

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

J. Michael Homan
Medical Library Association President
2000–2001



Although he is always thoroughly prepared and meticulously organized, passion is central to Michael Homan. It not only defines his relation to life but is also a quality he admires in colleagues as they face the challenges of reshaping their future. "The key to understanding the passion health sciences librarians have for their profession is easy," he wrote in 1998. "Both exceptional patient care and discov-

eries in biomedical research rely on timely access to a vast and growing knowledgebase of information, and librarians serve as the vital member of the health care team who can quickly find, filter, evaluate, and manage quality information" [1].

This is not hype for public consumption. Michael says the same thing in private with the same enthusiasm: "I think this is the best time ever to be a medical librarian

due to the transforming power of information technology. More than at any other time in history, medical librarians are able to contribute in a significant way to excellence in clinical, scientific, and administrative decision making and in the advancement of the biological sciences." His combination of historical vision and personal passion make him an ideal choice to lead the Medical Library Association (MLA) into the new millennium.

Michael has served since 1994 as director of libraries at the Mayo Foundation, Rochester, Minnesota, and since 1995 as assistant professor of medical informatics at the Mayo Medical School. His colleagues throughout MLA recognize him as editor of the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, a responsibility he held from the October 1996 through the April 2000 issue. These distinguished aspects of his professional life, including numerous publications, are what you may expect in an incoming president. You will not understand Michael Homan, however, if you think he is all work and no play. The two frequently combine or intermingle. His capacity to enjoy life embraces every aspect of his library career. It extends to family and friends. It includes an endless appetite for travel and a truly extraordinary love of music. Music is perhaps the best place to get to know him.

Music and especially opera Michael openly describes as "passions of mine." He began piano lessons at age four, but his parents stopped them because, he said, "I was doing everything by ear." He started again at ten, in somewhat more disciplined fashion, and continued piano through his undergraduate

years at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, where he majored in history with minors in chemistry and biology. He sang baritone in the college choir. He still recalls the thrill of the first concert he attended with his father on a family Easter vacation in San Francisco in the early 1960s. It was an Artur Rubenstein piano recital at San Francisco's War Memorial Opera House. He remembers the first opera he attended: Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Catholic University in Washington, DC, performed while he was at the National Library of Medicine for MEDLARS training (the connection is typical). He returned the following evening to see the same opera with a new cast. As he says, "I was hooked on opera from that time forward." Today, no trip to New York, Chicago, or San Francisco is complete for Michael without attending a performance at their world famous opera houses. In winter, he is likely to be found at the Minnesota Opera in Saint Paul, and, in summer, he makes an annual pilgrimage to the Santa Fe Opera.

Michael grew up in Wallowa County, Oregon—the far northeastern corner, sheep and cattle country, wild and mountainous. His childhood included an association with libraries, as his great-aunt Bertha was city librarian for fifty years at the little Carnegie library in his hometown of Enterprise, Oregon. During the summer, he would visit the central Multnomah County Library in downtown Portland, with its seemingly awesome collections. After graduation from Lewis and Clark College—where he had difficulty deciding among his passions for music, biology, chemistry, and history—he focused on librarianship. His early fond memories of libraries and librarians combined with a generalist approach to education led him finally to the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago. He re-

ports that he thoroughly enjoyed Chicago ("with the exception of a cataloging course") and soon began a post-master's internship at the Biomedical Library, University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), under the leadership of Louise Darling and her excellent team.

Innovation might as well be Michael's middle name, if his middle name were not Michael. His career has already spanned the period from punched-card, batch-mode processing of MEDLARS search formulations to the current Web-based world of medical librarianship. He helped design and teach the first MEDLINE training class offered outside the National Library of Medicine—at UCLA in 1972—and was one of the first medical librarians to use the network on which the current Internet was based (the ARPANET at a MEDLINE training class at Hawaii Medical Library in the early 1970s). Were these challenges not enough, he also helped design and construct two new libraries: the Corporate Technical Library at The Upjohn Company (1984) and the consolidated Science Library at the University of California, Irvine (1994). Meanwhile, he served as the first managing editor of books for the Medical Library Association (1990–1996) and as the twenty-second editor of the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* (1996–2000).

