



Photo by John Carmen

# JACK TALES

BY KIMBERLY PARSLEY

CATALOGING THE STORY OF JACK G. MONTGOMERY'S CAREER IS NO EASY TASK. HE BEGAN HIS CAREER IN PRIVATE INDUSTRY, AND SINCE THEN HAS BEEN A RECORDING MUSICIAN, FOLKLORIST, LIBRARIAN, AND PUBLISHED AUTHOR. CURRENTLY, HE IS ALL OF THESE ALL AT ONCE.

Professor Montgomery's day job is Collections Services Coordinator in the Department of Library Technical Services at Western Kentucky University. His former career in private industry along with the professional librarian positions he has held at four universities led him to become interested in conflict management,

specifically as it relates to libraries and librarians. Along with a colleague from Appalachian State University, Montgomery co-authored *Conflict Management for Libraries: Strategies for a Positive, Productive Workplace*, published by the American Library Association in 2005.

For the book, Montgomery and his colleague conducted a national online survey. "What we decided to do with the survey was not to focus on the statistics and numbers, but to try to develop an instrument that would allow people to tell us their stories, get them to tell us their concerns, because that's the perception of reality they experience each day," he said. "We sent it out and in the first three days we had more than 150 responses. I knew at that time we must have hit some nerves."

Eventually, 455 surveys were included in the data. In addition, the authors also received letters, often

lengthy, from people describing their workplace situations. The results were revealing, and included positive responses in addition to negative responses. Montgomery said that often the responses sent in by managers were quite different from those sent in by their subordinates. Most shocking of the survey information received by Montgomery and his colleague were fifty-seven accounts of inter-office violence.

**"It's very hard for me to just do one thing."**

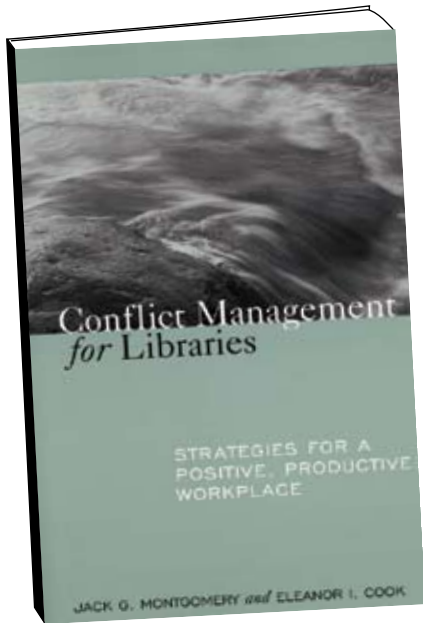
The authors concluded that working in a library is like working in the post office, and cited several reasons for this claim: much of the work is repetitive and detail oriented; layers of bureaucracy distance employees from decision making,

leading to feelings of helplessness; library job skills are often not transferable to the non-library business world; and the syndrome of having a "job for life" changes how managers deal with serious human resources matters.

From the responses, the structure and arrangement of the book was determined: seventeen case studies were featured with each followed by commentary by two professional conflict mediators and a commentary by the authors.

Since the book's publication, and due to good reviews in the professional literature, Professor Montgomery has been giving presentations and conducting workshops on handling conflict and on emotional intelligence at various conferences and institutions across the country. "What I'm really trying to do is reach out and say, 'this has to be a perceptual change for managers to work with and practice everyday,'" he said.





Jack Montgomery's book, *Conflict Management for Libraries*

Montgomery began his library career as a staff member in a law library where he witnessed first hand how conflict was addressed in a library setting. "I realized that many of the issues I was dealing with were managerial, yet for most libraries there was no sense — at that time — of what management and leadership was about. It was almost something about which no one was supposed to talk. It was considered almost distasteful and outside the realm of librarianship. After becoming a professional librarian, for years I suggested programs to try and fill what I felt was a need in our profession only to have them turned down with comments like 'Oh, no one's interested in that' or 'That's not part of librarianship,'" he said.

"When I was in library school, there was very little thought given to the topic of management or how to manage anything related to people," Montgomery added. "Yet librarians work with people and within organizations. Having come from private industry, I could see this, but somehow there was blindness to the need for managerial training at that

time." He said that, even today, most librarians are hired to do their jobs with credentials that have nothing to do with management, and yet they manage people, budgets, resources — all the things that a businessperson in private industry would consider as normal as breathing.

His first real speaking opportunity on the topic of conflict management for librarians came in the late 1980s at the Charleston Conference on Issues in Book and Serial Acquisitions, a conference held every year that brings together publishers, vendors, and librarians from all over the world. Those speaking engagements in Charleston and at meetings of the American Library Association, as well as his published articles in the professional literature, resulted in the offer to write a book.

Professor Montgomery said that now, more than ever, librarians and library administrators are being required to fill roles and meet obligations outside the traditional scope of their profession, with many librarians being put in charge of implementing changes to budgets and technology, and developing outreach to existing and new patron communities. "It changes every year; therefore, our management of ourselves and others has to change, even though no one likes to be in a constant state of change," he said.

