

UC Berkeley

"Librarians Navigating Change" Oral History Project, UC Berkeley

Title

R Brandt 16-April-2025

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1kg6d4j0>

Authors

Glusker, Ann

Brandt, Randal

Publication Date

2026-02-02

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“Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project

URL: https://escholarship.org/uc/berkeleylibrary_navchange

University of California, Berkeley - Library

Berkeley, California

Contact: Ann Glusker, glusker@berkeley.edu

Randal Brandt

Interviewed on April 16, 2025

By Ann Glusker

--For more information about this project, and the oral history method in general, please consult the Project Overview Document at the URL provided above.

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[00:00:01](#) **Ann**

This is Ann Glusker interviewing Randy Brandt on April 16, 2025, for the “Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project. This is a remote interview. Ann is in Seattle, Washington, and Randy is in Berkeley, California.

So, generally what I've been asking people to start is, could you talk a little bit about your background, and then move into what led you to librarianship?

[00:01:03](#) **Randy**

Okay. Well, I grew up in the San Joaquin Valley of California, and went to California State University in Fresno for undergraduate, where I majored in English, because I like to read [laughs]. I decided that it would be a good use of my time to earn credit for reading. I got my degree in 1987, a Bachelor's, and had no job. The other thing that I thought while I was in college was that I would be going into teaching, because that's something you can do with an English degree. I took a few education classes, and the classroom classes were fine, but then they started sending you out in the field into actual elementary, middle school, whatever, classrooms. I discovered very, very quickly that teaching was not going to be for me...

So, I got my degree, and found out that Fresno County was offering civil service exams for library positions. I signed up for that. Did fine, started getting interviews and got my first library job, which was managing a branch. Branch manager, first job out of the gate.

[00:02:44](#) **Ann**

Wow. Wow.

[00:02:46](#) **Randy**

At the Pine... What was it called? Pinehurst... I'm not sure [it was Pinedale]. The tiniest branch in all of Fresno County. It was open a grand total of eight hours per week: two days, four hours a day, in the afternoon, like Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. It was located next door or between a community center and an elementary school. It served seniors and elementary kids. And they gave me one hour extra to do clos[ing] time, to shelve the books, and do whatever else needed to be done. It's a nine hour a week job. I had been working as a janitor when I was in school, so I was able to keep my janitorial job for a while, which was at nights. That enabled me to take this nine hour a week job, but it was permanent with the county. I never actually worked nine hours. They started training me, they sent me to other small branches to do training. I got

paid for that, and it was really easy to schedule because I only had two afternoons that I was committed to being at my branch.

Then they started giving me extra hours down at the main branch in downtown Fresno, on the circulation desk. And then a permanent job came up, at the circulation desk. I was able to transfer into that, into a permanent job within about, I don't know, three or four months, and then the little tiny branch was librarian-less again, which is always the problem with that little branch. Anyway, I worked for several years at the Downtown branch, just working the circulation desk. That was right at the time—this was in the late '80s, so '88, beginning of '89—when libraries were converting their card catalogs to online catalogs. People were getting trained and assigned in doing some manual conversion of catalog cards, which is basically cataloging. I self-taught myself what cataloging was, and loved it.

The children's room was physically connected to the main circulation desk through a back door, so when the children's branch was closed, we could go in there and use the computer terminals. I would sit there with a box full of cards and convert the cards into MARC [MACHINE-Readable Cataloging record] records in our local system. Since I was an English major and I love literature, I did all of the 800s, which was the [Dewey Decimal number for the] literature section. [Laughs]. I realized I really liked working at the library, I did not like working the circulation desk. I always say I learned two very critical things about myself and my career working at the Fresno County Library. One is that I love cataloging and the other is that I hated the public. So, I became an academic.

[00:06:30](#) **Ann**

I know that many share your feelings [laughs].

[00:06:31](#) **Randy**

So that's how I ended up as an academic technical services librarian, the farthest away from the public you can get. The library was very supportive of staff people who wanted to go to library school. There was somebody on staff who was sort of the [person]... When I started asking around about "I'm thinking about going to library school, I don't know what to do," they [said], "Oh, go talk to this person." So, I made an appointment, talked to her, and she had all the brochures. This was again, pre-internet—she had brochures [they laugh] from, you know, UCLA and Berkeley and San Jose. And I don't know where else, but certainly those three.

