Unauthorized “Improvements”
Spawn Campus-Wide Movement

A senior University of Toronto librarian has gained immense popularity across campus, and threatens to trigger a national movement, in an unexpected development that has the University’s senior Administration scrambling.

The case gained notoriety last Friday, when, in a landmark ruling, a UofT librarian was found guilty of improving University Property without prior approval from the Office of Advancement. Unauthorized improvement was only the leading wrong; additional charges were pressed of failing to respect the unremittingly staid and encrustifying character of the Memorandum of Agreement between the University and its faculty members and librarians, and of obsterperously subverting the contract between the University and the International Brotherhood of Painters, Oddfellows, and Allied Trades.

The incident involves Ms. Karen Melville, a highly respected librarian in the Faculty of Information Studies, where she is Director of the Professional Learning Centre (PLC). On an otherwise undistinguished Saturday afternoon last November, Ms. Melville, who, without avail, had 237 weeks earlier had submitted a formal request to have the walls repainted and the locks changed on her office, took matters into her own hand, came to work with paint brush and paint can in hand, and preemptorily transformed the walls of her office into something eminently livable. Members of the Faculty were shocked at how pleasant offices in the famously triangular and hexagonal building could be. “It was just sooo … .”, said Ms. Melville,

Cooking up a New Curriculum for PLC

Ms. Karen Melville, intrepid Director of the Professional Learning Centre, a Continuing Education Program of the Faculty of Information Studies, surprised the traditionally conservative library community by introducing a Professional Certificate in Baking, aimed squarely at the information technology and “dot-com” sector.

“In the recent economic down-turn,” explained Ms. Melville, “our customers came flocking to us for help. With investment from venture capitalists drying up, and with no prospects of revenue materializing any time soon, many of our client companies were turning to bake sales as a way of earning money. The problem is that virtually no one in the IT industry knows how to bake. As it has so many times before, PLC is stepping into the vacuum, to provide this essential skill base for the startup company of tomorrow. The next time the economy goes down the tubes, PLC graduates will come to the fore.”

Karen Melville brings her own talents to this new direction for the Faculty. She is a famed baker—a legendary producer of pastries, pies, muffins, and cookies, as well as having made successful forays into pasta and veal. But in offering the new program she is not resting entirely on her own laurels. She has invited distinguished members of her host Faculty to provide guest lectures on time-honoured problems in the baking industry. Prof. Ethel Auster will deliver a class entitled: “Downsizing the Pie: A history and prognosis of the tart in 21st century cuisine.” Prof. Andrew Clement will expound on “The Social Life of Muffins,” with
Faculty Sheds Past—Literally

Students, Faculty, and Staff of the Faculty of Information Studies were astonished to arrive at work after the Christmas vacation last Monday morning, only to discover that the entire administrative floor of the Faculty, and two floors of archives below them, had been completely evacuated of all contents. At first the raid was thought to be a case of excessively zealous and pathologically misguided theft or burglary, but on-going investigations by the University Police force have led to a more surprising explanation.

The crucial tip was received from an unemployed PhD student in forensic data mining who moonlights as a refuse collector with the Toronto Sanitation Department. According to report, eleven garbage trucks had to be sent from headquarters to the Faculty, at the end of last week, in order to remove 3,271 boxes of refuse. Further investigation has led to recently retired Ms. Karen Melville, famed Director of the Faculty’s Professional Learning Centre, an energetic, efficient, and effective leader with a known aversion to unwarranted accumulation of extraneous objects.

“The new Dean had asked us to take responsibility for a new Academic Vision,” explains Ms. Melville, who has pleaded “no contest” to the charge. “The documents, dust, and detritus of prior decades was slowing us down. In order to embark on our new mission, the Faculty must not be hampered by the legacy of the old. While on vacation, I realized that starting the new year on an entirely fresh start would give the Faculty the flexibility it so crucially needs, going forward. This way, there is no chance that we will be hobbled by restrictive ties into the past—such as knowing who our students are, what courses we offer, whom we employ, or what we pay them. Why be saddled by the past? Everyone should start the New Year unencumbered. That’s what I am doing. (It is also why I will be catching the next plane to Peru.)”

“The retirement papers I had to sign last December specified that I clean out the office before departing,” Ms. Melville went on. “And as you know, I take agreements seriously. I do what I promise, and I am never one to shirk from my responsibilities. Plus, the more I thought about it, the better an idea it seemed. What better way to contribute to the Faculty, on my way out, than to give it the ultimate act of office cleanup?”

“Think about it this way. A year ago the University appointed a new Dean, who arrived at UofT without knowing any of us, without knowing anything about libraries—perhaps, as a philosopher, without knowing anything at all. He is so inveterately disorganized that papers only box him in. Since his arrival a year and a half ago, no original document he has been given has ever been seen again. He was charged by the administration with renewing the Faculty—but given no resources.

