement, it was impossible not to know that a violent act had occurred that Sunday night.

Arrival of 16th truck from TX.

Anger can be a useful emotion at times, so it wasn’t too difficult to turn what I was feeling into motivation to make things right—or at least better. At this point, Dan and I had to formulate a plan for getting the remaining contents packed up and out of the basement. I wasn’t going to go into any detail here, as we’ve recorded that information elsewhere. We knew it was critical to get the salvage process moving, and that it was equally critical for the process to be well-organized so our collections could be put back together again someday.

The six weeks or so I spent immersed in the Zimmerman packout and initial recovery are east end of the building was dark. The smell of smoke was intense. As we walked through the Government Information reference area toward the periodical stacks, I saw a blue tarp on the floor near the GID desk. It was piled high with remnants and fragments of burned journals. The sight took my breath away for a moment, almost like a physical blow. I hadn’t known what to expect in the basement, but somehow this wasn’t exactly what I had prepared myself for. I think the next thing out of my mouth was probably something brilliant, like “Oh, shit.” It was clear that this had been a major fire, and I kept thinking to myself how hard it actually is to set a bound volume on fire. All those crazed bigots who want to ban books from public libraries have an official report on the cause of the fire. But standing in that damaged basement, it was impossible not to know that a violent act had occurred that Sunday night. Anger can be a useful emotion at times, so it wasn’t too difficult to turn what I was feeling into motivation to make things right—or at least better. At this point, Dan and I had to formulate a plan for getting the remaining contents packed up and out of the basement. I wasn’t going to go into any detail here, as we’ve recorded that information elsewhere. We knew it was critical to get the salvage process moving, and that it was equally critical for the process to be well-organized so our collections could be put back together again someday.

The six weeks or so I spent immersed in the Zimmerman packout and initial recovery are hard to describe. In my mind, that time is both utterly surreal yet also one of the most genuine
and authentic experiences I have ever had. It was nearly all-consuming: every moment I spent on campus was devoted to post-fire recovery; it was almost impossible to leave it behind at night, in part because the smell of smoke and dead journals lingered in my clothes, hair, and boots. The gritty reality of working in the stacks is juxtaposed in my memory with: the bizarre and extensive collection of clocks Dan acquired in his office; an hour or two I spent untangling and inventorying a never-ending pile of phones in what had been Sever’s office; and the melted light covers which protected rather than destroyed journals on top shelves. The progress made in the building each day by the packout teams, the cleanup crews, and the contractors was impressive. Being a part of this work and doing the physically demanding tasks required by the circumstances gave me a sense of accomplishment quite different than what I would normally experience at work.

I know that people have wondered why on earth I willingly volunteered to get involved in a dirty, challenging, and, at times, overwhelming and stressful project. I don’t know if I have an answer to that question. Many people have stepped up throughout this experience to help with the recovery, not just of the collections, but also in the restoration of services and workflows. There’s no question that the library staff have a strong commitment to the communities we serve, I think that for many of us, myself included, that level of commitment extends to the physical places as well. It is a place that gives you a tangible connection to philosophers, scientists, and students from years past, when you can pull off the shelf a volume printed ten, fifty, or a hundred years before your own birth. So, in part, my answer to “Why?” is that by working on the fire recovery, I can pay back at least partially an intangible debt I owe to the libraries of my past and current life that have been my refuge when I needed one, and nurtured my own journeys of exploration.

This past year here in the library has been strange because of the fire. Everything just changed. People changed. There was a lot of stress but many people actually got nicer. People just got nicer and everyone was sympathetic. They’d say, “You’re not here anymore; well, where are you?” Everybody wanted to know where you were the day of the fire. And I still can’t believe it’s been over a year. You got to know the security guards. And I saw people who worked for the library that I never knew did. I’d see them come through the building before, but I didn’t know they worked here.

What got to me, too, was that I’d thought, “Construction workers? Messy men.” Actually, they were the cleanest people around, way cleaner than the students. They were very neat. I was surprised by that. I thought they’d destroy the bathrooms, but, no. At one time they were doing something I had to tell their foreman about and he lined them up at lunchtime and told them, so they were mad at me for a while, but not too bad. I asked them, “Would you do that at home?” “No, my wife would kill me,” they’d all tell me. So I said, “Excuse me, just consider me like your wife.” [Laughter]

Most people were very nice … and they were funny. They made me laugh. All through the bad, taking out of stuff and all the walls coming down and all the dirt coming through, they were funny. I enjoyed that time. As bad as the library was burned, it has still been a fun time.

