



People of PROMIG

Gerald R. Natal
Health and Human Services Librarian
University of Toledo

People of PROMIG: How did you get started in your career?

Gerald Natal: When I got out of the military in California, I had taken a part-time job in a brand new local public library branch as a monitor to help prevent vandalism. I eventually worked my way through several positions in the library system, including stints as library technician, substitute for small branch librarians, bookmobile driver and graphic artist. During this time, I also made deliveries for a library cooperative system. When I returned to Ohio, my credentials earned me a job as circulation supervisor at The University of Toledo. After a few years it appeared I was going to remain in library work, so I decided to go to library school. My first professional position was at a prison library; when a visiting instructor position became available at UToledo, I found myself returning. This eventually led to a permanent position.

People of PROMIG: What's your job title?

Gerald Natal: I am the Health and Human Services Librarian.

People of PROMIG: What do you enjoy most about your work, either as a librarian or in your specific role?

Gerald Natal: There is an immense amount of variety in my position, as there is within the profession. I am liaison to one of the larger colleges on campus and come in contact with quite an array of people, cultures, experiences, and ideas. While there is occasion to feel overwhelmed at times, I find that being a librarian provides for limitless personal growth, and I simply find it rewarding to help people. On a broader level, there are unending opportunities to affect change and leave a positive mark on the world.

People of PROMIG: What part(s) of your job are most challenging?

Gerald Natal: While I feel having faculty status as a librarian is a huge benefit, the road to tenure and the subsequent obligations make for a challenging workload. Also, as librarians continue to address the facts of living in



Image courtesy University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio

a world of inequality and exclusion, I find the need to constantly remind myself to look inward and recognize what needs to be changed, as well as look for external opportunities to contribute to systemic change. The challenge is working these concepts into the everyday aspects of academic librarianship—reference, instruction, collection development—and recognizing more subtle areas where inequality and exclusion require my attention.

People of PROMIG: Can you tell me about an event you planned that exceeded your expectations?

Gerald Natal: Nothing comes quickly to mind, but in addition to being interim president, I am also acting president-elect and therefore chair of the 2022 ALAO conference. This will be the first in person since the COVID pandemic. I certainly hope the conference exceeds my expectations!

People of PROMIG: What do you think most people would be surprised to learn about you?

Gerald Natal: Most people I meet are surprised to learn that I am a librarian—I guess I don't fit the stereotype. Also, folks always seem to be surprised when I tell them I've been to Antarctica; I was stationed there when I was in the military.

People of PROMIG: Any recent project that you'd like to tell us about?

Gerald Natal: I had a co-authored article accepted by College & Research Libraries concerning experiential learning opportunities in my library for art students. The students gain valuable work experience and the library benefits from the murals and other projects. Providing these opportunities also demonstrates the library's pedagogical value.



Image courtesy University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio

People of PROMIG: What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

Gerald Natal: Perhaps not advice per se, but when I was an undergrad at B.G.S.U. many moons ago, I had a philosophy professor who in retrospect reminded me of Mr. Rodgers. I often observed him bounding across campus like a gazelle; he would come into class, remove his sweater, shoes and socks, and proceed to conduct his class from the lotus position atop his desk. One day he said, "When you get what you want, you will find you don't want what you have." I found this to be an accurate statement on many levels, living in a materialistic society where satisfaction seems impossible to attain and many decisions are made in haste without forethought and often under pressure. That sentiment comes to my mind often.

People of PROMIG: What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

Gerald Natal: As an undergraduate I was conflicted about whether to pursue music or art. Life's circumstances took me away from art as my main career for the most part; while I have played in bands for many years, I'll never be anything other than an amateur musician. But I do view my passion for art as a potential source of income. I have sold artwork in the past, and I've had a taste of illustrating children's books, and that is something I would love to explore further, perhaps author my own.

People of PROMIG: You are currently serving as president of ALAO. Can you tell us a little bit about what it's been like to serve in that position?

Gerald Natal: I inherited the position prematurely due to the early resignation of the then-president, and so I required an exceptionally large helping hand; despite whatever initial trepidation I may have had, so far it has been a wonderful leadership opportunity. I have always taken note of the myriad times when I heard an ALAO president exclaiming how they could not do the job without the help of those on the board and various committees. I wholeheartedly agree and add to this the realization that the membership plays a part in the success of the president as well—I have gotten some excellent suggestions from active members. I have a magnificent support system. Another bit of wisdom I acquired from being in the military is that it is easier to affect change if you are in a position of authority. I am blessed to have a perfect seat to oversee the great work done through ALAO towards dismantling antiquated ideas and moving the library profession forward through the organization's members. If anyone is considering taking a more active role in ALAO and making a difference, I suggest bringing your skills and talents to the board and office of the president. When the term is over, I think they will look back and realize what a reward and privilege it was to serve.