“Queen’s Park, similarly, wants Ontario Universities to reinvent themselves, with no funding. It’s clearly a new trend—and the PLC is a master at spotting trends. The age of ‘Do More with Less’ is over. We are entering the next stage: ‘Do Even More, with Nothing at All’. To meet this challenge, the Dean has asked us to think radically. I have followed his instructions, by pursuing the downsizing trend to its ultimate conclusion. Operating without equipment, records, furniture, or documents will not only save us money; it will provide us with a cleaner, more efficient, more effective route into the future.”

Ms. Melville’s colleagues seem bemused, and tend to nod knowingly, when queried about these remarkable developments. “Fundamentally,” commented Sandra Alston, senior collections librarian at the UofT library, “Karen Melville is not into stuff. Ms. Alston should know; she and Ms. Melville co-own a duplex in North Toronto. Somehow, their opposing talents in collection development and collection disposal have created a bond. City records confirm that Ms. Melville and Ms. Alston do indeed jointly own lot 206-1035 in North York. Whether Ms. Melville’s side of the dwelling contains any objects remains unknown at this time. Neighbors have spotted some quantities of ‘Who Done It?’ novels making their way into the residence—but apparently only to stay for a few days, before being swept away in a spirit of cleansing. The minimal time required to read this type of literature may explain its appeal to the owner.

Ms. Melville was referred by the University to the Clarke Institute—currently known as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health—for diagnosis and observation. Both doctors assigned to her case commented on the unusual challenges presented by the case. “We regularly encounter cases of kleptomania, across campus” they said. “Faculty members regularly take possession of items that do not belong to them—particularly ideas. Obsessive acquisition is also on the rise, due to the incessant pressures of advertising and late market-driven neo-capitalism. But rarely do we encounter such a staunch drive to discard things—such a pure, intense, and selfless desire to clean the world up.”

Calls to the Faculty for further elaboration on this extraordinary state of affairs were not returned—perhaps due to the fact that the Faculty no longer has any telephones. One question raised by several observers, to which The Informed will return in a future issue, is whether Ms. Melville’s next intention, after performing this wholesale cleansing, was to paint.

Karen Melville on the first day of her retirement. “You have no idea how much younger I feel,” she commented to admirers.
Riding the IT Rocket

UofT’s Professional Learning Centre (PLC), a continuing education program of the Faculty of Information Studies, stepped up its advertising campaign on the Toronto Subway system yesterday by unveiling its latest series of advertisements for the widely-known program.

In a triumph for the tenacity and inventiveness of its Director, Ms. Karen Melville, the PLC won a contract to display its ads on the outside of the subway cars, as well as inside. As noted here last month, the previous series of advertisements had extended the full length of a train car, listing the innumerable benefits of taking up a career in the rapidly-developing fields of information technology, library and information science, archives and records management, and genealogy.

This month’s ads are even more audacious—and would not fit within the confines of a single car. In an unusual development, Ms. Melville convinced the General Secretary of the Toronto Transit Commission, a PLC graduate, that recruiting students for the PLC was not only vital to the on-going viability of the TTC itself, but profoundly important to the future of society as we know it.

Known around the city for her boldness, tenacity, inventiveness, and willingness to strike straight to the heart of any matter, Ms. Melville solicited testimonials not only from all previous graduates of the program, but—taking advantage of tremendous enrolments in its genealogical courses—from the ancestors of all graduates. It is these testimonials that give the new series of advertisements their unusual length. Thoughtfully, those of far-ago relatives have been translated into English, and 27 other languages, in order to bring their message to a new public.

“Ride the IT Rocket Through the Ages” is the name of the new campaign. Ms. Melville exploited the Faculty’s extensive research on usability and information retrieval, in order to determine how small print could be read at close range while racing by at high speed.

“Don’t accumulate material possessions,” the ads implore, invoking Ms. Melville’s abiding theme of discarding irrelevant possessions (see related story, page 2). “All possessions give you is more stuff. IT skills are vastly more portable. You can take them with you, no matter where you go.”

“I never knew how true it was that the skills learned at the PLC could open doors,” opines a particularly poignant testimonial from a long-departed and dearly-missed member of our community. “Don’t underestimate Ms. Melville’s admonition that ‘you can take it with you when you go’.”

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deftly conveying with a combined manual and facial gesture the particular shade of yellow used in the Faculty administrative offices, for which English lacks any publishable description.

Ms. Melville received the news of the indictment with an air of aggrieved disgust (accompanying photo), but according to confidants remains unrepentently unrepentent. Since the guilty ruling, her popularity across campus, already high before the incident, has grown in leaps and bounds. Students and faculty in divisions from archeology to microbiology have been observed secreting cans and brushes into their offices, concealed in book bags, beer kegs, roll-on briefcases, and other forms of camouflage. Gary Trudeau, author of the famed Doonesbury cartoon series, released a statement today saying that Ms. Melville will be featured in next month’s installment of the internationally syndicated serial. It is the prospect of such a wholesale movement that has the University running scared. “That the University of Toronto has $800 million dollars of deferred maintenance is a major negotiating point in our submission to the Rae Commission,” reported senior members of the administration at Simcoe Hall. “If members of the community take it into their own hands to fix up the campus, who will take our arguments seriously? How can we be one of the world’s great teaching and research universities, unless we have crumbling walls?”