Barbara Aragon
Custodian, Zimmerman Library

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While documenting the fire recovery there was also the aesthetic level for the lack of a better word. Something about the visuals that came out of this whole process was very interesting and some of the photographs I picked came out of that. I think a person’s own sensibilities dictate that, you can’t help it. You’re on your knees looking up; you’re trying to frame it in such a way. I don’t know what it is. You see it in documentaries, with good photographers, you see it in newspapers and magazines—where a photographer’s taken a picture but it’s also a beautiful picture. I’m not saying that I’m trying to do that in a conscious way, but subconsciously you do that.

When the basement was completely demolished, completely empty there were just bare concrete walls. There was all this space that had been full and active and now was just dead, a vacant, open space. At that time there was obviously the potential for looking at it in more than a strictly documentary way.
At the Welcome Back Days celebration in August 2005, the University Libraries handed out several black and white postcards. One displayed a cheerleader in calf-length skirt, bobby-socks and saddle shoes kicking up a leg beside a huge fire: the bonfire for the 1952 Homecoming football game. I was born in 1952 and, enjoying that connection, carried off one of those cards.

In September 2005, the University Libraries underwent a rather disruptive reorganization. Emotions flared, departments dissolved. Thinking of Nero and a burning Rome, I taped that high-stepping cheerleader and her roaring flames outside my office door.

When a real fire struck Zimmerman Library six months later, I wondered about the power of images then modified that original card. Perhaps in the future we’ll take a bit more care with the images we use to welcome in the academic year.

One of the real plusses out of this whole thing, for me at least, was being able to work in Centennial and Parish and getting to know other staff I’d never really taken the time to talk to. Also the students, getting to know the students at both places, and the different climates of the other circulation desks. That was really nice.

And another thing I want to say is how the top levels in the administration really supported us, at least I felt that way. They really helped us deal with the changing situations. And their putting up that display about the fire. I think that really helped impress patrons with the magnitude of the damage, what had really happened. You could just watch them take it in.
Aaron Blecha
Student Employee, Zimmerman Library

The Library of Congress description of the book I made about Zimmerman for my class this semester is “peep show.” My description, however, would be “an accordion-bound perspective book.” It’s a book that lies flat when closed, about the size of a small paperback, but if you pull the book covers apart it is, in effect, very much like an accordion. It expands to a length of two maybe three feet at the most, although that’s a little bit large. The interleaving plates in this accordion structure, if you look through a peep hole at one end of the book, produce a three-dimensional effect. You see a fore-field and various degrees of perspective going back, often in a landscape setting. A project I want to do for a bookmaking class I’m currently enrolled in—and also to highlight the fact that we’ve received several of these “peep show” books in the CSWR collection—is of Zimmerman Library starting with the West Wing and various masses of the structure of Zimmerman Library. The rear panel will be a plume of smoke coming from the northeast corner of the building through a skylight closest to where the fire in the basement happened. I’m still hunting for images. I know a lot of people are writing poetry and putting together other artistic projects. I hope this will be an addition to those contributions.

Flora Clancy
Professor Emeritus, Art and Art History

I found out about the fire from the newspaper—the Albuquerque Tribune—and it took a while to understand how serious it was. I believe Deborah Cole was the one who told me where and how to find out what had been destroyed. When I understood where the major damage had been, I was in denial that it actually and directly affected my research resources. I’ve been working on two research projects, a monograph on the monuments of Piedras Negras, Guatemala and an article on the earliest dated stela of Tikal, Guatemala. Both, of course, are ancient Pre-Columbian art. I use the very periodicals—anthropology and archaeology—that were destroyed in the fire.

I also knew in my gut that the fire had been set on purpose but have no idea whether the subject of the periodicals was a target or just any place in the basement, which would certainly do great damage. When I came to Zimmerman after the fire the building still smelled of smoke. I couldn’t then and I still can’t actually grasp that anyone would do such a thing. Libraries are sacred. I thought of the Library at Alexandria, of Nazi book burnings, of Fahrenheit 451. (I’m not sure I have the degree number correct, but I think it’s the temperature at which books will burn.)