It was funny because a few years before that, while I was still in undergrad, I had a friend in college who took a gap year. His parents were divorced and he lived with his dad in the Valley, but his mom lived in Berkeley. During his year off, he moved to Berkeley, got a job at Virginia Bakery and a motorcycle. And invited me, “Hey, you should come up to Berkeley.” He and I had a shared love of books and used bookstores and things like that. He's like, “Come up to Berkeley. There's a ton of bookstores in Berkeley.”

So I did. I took the train. He picked me up on his motorcycle, and we spent the weekend bombing around, going to a thousand bookstores, only one of which is still here, Moe's. I always say that's my Berkeley origin story because, you know, I went home after that weekend saying, “If there's any way that I can ever get back to Berkeley to spend a significant amount of time, I want to do it.”

Well, then a few years later, library school... Guess where there's a library school? At Berkeley! I decided to apply. I only applied to Berkeley. I didn't apply to UCLA and I didn't apply to San Jose State, which is pretty shocking when you think about it because, even back then, San Jose State was focusing on remote education. And they were actually offering courses in the Fresno County Public Library on the weekends. On Saturdays I could have taken classes at the library. You couldn't do the whole thing there, but I could have knocked out a fair chunk of my degree without leaving home. I didn't even apply [laughs] because it was like, “I want to go to Berkeley.”

So, I came up here and met with some of the faculty at the library school to find out more. The one thing that they told me was that if I applied and I wasn't accepted, I could reapply the following year. I might not be an accepted [this year, but the application from the] previous year would not be, you know, held against me or whatever. You could just sort of get a do over. So, I thought, okay, I'll apply once just to Berkeley. If I don't get in, then I'll reapply the next year. And then, you know, San Jose State and UCLA or whatever. But I got in, so I didn't have to do that. I was still living in Fresno at the time and I commuted for the first year.

[00:10:16](#) **Ann**

You commuted?

[00:10:18](#) **Randy**

Yeah.

[00:10:19](#) **Ann**

Wow. Okay.

[00:10:21](#) **Randy**

It's only a three-and-a-half-hour drive. I mean, I didn't commute every day. I got a place to stay during the week, but I would come up on Monday or depending on what my class schedule was. I did that for like the first semester and then the second semester I pretty much moved here full time.

So, I focused on cataloging. You could do that kind of thing back then, I took as many cataloging courses as Berkeley offered. I was able to work as a teaching assistant for my second year, and that second year they started a new cataloging course which was non-book cataloging.

[00:11:20](#) **Ann**

Oh, cool.

[00:11:22](#) **Randy**

Where we learned how to catalog things like VHS tapes and record albums and CDs. CDs were available, and maps and other things. After I graduated I was able to stick around and I was able to be the TA for that second year of that class as well. So, basically did as much cataloging-related stuff as I could. I was really fortunate, in that “how a bad thing becomes a good thing” [way]. My second year in our advanced cataloging class, we had to do an internship. Those got set up over the summer, and so if you were taking the class you submitted for an internship and you would get placed. I went back to Fresno, I went back to my job, and I don't know, all of a sudden realized I had never heard back about my internship. When I called to find out what was going on, they're like, “We never got your name, and everything is taken.” I'm just, “Oh, great.” They said, “But you know, the main library on campus usually holds a few slots in reserve in case something messes up or whatever.”

So, I got to intern in the main cataloging department, with a woman named Patricia Vanderberg, who became one of my strongest mentors for many, many years to come. It's way better than if they sent me out to Richmond Public Library or something, which would have been fine, but this was...I actually got to do something, exactly what I was planning for myself. So, okay, so that's library school. What else do you want?

[00:13:46](#) **Ann**

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So, from your CV, it looks like you just stepped right into librarianship at Berkeley.

