"Oh, I love the mustard-pot!" cried the Wart.

"Wherever did you get it?"

At this the pot beamed all over its face and began to strut a bit, but Merlyn rapped it on the head with a teaspoon, so that it sat down and shut up at once.

"It is not a bad pot," he said grudgingly, "Only it is inclined to give itself airs." ¹

"Oh, owl!" cried the Wart, forgetting about Merlyn’s troubles instantly. "Look, he has decided to talk to me!"

The Wart gently leaned his head against the smooth feathers, and the tawny owl, taking the rim of his ear in its beak, quickly nibbled right round it with the smallest nibbles.

"I shall call him Archie!"

"I trust you will do nothing of the sort," exclaimed Merlyn instantly, in a stern and angry voice, and the owl withdrew to the farthest corner of his shoulder.

"Is it wrong?"

"You might as well call me Wol, or Olly," said the owl sourly, "and have done with it."

"Or Bubbles," it added in a bitter voice.

Merlyn took the Wart’s hand and said kindly, "You are young, and do not understand these things. But you will learn that owls are the most courteous, singlehearted and faithful creatures living. You must never be familiar, rude or vulgar with them, or make them look ridiculous. Their mother is Athene, the goddess of wisdom, and, although they are often ready to play the buffoon to amuse you, such conduct is the prerogative of the truly wise. No owl can possibly be called Archie."

"I am sorry, owl," said the Wart.

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"And I am sorry, boy," said the owl. "I can see that you spoke in ignorance, and I bitterly regret that I should have been so petty as to take offence where none was intended." 2

When I began to examine seriously the current state of affairs among young people's librarians in Canada, or among those who profess a profound interest in this particular aspect of work in public libraries, and then looked at the actual practice of carrying out this task, I could not help thinking about that shiny mustard pot, and a great deal of strutting about without, really, so very much to strut about. At the same time like the owl, Archimedes, I am doubly quick to admit that we often strut about and speak in ignorance, or perhaps worse, we do not strut or speak at all. I wonder which holds within it the lesser virtue but I cannot say, for I have no real relationship to Athene but merely was once the chairman of a committee commissioned by the Young People's Section of the Canadian Library Association to look into the situation regarding young people's work in public libraries, and then to inspire, or induce, a committee to write standards with which all librarians might work.

The committee began with a glorious resolution—a real fanfare which should have moved any audience to an intensive and indeed passionate quest for the necessary ideals. Indeed the resolution left little doubt in my mind that our small committee was full of impassioned Warts. It was worded thus:

WHEREAS it is of exceeding importance that young people be stimulated and delighted by good books, that their reading interests be developed to extend their knowledge and broaden their horizons and thus help them to understand and to accept their responsibilities of living in a complex world, and

WHEREAS the development of this specialized service demands adequate organization, and

WHEREAS the Canadian Library Association Inquiry referring to Young People's Sections, or Departments, in Public Libraries, has shown these sections or departments to be inadequate to fulfill their responsibilities,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Executive of the Young People's Section (of the Canadian Library Association) appoint a committee to formulate standards for young people's work in Canadian Public Libraries. 3
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Only a few weeks of hard work as chairman began to give me the notion that perhaps the resolution had not been warmly spoken without a great fear. Perhaps our love was more like the Wart's fearful and respectful admiration and affection for the owl, Archimedes. Surely our resolution was not too high a challenge. Did it seem to strut about too much? Or were we, in fear, beginning to strut about?

The wonderful thing about the dialog was that although some people began to speak about standards and other people's ideas in terms equally as detestable to those people as the names Wol and Olly were to a dignified owl like Archimedes, still we are all on pretty friendly terms. And indeed I am quite prepared to state boldly that even questioned privately, in most instances, those whose feathers were most ruffled would, like the owl, admit that they were sorry for getting so upset because, after all, they realize that everybody was speaking in ignorance and it was just petty of them to take offence where none was intended.

Our survey of young people’s sections, or departments, in Canadian public libraries was a part of the Canadian Library Inquiry of 1960-1961. Our resolution to write standards immediately followed the results of this inquiry and the subsequent six years of study and continuous correspondence enriched every single librarian in Canada who gives a “hoot” (I can’t forget the owl) about what happens to young people in our public libraries. The arguments and changes made in our ideas, and really in our ideals, printed as a working paper for a conference, and which in the future will be named “Guidelines for Work with Young People in Canadian Public Libraries,” can be a jumping-off place for the future. We had to begin somewhere to put down some of those principles which we had discussed and observed to be best in our work with young people. It is, however, the feeling among most librarians that there are no special standards for work with young people, but that any standards which can be formulated can only be the same as those written for first-rate public library service generally.

