



Quiet, Please: Dispatches From A Public Librarian

Scott Douglas

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Quiet, Please: Dispatches From A Public Librarian

Scott Douglas

Quiet, Please: Dispatches From A Public Librarian Scott Douglas

For most of us, librarians are the quiet people behind the desk, who, apart from the occasional “shush,” vanish into the background. But in *Quiet, Please*, *McSweeney’s* contributor Scott Douglas puts the quirky caretakers of our literature front and center. With a keen eye for the absurd and a Kesey-esque cast of characters (witness the librarian who is sure Thomas Pynchon is Julia Roberts’s latest flame), Douglas takes us where few readers have gone before. Punctuated by his own highly subjective research into library history—from Andrew Carnegie’s Gilded Age to today’s Afghanistan—Douglas gives us a surprising (and sometimes hilarious) look at the lives which make up the social institution that is his library.

Quiet, Please: Dispatches From A Public Librarian Details

Date : Published March 25th 2008 by Da Capo Press (first published March 24th 2008)

ISBN : 9780786720910

Author : Scott Douglas

Format : Hardcover 330 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Humor, Biography

 [Download Quiet, Please: Dispatches From A Public Librarian ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Quiet, Please: Dispatches From A Public Librarian ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Quiet, Please: Dispatches From A Public Librarian Scott Douglas

From Reader Review Quiet, Please: Dispatches From A Public Librarian for online ebook

Roland says

A great story about one man's quest to...work in a library. Much better than that other piece of crap library book on the market, which is the equivalent of listening to a cranky old man bitch about his job for a few hundred pages.

Oh, and my being in the book in no way colors my review of it.

Mary Jo says

Quiet Please: Dispatches from a Public Librarian held such promise, the initial flip through the pages had me wanting more, it seemed so clever really the way the chapters were set up, the funny little footnotes~ until one actually sat down to read it word for word. What was initially taken as clever and insightful was actually a very sad account of someone who is clearly in the wrong profession. In all fairness to the author and the book I had to apply book club rules - read the first 50 pages to let it try and hook you before you put it down. So I did just that, and then just to say I was open minded, after all it was written by a librarian ~ I read another 70 pages - that's right 120 pages written by a a librarian who clearly was according to himself, far superior to any person he ever worked with or encountered in a library or graduate school. On page 119 a paragraph opens with (I quote Mr. Douglas directly here), "As if my job couldn't get anymore mundane, one day the library decided it needed stats, when a library decides to do stats, it does them hardcore. It jams the stats so far down people's throats that the people don't want to even come into the building." C'mon REALLY? A deep throat reference to gathering statistics, and then go on for pages to proclaim how offensive it was for him as a librarian to actually have to participate in this gathering of unholy data. Do you blame me for just putting the book down at this point? This person is truly in the wrong profession and I must say that I am not proud to have read his dispatches.

Neil says

Is this what working in a library is like? Well yes and no. Every library is different and from what I've seen in my time in the profession, every library worker's experience of the library is different. Mr. Douglas, whether through his own mentality or through exaggerations meant to obtain what he thought would be a funny book, seems to see librarianship as long stretches of boredom punctuated by encounters with crazy patrons and co-workers. It's one legitimate experience of the library, one that is true-to-life for many who work in libraries. There are many difficult encounters with wacky, annoying, or simply sad people in the library. Everyone who works there has bad days and I've seen many get bogged down permanently in their obsession with that part of the job.

But for others, library work remains continually engaging. Whether it's pride in creating a great local institution, the pleasure of providing good service, or an ongoing love of getting to work with books and other collections every day and introduce these materials to others, many who work in libraries find the job continually sustaining.

If Douglas was funnier, or a better writer, this could still be a good book, but there are glaring problems. His use of footnotes for material that should be written into the text is annoying in the extreme, the equivalent of a drummer's rimshot to try to milk a laugh out of comic material that isn't particularly funny.

Two of the writer's personal traits annoy me too. One is the tendency to slam co-workers and patrons with cheap shots, then try to leaven the cruelty by proclaiming "I really liked them." I suspect this appreciation for the foibles of the people he met in the library is in some cases genuine, but his writing rarely shows the upsides that he appreciated, just his displeasure at what he didn't like about them.

