

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript  
Episode #37  
“How to collect a collection with Jessica Russell”  
Sno-Isle Libraries, Aug. 30, 2019



Jim Hills:	00:00	Hi, this is Jim Hills and in this episode I get a chance to speak with Jessica Russell. Jessica has one of the longer titles here at Sno-Isle Libraries, and for my money, one of the most interesting jobs. Her title is assistant director technical services for collections services. What that means is Jessica gets to help build and keep fresh the collection of materials here at Sno-Isle Libraries. So we'll talk to Jessica about her background in libraries, what it does take to keep a collection going, and we're going to ask Jessica what her favorite part of the collection is. We'll be back right after this.
Speaker 2:	00:46	Welcome to season two and episode 37 of Check It Out!, The Sno-Isle Libraries podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds.
Speaker 3:	00:54	The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.
Jim Hills:	01:02	Hi, I'm Jim Hills and I'm here in the studio with Jessica Russell, who is assistant director of collection services here at Sno-Isle Libraries. I'm excited to be able to introduce Jessica to all our listeners. I've had wonderful opportunities to have conversations with her here in the building, with my role as communications and marketing. Actually I have a new title, assistant director, hyphen, no wait, assistant director communications, is it comma or hyphen?
Jessica Russell:	01:32	Comma. I say comma.
Jim Hills:	01:33	Communications and marketing.
Jessica Russell:	01:34	Yes.
Jim Hills:	01:35	It's a mouthful.
Jessica Russell:	01:36	It is.

(Continued)

Jim Hills: 01:36 Yeah. So I do communications and marketing. And you do...

Jessica Russell: 01:40 Collection services.

Jim Hills: 01:41 Yay. So you're relatively new. I'm new. But you're newer.

Jessica Russell: 01:47 I'm brand spanking new.

Jim Hills: 01:51 So how long have you been here?

Jessica Russell: 01:52 I started at the end of March. Yeah, I drove, I finished up my work in Houston on a Friday, and I packed up my car and set off on a Monday, and started work here the following Monday.

Jim Hills: 02:08 That is not much of a break.

Jessica Russell: 02:10 No, but I have to say it was a beautiful drive.

Jim Hills: 02:15 Cool.

Jessica Russell: 02:16 Absolutely breathtaking.

Jim Hills: 02:18 Have you been here before?

Jessica Russell: 02:20 I was actually out here in Seattle for the American Library Association mid-winter meeting.

Jim Hills: 02:26 Was that your first introduction to the Northwest?

Jessica Russell: 02:29 It was not. I actually have an aunt who lives in Seattle, and when I was in high school, my dad and I came out and did a sea kayaking trip in British Columbia.

Jim Hills: 02:40 You're totally legit as a Northwesterner.

Jessica Russell: 02:42 I am legit. And I have, I was so delighted to get the opportunity to come move out here. I like a gray, gloomy day.

Jim Hills: 02:51 It's good for reading.

Jessica Russell: 02:52 I think it suit me really well. It's perfect for reading.

Jim Hills: 02:55 So what were you doing in Houston?

Jessica Russell: 02:57 I was the collection development manager at the Harris County Library System in Houston.

Jim Hills: 03:03 Is that Houston? Is Harris County Houston?

Jessica Russell: 03:05 Harris County is Houston. Yeah. And it's really similar to the relationship between King County and Seattle Public, here in this area where you've got a big city system, and then a big county system. And I managed the collections for that big county system.

Jim Hills: 03:22 So what prompted the attraction to come to Sno-Isle libraries and do the, are you doing the same thing? Are you ish?

Jessica Russell: 03:30 Ish. I managed collection development there, and here I have moved up to to manage that whole process of collections, which is a really exciting career development for me. A really fantastic opportunity for growth.

Jim Hills: 03:45 So for our listeners who, collections, so of course a library has a collection, but how does a library get a collection? I'm imagining that's a big piece of your role.

Jessica Russell: 03:55 Yeah, that's exactly what my department does. We manage the budget, we purchase all of the books, the magazines, the DVDs, the CDs, all the things that if you check it out, then we probably picked it out. We placed it on order, we got it into the library building. We figured out a way to categorize it so we'd be able to locate it again. Another department does all the processing, but they are awesome.