"The point of writing the book was to help people start thinking and start making better decisions about how they manage the people in their organizations," he said, and added that the book, though written for librarians, is applicable across many organizations and disciplines.

Montgomery's other interests are vast and varied. As a native South Carolinian, he is currently working on a book about the folk-healing traditions of three different communities of that state. The book's working title is *American Shamans: Journeys with Traditional Healers*. He said the book is a follow-up to work he did as an undergraduate student at University of South Carolina in the 1970s, in which he went into the field to find people who were practitioners of older methods of healing, such as laying on of hands, chanting — even talking with spirits. "They were doing all kinds of what we would now think people surely wouldn't be doing anymore, but they were doing it," he said.

Having been interested in this type of study for more than thirty years, he has visited many such healers and was surprised that their methods were often effective. "It truly was like entering another reality," he said.

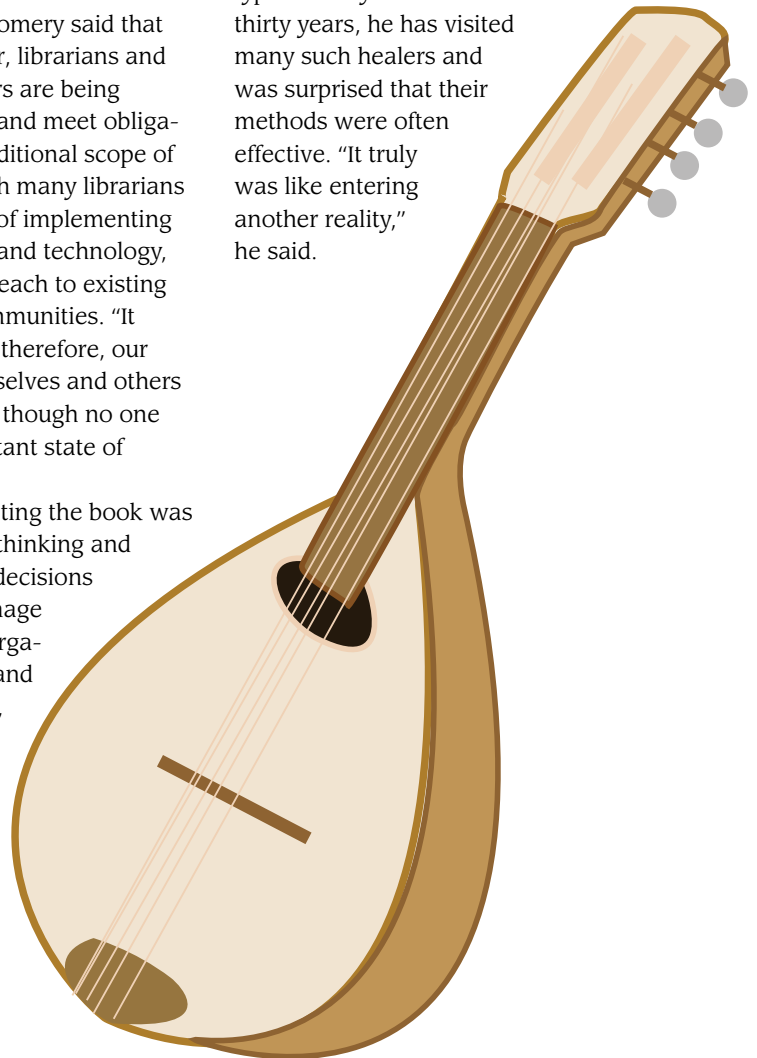






Photo by LaDonna Harmon

Montgomery noted that in addition to the practices, some of the ideas he encountered were difficult to accept. “Here were people who didn’t believe we ever landed on the moon because the moon is a magical thing and you can’t do it. Here were people who were removing evil spirits. It sounds like something from another age, but it’s not. It’s still going on right now in Kentucky and elsewhere,” Professor Montgomery said.

He enjoys the research because it is so different from his research on management issues. The folklore research began as the topic of his undergraduate senior thesis. Once the thesis was complete, he thought that was the end of his research, but while in Charleston in 2004, he began chatting with a publisher of regional histories. The publisher expressed an interest in turning additional research

into a book. To Montgomery’s surprise, the tapes of his long-ago interviews were still intact and he renewed his research from there.

“The interesting thing to me is that despite modern technological society, mass-media, and their own educational backgrounds — many of these people are college educated — that part of them that lives in that different reality is still very real to them,” he said. The book is three-fourths finished, and in addition to stories from South Carolina, will include components about Pennsylvania and Kentucky.

Switching between his multiple projects helps him to refocus and concentrate. Following the 2002 release of his first musical CD, “Onward to Avalon,” which has sold copies worldwide due to Internet marketing, another recent project

is “Everywhere I Look” — a CD of Celtic music, some of which he wrote and some traditional music that he arranged. With a new band called Shadowdancer, he has performed in clubs and at festivals in Kentucky, Tennessee, and South Carolina.

***Switching between his multiple projects helps him to refocus and concentrate.***

Montgomery sings and plays guitar and Appalachian dulcimer, “and I can play at the mandolin,” he said. “I’m really enjoying getting back into music. There again, it’s something else to focus on. It’s very hard for me to just do one thing.” ■