My plan is to attend the University of Alabama through a combination of on-line and in-class courses to achieve a Masters of Library and Information Science. The location matches several factors. My wife has a job in Huntsville and so on-line classes are a bonus but due to family nearby it would not be terribly hard for me to relocate down to Tuscaloosa to take classes. This is my home state and my plan is to stay in Alabama as long as possible. Tuscaloosa as a campus has a history that I admire, and have visited while attending UAH. The ALA accreditation it offers gives me the best opportunity to take my career wherever it needs me to go.

While I am still undecided between working with an educational library or a research library, or some combination of the two, I am quite sure about my love of library science and information studies. At its core, my interest in library science is a direct interest in the written word. I have been avid reader my whole life, reading a wide variety of things. I worked part of my senior year as a student librarian in high school. I was a reading tutor in high school. I have worked in a bookstore all the way from seasonal worker largely in charge of one section to manager and as a webmaster.

Books are only a part of my interest in this degree, though. I also have a lot of interest in the flow and dissemination of information. Now that just about anyone can have a website, blogs are extremely commonplace (as well as their offshoots like Twitter) and many journalists have given up on even seeming unbiased, how do we continue to learn and how do we continue to know what we are supposed to know without just absorbing the prejudices and faulty notions of those before us, assuming we can even shovel through the mass of hastily written paragraphs and URLs? This is one of the main questions I wish to find a way to answer. Websites quote websites that quote websites. How is a student supposed to separate out the signal from the noise?

I spent my undergraduate years studying a mix of philosophy and physics, with a good number of other disciplines added in as time allowed, ranging from X-ray astronomy to the history of Communism. My unstated purpose, fueled by a notion of there being a definitive set of answers, was a interdisciplinary study of just about everything I could get my hands on. While attending classes, I spent a fair time in the library or on-line researching other topics. I eventually became aware that however many answers there are, they are in danger of being lost because of the increasing width of the information stream. Knowledge is becoming the domain of the specialist, with universal approaches being stretched to mere surveys of ideas. While writing my senior thesis in philosophy, I found it took me some time to research the topic—which combined a philosophical look at responsibility and an epistemological way to look at distance not related to arbitrary measurement units—due primarily to how new my concepts were and how the most readily available and easily indexed literature focused on thinkers from nearly a century or more past.

This made me aware of just how much we pay so much attention to a limited number of philosophers and historical events, because we have very little time to focus on more. We simplify the past down to a few, and often technically incorrect, memes that stand in as models for the fullness of their thought and invention. We are losing track of the cross-generational dialogue that historians and others see as a key component of art and philosophy and science.

After college, I worked a couple of short jobs before going to to work for a bookstore. Soon after I moved on to managing a different one. Running a bookstore—part of a small chain spread throughout three states—gave me a lot of perspective on how the "book cycle" works. I worked with sellers, customers, warehouses, authors, distributors, libraries and teachers. I have worked with maximizing what books I could carry versus paying for the shelf space to carry them. I have seen censorship from various angles, ultimately choosing to take a fairly anti-censorship approach myself. I have seen how book reviews, movie adaptations, book clubs, and scandals affect the industry. I have had a wide view of customer interaction and how people perceive a bookstore's and a library's place in a society.

Learning how people perceive books was probably the single most powerful thing that I learned throughout my three years of working with bookstores.

It also allowed me to see just how tricky a budget can be for schools and libraries trying to fit both a budget and a educational need. I had to design paperwork to help speed up purchases for teachers, and a combination of good and bad interactions with administrations has given me a fair picture of the kind of hurdles they have to go through to do their job well.

I have a good amount of experience with computers, mostly working with Linux but also Windows, Mac and FreeBSD. I work with the programming languages Python and Perl, also some C++ and Java/script. I have had the chance, because of my webmaster duties, to work with more of the gears of the book system, learning about the methods of organization, ISBN numbers, EAN codes, pricing, and printing matters. I designed code to organize and sort databases, to improve searches, and I have had to maximize the amount of information a small amount of space can give.

A lot of my current, personal focus is with the concepts of electronic information: e-books, on-line journals, Wikipedia, storage of public domain texts through Project Gutenberg, freely distributed materials, Creative Commons, indexes of periodicals, and the ideas of pirated versus private information. I am even tweaking some ideas of my own for a simple, non-proprietary and free way of organizing e-books. I study these things in my own time because they fit a need that I see information sharing as having. As it stands, a research firm has to spend many dollars just to look at an index of old journal articles so they can pay a fairly high fee to get one-time usage of articles that most match their criteria. Most of these articles are in varied formats, requiring specialty applications that can vary widely from computer to computer and often lack one or more basic tools like searching, bookmarking, annotation, and reader-side sorting.

While I am a book lover and I love the feel of a novel in my hands, I also know that the future of effective research and study as time and money become more frantic will not be a single researcher pouring over pages of hard-copy text for hours and hours to find relevant articles. I want to work out ways to speed this up. As computer databases become smarter to the concept of relevancy, positive research becomes easily more viable instead of just choking down the next generation that comes along.

Electronic formats also help in numerous other ways that I would like to work with. With the ability to change font sizes, shapes, and colors, and with text-to-speech readers and text-to-braille displays, costly resources for people with sight issues can be freed up. Summer reading books become indexable. Teachers can insert notes directly into electronic copies. While textbook prices are staying the same, computer prices are decreasing constantly. There may be a day, very soon, where students can be given a personal laptop cheaper than they can be given a full set of textbooks. With translation software being improved, there is a chance that readers of all languages will be able to have access to information they would normally have to wait for a translator to give them.

I am excited by the prospect of learning more about these given fields. I think a lot of good can come out of knowing more. I have learned a good deal by just the choices I have made in life, but I have a lot more questions to be answered. I look forward to attend the University of Alabama and putting a few of them to rest as best I can.