Jim Hills: 04:26 Of course.

Jessica Russell: 04:27 Of course. Carolyn and her crew, but we then look at the life cycle of those items as well, because it's not just a one and done, we purchase the materials, and they go to the shelf and we never think about them again. It's a lot like your closet at home where there's maintenance that has to be done. We have to let some things go whenever they get soiled or torn or dirty, and replace things on a regular basis.

Jim Hills: 04:59 So sometimes here on Check It Out, the hosts make jokes of their own age. You're clearly younger than me, as our listeners can clearly see. And so you've got a ton of experience in collections. I'm curious first about how you go about deciding, and then... like three things. How do you go about deciding, how does a customer influence that at all or ever, and then how has it changed while you've been doing it? How do you go about deciding?

Jessica Russell: 05:37 Well, we use all kinds of tools. There's thankfully all kinds of fantastic tools. We use review journals where other librarians have reviewed materials and give us a quick synopsis about why we do or don't want that item. A lot of our vendors, the companies that we buy all our books from, they do give us some help in winnowing that fire hose of new publications down to a nice comfortable garden hose trickle. And we make sure that we use those resources, and then we are really actively engaged in what's going on in pop culture, what's on the New York Times Best Seller List. It's a lot of nets laid over the top of one another, so that we make sure that we're capturing all that great material.

Jim Hills: 06:28 Sno-Isle I think has like 1.2 million items in the collection, something like that.

Jessica Russell: 06:32 1.5.

Jim Hills: 06:32 1.5 million.

Jessica Russell: 06:32 1.5.

Jim Hills: 06:36 See, you're having an impact already.

Jessica Russell: 06:37 I just got my collection report.

Jim Hills: 06:41 So you've talked about the fire hose of stuff. How much stuff has to get filtered? How big is that fire hose? Could we have bazillions of things in the collection?

Jessica Russell: 06:49 Yeah, I don't know what the numbers are in terms of what's being published, but it feels like it's really turned up. The publishing world has really turned things up a notch, especially once some of that gatekeeping of it just being the Big Five publishers kind of eased up, and there's all that self-publishing that's a really active environment. We've got to use the tools that we do in order to kind of narrow things down a little bit. And then you'd asked about what role the customers play.

Jim Hills: 07:20 So yeah, you've got these folks that are helping you, that you're managing. How does a customer get involved with this?

Jessica Russell: 07:26 So Sno-Isle has a great system called Request For Item Not In Catalog, or RINC. It rolls right off the tongue, RINC. And all of our customers can access that through the Sno-Isle website, and let us know what they would like to see that we don't have on the shelf.

Jim Hills: 07:44 That's awesome. So does that happen very often?

Jessica Russell: 07:47 Oh, Oh, I wish I could remember the count, but hundreds, we're filling hundreds of RINCs on a weekly basis.

Jim Hills: 07:55 No kidding?

Jessica Russell: 07:55 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 07:56 On a weekly basis.

Jessica Russell: 07:57 On a weekly basis.

Jim Hills: 07:57 Responding to customers who want something that's not in the collection, and we go out and get it for them.

Jessica Russell: 08:03 Absolutely. And some of it, it's also a feedback process. Some of it is folks are saying, "We really want you to get that new James Patterson." And we say, "Yes, we're already on top of that. We've already got that James Patterson for you."

Jim Hills: 08:17 I think that's really interesting, because I often have a feeling about agencies, and a small library's an agency, that is maybe not paying attention to me, but this sounds like we pay really close attention to the customers, and what they are looking for and what they want.

Jessica Russell: 08:39 We do.

Jim Hills: 08:39 Like it's actually their library, we're just holding it for them.

Jessica Russell: 08:45 It is absolutely their library, and that's part of the beauty of a community library construct, is that it's meant to grow in response to what customers need. And so our collection at Freeland may look a little bit different than our collection at Lynnwood. We're a floating collection, which means that we allow all of the materials in our system to move around from those 23 locations freely. But the customers, by their choices, by what they checkout, by what they place on hold, they're also helping to build those community library collections. And that's a really exciting element of it. Not only at that floating collection level, but then they tell us what kind of content they want to see.