What makes me really crazy is Douglas's own laziness, and how he never realizes how this creates most of his negative experiences. He admits that he spends most of his time off desk doing nothing and acts as if this is normal for the profession. As a hardworking librarian, that makes me angry. I don't want the job I love degraded by someone who practices it badly. As in almost any profession, one can find ways to coast, but there is no end of work to be done in a library. Those who can't find any of it ought to be fired. Even at the desk, which Douglas claims is his favorite part of the job, he seems prone to vaguely pointing in a direction or mumbling a Dewey number when asked a question. That's crummy service and I hope it isn't really typical of his work.

There's also no arc to this story. Douglas is unhappy with his job but doesn't really want to leave it. It seems like he is working toward some epiphany about his job, but instead, he finds a girlfriend and that makes him happy. It doesn't have much to do with everything that bothers him about his job or his life, it just provides him with a distraction. I couldn't help but think that his career, his relationship, or both are in trouble when this new distraction becomes less new.

Finally, I'm bothered by the author's absolute dismissal of library school. My library school experience was good, but like any other educational opportunity, you get out of it what you put into it. There were classes that didn't apply much to what I do now, but others were excellent. Most were somewhere in the middle, and I worked to make them relevant by thinking about the theory and figuring out how I would apply it in practice. Douglas should have tried the same. I have co-workers who have the same gripes as Douglas about the MLS degree, but I can't help but notice that they are generally less effective as librarians as those who have more mixed reviews of their schooling. I don't think it's a coincidence. Douglas ought to be a little more thankful that people are working to provide advanced education and set professional standards so he can make a living in the career he has chosen. Instead, this book is a wonderful argument for why shoddy librarians could be replaced by untrained part-time workers.

This isn't completely unreadable. There are flickers of insight and compassion. I suspect Douglas is a better librarian than this book indicates, that he is trying to portray himself self-deprecatingly to achieve laughs. But it just doesn't quite work and he comes off more as lazy and thoughtless. It also demonstrates the problems with trying to turn a blog into a book. What narrative structure there is here seems like it was imposed as an afterthought.

In the end though, I hope this book is not taken as the only version of librarianship by those who don't work in libraries. I hope it isn't taken as an excuse by lousy librarians to do their job even more poorly. If you thought this book was great and you work in a library or are thinking about working in a library, please consider another career.

Trin says

Supposedly a memoir about Douglas' work as a public librarian, this book is actually about how Douglas is

smart and sane, while everyone else who works at or comes into the library is crazy and dumb. My god: rarely have I read a memoir where the author comes off as more of a pretentious ass. If Douglas were funny it might work, but instead he's just *mean*. And not even *honestly* mean: he keeps trying to turn his mocking into little lessons about the importance of community, or "covering" a chapter of spiteful observations about a coworker with "I didn't hate Brenda, but..." Oh you big liar. You totally hate her. I *know* that you hate her, because after saying "I didn't hate Brenda, but..." a whole bunch of times at the beginning of the narrative, toward the end you slip and reveal, "I hated Brenda." In the words of Marshall Eriksen, "LAWYERED!"

Douglas says there are two types of humor, David Sedaris humor and Dave Barry humor (the latter, obviously, being the unsophisticated, plebian type that's only funny to people who aren't Scott Douglas). Actually, there's a third kind: humor that totally doesn't work. Librarians everywhere can feel free to shelve this book in that section.

Steve says

God damn this is a good book. As an ex-library worker I might be biased, but this book is so funny, and smart and sincere.

Scott Douglas is relatable. We like the same things, and we're enraged by the same things. If we hung out, we'd probably drink wine and talk about our favorite movie librarians (mine would have to be Andy Dufresne in the Shawshank Redemption, I'd imagine his would be Parker Posey's Mary in Party Girl, because who doesn't love her? (this is of course eliminating Sylvia Marpole as she is an animated character (though Bebe Neuwirth is, undoubtedly, a major babe))). It feels like that's what makes this book work the most. Of course, it could be any of myriad other factors (the structure and the voice both stand out quite a bit).

At any rate, this book is great! Read the shit out of it!

Carly says

A narcissist tells stories about working in the public library - not a good match between job and personality. If only there were a 0 stars rating.

If you want to read a book about working the public library, try Free For All: Oddballs, Geeks & Gangstas in the Public Library by Borchert. Borchert is funny and also has an ounce of compassion for his fellow man.

