

Letter from the Chair

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Dear EMIERT colleagues,

As I write this "Letter from the Chair," I cannot help but reflect on several conversations I have taken part in this week. Each conversation circles back to the same issue that has increasingly concerned me since I assumed the position of EMIERT chair in July 2007: active participation in professional associations. This topic is especially timely as I work with the loyal, dedicated, and productive EMIERT members who repeatedly give of themselves and their energy to serve on committees, contribute to the *EMIE Bulletin*, hold offices, and organize, coordinate, facilitate, and plan to maintain our Round Table and provide you, our members, with programming, ideas, and resources. In short, there are not enough of us to accomplish all the work that needs to be done and to sustain a meaningful round table.

What can we individually and collectively do to help solve the problem?

- First, **VOLUNTEER!** We need members to serve on the Publicity Committee, the Public Relations Committee, the Building Coalitions for Ethnicity Committee, and the many other committees that EMIERT offers. We need members willing to serve as liaisons to other ALA committees and round tables and to report back to the Executive Board and the membership.
- Second, **COMMIT!** We need members willing to fulfill their commitment to serve for a one-, two- or three-year term, provide the continuity, and develop the momentum that every organization needs.
- Third, **COMMUNICATE!** We need members willing to communicate and share not only their talents, but also their experiences and stories of success (or not) in working and developing multicultural library services and collections. Through our EMIE-L listserv, our general and committee meetings, and our publications, we can benefit from broader communication as we move toward building increased interest and awareness of these issues and challenges.
- Fourth, **MENTOR!** We need seasoned professionals to share their expertise and time and to lend a supportive and kind ear to less experienced young professionals and library school students as they navigate the professional ropes and test their creative ideas. In talking with a very talented and dynamic library school student I know, I learned that an important element is missing in the curricula and experience of several contemporary library school programs—exposure to the value of participating in professional activities outside the primary job. This student commented that in her program numerous courses, seminars, and discussion groups are available to learn about providing services, developing collections, and examining focused issues related to multiculturalism. Omitted, however, is information about professional associations like EMIERT that offer many opportunities to get involved, further one's knowledge of the field, contribute to the body of literature, develop and hone one's leadership skills, and network with colleagues sharing an interest in multiculturalism and cultural diversity.

Mentoring colleagues who are developing their professional skills and credentials has many other benefits. We can learn from them. We need to hear what will make EMIERT relevant to these young professionals today . . . and next year. . . We need to learn about the constantly evolving cutting-edge technological skills that we can adapt and employ to encourage a broader discussion of topics related to cultural diversity and multiculturalism. Daily we see in the news how the use of media (the Internet, streaming video, podcasting, blogs, and text messaging) is shaping a new political movement that invites and nurtures the participation of a younger segment of the population. EMIERT needs these people who have mastered new technological skills and hold high expectations for the integration of technology within our services, our programming, and our professional associations.

In light of these concerns the EMIERT Executive Board is looking at how we can contribute to the mentoring process, increase our visibility to library school students and recent graduates, and enhance an atmosphere of information exchange. As I write, the Board is discussing the establishment of a scholarship to be awarded annually to help a young professional attend an ALA Annual conference. One criterion for the scholarship is that the winner agrees to serve on an EMIERT committee for a one-year term. Over the next few weeks the Board will continue to refine the concept and work with the Multicultural Awards Committee to bring the award to fruition. Watch for updates disseminated via EMIE-L.

In the meantime, please consider what you might be able to contribute to EMIERT. We have many positions to fill. All of our committees need additional members. As always, we look to increase our

visibility and attract new members to EMIERT. Contributions to EMIE-L and the *EMIE Bulletin* are always welcome to keep the networking vital and the information timely. We look forward to hearing from you!