At first, after the fire, I was unbelieving that my usual resources were gone; that I couldn’t consult them. I think it was about three or four months later that I tentatively tried Interlibrary Loan for an article I really needed to read. I had it within 24 hours! “Wow!” I thought, “What a resource!” Since then I have regularly gone to ILL and have been truly pleased with their ability to locate material and their efficiency in delivering it to me. Most of my interaction has been done online, another amazing gift: to receive an article that I just printed out at home. Every time I get material from them I feel grateful to be able to continue my research. I’ve even written them to say so. Without ILL my work would have come to a screeching and nasty halt.

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November 14

ALC relocates from Tower 1 to 83 CSWR call numbers F through F804 A3 and from 83 to Tower 2 ZIM Dewey call numbers 000 thru 133.1 Od5a.

November 15

ALC relocates from Tower 1 to 83 CSWR call numbers through F811. W3 copy 3, from 83 to Tower 1 ZIM Dewey call numbers through 324.73 M137T, and from 83 to Tower 2 ZIM Dewey call numbers 360.
For a long time, it seemed that all I saw were flashes and fragments from those first days after the fire: Shelves fallen in with journals dumped on the floor, everything coated in soot, barely visible with flashlight and emergency lighting. The huge tarp piled high with charred fragments of journals. Pieces of a charred page from the 1800s. Plastic melted on top of the books after flowing down from the melted lights and alarms.

Disbelief. How could it possibly happen? Fury. What evil could do this?

Later: gratitude as colleagues across the country sent their sympathy and offers of help. Even some huge conglomerates that rarely have a caring human face offered support.

Getting things out of my office was incredibly hard, and yet a step forward. Packing in half an hour. Separating my personal things and the things I might need to work with soon. Knowing it could be ages before I saw the rest of the files. Knowing I would never see that office again. Hard to pack and not cry. And yet it was a start toward rebuilding.

Reopening Zimmerman 2nd and 3rd floors was a huge step forward. A few times when I was on Fire Watch, I talked with faculty and former library employees who came to reassure themselves that Zimmerman did survive. It was hurt, but it would recover. Zimmerman had a meaning far beyond just that of a library building; it had an emotional identity that called to people.

And I know we are recovering. The building hasn’t been this clean since it was built. We have new computers, new shelves, new flooring, new electronic journals. We are healing. We will rebuild the basement.

But it will never be exactly the same. A collection that was built over a century with the work of many librarians cannot be completely restored. Beyond that, the sense of violation and vulnerability will never completely go away. My mind knows we are recovering, and even that some things will be much better than they were “Before the Fire.” And my heart still mourns at the evil and the loss.

Walking through the stacks... Discovering Life and Look magazines from WWII. Perhaps the ones that my mother, father, aunts, uncles, and grandparents leafed through for photographs of a world gone awry. I come upon copies of Revista de Occidente from the twenties, did Federico García Lorca peruse that very issue once upon a time? Wonderingly, I open pages of The Yellow Book to Aubrey Beardsley’s decadent prints, more than a century old. All gone, because of the lack of a sprinkler system in a university library where so many reviews and magazines, treasured and ancient, like our old ones, required vigilant forethought. How to convey the way I feel? A metaphor:

Sudden divorce:
My lawyer got wife, kids, home, car, cat, and canary.
With his bill came a friendly note.
In my own “best interests, and those of all concerned.”
Sever Bordeianu
Coordinator, Print Resources

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT BY FIRE:

On how to weed those things that nobody ever read anyway

The cleanup and the packout after the fire were intense. Five of us examined and inventoried thousands of volumes on random topics destroyed in the fire. The fire did not shelfread, itjumped across shelves, and sometimes it burned only the top rows, or skipped some volumes. But journals are always seductive, and even in the middle of this intensity, it was impossible not to open the issue of *Paris Match* reporting Grace Kelly’s car accident, or the issue of a Spanish magazine reporting Franco’s death. Trashing those made me feel like I was trashing a moment of my own history, because I remembered vividly when those events occurred, and their impact on world history.

And yet, I probably spent as much time looking through issues of a title that had no impact on world history—and consequently I don’t remember much from its content. We had to trash our entire run of the USSR’s *Bulletin of the International Peasant Union*. Twenty-one volumes in all. It was a true Soviet product. The volumes were big and heavy—no way I could pick up more than one or two in one hand. Here was a title that proletarian sweat had produced, at great hardship, during great times of privations for the population, its only purpose being to propagate communist nonsense, and which our library had dutifully collected, bound, and shelved, and which was probably being read for the very first time (the pages looked very pristine behind the burned covers), and for the last time. “Up in smoke” gained a special meaning in this situation. Just like the ideas discussed in the issues of this worthless journal.