Alisa Kester says

I expected to like this. He's a librarian, I'm a librarian, and the few excerpts I'd read sounded like he had some interesting crazy patrons stories.

But in fact I hated it. I **forced** myself to read to page 156, and then skimmed through the rest in about 5 minutes. The problem is, the author is a pretentious jerk. And while I'm happy to read a book by a jerk if he makes me laugh, this guy is also not funny in any way, which is a huge problem in a book that doesn't have anything else going for it. And the footnotes! Usually, I like footnotes. But not when the author forces me to

look down three or more times every page to tell me something really stupid. For instance, he writes:

"I didn't think much of Michael's behavior because I was too busy to care; but it became water-cooler talk among staff."

Footnote to the above sentence: "There is no water cooler at the library."

Really? What a shatteringly interesting statement! Another attempt at failed humor, or does he imagine I actually care?

Sarah says

Disappointing.

I had high expectations of this book. I hoped the author's observations about public librarianship and library school would be amusing or insightful. They were neither.

Some advice to Mr. Douglas:

- * ~~"Smelt" is not the past tense of the verb smell~~, and "desert" is not what comes at the end of a meal.
 - * Footnotes are a bold choice, and should be used only by those with the skill to pull it off. For good examples, please see *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* or the front matter to *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. For bad examples, see your book.
 - * Please refrain from using the phrase "in fact" in the future. I believe you have used up your lifetime allotment.
 - * If you're going to be an jerk, just be a jerk. Don't end a bigoted rant about {insert patron group here} with some Doogie Howser-ish nonsense about how much you learned from them.
 - * Don't annoy the catalogers. We can bury your book so deep in the OPAC that no patron will ever find it.
-

Rita Meade says

Let me preface this by saying that in no way do I consider myself to be a perfect librarian. On a bad day, you might hear me complain about a difficult patron or a frustrating encounter with a co-worker. I can be impatient and annoyed and upset. More often than not, however, you will hear me sing the praises of my job and the endearingly wacky people I encounter on a daily basis. Honestly, if I ever appear as mean-spirited or bitter as Douglas does in this book, feel free to revoke my MLS degree. I suspect that he thought that fellow librarians would, while reading, chuckle along with the stories and nod their heads in a knowing manner. In reality, I am completely disinterested in being categorized with this man as a librarian. It's one thing to good-naturedly vent from time to time (or even bad-naturedly vent. It happens). It's quite another thing to humiliate and mock people in print - the people who essentially sustain your livelihood and give you a purpose in the first place.

This book made me uncomfortable, confused, and even angry at times (the chapter on mentally handicapped patrons was purely offensive). I am not sure what readers are supposed to take away from this unfunny, poorly-written mishmash, other than the fact that it's obvious that the author should not be working with the

public. If Douglas was going for satire or irony, he completely missed the mark. It's my sincere hope that readers do not think that Douglas represents all public librarians. Some of us, as crazy as it sounds, actually enjoy our jobs and ultimately respect the people with whom we work and the public we serve. Douglas needs to remember why he became a librarian in the first place and if he can't, maybe he should reassess his career choice and leave the reference work for those of us who still care.

(P.S. What's with all the incessant, annoying, and unnecessary footnotes?? Give it a rest, man!)

Greg says

A review where I find I'm writing more about myself than the book at hand, only because the farther along I read in the book the more I saw myself in the book -- which might not be the best way of reading a memoir.

When I first came across this book I thought 'oh cool - a book about being a librarian', then I thought it will be nice in the biography section with the other book that came out a few months ago about being a librarian, and I'll mean to read it and probably not, or at least until it comes out in paperback, and then maybe still forget about it. Then though I happened to open the book up to an early page and noticed first footnotes (and not that I would phrase it as a man-crush like the author does, I will admit being a complete sucker for David Foster Wallace (and Thomas Pynchon, but not Mark Twain who I avoid like the plague because of a horrible first experience with him at the hands of an incompetent English teacher)), which (I'm back on footnotes here) are an instant selling point to me and on the same page the story about trying to impress a librarian by reading Thomas Pynchon, only to find out the librarian thinks Pynchon is maybe some actor in a Julia Roberts movie. That's all I needed to see, the book went right on top of my to buy pile of books and actually made it out of the to buy pile in the first week it was there (no little feat let me tell you, books can live in that pile for quite awhile).

