

Would You Ask A Librarian For A Lap Dance?

by Roz Warren

In the 15 years that I've worked at my local public library, I've learned that we librarians do plenty of things for our patrons that aren't in our job descriptions. After a patron asked me to change her flat tire, and another wanted to check out our pencil sharpener, I logged onto my favorite librarian hangout on Face Book and asked: What's the oddest thing a patron has ever asked you to do?

The first response?

Someone just asked me for a good book to read on the toilet.

Quickly followed by:

A patron who was on his way to the casino wanted to rub my red hair for good luck.

Last week a woman came in asking for my help to get the witches and demons to stop pinching her.

A patron once asked me to sit on his lap. (I laughed at him.)

Unusual Patron Requests proved to be a hot topic. Within a day, I had over 100 responses, as librarians shared stories about that special patron who:

Asked if she could leave her kids at the circ desk with me while she ran errands.

Wanted me to find books to prove that he was Julius Caesar, reincarnated.

Asked me to tell the man sitting at the computer next to hers to stop controlling her computer with his thoughts.

Brought in a mounted wildebeest head and asked if we could store it in the archives for the summer.

I soon realized that Odd Patron Requests fell into categories. Some requests were from patrons who wanted to look their best -- with our help.

A woman once asked if she could trade pants with me because she was going on a job interview.

A man once asked me to use library tape to remove lint from his suit jacket.

I've been asked my opinion about which frame a patron should select for her new glasses.

One man asked if he could use our community meeting room to shave with an electric razor. ("Is the power out at your house?" I asked. "Nope," he said. No further explanation.)

After asking me a reference question, one patron pulled a toothbrush from her fanny pack and went to town on her teeth as I spoke. And when that was done, she brought out the dental floss.

Some requests were car-related:

People have been known to come to the reference desk and ask if we have jumper cables.

A patron once asked to borrow my boss's car.

One of our regulars asked me to drive her to a town two hours away so she could look at apartments.

There were numerous requests for Library Hanky Panky:

Last week, a patron asked me to have sex with him in the alley. I didn't.

A 50-year-old guy asked our Children's Librarian to join him in the rest room. No dice.

One patron asked me to meet him in the copy room. (Wink wink.) Sorry, no.

I once had a male patron in his 50s who wouldn't leave the reference desk until I told him he was naughty. (Handled by stating, deadpan, no eye contact, "Go on with your bad self, then.")

Librarians have been asked to break the law:

A male patron once offered me \$100 if I'd go into somebody's yard and steal a cactus.

A patron once offered me \$50 to make her a fake passport.

One patron wanted me to tell her my son's social security number so she could use it to get more financial assistance. (I said no.)

Many unusual library questions are medical in nature:

One patron appeared in my office doorway holding a cotton swab and a petri dish and began by saying "You can totally say no to this...." (I did.)

Let's just say that if I wanted to diagnose Athlete's Foot, I'd have a MD, not a MLIS.

“Does this look infected?”

Some patrons want to take our innate helpfulness and eagerness to serve the library community to the next level:

One patron phoned and asked me to check out a list of books for her and drop them off at her house.

A patron once asked for my home phone number so she could phone me with reference questions when I wasn't at work.

Patrons have asked me to do their taxes, clean their homes, and perform at their children's birthday parties.

A patron once asked me if he could borrow \$7,000.

A woman once asked me to go look for a dead body she was sure was buried by a lake, because the police wouldn't listen to her.

We are also called upon to Identify Things:

A patron once asked me to identify a dead bug she'd taped to a piece of notebook paper.

I was asked to ID the snake a patron had caught in a bucket.

“There's a brownish-grey fluffy animal under my porch. What is it?”

We've also been called upon to research a variety of interesting topics:

One patron wanted me to find a book to teach her dog German.

I've been asked to research how to avoid being cloned without your permission.

A patron once asked me to direct her to the books about Brazil written specifically for Unborn Children.

I once received a reference query from an inmate a nearby correctional facility for "books on how to levitate."

Librarians are helpful by nature, which means that often we're just fine with going above and beyond our job descriptions to perform small acts of library kindness:

An elderly woman just asked me to tie her shoes for her. (I did. She was too old to bend down and reach them herself.)

A patron recently asked me to help her find the tune and lyrics to patriotic songs so she could sing them to her Marine boyfriend on their upcoming road trip to the state capital. (Sadly, this woman had a mental illness, and there was no boyfriend or road trip, but I treated the question as if there were.)

Despite the odd requests, we librarians remain undaunted. We continue to love library work. And of course, everyone loves a library story with a happy ending. For instance?

A divorced dad came to Story Hour, asked me out, then asked me to marry him!! I did!

(Roz Warren is the author of OUR BODIES, OUR SHELVES: A COLLECTION OF LIBRARY HUMOR.)