The actual everyday practice in many of our public libraries, compared with the above attitude, is almost amusing but certainly heartening, because young people are usually considered in a special way. Of course, there are places where, as in other professions, there is a lack of inspiration which precludes a search for the understanding so essential in dealing with youth. It is true that many are discouraged,
or confused. Standards could have made a middle way possible because standards must look squarely at who librarians are, whom they serve and what their special needs are. Perhaps “guidelines” can do the same in a more roundabout fashion.

One disturbing attitude was raised over and over again in our discussions. This was the conviction that youth, in their grasp of current thought, are the equals of, or have surpassed those who serve them in libraries. If this were true, which it is not, then we have surely failed. Some maintained that librarians could never keep up with the current curricula set by schools and universities. I have not found it necessary to keep up in this sense surely, nor have others. It is true that a child aged four may be taught calculus but this is not to suppose that he has already acquired wisdom and understanding. Wisdom, common sense, and concern linked with curiosity and “wonder at the world” are unbeatable attributes in good librarians. These are not normally all present in a child aged four. They are taking shape in the searching mind of youth but they are not to be feared by librarians. Not even when a fifteen-year-old boy decides to write an essay on the love lyrics of Catullus or a comparison of relativity and metaphysics. But standards would say that the good librarian supports his young public in all such pursuits—supports youth to plumb the depths of a subject even to discover that one must learn more in order to understand. This is, in truth, education.

It seems to me that those who serve best in Canada have found a middle way. They know that to fear is to remain static, to withhold knowledge. A middle path gives one room to explore and still have a firm footing. Thus knowledge is no longer withheld. Slowly, and then in a kind of torrent, librarians said that boys and girls in senior elementary grades must have access to the young people’s section, which is tantamount to saying, the adult library. Canadian librarians are now stating quite firmly, although for a long time we suspected it to be quite true, that young people must not be cut off from the library in a separate room. They must have the whole of a library but with first rate guidance and knowledge, and of course, as often as possible, first rate librarians who are specialists in library work with young people. Now, of course, this also implies that children from the senior elementary grades will visit the adult library more frequently because they will be permitted entrance, as previously agreed, to young people’s facilities which must continue to include young people’s specialists working in an adult area.
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In the years to come—perhaps sooner than most Canadian librarians either hope for or think possible—these collected papers now to be called “guidelines” will demand to be turned into “standards.” Experience will select, as if by magic, a need for standards of practice. Indeed how can it be otherwise if a special kind of attitude and service is required within any disciplined profession?

The Canadian Library Inquiry of 1960-61 looked into work with young people in Canadian public libraries serving areas with a population of 10,000 persons and over. Seventy-six replies were received in response to their survey. Some simply condemned the notion that young people’s work was any different in practice than work with adults. Others answered questions with serious concern and comments. Certainly there was room for discussion, improvement and hoped-for standards.

When by 1964 no real agreement could be reached on what standards should be written, another survey was embarked on by questioning people in each of the provinces and the Yukon who had a broad knowledge of library affairs generally and who could comment or refer us to others who might be consulted. Again we received letters intimating that while more and more libraries were concerned about giving youth access to larger book collections, there was a growing need for standards of performance and practice. However, there was a disturbing suggestion of doubt that standards could be set for a whole country. In fact one prominent librarian of one of our largest public libraries told me privately that standards are impossible goals.

My question was and still is, standards in what sense? If standards are ideals formed as a result of practice, observation, careful selection, and examined thought, then surely they must be called standards. Standards are not rules and regulations. They are absolutes, something to be striven for, which in actual practice and circumstances may appear in variant forms. This difference in definition was the barrier to a successful discussion and completion of written standards. It is important to point out here that in the preface to the collected papers which are to be called “guidelines” we stated:

From the beginning, the Committee on Standards intended that what they studied and wrote should be applicable to all libraries regardless of size. . . . It seemed of paramount importance that we write some kind of answers to fundamental questions. How does our affluent society affect youth? What makes a young person? What are his library requirements? How shall we approach him?
How shall we introduce him to the wide world of reading in the public library? Then in the chapter about organization and the technical functioning of the young people’s section of a library where we specify sums of money, percentages, allocated space, number of staff or methods of staff training and conducting of staff meetings, we have indicated that individual libraries would have to adapt these quantitative standards to their particular size and scope.

It was never the committee’s intention to write a rule book or a handbook. It was rather a kind of spontaneous desire amongst the committee to write something which, while it would surely set down some guide lines, would above all else inspire and encourage and provide a jumping-off place to new and better library service for Canadian youth.4

It is true that examples of procedure were cited within some of the papers but these were merely used as references. Regional libraries which vary with regard to their functioning and procedure in Canada were also encompassed. School dropouts were included in our planning, although we recognized that these are difficult to reach, come most often to the library when driven through necessity, and then certainly are more likely to consider themselves as members of the adult program. In Canada many have returned to the adult library through our war on poverty and Manpower Training Programme.