From the start of his career, Michael was fascinated by literature scanning, indexing, and searching. Beginning in July 1971 as a Biomedical Library intern at UCLA, he learned in-depth searching and indexing at UCLA's Brain Information Service and MEDLARS Search Station, and completed MEDLARS indexing training and the first MEDLINE online training course at the National Library of Medicine that same year. Michael's skills and enthusiasm moved him rapidly up to new positions. From July 1972 to March 1974, he worked as a MEDLARS

search analyst, accountable for providing online and batch-mode searching of the MEDLARS database serving a four-state region. During this time, Michael developed his talent for planning, creating, and teaching classes and workshops. Still moving up, in March 1974, he accepted a position as head of information services for the Pacific Southwest Regional Medical Library Service (PSRMLS), staying through February 1979. By now, Michael's gifts for organization and his interpersonal skills made it seem natural that, five months later, he should also be appointed as the regional medical library media consultant (at a time when media was the big new emphasis in technology for medical education). In this position, Michael was accountable for planning, evaluating, and providing a regional audiovisual reference, workshop, and consulting service to a four-state area served by PSRMLS under contract to the National Library of Medicine.

Michael has always been a planner drawn by new challenges. With skills and experience honed at UCLA, in April 1979, he accepted the position of head of information services and central technical documents at the Corporate Technical Library for The Upjohn Company (now Pharmacia-Upjohn), a multinational pharmaceutical company in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Under Lorraine Schulte's leadership, the Corporate Technical Library had become the largest and most technologically advanced of the company's various libraries and information centers, with twenty professionals and twenty support staff. Michael adapted rapidly to the corporate environment and quickly won the respect of both staff and management. During his tenure at Upjohn, Michael helped design and build a new corporate library and introduced a variety of products and services in the areas he directed: proprietary databases of technical reports, published product lit-

erature database, computer literature research and analysis, reference, online training program, and other public services operations. In May 1988, as the planner gene kicked in once again, Michael, with happy memories of Kalamazoo and Upjohn, accepted a position at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) as assistant university librarian for the sciences.

This new job offered round-the-clock challenges, especially as it included planning and creating a large new science library from the ground up. Michael was also responsible for planning, directing, and evaluating library services and programs in the sciences as well as for the management of four science libraries serving the College of Medicine, the School of Biological Sciences, the School of Physical Sciences, and the UCI Medical Center. Once again, Michael found himself riding several horses at once. From January 1991 to June 1993 at UCI, he was simultaneously the acting assistant university librarian (AUL) for humanities and social sciences, with management responsibility for all public service operations in those programs. From September 1991 to January 1994, he was also library personnel supervisor in the absence of an AUL for personnel. Passion alone would not have seen him through. It took determination, tirelessness, a gift for time management, and personal grace under fire. What else could explain the abilities to work with architects, planners, builders, designers, managers, administrators, and library staff at every point in the process of building a new science library while still retaining a sense of humor?

Pursued by Mayo Clinic to serve as its new library director, Michael finally relented once the new UCI science library building project was

completed. He joined the Mayo Foundation as director of libraries in May 1994 and was made assistant professor of medical informatics in the Mayo Medical School in June 1995. The move to Mayo has been a perfect fit for Michael, calling upon the experience he gained in both academic and corporate institutions. Because he hates hot weather, the snows of Rochester do not alarm him, and he rides out the winter storms in his hilltop home in the woods, visited by the local deer, woodpeckers, wild turkeys, and an occasional pesky groundhog.

Michael will be an excellent MLA president, not least because he is deeply committed to all the responsibilities he accepts. His compassion, ethical sense, and strength of character pervade every aspect of his life and work. At Upjohn, he could usually be found at work on Saturday mornings, although Saturday afternoons were almost always devoted to the broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera during the opera season. The loyalty of his staffs is legendary. He cares about individuals and gives generously of his time and knowledge. He stands up for his beliefs and does not suffer fools gladly (though he is, of course, always polite). His desktop is usually so spare and well organized that one colleague at Upjohn hinted that it must contain a trap door where all the paper goes.

Even after giving up the rigorous pleasure of endless deadlines as editor, Michael still has the *Bulletin* very much in his thoughts. He helped launch an electronic table of contents in 1997 [2, 3] and strongly believes in the need to publish an electronic version of the entire *Bulletin*. He has argued that much of the infrastructure for the publication of a peer-reviewed, high-quality journal was already in place. An

online version would offer many gains, he wrote in 1999, especially in ease of access, greater visibility, attraction of additional authors, enhanced competitive position, and "refinement of MLA's image in the networked environment" [4]. Stay tuned.

There are some things that will not change. Michael's love of travel both on the job and off duty included, most recently, a fall 1999 trip to France for a conference on digital libraries (at the new French national library in Paris), followed by a nine-day walking tour of Provence. Do not expect too many missed opportunities to attend his favorite opera, Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*. Loyalty is deeply important to Michael. He returns to visit his family in Oregon at least once or twice a year, reviving his spirits in the beautiful rural countryside where he grew up. Old friends, new friends, and colleagues from every part of the world will find that his many well-honed skills—complemented by warmth, laughter, and a real concern for others—bring a welcome start to a new century of leadership at MLA. We are lucky to have his vision and passion to guide us.

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