[00:13:53](#) **Randy**

After I graduated, the other appeal of the Berkeley library school program at the time was that it was basically set up for you to complete it in three semesters. Some people did it in two, some people did it in more than three, but if you were going full time, three was sort of the [norm]. To do it in two semesters, you usually had to be able to do summer school. I hadn't fully relocated to the Bay Area at that point, so I was actually able...Let me back up a little bit. Going back to Fresno County Library. This woman, whose name I've completely forgotten [it was Linda Sitterding], was the one who helped me find out about library schools, she was also managing a grant project at the library. Fresno's most famous literary figure is William Saroyan. The library had been collecting Saroyan materials forever, but they had written a grant to purchase a collection, basically doubling, at least doubling the size of their holdings in one fell swoop. It was a purchase. I don't know all the details of the grant, but it was all grant-funded to acquire the collection, to preserve it, and to catalog it. That summer, while I was in between semesters two and three of library school, was when they were starting the cataloging phase of this project. And guess what I'd been doing for the last year? Learning how to be a cataloger.

I was coming back to my job that they had to hold open for me. Rather than have me go back to the circulation desk, they had me work on this William Saroyan cataloging project, which was just amazing. It's sort of my first experience of, you know, cataloging really cool stuff. Not necessarily rare books, but definitely on the special collections side of the spectrum. I was able to do that full time, [and] get paid for it at my library assistant rate. I was also able to do independent study at Berkeley for it. I was like, wow. Because I'm doing professional level work, and they're like, "Well, write a paper about it and we'll give you four units of credit." So, I felt like I was like, triple dipping. But, everybody said it was fine.

[00:16:42](#) **Ann**

I mean, if you're doing a great job for what they need, go for it [laughs].

[00:16:48](#) **Randy**

So anyway, it was an amazing experience and, it was funny, just a couple of years ago, we revisited the library, and I was able to meet up with somebody there and explain to them this, what I had done. And they were like, "Oh, well, do you want to see the books?" [They laugh.] And I was able to show my wife and daughter my favorite book of all of the ones that I had

cataloged, which was a copy, a first edition, of *The Time of Your Life*, which was a play that Saroyan had written and had been on Broadway and won a lot of prizes. It was one of the—I don't know if it was the debut, but it was certainly a very early career move for a young unknown hoofer named Gene Kelly. He wasn't the star, but he's like the dancer or something. They had a copy of this book that had been signed by the entire original Broadway cast, including Gene Kelly. I'd always talked about it and then I found it. It's in a cabinet, it's not out on display. But I was able to find it and open it up and like, “Yep, there's all the signatures I remember.” So that was fun.

00:18:22 **Ann**

I can only imagine how exciting that was. Back when you were first working with the collection, you opened that, and you were like, “Oh, my goodness, I get to catalog this thing.”

00:18:32 **Randy**

So, you can see where I ended up, the seeds were planted early there. Anyway, I came back after that and finished up my third semester, graduated in December 1990. And, I mentioned before that I'd been doing this teaching assistant [TA] stuff, and especially with this advanced cataloging class. Somehow the Library School was able to keep me on as the TA for the following year for that spring semester, and I converted my internship into a temporary library assistant cataloging job in the main library. And then I got a third job working at the Alameda County Library in Fremont in the catalog unit there, again, just on a very small [project]. I guess they must have written a grant or something, cataloging music CDs. So, I had three jobs simultaneously. They worked out because I could schedule them. None of them were full time. I was able to go to Fremont twice a week and work full days there, then do the other three days with my Berkeley jobs.

There was a [Berkeley] grant that had been started around that same time through the Map Library. Well, it was the Map Library at the time—it was before Maps and Earth Sciences had merged—and they were looking for an entry-level cataloger to catalog maps. The grant had funding for a librarian and a library assistant and they had hired the library assistant already and she was already started, had started working, but they had decided that they wanted a librarian to do the pre-1900 maps. So, anything published before the 20th century. It was a California maps project. It was a joint grant between Berkeley and UCLA, ostensibly to catalog all of the maps of California held in those two institutions.

The grant had been awarded and was underway, and like I said, they'd already hired the library assistant at Berkeley. The idea was that Berkeley would catalog all of their maps of Northern California, UCLA would catalog all their maps of Southern California and then there would be copy that we could share. If we had [an item], then we would go through and hopefully “Oh yeah, UCLA just cataloged this so we can just add our holdings to it” and *vice versa*. There was a one year grant, I got hired at the six month point. Again, kind of like my first job with eight, nine hours a week. This was a job for six months. It was full-time, but it was only guaranteed for six months. But Phil Hoehn, who was the map librarian at the time and was my supervisor, he assured me, “Oh, don't worry, they always renew these, it'll go on for several years.”