I feel that an existential justice had happened, on a small scale, to be sure. I’m sure there are dozens of other research libraries in the world who have not burned down, and where the pristine volumes of this journal are proudly taking up prime space on their library shelves.

In the turmoil and the chaos, for a fleeting moment, I felt that for once the fire’s indiscriminate destruction did something constructive, something that none of us would have done deliberately.

The saddest thing of all, when I checked the LIBROS record, this humble title, *Bulletin*, had been expertly cataloged with one uniform title and six alternate titles:

- Bulletin (International Peasant Union)
- International Peasant Union bulletin
- International Peasant Union bulletin monthly
- Monthly bulletin of the International Peasant Union
- Monthly bulletin (International Peasant Union)
- Bulletin of the International Peasant Union
- IPU bulletin

No lack of access to this title. And the holdings statement looks great. Sadly, our only gap was v. 4, no. 5.
Maria Szasz
Graduate Student, Department of English
University Libraries’ National Library Week Student Poetry Contest, Runner-Up

THE INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY OF THEATRE

A heavy, three-volume set,
With handsome mauve covers
Only a scholar could love.
I once could find them in the dark,
Lying patiently in the far east stacks
Of the first-floor Zimmerman reference section.
Over six years and counting.
Their endless information has fueled
Essays, exams, a dissertation,
My dreams.
An amazing, invaluable resource.
After the Fire, they were “UNAVAILABLE.”
Were they lost in the blaze,
Charred beyond repair?
Reduced to smoky, brittle fragments
Blowing through cracks in the outside fence?
Just one of the hundreds of books and journals
Gone forever in a lick of flame.

Why would anyone destroy books?
An angry student’s deliberate revenge?
Or a horrible mistake?
Official lips say nothing.
Whatever the motive, the damage is still
Beyond measure.
Impacting all of UNM,
Reverberating through readers around the world.
My favorite three-volume set
Suffered only minor injuries:
One broken binding.
A sad, but small price to pay
For the safe return of Knowledge.
Reminds me
Never to take for granted again.

Susan Magee
Coordinator, Web Services and Customer Studies

It’s hard to believe it’s already been a year since it happened. I think they should give us the day off, everybody, on the 30th. I think they should honor the anniversary, something significant. I think they should do some event for the campus that says, “This happened.” They need to be talking to the Lobo about running an article about “this is what happened; this is how far we’ve come, all of that.” Or a human interest story in the Lobo about what the staff has done to keep their spirits up. The campus needs to know that it’s been a struggle behind the scenes. That it hasn’t been easy. And contractors come and go and they were part of the community for a while as well. We need to honor the people who’ve kept the library going. Everybody in the system has contributed, even those of us who weren’t located in Zimmerman. Everybody has had a part in keeping services going. That’s my opinion. If I ran the world, it would be better informed.

*As a direct result of Susan’s comments, UNM Today fire anniversary articles already in the works were updated with interviews of various UL staff involved in ongoing fire-related projects.

Progress made to date on recovery work from the October 31 flood damage:

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Lying patiently in the far east stacks
Of the first-floor Zimmerman reference section.
Over six years and counting.
Their endless information has fueled
Essays, exams, a dissertation,
My dreams.
An amazing, invaluable resource.
After the Fire, they were “UNAVAILABLE.”
Were they lost in the blaze,
Charred beyond repair?
Reduced to smoky, brittle fragments
Blowing through cracks in the outside fence?
Just one of the hundreds of books and journals
Gone forever in a lick of flame.

Why would anyone destroy books?
An angry student’s deliberate revenge?
Or a horrible mistake?
Official lips say nothing.
Whatever the motive, the damage is still
Beyond measure.
Impacting all of UNM,
Reverberating through readers around the world.
My favorite three-volume set
Suffered only minor injuries:
One broken binding.
A sad, but small price to pay
For the safe return of Knowledge.
Reminds me
Never to take for granted again.
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES CELEBRATES
NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK
POETRY READING • AWARDS • RECEPTION
APRIL 20TH, 2007 • 1:00 PM • WILLARD ROOM • ZIMMERMAN LIBRARY

Student Poetry Contest Winner

UNM Gerald W. May Award 2006: Kathy Gienger

University Libraries is celebrating employees who have gone above and beyond in helping Zimmerman recover from the fire last year. Employees who have made special contributions were recognized at an April event. Three quarters of the University Libraries staff members were displaced by the fire. One third of the staff and faculty who worked in the building remain in temporary spaces at other branches while the basement is rebuilt. Librarians think in terms of books, and Library Specialist in the Center for Southwest Research Deborah Cole is leading a group of employees who are developing a book from the experience. The book will have a limited publication, but celebrates the efforts and experiences of employees through the past year of rebuilding and recovery. Cole said this is one way staff members can handle the changes they have seen in their work environment."