Jim Hills: 09:32 So we got off on a tangent because I really wanted to follow like where you were before Houston. And I looked, I got a peek at

your bio ahead of time, and it said Montgomery, it actually said MCC something L.

Jessica Russell: 09:45 MCMLS.

Jim Hills: 09:45 And I had to look that up and it said Montgomery County, I went isn't Montgomery County like in... around the DC area? So she came from DC. Nope. Montgomery County, your Montgomery County is not in the DC area, is it?

Jessica Russell: 09:58 No, it was north of Houston.

Jim Hills: 10:00 It's in Texas.

Jessica Russell: 10:01 Yeah Houston sits right centered in Harris County, and then for about a decade, I worked in the county north of there. And it's very much like the setup of Snohomish and Island counties, sort of north of King County.

Jim Hills: 10:17 Yeah. So Texas, is it in your blood or do you just acquire it? What was before that?

Jessica Russell: 10:25 It snuck up on me. I actually grew up in Baton Rouge in Louisiana, and went to library school there, and just happenstance happened to end up in East Texas, in Houston, and got settled in there. And I have to say that the library world in Texas is really connected. There's a really active state library association, the Texas Library Association. And it gave me some really incredible opportunities to be connected to other librarians in Texas. And I think it really kept me there.

Jim Hills: 11:03 So Louisiana, and then Texas, and now Sno-Isle libraries, there are only a couple of places further west you can go, and stay in the US, so we'll see what happens next, right?

Jessica Russell: 11:14 I'm Alaska bound.

Jim Hills: 11:14 Yeah, there you go. Is Hawaii farther west? Yeah, absolutely. You can go either one. Yeah, you can choose. So the other question I wanted to know is how are have things changed in collection development? Because I know that clearly the things that are in the collection, we've talked before on this podcast about how Sno-Isle libraries used to be able to check out art for people's walls, and you could check out a painting, have that on your wall, wherever, for a while, and then swap it out for something new. We don't do that anymore. There are a few things we don't do anymore. We don't do VHS tapes anymore-

Jessica Russell: 11:52 Or cassette tapes.

Jim Hills: 11:52 Or cassette tapes.

Jessica Russell: 11:52 Or 8-track.

Jim Hills: 11:53 Right. So there's the thing itself that has changed. So a little bit of that, and then kind of the what of the collection. So talk about the physicalness of the collection. How is that changing? How are things, where are we going?

Jessica Russell: 12:12 That is a fantastic question. And I have to say, you said that I was, you just knew that I was younger than you are, but I've still been, I started I think in libraries at a really interesting and pivotal time, because VHS was still really prevalent when I became a librarian, and-

Jim Hills: 12:31 I have a few of those, more than a few of those in my basement.

Jessica Russell: 12:34 There you go. There you go. And they were great, because they were incredibly durable, much more so than DVDs. And when I started, we had these big reference collections with multi-volume sets, and just rows and rows of reference items. And I attended to and maintained a reference collection like that at a couple locations over the course of my career. But around 2008, around the time of the recession, libraries really took a hit budget-wise, and we started to pull back heavily from purchasing that kind of print reference. And at that point, the internet was so firmly established as a resource that people went to first that we pulled back on some of the things that we had had before, like big reference collections. And I think we've moved a lot more into resources and support of people's lives, their daily lives.

Jessica Russell: 13:38 We entertain, we delight, we inform, we engage, but we're more focused too on having materials just in time, rather than just in case.

Jim Hills: 13:51 I've never heard that phrase before. I love that.

Jessica Russell: 13:53 It's one of my favorites. I envision us moving to a collection that's maybe a slightly smaller footprint, but all in really fantastic condition. We replace those mid-list titles that are evergreen and that have such a hold on our hearts. I think about things like Harry Potter that we just continue to love and replace. And we move away from some of those bigger reference collections, and we make space in our library

buildings too, for people to gather, to use our Wi-Fi. And in order to do that, we did have to move away a little bit and reduce some of our print collections.

Jim Hills: 14:40 Has that change changed how you see your role as a librarian? Whatever attracted you to being a librarian in the place? How does that, the role of the library and the community in this relationship with the customer, how have you seen that on a personal level, and how you view that?