I took the job, got started. UCLA was listed as the lead campus on the grant. Phil explained to me that it was a strategic move to put them first, even though Phil basically had written the entire application. This was at a time when a lot of grants were being given to libraries to do cataloging, retrospective conversion projects. Berkeley had written and been successful in several of them, and they thought they would have a better chance at getting another one if it was coming from UCLA. So, UCLA was listed as, whatever, the lead agency. They were therefore responsible for submitting all the paperwork. Well, UCLA never got started on their part of the grant. For a whole year they didn't. Never hired anybody, they never got started, and then they forgot to submit the paperwork to renew it.

[00:23:24](#) **Ann**

No!

[00:23:28](#) **Randy**

So that was a fun conversation that I had with Phil when he told us that [for] the second year of the grant, we had missed the deadline. By the time he found out it was too late. We already missed the deadline, so we could reapply for the following year. But, year two was not going to be funded. So because UCLA hadn't spent any of their money, they transferred their portion of the money to Berkeley, and then we switched. It was kind of dumb. We switched from cataloging maps of Northern California to cataloging maps of Southern California. I mean, we had also already been doing maps that covered the entire state. We kind of ran out [of those] fairly quickly. Especially the ones that I was doing, the pre-1900 maps. We ran out fairly quickly of things to work on. So again, this one of those...[it] was a really bad thing that turned out to be really great.

We switched over to cataloging the Land Case Maps which are here at Bancroft. They were the maps that had been made for all of the cases that had to be filed in [the] district court of California, after California became a state. So, everybody who had been given a land grant by Spain or Mexico had to adjudicate their property to prove that they owned their land, and all of those case files had to include a map. They were all manuscript maps. Some of them were very professionally done with professional surveyors, and some of them were done by the landowners themselves. And they were, they're more... I call it folk art, more folk art than cartography. We started with all of the Southern district maps. And so I learned how to catalog manuscript maps, which is a pretty rare skill.

00:25:40 **Ann**

Fascinating though, to have seen them.

00:25:42 **Randy**

So, that was my first job. I was hired as a Library Assistant 1. Or, sorry, Assistant Librarian 1. As low as you could be on the librarian scale. But, you know, it's one of those where I maybe didn't make very much money, but the skills that I gained were just incredible, and Phil was so incredibly supportive. I don't know if you saw [on] my CV: my first professional publication or whatever activity was the paper that I gave at ALA [American Library Association], which happened to be in San Francisco that year. I was able to give a paper on rare maps cataloging.

What was really funny about that whole map cataloging job is [that] to catalog maps, it requires a fair amount of space, big tables. Especially if you're doing it at scale. We had two people cataloging. They were able to find a space for us over in Stephens Hall, on the second floor of Stephens Hall, which is above what's now the Ethnic Studies Library. It was the Business Library at the time, but it used to be the Student Union Building, so the second floor was the ballroom, kind of like Pauley Ballroom is now. That was the second floor of Stephens Hall. They had already started cutting it up into smaller pieces, but there was still a very big open space room that was just kind of like this study space that nobody knew about because there were never any students up there, and they made some secure areas where we could have the stuff.

The maps that I was cataloging, the maps [that] my co-worker was cataloging, were all in Doe [Library], either in the Map Library or the ones that I was cataloging were in Bancroft. So, what did they do? They gave me a key, [and] showed me where the back door to Bancroft was.

[00:28:06](#) **Ann**

Wow.

[00:28:07](#) **Randy**

And I was able to come and go as I pleased, taking maps out of the map room, the map shelving area, and rolling them up, tucking them under my arm and taking them out the back door and walking across campus with them. My only instruction was to, you know, in the winter when it was wet, to plan accordingly.

[00:28:34](#) **Ann**

That was my first thought—what if it's raining?

[00:28:37](#) **Randy**

Well, if it was raining, we were not allowed to take any maps back and forth. When the weather started getting to be, “Oh, it could start raining”, we took extras so that we would have plenty to work on, and then we just kept them until it was dry enough to bring them back after we were done. So, sometimes I bristle at the fact that I have to have my bags checked by these student library security guards on the way out of the building now [laughs].