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UNM Today, April 30, 2007

Three UNM Staff Honored for Exceptional Service

UNM Today, May 7, 2007

UNM 2007 Outstanding Work Group Award:
Center for Academic Programs Support (CAPS)

UL Exemplary Employee Award 2007:
Bonifacio Anglada, Jr., Ed Castillo-Padilla, Louie Perez, Anne Schultz

UL Bright Idea Award 2007:
Rik Burkard, Louise Danielson, Gail Lane, Magoo Shoulderblade

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Center for Academic Programs Support (CAPS)
Kathy Gienger
Print Resources

WHAT WOULD FREUD SAY… SOME TIMES A LIBRARY IS JUST A LIBRARY?

I never dreamt much about the library before the fire. But since the fire I’ve dreamt about nearly every area in it and some that aren’t.

THE BASEMENT: I guess the one dream that relates most to the library fire is what I like to refer to as the Universal Studios dream. In it, I ride the elevator down to the basement with other people to get a tour of the burned out basement. We get off the elevator and into carts that look just like the big canvas mail bins Louie Perez and Bonifacio Anglada use. The basement is dark and the carts begin to roll across the floor. The closer we get to where the fire took place the more burned out the basement looks with charred bookshelves and destroyed books piled up all around. It is warm and there is a glow from embers still smoldering after the fire. The glow increases and it gets warmer and warmer as we approach the center of where the fire was supposed to have begun.

THE WEST WING: In my favorite dream, the West Wing is what I would imagine an old European style library would look like. It has beautiful parquet floors, polished wooden bookcases and panels in a reddish brown wood full of what look like rare books in leather and velum bindings. The most wonderful part of this area of the library is what used to be the John Gaw Meem Room. The room is an office with polished wooden floors, a large antique desk, and one wall is lined with French doors that open up onto an English garden with lilac bushes, large trees, a fountain and a lawn.

One dream that takes place in this European style West Wing involves a tea party to honor the architects doing the work to restore the basement and the reference area. We eat on fine china and are served tea and coffee from china teapots, by waiters in white jackets and bowties. There is a banquet table with platters full of cookies and pastries. For some odd reason the cookies are shaped like exotic birds and prehistoric fish. In this dream there is a curio cabinet that catches my eye. In it are amber figurines and other objects including one that is a good luck charm that apparently really works. I want to open up the cabinet to use the charm but it is locked.

THE LOBBY AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES: In two of my dreams, the main lobby of the library is more like some expensive corporate business office in a big city with marble floors and walls and a big staircase leading up to the 2nd floor. In one dream I go up to the Administrative offices on the 2nd floor and they are also my idea of corporate offices. They have glass and stainless steel walls and very expensive modern looking furniture. I’ve only dreamt once about this part of the Library.

TECHNICAL SERVICES: As for technical services, it has come up in at least two or three dreams now. It is always a maze with very little room to move around. It is packed with desks and people, all separated by bookshelves that are crammed full of books, boxes and papers. In one of these technical services dreams one wall of the building opens out onto a runway where planes land and boxes of books are rolled down a conveyor directly into the library to be processed. If you want to go to book seats on flights. The planes leave directly from the library. However, you do have to go up to the 2nd floor and through security to board them.

VARIOUS FLOORS: In at least two dreams the technical services elevator goes not only to the 3rd floor of the main library but it connects to all of the tower floors. Unfortunately the elevator never seems to take me to the floor where I want to go. I inevitably end up on a dark floor or in the basement or a boiler room being stalked by a killer. If I try to take a stairwell up or down to avoid the elevator scenario, I still end up in a dark and scary area of the library. Having to go from one floor to another in my library dreams has become a dilemma.