Respectfully,

Myra Appel, Chair
Ethnic Materials and Information Exchange Round Table
2007–2009

The Instituto Dois Irmãos

by Bethany Lynn Letalien
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The Instituto Dois Irmãos (i2i) in Brazil and its sister organization in the United States, the Two Brothers Foundation (<http://www.2bros.org>), are non-governmental organizations working to provide educational opportunities to residents of a poor community in Brazil. They initially focused on English classes but have recently expanded their services and activities in several directions, such as literacy efforts that combine a reading room with instruction for children who are attending school but illiterate.

The i2i works in one of the country's most well-known *favelas*. While favela is often translated as "shantytown," Rocinha, located in Rio de Janeiro, boasts many more permanent structures and basic services than the English term implies. Nonetheless, Rocinha is known for its drug violence, size (with some 100,000+ inhabitants), and location near some of Rio's priciest real estate.

Institutions such as the i2i are vital to the future of Rocinha's children, who are likely to drop out of school. A college education has recently become a more attainable goal among Brazil's poor, and employers are demanding well-qualified candidates for the most basic of jobs. Illiteracy can make it impossible to attain employment, while foreign language skills can set a candidate apart. The i2i is thus vital to adults in Rocinha who are returning to school and seeking to gain or hone English skills. It is not surprising, then, that waiting lists for classes are long—and the instructor for the recently added literacy courses has had the particularly painful experience of having to turn away desperate parents of illiterate nine-year-olds.

After several years of operation, Two Brothers purchased a building for the i2i in 2006. Beginning that year, I conducted action research with the i2i towards my dissertation with the aid of a Fulbright-Hays Fellowship. Our first task was to teach the local leadership how to run a much larger operation. In early 2006, the i2i did nothing more than offer ten hours of English instruction per week or less in a preschool they rented at night. By 2008, they owned a building, had undertaken a major construction and renovation project, and had added a reading room and numerous classes.

Our second task was to create the reading room, which now has over 2,500 unique items in its LibraryThing catalog (<http://www.librarything.com/catalog/instituto2irmaos>). Despite this, the reading room is still unable to meet the needs of all the i2i students, foreign volunteers, and leaders.

Helping the i2i

The collections currently consist largely of English-language volumes donated by the American School in Rio and by private donors. Adult literature in English is seldom used, but children's books in English are useful to beginning students of all ages, and teachers have expressed interest in having enough copies of the same easy reader for entire classes of approximately ten students. Reference materials in all languages are lacking, as are materials of all kinds and for all age groups in Portuguese, Spanish, and French. The i2i is also in great need of computers: the reading room was envisioned to include a computer center, but this has not yet been possible for lack of equipment. Finally, games and art supplies would be greatly appreciated.

The i2i is always seeking volunteers to teach its language courses. English teachers are, of course, needed, and they have didactic materials for Spanish and French but often no instructors for these languages. Participation in the institute's literacy efforts would likewise be beneficial. As mentioned, the teacher for the literacy courses in Portuguese (a resident of Rocinha, college student, and mother of two small children who finds the time to teach several groups) has been unable to meet the demand; the i2i has not yet been able to offer adult literacy classes at all.

Additional volunteer opportunities exist, and the i2i is open to proposals. For example, one former volunteer recently returned for a short visit and gave a widely attended and well-received lecture on the political system in the United States; others have stayed longer and focused on arts and crafts, from painting murals to making jewelry. No teaching experience or knowledge of Portuguese is required, although both are quite valuable. The philosophy of the i2i and Two Brothers defines education broadly, emphasizing the value of cultural exchange for the personal growth of both residents and volunteers. The i2i does not charge volunteers any fee, but the organization is also unable to offer compensation.

Two Brothers, which is responsible for raising funds in the United States and for some of the initial vetting of volunteers, is in constant need of consultants and others with time to dedicate to the foundation. We conduct our business almost entirely via e-mail; the minimum time commitment and expense of volunteering for Two Brothers are small.

