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LJ Talks to Librarian/Author Scott Douglas

Norman Oder -- *Library Journal*, 6/26/2008



When the Council on Library/Media Technicians (COLT) holds its **41st Annual Conference** for library support staff today and tomorrow in Anaheim, CA, as a precursor to the American Library Association Annual Conference, the presenter of the session on "Dealing with Difficult People" is Scott La Counte of the Haskett Branch, Anaheim Public Library.

[\(Check the LJ 2008 ALA Annual Conference page for more coverage.\)](#)

La Counte knows the territory; as Scott Douglas, he wrote the "humor memoir" *Quiet, Please: Dispatches from a Public Librarian*, published in April by Da Capo Press, and he blogs at [Speak Quietly](#). *LJ* gave it a mixed-but-positive [review](#).

This spring, reviewer and reporter Norman Oder sat down with the 30-year-old author in Anaheim to learn more about the man behind the book, and followed up recently by email.

What's the secret to dealing with difficult people?

It's not taking things personally, not losing your cool. It's not about you.

You have a lot of wacky characters in the book, including colleagues. Have any of them been annoyed?

Most people have read it, and no one's complained. The characters are composites. It's been fun watching people guess whose who, because more often than not they are wrong, but I think it's great that they're responding to the characters and identifying with them.

People thousands of miles away whom I have never met are writing to tell me how much a character is exactly like someone they work with.

Some of the book, you acknowledge, was exaggerated.

Memoirs are truth as the author sees it, which isn't always how other people see it. I definitely call it nonfiction, but a lot of it is tongue in cheek.

What was your goal with the book?

I want to open doors for a whole different audience. I also didn't just want to tell a bunch of funny library stories—I wanted it to follow an actual story complete with a conflict, turning point, and character development.

Before the book, you were best-known for "Dispatches from a Public Librarian" in *McSweeney's*. How did that start?

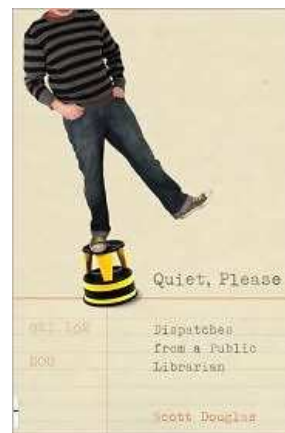
Luck. I was emailing a list piece. [*McSweeney's* likes to run lists.] The editor noted that a couple were library-related. He said, "Email me some stories about libraries." Actually, less than ten percent of the book is from *McSweeney's*.

You're pretty negative in the book about library school at San Jose State. Should aspiring librarians go to library school?

I don't know if they're getting what they're being promised. It was surprising how many faculty had never worked in a public library. I've heard better things about the new director, though. There's more of a focus on public libraries and less on theory. I did learn a lot from the library school practicum.

What would you teach if you taught LIS?

Probably computer literacy. My passion is teaching about computers and how to use them. It's amazing how far behind some librarians are. Librarians used to be the first ones out of the gate embracing new trends and technologies, but



some librarians are. Librarians used to be the first ones out of the gate embracing new trends and technologies, but lately too many have been taking a wait-and-see approach.

On rereading the book, it struck me that you're a conservative Christian--not too many librarians put that out there.

A lot of conservative Christians are young and are motivated by social issues. There's a book, *Velvet Elvis* by [Rob Bell](#), which is reinventing a lot of Christian ideals. I'm sure he has his own views on abortion, but his main concern is to help the community.

How does that apply to libraries?

It's serving people. The idea of serving people is very much an idea that a lot of librarians have forgotten. I've always wanted to go to other countries and start libraries. My brother was a missionary.

Why the pseudonym?

I knew if I wanted to keep writing, it would be an easier name to pronounce. I'll keep Scott La Counte if I ever do any more Christian writing.

Your writing can sometimes be a bit snarky, but in person, you seem more mild-mannered.

I was writing to entertain. The book is full of dark and dry humor that comes off snarky to some people.

The book has gotten a wide range of reviews—do you think reviewers "get" it?

The same thing every writer learns: don't take the reviews personally. Most reviews have been quite positive, which I take as a compliment. It's more important to me that I wrote something people talk about; it's been about three months and people are still talking about the book as much as they were when it first came out.

What are you working on now?

I'm working on something that will hopefully make people rethink what they knew about the Internet.

What else are you doing?

I'll also be at ALA on top of COLT, and I'll be at the Louisiana Book Festival in October. I released a middle grade book completely free on my [web site](#) this past week, and have already gotten a few hundred downloads (hopefully it will be in the thousands by the end of the month). People like free, and there's no reason why more writers can't give some of their stuff away. It's the direction the film and music industry has been going for years, and it's a trend the publishing industry will likely have to face very soon—especially if ebooks become increasingly popular.

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