Jessica Russell: 15:05 So the thing that's been the constant is the change. And when I think about what my future in library is, it looks like the one thing that I know that's going to be constant is the change. But the other constant is that love of story, that love of ideas. And the thing that's changing is more the way that we deliver them, the way that we interact with them, the way that we access them, but not really the stories or the data at the heart of all of those different formats. So that line that stretches out from like cassette tapes to our downloadable digital eAudio books, it's all the same kinds of stories. We're just delivering it in different ways and accessing it in different ways.

Jim Hills: 15:54 That's an excellent point. As we see, in my role in communications and marketing, we're really trying to look at what customers are doing in the rest of their lives. What is their expectation of receiving information? Either information that they need, or information they want, because they need it for their lives or they want it for... just for entertainment. And what method do they want? And that is clearly changing.

Jessica Russell: 16:28 It's changing, but the thing that's really interesting is that some people are digging in and they've formed really strong preferences. But I think that those are more outliers, and we see a lot more of people, they're like, "Well, whatever's available, whatever's convenient." And if I'm standing here in the library building, and Michelle Obama's *Becoming* is on the shelf, and it's my lucky day, then I check it out and that's fantastic. And if not, maybe I've got a hold on the eAudio because I wanted something to listen to in the car. I think more people are becoming a little bit more agnostic about the format, and just looking at it as a matter of convenience. Like what can they get that at that point that they need it.

Jim Hills: 17:12 Right. As you were talking, I was reminded, I think I saw probably a New Yorker cartoon recently with two people looking at their iPhones. I don't know if they're iPhones. I have an iPhone. Phones. And they clearly can't get a signal, and one of them says to the other, "Couldn't they just put it on paper? It

would be so much more convenient." So books aren't going away, are they?

Jessica Russell: 17:34 No, no. And I think we have to think back to like human basic needs. We like to touch stuff, we're tactile. And we also spend a lot of time with screens. And so our eyes need a rest. Folks still enjoy the physical experience of a book, and holding the book. So I don't expect that we will stop having physical books at the library anytime soon. It's just that we're now in that space of balancing both the print and digital collection.

Jim Hills: 18:06 So speaking of stories, that people are still looking for stories, I'm imagining that in collection development we have, as you said earlier, there are people who have areas of expertise, and they get assigned that. Do you have a particular area of expertise or a particular area that you gravitate to in your own reading?

Jessica Russell: 18:28 I do. I do. Thank you for asking me that question, Jim. I am a huge romance reader from way back.

Jim Hills: 18:37 No kidding?

Jessica Russell: 18:37 Yes.

Jim Hills: 18:39 So romance novels don't always get a ton of respect I think in the writing world, right?

Jessica Russell: 18:45 That's correct.

Jim Hills: 18:46 Okay.

Jessica Russell: 18:46 Let's change that right now.

Jim Hills: 18:49 So tell me about romance and how that works for you, and how you view that.

Jessica Russell: 18:56 In preparation for coming to talk to you today, I had looked up the definition of romance as a genre, because I thought that was kind of interesting, because sometimes you'll get, as a reader, somebody will say, "Oh this has romance in it." And sure that's fine, but I don't want fiction with romance. I want romance as a genre. And those books have a central love story as the main focus, and then they have a happily ever after, or a happy for now. So they have an emotionally satisfying ending. And I think that's part of what I love about it, is that emotional satisfaction that you get. And then I found this amazing quote

from Jennifer Crusie who said, "A romance novel is based on the idea of an innate emotional justice in the universe."

Jim Hills: 19:45 Oh wow.

Jessica Russell: 19:46 And that absolutely resonates with me. The idea of romance as innate emotional justice.

Jim Hills: 19:53 So romance and justice going together, right?

Jessica Russell: 19:55 Yes, yes. Well, it's a moment in the day when everything is going to work out, and maybe you'll be breathless wondering if they're going to get back together. But they do, and you know that. And you're just there to enjoy the ride.

Jim Hills: 20:15 Awesome. So I don't know exactly when we're going to post this episode, but it is early August, and I happen to know that this month, we're doing something out of collection development, actually it's out of, what do we call that area anymore? Anyway, we've got a blog post-

Jessica Russell: 20:35 I was going to say, give me a hint.