Because the i2i continues to gain responsibilities and the two organizations are experimenting with their relationship, duties and processes change frequently. Interested parties are encouraged to visit the organizations' shared web site at <http://www.2bros.org>, and contact any of us. Anyone who is interested in receiving more information or in volunteering, donating materials or funds, or perhaps forming an institutional alliance is encouraged to contact me at beth@2bros.org.

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Graphic Novels by Women: A Selected Bibliography

By Liorah A. Golomb
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Try this experiment: Go to the online catalog of one of the large graphic novel collections (Michigan State, Ohio State, or the Library of Congress, for example), search the subject “graphic novels,” and scroll through a bit. *There’s Batman, Bartman, and Black Hole; Last Day in Vietnam, the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, and Little Lulu; Tales from the Farm and Tales of the Slay-ers*.¹ Graphic novels are a medium, not a genre. They come in the same flavors as other media: horror, fantasy, mystery, humor, history, erotica, biography, how-to—there’s probably even a graphic novel cookbook out there somewhere.

Just as you can’t make any generalizations about the content of graphic novels, neither can you generalize about the ones created by women. True, there are several in the confessional mode and not so many of the superhero variety, but women are still in the minority of graphic novelists. As more women come to produce comics, no doubt the artificial distinctions we make will fade. Therefore, no conclusions should be drawn about women who write graphic novels from the titles in this selected bibliography. These are not the only women working in the medium, only some of my favorites.

Abel, Jessica. *La Perdida*. Pantheon, 2006. Carla’s estranged father is Mexican, but she can’t even speak enough Spanish to order food at a taco joint in her hometown of Chicago. She goes to Mexico City, spurred largely by her idealization of Frida Kahlo, to get in touch with her Mexican roots. Her sole contact there is Harry, a rich *gringo* with his own heroes: Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs. It turns out, however, that being half-Mexican doesn’t make Carla any less of a *turista* in the eyes of the natives. She makes some friends, but her desire to “become Mexican” leads her to make some bad choices, and the plot takes an unexpected turn. Without language or cultural understanding, Carla is *la Perdida*—the lost one. Abel makes excellent use of the graphic novel medium in this work; it is packed with dialogue, and each panel of the black-and-white artwork is densely drawn, but they always seem complementary. A handy glossary helps with the Mexican slang. Abel is also the creator of Artbabe comics and, most recently, a co-creator of *Life Sucks*, a graphic novel about the mostly tedious lives of Los Angeles vampires.

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Houghton Mifflin, 2006. Bechdel’s superbly drawn and written autobiography is about deception, family secrets, and, ultimately, recognition. The Fun Home of the title is the old Gothic Revival house in which the family lived and which Bechdel’s father spent nearly all his free time restoring and decorating in period style. It is also the funeral home operated by her grandparents. And it was even a place where the young Alison and her two brothers frequently played and had fun. Hers was not a childhood of abuse and neglect, but rather one in which things were not precisely as they seemed. The house symbolizes this. Alison’s friends think the family is

rich, but in fact many of the fancy decorations are *objets trouvés*—found in the trash. The truth is that her father came from rural Pennsylvania and relative poverty. Alison’s mother acts in community productions and is often absorbed in her characters. But the big secret has to do with her father’s sexuality. When Alison writes home from college to tell her parents that she’s a lesbian, she learns that her father is also homosexual, and she reexamines her childhood in light of this information.

Bell, Gabrielle. *Lucky*. Drawn & Quarterly, 2006. Being a young hipster artist living in hippest Williamsburg, Brooklyn isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. Bell’s self-styled character is anything but lucky. We see her move from one decrepit shared loft space to another until the sight of her and her boyfriend schlepping boxes and mattresses becomes a running joke. The only happiness her occasional modeling jobs bring her is the elation she feels when she’s not modeling. She works as an artist’s assistant and imagines being turned down for a project because her work is deemed derivative of the artist she’s assisting. The poor thing even loses her drawings for an issue of *Lucky*. There’s nothing monumental happening here, no abuse or disease, just a sparsely drawn paean to the mundane. Somehow, that’s very refreshing.