Perhaps my readers assume at this point that my attitude is one of almost complete disillusionment or at least skepticism when I consider Canadian librarians total reaction toward youth. This is not so but I will admit an absence of continuity of action and feeling among Canadian librarians in this specific instance. On the other hand I do not forget that Canada is a vast country sparsely populated in ratio to its size, with many large empty spaces lying between populations and libraries. Without the Canadian Library Association we would never have had an opportunity to work toward standards. Nor would we have two excellent book committees that issue comprehensive booklists5 and a newsletter to bind us together in some common pursuits. The provincial library associations have also been useful for communication of ideas especially between school librarians and public librarians. However, school librarians in provincial library associations tend to dominate the young people’s sections. The reason for this is that few librarians from public libraries have specialized in the past, or had opportunities to work primarily with youth, and

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therefore are more likely to select meetings concerning problems directly connected with adult services thus overlooking what some consider a quite important sector of adult work, the young person.

The picture has a brighter side; in correspondence with librarians I have clearly discerned one predominant philosophy—youth must be given all of the library materials they require because a library which serves well in a patron’s early years means a library used for a lifetime. Nobody will deny that all young men and women in the modern world will need to participate in continuing education throughout their entire lives. Our 1961 survey showed 13 librarians engaged in full-time work and 63 librarians in part-time work with young people in libraries serving populations of 50,000 or more. At this time there were no librarians engaged in full-time work but 32 in part-time work in libraries serving populations of 10,000 to 50,000 persons. Correspondence in 1964 with all provinces and territories, along with recent Canadian Library Association Young People’s Section meetings, have proven that the general trend is to amalgamate young people’s work with adult services, using the same staff with specialists whenever possible, the same area and the same book collection, but adding special displays, tours, or classes in the use of library materials and special booklists. This is also the case in large public libraries like Vancouver, Edmonton, and Toronto.

Toronto still emphasizes the role of the young people’s specialist as it has done over many years. In fact Toronto Public Library, like the Canadian Library Association, consistently seeks the best attitudes toward and practices within the area of young people’s service within its Adult Services Division. The best service to youth in Canadian libraries came out of Toronto Public Library and spread throughout Canada in at least four ways: (1) through Toronto’s very important role in the work of both the provincial and national library associations; (2) through the personnel who have worked for this library, learned its philosophy, and received its staff training; (3) through its reading guidance in first-rate book selection, which has been published in excellent lists; and (4) through articles and talks prepared by its staff. Today at Toronto Public Library a young adult staff is abreast of the times in work with youth, constantly making the entire staff aware of this special section of the community. Thus young people are served equally well in Toronto’s larger libraries and may be referred on to a central reference service. The entire book collection
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is at the disposal of young people, nearly always with expert guidance available.

This is as it must be and should be in all of our larger libraries. But many still fail because they either set up separate rooms which have proven themselves for the most part redundant, since they must still make the entire library available to young people, or they give students complete access to their collections without adequate guidance. In smaller libraries where the population served is 50,000 or less, book collections are smaller and not as difficult for students to use, but nevertheless youth are neglected if there is no trained librarian to work with them after school hours. Many librarians surveyed have reported no such service.

Again we must not forget the willingness displayed by young people’s librarians at our meetings on standards for young people’s work in the public library to try to provide some kind of special service to youth within the adult services sections, or departments of their libraries. Although recognizing shortcomings in service to young adults, we must remain aware of Canada’s shortage of librarians and the demands made upon our library schools by industries, universities, schools and government. Nor should we forget those communities where good library service is not easily obtained because the communities are small and distant from larger centers. Our “guidelines” state without any reservations that although there may be no special staff, or space for guided library tours or classes, book talks, displays, or even booklists, there must be sound book selection and some inspiration from some source. In other words the “guidelines” consider even the smallest and most inadequately served communities from the point of view of library service. And in these cases the “guidelines” suggest lists for buying, and at least some means of access to reference resources outside of the community. Where there are regional library systems we have drawn attention to those services—mainly sound book selection and inspiration—which are possible to lesser and greater degrees depending upon staff and cooperation within a regional setting.

It is easy to write about what seems to be a simple and easy method for obtaining a fairly good library service through good book selection and some correspondence or telephone communication. It is a much more difficult thing to make even this kind of library service, especially where so many miles often lie between those who need help and those who would like to give it. The point is that our committee
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did aim to write standards that, as a philosophy, would inspire librarians and officials to see what our young people really require and how they, as responsible librarians, ought to feel about taking action.

The Young People's Section of the Canadian Library Association has come a long way since it was constituted in 1950. Besides, we of the committee on standards really know now what we would like to achieve in young adult service, even if all those concerned are not in total agreement about the best means to be used in every spot on our map, and even if we differ in our concepts of the term “standard.” We may have a perilous journey ahead. But the exchange of ideas brought about by launching standards may help to keep reason on our side and enable us to keep pace with the times and their new demands.

References

2. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
4. Ibid., p. ii.