[00:29:12](#) **Ann**

You know, times are different.

[00:29:15](#) **Randy**

Times have changed. Anyway, as soon as the grant was not renewed for the second year, I started looking for my next job, which ended up being another grant-funded project, outside of the library.

It was still within the librarian classification or whatever, at the Hearst Museum of Anthropology. It was a project called the California Indian Library Collections. The goal of that project was to reproduce materials that were held in Berkeley libraries and archives and put copies into public libraries, so that the people who the material was about could actually access them. It was a very ambitious project. The idea was to have at least one set, or at least a subset, of these materials in at least one county library in every county of California. It never achieved that goal, but there are at least 20 collections, sets of these collections, in Northern California counties. About two years ago we drove through Eureka, and my daughter was doing research at the Eureka Public [Humboldt County] Library. We were walking around, hanging around, and

in the back corner of the Special Collections was the California Indian Library Collections. And I'm like, I did that [laughs]. So, that was cool. There is a complete set in the Ethnic Studies Library as well.

So, I was basically the cataloger, bibliographer-cataloger, for that project. And what was interesting is that because it was in the librarian series, I was able to do advancement and do promotions and stuff like that. I actually got promoted while I was there to the associate rank. I went through a promotion review. But then when I left there and took my next job, which was now finally my first permanent job, at the Water Resources Center Archives, which had even less money than these grant-funded projects, they couldn't afford to hire somebody at the associate level. I had to actually go backwards and take an assistant job after being promoted to associate, in order to take the job. But it was permanent, so, you know, it was a small price to pay.

[00:32:19](#) **Ann**

Okay, I have many things to say, but not for the transcript, so go ahead [they laugh].

[00:32:27](#) **Randy**

So, then I finally had my first permanent job. Water Resources was an affiliated library. I don't know if it's the weirdest affiliated library, but it was definitely, definitely up there in that. The library had been started in the 1950s. Not long before I started, Linda Vida became the second librarian in charge of that collection. The founding librarian and his longtime assistant had both... Well, he had retired maybe two years before I started, and then the assistant Susan Somebody, had retired, but she was still around. Well, they were both still around, but she came in and was helping Linda get acclimated to the whole process. Linda hired me, and they were able to get a second librarian, which was good. But they couldn't do it at any higher than the assistant ranks.

So there were four, that was basically a four-person library. Two librarians, two library assistants. We did everything from collection development, to cataloging, to archival processing, to preservation, to binding, to public services, to exhibits, to etc. etc. etc. A lot of community outreach, liaison with a lot of organizations like The Water Education Foundation, which is in Sacramento. [It] was a huge supporter and we were able to mutually benefit both organizations. We got to do fun stuff. Linda and I got to go have a meeting with Kevin Starr, who was the State Librarian, and then after that meeting we got a behind the scenes tour of the State Archives

which was still under construction. They were just about to open. We contributed some materials to the museum exhibit, but as part of that behind the scenes tour, they took us into the vault. Inside the vault, there are two things that I remember seeing. One was the original California State Constitution manuscript. And the second thing was Sirhan Sirhan's gun.

[00:35:10](#) **Ann**

Whoa! Who cataloged that?

[00:35:12](#) **Randy**

I don't know.

[00:35:15](#) **Ann**

Whoa.

[00:35:15](#) **Randy**

But I know where they are.

[00:35:17](#) **Ann**

I can see why both of those things made an impression [laughs].

[00:35:25](#) **Randy**

Anyway, I was at Water Resources for seven years, and I enjoyed the whole time I was there. I wasn't looking to leave, but, you know, when people would ask me, "Oh, well, what do you want to do?" I said, "Well, you know, if I'm going to stay at Berkeley, really, the only other place I'd want to work is at the Bancroft Library. But there'll never be a job there for me." Because I knew my predecessor [Patrick Russell], and said, "Well, you know, he'll never retire." [But] of course, everybody eventually retires. Right? So, Patrick retired and the job came open. It did take a while, as things always do. It took about a year, I guess, from the time that he retired until they were finally able to recruit. But part of that was because they were hiring the head of technical services as well, and so they wanted to fill that position first. That was David de Lorenzo who got that, so that David would be able to hire the staff that he would be managing.