Jim Hills: 20:36 Bibliophiles. We've got a blog post on bibliophiles-

Jessica Russell: 20:40 Beyond Bestsellers.

Jim Hills: 20:41 Beyond Bestsellers, focusing on Nora Roberts. And so if you love Nora Roberts, what else might you love? And that's happening this month.

Jessica Russell: 20:51 That's exactly right. And our feature title on OverDrive this month is Made for Us by Samantha Chase, I do believe, and it's a great contemporary romance, very centered in family. Nora Roberts does these great multigenerational sagas, and they're really rich and atmospheric. So if you're a Nora Roberts fan, you should check out Made for Us on OverDrive.

Jim Hills: 21:18 And if you're listening right now, and you just can't bring yourself to listen to the rest of this, and you want to go find out, I'll link to this right now. You'd go to Sno-Isle.org, and then you'd go in the upper nav, and you go to we suggest, and go to bibliophiles, I think, blog, and you'll find that link. It's on our website, and you can go find that download. It's available, no waiting.

Jessica Russell: 21:46 No waiting for the month of August.

Jim Hills: 21:48 So can we drill down on that a little bit? Because you mentioned OverDrive-

Jessica Russell: 21:53 It's one of our digital platforms.

Jim Hills: 21:56 A vendor that we use, right? To deliver. And that's one of the things that you have talked a lot about since you've been here since May?

Jessica Russell: 22:07 End of March.

Jim Hills: 22:08 End of March. Who knows, M months. And it's very interesting trying to bring forth that availability of that digital platform, and how flexible it is, and what's available there, and how customers can interact with that.

Jessica Russell: 22:25 Yeah, I think that it's a commonly held misconception that if it's a digital eBook, then just everybody should be able to access it at the same time, and there's some misunderstandings about why do I have to wait for this eBook, why do I have to wait a really long time for that really popular eBook? And it's because the publishers set the license, and the licenses, how we are able to lend it out to our customers, and we have some publishers that do one copy, one user, and that's one person at a time.

Jessica Russell: 23:02 The perfect situation is simultaneous use, which means that anybody who wants to check something out can, and I'm really excited to remind our listeners that we have a fantastic selection of simultaneous-use eAudio books in our OverDrive Collection. So there's a couple hundred eAudio books that you never have to wait for. They're always there waiting for you.

Jim Hills: 23:24 And that group changes?

Jessica Russell: 23:27 They're consistent for about a year. We lease them and then we get the opportunity to either pick new ones, or continue on with some of those same ones.

Jim Hills: 23:35 So if you want something now-

Jessica Russell: 23:37 Those are the things to go for.

Jim Hills: 23:39 We got it now. On the other hand, we are kind of the original shared economy, right? Public libraries?

Jessica Russell: 23:46 Absolutely.

Jim Hills: 23:46 It's part of the community aspect, and I think I've heard you say something about, well actually that's a big part of Beyond Bestsellers. If there is a Nora Roberts there, I was... so as a quick aside on Nora Roberts, I am not a romance reader. I tend to read-

Jessica Russell: 24:06 You could be converted.

Jim Hills: 24:07 I could be. I tend to read nonfiction. And Nora Roberts has written 220 titles. Oh my God, when does she eat?

Jessica Russell: 24:18 She is prolific.

Jim Hills: 24:18 Yeah. Does she eat or sleep ever?

Jessica Russell: 24:18 Nah, nah.

Jim Hills: 24:18 No, that's unbelievable.

Jessica Russell: 24:21 She just writes books.

Jim Hills: 24:23 And then she has, she writes under another name.

Jessica Russell: 24:26 J.D. Robb.

Jim Hills: 24:26 And has another 40 titles under that.

Jessica Russell: 24:28 That's right.

Jim Hills: 24:29 That's unbelievable.

Jessica Russell: 24:30 And she doesn't just write like contemporary romance. She does contemporary, and paranormal, and fantasy romance blends. So she is a Jack of all trades, master of all.