Parts of the book were a little disheartening, since I'm currently enrolled in Library School, and hearing some of the bad things about being a librarian, and the way he questioned his decision to become one and stuff, but as the book went on I found myself seeing that it's not so bad, and that a lot of the humorous horror stories he's relating could be lifted out of my own experiences working at the bookstore, with maybe a few little details changed (for example, he has a patron come up and tell him there is a man sleeping in a restroom stall, I had a woman come up to me and tell me there was a woman scratching her skin off in the ladies room, or perverts jerking off on the computers compared to some guy blowing his wad on a woman's leather jacket (while she was wearing it) in the Woman's Study aisle). Besides taking an amused solace in similar kinds of experience I also loved reading his short tales of going to Library School. I was also happy to find out that there is some kind of web-page out there for Librarians with Tattoos, it's nice to know that in the future I could belong to something bigger than myself.

I found the book to be overall really enjoyable, I'd recommend it to people, especially people who don't work in places where the homeless and crazy come to spend their days just for the wonderfully bizarre tales they bring with them.

Good stuff.

Grace says

Scott Douglas is brilliant! And he is, at the same time, just a regular guy. As a 5-year library employee (who would like to eventually get her Masters, but has to wait for financial reasons for a few years more), I could relate to so many of his stories, both of crazy patrons, and intra-office drama/gossip. His unique perspective of having worked at both a smaller and larger library ensures that librarians of all sorts will be able to relate

to something in his book. For me, it was his old (first) work building...the one with mold on the ceilings and a regular list of eclectic patrons coming in the door.

But this book really succeeds in that it is not just a cynical tell-all of all the insane things library employees have to put up with (my personal list, by the way, includes maggots in the binding of a book, being asked by a patron if he could body paint me, a patron who once printed out 100 sheets of paper with the simple internet query "how you put in PC at home" at the top of a search engine page, and so the list goes on). Scott's book is also, more importantly, the narration of an epic quest. The quest is one to find one's place in the working world, and to find satisfaction in one's job. Throughout the book, he questions whether library work is something he really WANTS to do, or something he merely has ended up doing. In the end, he finds a peace and resolution with his role as a librarian that seems to satisfy both him, and the reader (some of which have asked...or are currently asking...themselves the same question).

Two stories in this book especially moved me. The first was about a young handicapped patron and a Christmas gift, and the second was Scott's description of the closing of his old library. Throughout the book, he drives home the fact that as library employees, we are public servants, but for some reason, his description of standing alone in an empty building that had so many memories, and how when the patrons were gone, it was no longer a library at all...that was the story that drove home the fact to me the most.

High recommended to all of my fellow library employees on Good Reads. Stick your name on hold for it...you won't regret it!!!

Penny says

Homophobic, fat-hating, unlikeable, but he had some interesting points about libraries. Too bad he was a giant dick.

Jody McGrath says

Lol funny! This is the story of a man who becomes a librarian because he doesn't know what else to do. He questions his job choice, but he is really a people watcher, and the library attracts all kinds. I highly recommend this book!

Suzanne says

I loved this book. Why? Because

- A) I thought library school was the biggest waste of my time and money and will tell it to anyone who will listen
- 2) I think librarians by and large are the most socially defunct group of people (I may be included in that)
- III) Although I love the patrons, I have repeatedly said "This job would be great if it wasn't for the patrons."

This book reminded me of the many patrons who left me shaking my head (in both wonder and disgust). Two favorites include:

- The man who handed me a picture of a couch and said "I need to email this to my daughter." He did not want me to scan it (we didn't have a scanner nor had he ever heard of one); he wanted me to somehow (with

magic, I assume) get that picture onto one of his 30 flash drives (that itself is a long story) and attach it to an email. (He demonstrated this want by banging the picture and the flashdrives together and saying "But can't you just like get it on here?")

- The man who approached the children's circulation desk and announced "I am looking for something educational for my kids." I initially thought of applauding because, well, he had found the right place. Instead I lamely replied "You mean like books... like to read?" (Yes, I have one of them there MLIS degrees and yes, it is the dumbest patrons that make you, the librarian, appear to be the mentally deficient one). He was, in fact, looking for books, like to read.