ESCAPE: In one dream, Central Avenue passes right by the north side of the Library and city buses pull up near the loading dock. I get on one of these buses to go home but end up going farther and farther west. Central changes into an L.A. style freeway and I’m on my way to the west coast. Two hours on a city bus on this road and I could make it all the way to L.A. Escape at last!

The Library
November 26
ALC relocates from B1 to B16 CDC, South Valley, Wipo, Foia, Sandia collections

November 27
ALC relocates Congressional Records from replaced, floors in public bathrooms in basement lobby areas removed in preparation for scheduled upgrades (to include new fixtures, dividers, floors and walls to meet ADA standards and new design and color schemes in basement)
It seems like the longest year in the near twenty that we have spent together. I was up and about, as usual, around 5 a.m. on the morning of April 30, 2006. After putting about for a bit I turned on the television to KOAT-7 to catch the early news. Stunned and jaw-dropped, I rushed to wake Rik Burkard, a Library Specialist III, working in the Serials & Acquisitions Department in binding and marking who had just completed his 19th year with UNM exactly two months earlier on February 28, 2006.

We watched together in shocked silence as the morning anchors and reporters told what little information was known at that early hour. I could see the devastation on Rik’s face and noticed his shoulders slumping down and hands clasping, both classic motions when he is in distress.

After more than a week of work suspension with little incoming news about the status of the Zimmerman basement, Rik was at last called back to campus. There were so many questions to be answered, not the least of which was where he would actually sit down to do his work. As he came home each evening suffering from anxiety and frustration and sadness, the atmosphere in our household grew more depressive and somber. I certainly didn’t know what to do in support of a person dispossessed from their career employment. It was a struggle for many, many weeks but eventually returned to some normalcy by late summer.

As is his nature, Rik threw himself into the situation and ultimately, with co-workers, was instrumental in re-creating his Zimmerman basement work area in a 2nd floor hallway offered by Parish Memorial Library. The Fire Watch alerts had begun and dozens of dedicated employees signed up to take their training and assignments. As much as he wanted to be a part of that diligent effort, sadly Rik was not able to participate.

When he was about 12 years old, his three older brothers convinced him to take an enormous whiff from a bottle of industrial ammonia. In an instant Rik’s olfactory nerve was burned and destroyed. Since then he can barely smell anything at all, with even the smell of skunk, leaking gas or intense perfume completely escaping him. He has even lost much of his ability to taste and discern ingredients in food. He has lived with it for more than 35 years without much distress until the Zimmerman Fire Watch was set up. He knew he could not smell smoke and therefore could not take a watch assignment. Just loud enough for him to hear, co-workers wondered aloud why “some people” were exempt from Fire Watch duty while others had to suffer through. Only I can tell you how much that hurt Rik’s feelings, as he would never tell you himself.

In the past 12 months Rik has been instrumental in both finding a home for himself and his co-workers as well as in the restructuring and refurbishment of the Zimmerman basement work area. On April 20, 2007, he was the proud co-recipient of the Bright Idea Award for certain of his efforts. Rik is not an extrovert and it is pretty difficult to tell what emotion is impacting him at any given moment. It’s taken me nearly twenty years, and I’m still not always right in assuming what is going on inside his head or heart. But you can trust me to tell you that the Zimmerman fire impacted him in the extreme and he will never be the same. If you’ll excuse the pun, he has “fire” ants in his pants to get back to the basement to resume the remainder of his career in the UL system.
WALLS AND HOLES

I noticed the first one while washing my dishes in the West Wing kitchen: a one-inch square sliced into the sheetrock wall. Then I started seeing them everywhere. Most occurred near the baseboards, a few at chest-height. Every floor in the tower had at least two, one at either end. Three had been cut in the small West Wing kitchen and several in each of the walls on the 2nd and 3rd floors in the main part of the library. The empty squares remained where samples had been taken to determine if too much or any ozone from the fire had permeated those walls. In this case, a little bit of absence meant a presence—those walls—could remain.

It seemed only natural to pair those squares with an image I’d taken on my first visit to the basement after the fire, a two-hour Fire Watch shift on the Sunday night before Fall semester 2006 began. “Shadows” of what had been the inside walls of a row of carrels represented the other end of the spectrum of loss this fire had cast. That haunting, scraped-down patina of deconstruction joined the sharp edges of the squares to give voice to the feelings colliding inside me as I walked through an area completely stripped of familiarity and “place.”