Jim Hills: 24:45 Amazing. So Nora Roberts, prolific. And we have this opportunity to not only see what Nora Roberts is like, but we have a bunch of other things in the collection that if you like Nora Roberts, you can also, you might like these other things and we have plenty of suggestions for you.

Jessica Russell: 25:05 That's absolutely correct. Some of our fantastic community library genre experts have collected those titles. There's some amazing suggestions on the blog post that you've already referred to, and then if you go to the Sno-Isle OverDrive page, they've already got some of those suggestions collected. You

don't even have to search for them. They're just all waiting there for you on display.

- Jim Hills: 25:29 Just come get them.
- Jessica Russell: 25:30 Just come get them.
- Jim Hills: 25:31 I said this a couple of times before, but one of the interesting things that I have learned from librarians is that, and this whole idea of waiting, is that go into the collection, here's your library card. Go into the collection, and look. And look for the thing that you might've been looking for, but look next door. Look on the shelf right next to it, the digital, the virtual shelf or the real shelf.
- Jessica Russell: 25:55 Ask a librarian, ask a librarian. They love, we love to talk about books. And if that book that you really wanted is in, we would love to send you out of the building, or away from the digital collection with something you didn't even know that you wanted.
- Jim Hills: 26:10 I had that experience just the other day in a meeting, one of the librarians from the Oak Harbor Library, and I was sharing that, so I do read a lot of nonfiction, but my go-to used to be Carl Hiaasen, who writes funny crime things out of Florida. And he's kind of running to the end of his string. And so I was saying this, and he goes, "Oh, you've got to read..." And I actually, I can't remember-
- Jessica Russell: 26:38 Is it Randy Wayne White?
- Jim Hills: 26:39 Yeah.
- Jessica Russell: 26:40 Because the minute you said Carl Hiaasen, I was like, "Have you read Randy Wayne White?"
- Jim Hills: 26:44 No. But in that meeting, I used my phone, my Libby app, and I downloaded it. So I've got that in my Libby app now.
- Jessica Russell: 26:52 Just a fun fact, that author used to get-
- Jim Hills: 26:54 And I didn't get yelled at for using my phone in the meeting, which was so cool.
- Jessica Russell: 26:57 Because you were doing library business?
- Jim Hills: 26:58 Yes.

Jessica Russell: 27:00 That author, Randy Wayne White used to write for Outside Magazine in the 90s, and he is a fantastic journalist. He had a regular column, and he's well worth the read.

Jim Hills: 27:10 So very similar to Carl Hiaasen.

Jessica Russell: 27:12 Yeah, yeah. Very similar.

Jim Hills: 27:13 Cool.

Jessica Russell: 27:14 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 27:14 Are there other things that strike you about being a librarian in this moment that you find exciting?

Jessica Russell: 27:31 It's incredibly exciting to be in a profession that is changing so rapidly and and visibly. And I know that this is not an uncommon experience, and yet there's something, I don't know, there's something special about it. There's something special about the way that we sort of guide our community through that change. I also remember when libraries had card catalogs. That was my library experience growing up. And so now I'm getting to see this incredible arc of what libraries are changing and evolving into, and I'm really grateful to have the opportunity to see that. But also to be with our communities as we go through those changes.

Jim Hills: 28:26 Thank you so much. It's really exciting to be able to one, work with you, and then talk on the podcast with you about this stuff, and realize and bring this message that there are people here at Sno-Isle libraries that are really excited about bringing a public library to meet the needs of customers, to serve communities, and acknowledge that yeah, that change is happening, changes are happening, and that's a good thing.

Jessica Russell: 28:57 And we're still going to be here.

Jim Hills: 28:58 Yeah.

Jessica Russell: 28:59 Yeah.

Jim Hills: 29:00 Thank you so much.

Jessica Russell: 29:01 Thank you so much Jim.

Speaker 5: 29:03 Cuddle up with your preschooler reading fun books like Good Night Moon or Chicka Chicka Boom Boom. You'll find 100

enjoyable picture book titles which were hand-selected by Sno-Isle librarians. Guaranteed to create delightful and meaningful afternoon and bedtime experiences. All while helping your children learn to read. Find the Countdown to Kindergarten list, and many more online at Sno-Isle Libraries.

Speaker 2: 29:30

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