To Beeghly Library Friends:

To all alumni and friends: the executive committee of the Friends of the Beeghly Library welcome you to an open house at the library from 2:00 to 4:00 on Friday, June 15 and again on Saturday, the 16th from 9:30 to 5:00. There will be a small book sale as well as Friends buttons and framed copies of the Alma Mater. You are also welcome to attend the annual business meeting at 8:30 in the Information Commons of the library.

Sincerely, Harriet Kaylor, President of the Friends of the Library

Corresponding with Alan Mark Fletcher ’50—John Mumford

I have been happy to have an interesting e-mail conversation with author and Juniata grad Alan Mark Fletcher over the winter. Mr. Fletcher, who I would call an author, educator and adventurer, and wife Julie ’49, has given to the college two items to hang in the Library. One is a print of Java rice fields, and the other an early Dutch map of Guyana (1635). When corresponding with Alan, you understand how the two gifts are so meaningful. Hearing of his adventures throughout his life prompted me to ask him some questions in order to know more about his writing and Indiana Jones type of experiences, through Guyana and other parts of South America especially. Alan graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in biology. He continues to credit Juniata for giving him a first-class education and a blueprint for success. He spoke at Juniata recently on how modern science revolutionized the agricultural world.

Some excerpts of our conversations,”

Memorable Experience at Juniata:

Without a doubt, meeting my wife Julia ’49 at Juniata was my outstanding experience. We went together for all four years, and were married within days of my graduation. We have been best buddies for 66 years! I also have fond memories of Homer Will. He was the quintessential scientist. I worshiped the ground that he walked on. Also, S. Earl Dubbel and his wife Marion were dear to us. In my first year they adopted us as their parents-on-campus.

On having authored a wide variety books from “Guyana” to “Fishes that are Dangerous”:

I suppose the wide variety of books reflect a wide variety of interests. But come to think of it, I was asked to write all of my books. Lipincott had a very successful series of books, “Portraits of the Nations,” and they have never found anyone who knew anything about the Guianas. The book “Unusual Aquarium Fishes” (by the way, Alan was a pen-pal with Winston Churchill, who had aquariums) and children’s books came about because I had known the juvenile books editor of Addison-Wesley since my days with “Aquarium” (magazine). He asked me to write a series of children’s books.

Speaking of Guiana and since you spent so much time in that area, were conditions there really as the are depicted in “Papillon” the movie? It was a brutal prison colony?

I do have the book Papillon and have seen the movie several times. He gives a good account of what the prison life was like, but he greatly embellished his personal experiences. As I wrote before, I made several trips to Guyana, to collect tropical aquarium fishes and write about it. St. Laur. was the port at which all of the prisoners arrived. From there they were all parceled out to other prison locations, including Devil’s Island and others. St. Laur. had the largest prison, and I was free to stroll through it and take pictures.

You had other challenging experiences in South America?

Most of the hair raising ones were in private airplanes. But one of the ones I cherish most I being stranded in southern Colombia because of engine trouble with our DC-3, and having to spend Easter worshiping with tribal Indians in a Baptist Mission. I have been desperately sick in S. America. Usually from very bad dysentery. Once my life was saved by an independent Baptist missionary who had drugs that had been sent to him from medical friends in the U.S.; once in a remote Peruvian town, once by a Wycliffe Bible Translators physician in southeast Peru.

What was the influence of the western world in Guyana?

On balance, I believe the Western influence was positive. If you look around the world, former British colonies have done better than those of France, etc… Soon after independence, Guyana was taken over by an avowed Communist, Dr. Cheddi Jagan. When he started initiating wild things, the Brits suspended their constitution. That is how Burnham came to power. He was not gift, but at least he kept Guiana from almost certainly becoming like Venezuela is today.
WHY SPIN?—Robert E. Wagoner

Why has there been a popular revival of hand spinning despite the ready and inexpensive availability of manufactured yarns and textiles? This is a question I left unanswered when I was working on my book “Spinning and Sex.”