I was the first person that David hired after he started. It was interesting because when I interviewed for that, for the job that I have now, it's a huge brief that Bancroft cataloging has in terms of what we catalog. When I looked at all the different things, I basically was able to tick off every single thing except for one, which was rare books, but I had cataloged everything else.

And so I figured, well, if they think that they can teach me to catalog rare books, easier than teaching someone else how to catalog everything else, I'll have a pretty good shot at the job.

[00:37:35](#) **Ann**

So did the cataloging of rare maps not at least inform that? Or...?

[00:37:40](#) **Randy**

Well, maps are very different than books, you know... [but] I think all of the things taken together showed that I could catalog anything.

[00:37:54](#) **Ann**

You knew not to take the things out in the rain, right?

[00:37:59](#) **Randy**

Yeah. But, you know, if I can read the script, I can catalog it, so...

[00:38:19](#) **Ann**

It's so interesting for me to hear how varied and rich your work was before your most recent position, which is at sort of almost the 25-year mark now. And we've had many conversations, I know how rich your current position is. So, this is really fun for me to hear that background. And as you've been talking, I've been thinking, there's change all through that.

So at every point, you're talking about change in how the information is delivered, and change in how the libraries are creating services, and change for yourself, and how you decide to adjust or not to adjust. So, if you want to answer your questions moving forward just about your current job, fine. Or if you want to span the whole swath of your career, [fine]. So, what would you say over all of this time were the biggest changes in librarianship?

[00:39:25](#) **Randy**

My perspective, I think, is very different than, you know, a lot of other people, just because of the focus that I've had on cataloging and sort of the technical side. But, you know, certainly there have been. We've gone through several iterations of, you know, cataloging rule changes. I basically started my career, for all intents and purposes, in about 1989, and AACR2 [Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules] was revised in 1988. Those were the rules by which we cataloged. So luckily, I started after, so I didn't have to make that transition, but it was still very new and people were still learning it. Then we transitioned to RDA [Resource Description and Access]

several years ago, and now we're transitioning another version of RDA. So I've certainly seen how the work of catalogers has shifted over the years.

But also, especially with, I think, with some of the weird formats and things that we've done, how technology has changed and how information that has nothing to do really with cataloging, how that's changed and how that's been accessible. I'll just give you one example, which might be the most dramatic example, but it's certainly a good one. When I was cataloging those Land Case Maps, which were basically [representing] small geographic areas, they were, for the most part, not professionally done. But the Ranchos that were being cataloged, the boundaries of those Ranchos are very well known. They have been professionally delineated. So, one of the decisions that we made during the cataloging, which turned out years later to have been an excellent decision, was to include coordinates, geographic coordinates, latitude and longitude, in all the maps. Usually, that's a sort of a standard thing to include when you're cataloging a map, but usually the map itself will tell you what its coordinates are.

Well, these certainly did not. So, over in the map room, Phil showed me this giant book of computer printouts that had been printed out from the USGS [United States Geological Survey], that gave coordinates of all these different places in California, including all of the Ranchos. And I would go over to that book and I would find my Rancho and I would copy down the coordinates, usually on little, you know, three by five cards that I was carrying around, and I would walk back across campus and I would input the data into the catalog record. Now there's this thing called Bounding Box, which I actually haven't used that much because I don't really catalog maps anymore, but I've watched Heiko [Mühr, map cataloger at Berkeley] use it, where you can basically open up Google Maps, find the area that you're cataloging, draw a square around it, and not only does it tell you what the coordinates are, but it formats them, in a copy and paste-able version. Or you can copy and paste it from Google Maps into OCLC [Online Computer Library Center, founded in 1967, providing tech services to libraries globally] and it's all formatted and ready to go. I would have killed for that when I was [cataloging maps] back in 1991 [they laugh].

So, in terms of the ease with which I can do genealogical research on authors or printers or artists or whatever, now, so that I can enter that information into cataloging records, so I can create name authority records for these people, it's so easy now, where it was basically impossible before.

[00:44:13](#) **Ann**

So, has the nature of the actual content in a catalog record changed? I'm sorry to ask that question, I don't even know the answer.