And, of course, there are the library employees who are worse than worst patrons. There are the bun heads, the racists, and the bitter ol' hens who make what seems like the most boring job in the world riddled with more drama than LC and Heidi at the same club opening (see--librarians are hip; I so know what The Hills is all about).

Most of all, this book really made me miss my favorite coworkers at HWML (favorite being the ones who didn't hate me).

Disclaimer (added many days later): Not ALL librarians are either bun heads, racists, or bitter ol' hens. The clerks are too. No, but seriously, there are many, many wonderful librarians out there but it's the crazies that make for good story. And yes library school was a waste of time. Theory does not equate practice, and as Douglas pointed out in his book, there should be more internships and practicums instead of lecture, lecture, lecture. Either you're good at what you do or you aren't. Logging endless classroom hours isn't going to change that. Out of my 36 MLIS credits, 12 of them were useful and applicable to actual librarian work.

Paula says

What an unpleasant book. Scott Douglas doesn't seem to have an unreservedly positive thing to say about anything or anyone - with the exception of his significant other, Diana, who has absolutely nothing to do with the public library other than dating a staff member. He is mostly dismissive of his job and public libraries in general, then comes out with a statement like "This is my life, my passion. I see the road is long, but the road is bright." Huh? I never saw his passion for his work in this book, only his discomfort with the fact of being a librarian, a profession which he apparently finds profoundly "uncool." That's fine - he's not the first librarian I've met who feels that way, but deal with it in therapy, please, not in a tedious, unfunny book.

He makes one mean pronouncement after another about the other employees, then backtracks and says they really do get along, honestly. He tells us he hates teens, hates children, doesn't care for seniors, the homeless, or the developmentally disabled, then states how much he's learned from their nuttiness and ability to make his job more difficult while being endlessly entertaining. At one point in the book he relates how his manager decides to start serving popcorn, which Mr. Douglas find unconscionable - until he doesn't, because, as the manager explains, the kids in his neighborhood could use even the meager nutrition that popcorn delivers. But does he thank his manager for helping him to change his mind about this issue? He does not. He thanks the food: "It took a bit of popcorn and a library snack bar to make me realize that being a librarian was more than just giving people information. It was about serving a community. The food had taught me the true meaning of the word progressive." No, it couldn't possibly be that he'd learned something about compassion from his female boss, it was the food that taught him the lesson.

The way Mr. Douglas talks, you'd think every single library employee was an unmotivated, uneducated slug (except for him). But one of the things I love about working in libraries is working with so many dedicated, well-read, well-informed, enthusiastic people. There are slugs, certainly, as in every profession, but the great majority of people I've worked with, part-time pages to full-time librarians, managers, etc., have really been

wonderful. And every library I've worked in has been busy, unlike the silent-as-a-tomb places Mr. Douglas works. Do the people of Anaheim really not use their libraries, or is Mr. Douglas terrified of sounding somehow old-fashioned by spreading the word that even in the 21st century, people (all kinds of people, not just seniors and the homeless) are still using libraries?

Two more things: in one chapter Mr. Douglas speaks of storytime, but refers to the people who conduct those programs as "storytellers." Maybe this is an Anaheim thing, because I've never heard that term used to refer to the person at the front of the room who is reading stories out of a book, only to those performers who are actually "telling" stories from memory. In another weird, and frankly, wrong, use of a word, Mr. Douglas writes, "You say library and there's this iconoclastic image of an old-lady librarian telling people to be quiet and not to run." I think we can all agree that what he really means is "iconic" not "iconoclastic". Did this book not have an editor?

PS: Just like Mr. Douglas, I went to library school while also working at a public library. The best part about that was that I could tell right away what was useless theory and what was useful, practical information, and there was plenty of both. I was doing the work of a reference and Children's librarian before I took a single class, but I was definitely a better librarian after I had taken classes. The point of this is to say that if, like Mr. Douglas, you assert that you didn't learn anything in Library school, then you weren't paying attention. Mr. Douglas also states that "what they hadn't told me in library school was that being a public librarian meant you were a librarian for all people." I rather thought he would have been able to figure that out on his own, since he had actually worked in a public library for years. If you really want to know what it's like to work in a public library, don't waste your time with this book. In his effort to be funny, Mr. Douglas just ends up being mean and petty. He seems like the type of guy who will end up being the grouchy old man on the block who yells at the kids for running on his lawn.