I often think, as we—staff, patrons, guards, construction workers and janitors—walk and work and go about our days, that below us the basement waits. The rattling wind and abraded surfaces, raw and disturbing, wait. Just like the unsettling emotions and memories each of us now carry because of what came in the fire’s wake: sharp edges and scraped places, not at all easy to relate. Walls and holes.
It’s interesting, over the course of planning for the renovation, in some ways we’ve switched roles with the architects and designers. They wanted to add some design elements to make a statement. Then we stressed that it really needs to function as a library too. We needed to make sure the collections were near elevators, those kinds of practical considerations. So then they took away all the design pieces and it was really plain. For example, we were trying to figure out what ceiling height was needed to maximize our storage: Can you get an 18-inch clearance between the sprinklers and the books on the top shelf? Of course, we were concerned about maximizing the shelving capacity. The reality of managing and storing a million volumes in this building is not an abstract notion.

Then at some point, somebody said, “Well, do you have to have a dropped ceiling?” And we started thinking about it. So it released this creativity. They told us it can be kind of fun architecturally because you use the venting and conduit as design features…. Then the architects who were working with the designers started playing around with the detail on the columns, selecting furniture, carpet, tile, colors, etc. It felt like the basement was getting its soul back.

Then there’s the office space. When we look at the human factor of all this, it’s been symptomatic of trying to bring people together to make decisions and there’s still a lot of emotion around the loss and changes imposed on people. It’s probably been some of the most challenging processes of the recovery, the human side of it.

Fran Wilkinson, Ed Padilla and I were just looking at how everything is going to converge later this year: the installation of compact shelving in ZIM B1, B2 and B3; the basement remodeling should begin around June 1; and the plans for the move into the new Fine Arts and Design Library in the fall of ´07. And of course the packback of all the materials from the basement. We’ve got over a 100,000 volumes sitting in 17,000 boxes and 200+ cabinets of microfilm in a warehouse in Texas that need to come back. The reality of managing and storing a million volumes in this building is not an abstract notion.

To me the numbers really bring it home, like 3,000 linear feet (the estimate of volumes lost in the fire), what does that really mean? It’s about 36,000 volumes. This is not an insignificant matter and there are those in this organization who I don’t really think have grasped that. It’s not business as usual.

We have an opportunity for change—not just talk about it—but to take action. This is the future, that continuance piece. It’s the “What next? What now?” piece. We’re not putting the library back the way it was. It’s the “What next? What now?” piece. We’re not putting the library back the way it was. Yes, we are putting books back in a building, but we’re not doing it the same way because we know there’s a different path down which we as an organization—as an institution—need to go. We need to put our full energies and resources toward making it happen. So we’ll see if we can pull this off. It’s a little scary. It’s very scary. But worth doing.
Russ Cole
Nighttime Shelving Supervisor, Zimmerman Library

When security is no longer here and the building is all opened up as it was, we’re going to redo some of the training for the shelving crew. But the next time an alarm goes off at night? I try to visualize what that’s going to feel like and what we are going to do.

One thing that haunted me a little, when I do my rounds for checking all the doors, the last rounds either start with the West Wing or basement. The night of the fire, I thought, “Maybe I’ll try the basement first.” Then I thought, “No, I’ll do the West Wing.” So I’d just come back from going all through the West Wing, sat down, took a bite of fried chicken and the alarm goes off. If I’d done it the other way around I might have run across something.

As for the one-year anniversary, the date has occurred to me. I’ll probably mention to the people who are working that night to have a little bit of extra vigilance because right before finals the general population, be they students or whoever, gets a little crazy and if weird things happen, it’s going to happen then. So we’ll be kind of on our toes, though the student workers will be a bit more frazzled, too, so we’ll try to account for all that, but we’ll keep the vigilance maybe one notch higher on that night. Traditionally, if a fight is going to break out in the building between patrons, it’ll happen in finals week. So everyone is edgy.

You know, I mentioned sending that second person up to the 2nd floor and he found people that the other person hadn’t found—it astonished me that they hadn’t heard the alarm. Because I thought they would have. So I realized that I don’t have a clear knowledge of where people don’t hear alarms. Because Verity Robert said, when she went around in the basement—and thank god it was her down there knocking on those study rooms in the basement—in those rooms people hadn’t heard it at all. So when we get to the point when we’re back fully operational, I want to be real clear on where you can’t hear the alarms. Where the people were sitting and studying on the 2nd floor the night of the fire is where those windows overlook Smith Plaza; they were completely oblivious to the alarm.