[00:44:22](#) **Randy**

No, no, there have been a lot of changes in some of the behind the scenes metadata that goes into catalog records, but in terms of... they still have the basic author, title, publication, number of pages, size, series, pertinent notes, subject headings, genre terms, added entries. In special collections cataloging, we care about some of those things more than the public library might, or even, the main library at Berkeley, because, you know, we're always trying to describe the artifact in more detail with rare materials and special collections. But no, the basic content of the record hasn't changed.

[00:45:22](#) **Ann**

Thank you, [that's] so interesting. My next question, and I've been asking everyone this question, no need to dwell on it, if there's nothing special that you feel like you want to offer... But I'm just thinking for some of the things you've mentioned, and certainly for some of the career jogs and changes you've mentioned, you probably could see change coming. Like, the second that Phil says to you, "Oh, UCLA forgot to do the grant for the second year", okay, change is coming. [Is] there anything that you can identify as strategies or approaches that you've taken in those situations?

[00:46:22](#) **Randy**

I don't fear change. I sort of see change as inevitable in basically everything in life. I feel like I'm pretty adaptable. That's one of the things about, about catalogers... Well, or at least about me as a cataloger, it's very rules-based, right? So, I don't need to know. I don't spend any sleepless nights wondering "why" about a lot of things. Just show me how, right? Show me the rules, show me how to implement them and that's what I'll do. I don't stress over, "Well, why are you making me do this?" When I was TA'ing in library school, there were some people like, "Well, why do I have to do that?" It's like, "I don't care. This is, this is how you do this. This is what this job entails. This is how you do it. Here's the book that tells you how to do it. Here's the thing that you're doing. You just have to translate what you're told in the book to this." [They still ask], "but why?" [I respond], "I don't care. You know, it doesn't matter why. I mean, there are good reasons behind it, but, you know, it's like, you don't have to, like, spend that much time thinking about it."

I haven't really been worried that much about change in how my job is done. I've been through two, you know, system migrations. Well, basically three, because when I switched from Water Resources to Bancroft, I had to learn a new system because the affiliates [affiliated libraries] were not integrated into the library catalog. We could talk some more about that. I was still doing the same work, but in a completely different system. So, it does sort of involve... the structure is the same, but the tools that you're using to achieve the same result are different. Every time you migrate to a new catalog system, you have to learn how to do that. And [in] every system, some things work better and some things work worse than the one before it. You have to learn to adapt. I've been able to do that successfully several times. I mentioned RDA before. It's an acronym for Resource Description and Access. [When it was coming out] a lot of people who were towards the end of their careers decided to call it Retirement Dead Ahead [Ann laughs]. And, you know, I can see that. I kind of hope that whenever I retire there's some big change that's just on the horizon that I can just be like, okay, I'm out.

[00:49:43](#) **Ann**

AI is that for some people, I'll tell you. Yeah, we'll have to think of a good acronym.

[00:49:48](#) **Randy**

Yeah, right. Yeah, it was either Retirement Dead Ahead or Retirement Day Announced.

[00:49:58](#) **Ann**

I have heard people in these interviews talk about that feeling of gauging at what point you are in your career and where the energy and motivation is to sort of revamp for the next thing. But not one person mentioned it being the first time they made that calculus. Basically, everyone was making that calculus all the way through their career. "Okay, here's this next big thing. Okay, here we go." And then, "Next big thing. Here we go." And then you get to the thing where it's kind of like, retirement is possible and the calculus changes. That's true for many people, and I think it's kind of what you're saying.

[00:50:41](#) **Randy**

Oh, yeah. The other sort of change thing, and I know you had questions about the budget situation. But, I've been here basically since 1991, and it's never not been like a budget crisis. Some periods are better than others. But, you know, [when I] started we went through this. I remember it was after I had gone to my second job, but it was literally my second job when I was like, you know what? I think I'll be able to take early retirement. Because [it seemed like we

were] to the point where they were offering it to anybody. They just wanted anybody to leave. Like, “Okay, I’ve been here for three years. I’ll take early retirement.” That’s what it felt like. My mentor Phil, took it in one of the early rounds, and then he went...

[00:51:11](#) **Ann**

Oh no, not Phil...