When I talked to people who owned spinning wheels and were skilled in producing yarn with their own hands I never could quite pin down why this occupation was so important to them. They were often rather inarticulate about the reasons for their devotion to the craft and found it difficult to put into words. Sometimes they would refer to the end products of their work—a scarf or sweater that they made from yarn that they spun. Or often they would talk about the tranquilizing effects of spinning, as if it were a kind of therapy. Usually the conversation would end with a smile and shrug, and a comment such as, “I don't know—I just like it!” I found this puzzling, especially after I learned how widespread this passion for spinning was. All across this country, in virtually every town—indeed all around the world!—there are circles or guilds of busy hand spinners. Several different online sites present videos to explain spinning to newbies, and there are dozens of catalogs and publications to pour over, not to mention a brisk market for spinning wheels—improved modern wheels, not just antiques.

At length, after Spinning and Sex was published, I came to see that the answer was implicit in my own book, but I had not realized it. In the book I had argued that the presence of spinning wheels in so many pictures and publications in the nineteenth century was due to a lingering look backwards to times when the wheels were identified with the nurturing presence of wives, mothers and grandmothers in the household. This is why we see only women at the wheel. In essence spinning wheels symbolized the perpetuation of life itself. This all came to an end with the advent of huge power-driven machines that could produce yarn in quantities as well as qualities that hand spinning could not begin to match, and which swept women out of the home to become wage-earners in these factories.

As a result the symbolic power of the spinning wheel also came to an end. Nowadays no woman would learn to spin as a way of making herself more sexually attractive! But the lure of hand spinning has revived, in spite of—or maybe because of—its limitations as a manual skill. Maybe the tactile experience itself—handling and twisting fibers together in measured ways—is appealing simply because it is so basic and so primordial.

Spinning requires a certain kind of knowledge, not intellectual knowledge that can be articulated in language, but a tacit knowledge that can be gained by hands and fingers only through repeated experience, trial and error, that finds satisfaction in what feels just right. This is knowing-how rather than knowing-what, more akin to an athletic skill or a dance movement that is practiced over and over until it becomes second nature.

I recently came across an essay written by a passionate and thoughtful hand spinner who values her manual know-how in almost sacramental terms. For her the tacit knowledge instilled in her hands is “sacred lore” that lies at the very heart of civilization. “Without this,” she writes, “there is no civilization, no technology, no history, no agriculture, no animal husbandry, no permanent settlements, and the whole of human history just did not happen.” Spinning is the art that has taken us beyond mere hunting and gathering. Moreover, she argues further, “much of this lore can only be passed hand to hand. It can't simply be read from a book or mastered by watching videos. . . If nobody did it, the real how-to and whys would be lost. . . And if we lost all the spinners, or even most of them, we'd lose the root of all textiles, and that's the root of life as we know it. It's too sacred a trust. . . I don't dare stop spinning.” [Abby Franquemont, Spinoff Magazine, Summer 2008, page 112]

Maybe Abby Franquemont's argument is a little over-the-top, but I have to think that her love of spinning because it is somehow rooted in the perpetuation of life itself is not far off the mark.

The book, by the way, published by the Huntingdon County Historical Society, is available in the Juniata College bookstore for $19.95 plus tax.
Clare Lewis—

I made this sculpture, entitled “Getting Lost in a Good Book,” for my intro to 3-D Design class in the fall of 2011. Our project directions were to make a tape installment sculpture and integrate it into the Juniata campus. I had originally come up with the idea of wanting to make a body look like it was getting sucked into a story, and so I decided to ask to install my sculpture into the library. The entire inside of the sculpture is made of clear packing tape and cellophane-plastic wrap. I designed my piece to be interpreted as getting lost in a good book, or getting sucked into one because stories can be so captivating. I chose a blank-paged sketchbook for my sculpture so one could interpret it as any type of literature because people have different preferences in what they read.

Getting Lost in a Good Book
As always, thank you for being a Friend!

View From the Director’s Office:

We have enjoyed the semester here at the Library. We like to think that the students have thrown themselves into the books as the sculpture by freshman Clare Lewis indicates. On a sunny day like today and with the quad full of activities, it reminds you of the best part of being on a college campus, the invigorating atmosphere which often feels like a family, all working toward a common goal. The Library staff was happy to hear that in a recent survey conducted by the Social Work Department, 100 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that, “I can find the resources I need for my research by using the Library and it’s online resources.” It gives us a positive feeling moving toward the end of the semester.

Kind regards,

John Mumford