Crumb, Aline Kominsky. *Need More Love: A Graphic Memoir*. M Q Publications, 2007. Aline Kominsky Crumb is the wife of Robert (R.) Crumb, arguably the father of underground “comix.” Kominsky is a cartoonist in her own right, and *Need More Love* is indeed a graphic memoir, beginning with her childhood in the Long Island suburbs (where she went to high school with Peggy Lipton of *Mod Squad* fame), through the heady years as part of the San Francisco comix scene, to her current situation as a wife and mother living in a medieval village in France. The book consists of a combination of text, photos, Kominsky’s comics and paintings, and comics drawn by other artists in her life, among them R. Crumb, Phoebe Gloeckner, and Diane Noomin, aka Didi Glitz. Much of it is quite funny. The cartoon about Yusef, Kominsky’s hair-sucking cat, had me in near-hysterics, perhaps because I have a similarly disposed cat. But there is much to like in this book even for people who don’t keep pets with strange behavior patterns. As a first-hand account of early women’s alternative comics, it is invaluable—this is a story that has yet to be fully told. There is obvious appeal to fans of R. Crumb; over half of the book takes place after Kominsky met him. The artwork is exaggerated and colorful, but Kominsky’s self-portraits do not do justice to her actual attractiveness. The Crumbs now provide the occasional comic to the well-established New Yorker magazine, a far cry from the likes of *Wimmin’s Comix* and *Zap*.

Drechsler, Debbie. *Daddy’s Girl*. Fantagraphics Books, 2008; and *The Summer of Love*. Drawn & Quarterly, 2003. The original publication of *Daddy’s Girl* was in 1995, with distribution limited to comic book stores. Fantagraphics re-released the book this year. It is a disturbing collection of stories revolving around Lily, the eldest of four children, and her sexually abusive father. On page 2 Daddy forces his penis into pre-teen Lily’s mouth while sister Pearl pretends to sleep in the next bed. On page 14 Daddy pulls off Lily’s nightgown and masturbates over her. On page 31 Daddy walks in on Lily as she’s about to shower and touches her

new breasts. And so on. All of this is perfectly disgusting, but what struck me most were the many scenes in which Lily, even if briefly, is able to carry on like a normal teenager. One wouldn't have thought it possible. Lily's story continues in *Summer of Love*, inked in camouflage colors of olive and terra-cotta. The family has just moved—again—and Lily and Pearl are now both in high school. Daddy is rarely seen (thank goodness), and the narrative focuses on the two eldest sisters and all the horrors that the teen years bring. They date, get high, make and lose friends, decorate for the school dance. Read without prior knowledge of *Daddy's Girl*, this would be a well-told, realistic tale of girlhood in the late 1960s. Perhaps it is better to read *Summer of Love* before *Daddy's Girl* to avoid the natural impulse to look for signs of young Lily in her older counterpart.

Gloeckner, Phoebe. *A Child's Life and Other Stories*. Revised ed. Frog Books, 2000. Phoebe Gloeckner was one of a number of comic book artists working in 1970s San Francisco. She idolized Aline Kominsky and R. Crumb—the latter of whom admits, in a preface to the revised edition of *A Child's Life*, to having had a strong attraction to the teenaged Phoebe. And it is not only Crumb's legendary licentiousness behind this attraction. Unlike Drechsler's unambiguously victimized Lily, Gloeckner's alter ego, Minnie, has some awareness of her sexuality and is complicit in the affair she has with her stepfather. But it is harmful all the same; at 13 years of age, she does not have the emotional capacity to understand that she's being abused, and she continues to be abused by those who profess to love her. Also in contrast to Lily, Minnie's scars are made evident. In one story, "Magda Meets Little Men in the Woods," little Magda (another stand-in for Gloeckner) meets four men—her future husbands and boyfriend. Each is more despicable than the next. It is Gloeckner's self-awareness and sense of humor that makes *A Child's Life* such an engrossing book. Gloeckner is a trained medical illustrator, and her comic art can be as realistic as she wants it to be. When she distorts images, it's for a reason and to great effect. *A Child's Life* is among the most important graphic novels written to date.

Kelso, Megan. *The Squirrel Mother*. Fantagraphics Books, 2006. Some of the stories in *The Squirrel Mother* can break your heart. Little girls breathe the bitter air of their mothers' disappointment. The Squirrel Mother of the title story is shown cooking and cleaning in panels captioned with her unfulfilled aspirations. In "Meow Face," a woman could have had a great career in fashion but for what seems to be a debilitating social anxiety. In another story, a mother in the midst of packing up house is transported to the dance floor as she listens to the "Blue Danube" waltz. But then there's the girl who does a report on Alexander Hamilton and develops a crush on him in the process—a novella both educational and sweet. Kelso's economic lines and her use of pastels complement the child's-eye view of the narrative. Her stories are deceptively simple and may leave the reader with an initial sense of having missed something, but a second look will be rewarded.

Malkasian, Cathy. *Percy Gloom*. Fantagraphics Books, 2007. Looking like a sorrier cousin of Elmer Fudd, the frequently disappointed Percy Gloom finally gets the job of his dreams: writing warning statements against any conceivable danger a

product might pose. Any further attempt to summarize the plot will make Percy Gloom sound silly and do a disservice to Malkasian's highly inventive story. The illustrations are masterfully drawn in sepia-toned curves, the characters all teeth and ears. The text is peppered with questions about the meaning of existence, but it is also ultimately positive: in the end Percy decides that "all this pointlessness" is "very entertaining" (152). You've probably never read anything quite like *Percy Gloom*.

Satrapı, Marjane. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. Pantheon, 2004; and *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return*. Pantheon, 2005. Following the release of the animated movie version of *Persepolis*, Satrapı became widely known. But she was already a star in the graphic novels world. The two *Persepolis* books tell the story of Satrapı's youth in cosmopolitan Tehran, the only child of her intelligent and socially aware parents. When Marjane was nine years old, the 1979 Revolution took place, and her world changed drastically. Suddenly things like attending secular school, listening to American music, and moving about freely were forbidden. Her outspoken parents had to worry about her safety and their own. The two volumes of *Persepolis* follow Marjane as she leaves Iran for Europe, which comes with its own set of problems, returns to Iran, and finally leaves again forever. Through her eyes, we also witness the subjugation of women in fundamentalist-controlled Iran. Satrapı's illustrations are clean, simple, and expressive, and her writing follows suit. She is also the author of *Chicken with Plums* (2006), a very touching story about her uncle, and *Embroideries* (2006), in which several generations of women talk about their lives and their relationships with men.

Varon, Sara. *Robot Dreams*. First Second, 2007. A poignant tale of a year in the life of a dog and his robot, all conveyed wordlessly. No words are needed, and like all good literature, there is plenty of nourishment for varied tastes. Depending on where the reader is coming from on any given day, *Robot Dreams* is a tale of the joys of a good friendship, a horror story about being trapped in one's own body, or a reminder to bring your toys in from the rain. From the time Dog abandons Robot—not callously, but because he can't quite figure out what to do with his rusted friend—Dog experiences a series of fleeting friendships, all of which end in him being left behind. Meanwhile, lying on the beach, Robot suffers a number of indignities but still manages to dream, sometimes even of pleasant things. *Robot Dreams* is an all-ages book, with several winks to us grownups: the letter carrier looks a lot like Zippy, the mascot of the United States Postal Service. And who is that smooth-headed fellow checking out a copy of *Moby Dick* from the library?

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Note:

1. Creators, in order of books mentioned: Bob Kane, Matt Groening, Charles Burns, Will Eisner, Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill, Marjorie Henderson Buell, Jeff Lemire, and Joss Whedon.