[00:51:16](#) **Randy**

He went to Stanford and worked for another 15 years. But now, right now, this is the first time where it's actually really affecting me personally in that my unit is now down to two people. We bypassed opportunities that we would have had a year or a year and a half ago to fill it [vacant positions]. Now there's no possibility. I'm seriously looking at not ever being able to hire more staff into my unit, so we're going through exercises now of figuring out what we have to stop doing.

[00:52:40](#) **Ann**

That is familiar to me, yes, it is. Although I have been saying to people that one of the reasons that I sort of conceptualized this project the way it was is that during the serials review two years ago, I don't know how connected you were to that, it was really, really scary times for us selectors at least in social sciences. I said to someone, “What's gonna happen? You know, we're cutting away bone now.” And they were like, “Oh, budgets. There’re always budgets.” [Laughs.] Not fatalistic, but sort of like refusing to get worked up about it. I thought, “This person has seen some things. This is really interesting.”

[00:53:34](#) **Randy**

Wow.

[00:53:35](#) **Ann**

So...

[00:53:35](#) **Randy**

I always remember early in my career in one of these bad budget times, and they were offering, basically doing anything they could to get people to voluntarily leave. I knew a lot of catalogers who had been here for a long time, you know, and a lot of them took them up on the offer and took the golden handshake and left Berkeley. I remember being at an early bird [morning

meeting] where the university librarian at the time, I don't remember who it was, but, was talking about the budget and I remember them just going, "Well, you know, we've had to cut this and we've had to cut that, and this is bad, and this is bad. But don't worry, our collection budgets are intact. We'll be able to continue to buy everything we want"—as they've just decimated the catalog department and the acquisitions unit and the serials, whatever. How are you gonna [do this?] You can buy it, that's great, but then what? I feel like that's always been the Berkeley way. Your collection budgets are sacrosanct and people are expendable, but, okay.

[00:55:03](#) **Ann**

Okay, that's another thing for not-the-transcript that we'll talk about. It's gonna be so fun for me having all these post-conversations about things. I do have another question for you specifically. I read through your CV. [While] I did not pick up on the Phil Hoehn-inspired first presentation, there's lots of cool stuff there. But one thing that I found kind of fascinating and has not really come up yet in the conversation is that really, I see you as having two jobs because you have your cataloging job, but I see you as also having a very strong collection development job as (did I write this down?) Curator of the California Detective Fiction Collection. It's not necessarily about change, but I think it is about change in terms of having some focus in your job that makes you kind of valuable in more than one way, and that feeds your professional interests in more than one way. I'd love to hear about that development and what it's meant for you professionally.

[00:56:25](#) **Randy**

Sure. I do feel like one of the things that I've been very successful at in my whole career is figuring out a way to turn my personal interests into professional, and ways to get professional support for them. I've long been a fan of mystery fiction and one of the things that my wife and I have done forever, and we still do is, if we travel somewhere, we like to read mysteries that are set in those places. I've spent a lot of time thinking about [the] sense of place in mystery novels. I lived in the Bay Area, so I started developing interest in Bay Area crime fiction. That started even before I came to Bancroft. But, after I got to Bancroft, I found out that we had a fairly strong collection already of San Francisco mystery fiction. The Library had acquired the library of a collector a couple of years before I started, and it was all cataloged (darn, missed out on that one). I knew it was there, and so I started, sort of informally, adding to that collection, either through donating things myself or making suggestions. Usually it was like, "Oh, there's this new book coming out by this author. We should get it." And I would tell somebody in acquisitions, and they would go get it. Very informal, pretty infrequent. But, I was developing this interest, and I started making a bibliography of Bay Area crime fiction, which is on my CV. It's called

“Golden Gate Mysteries”. I’ve lost some of the interest. Not the interest, but the ambition, to keep building it. I still add to it, but it’s much more passive right now. I used to really be aggressive about trying to find stuff to add to it.

But, anyway, I had this bibliography, I was adding things to the collection, one way or another. I remember in 2013, my office where I work is on the fifth floor of Bancroft, and the admin suite is on the fourth floor. I got into the elevator one day and was going downstairs for some reason, and I got on the fifth floor, went down to the fourth floor, the elevator stopped, the doors opened, and Peter Hanff, the deputy director of Bancroft, and Theresa Salazar, the curator of Western Americana, got on, and they’re like, “Oh, Randy, we’ve been meaning to talk to you. We were wondering if you’d be interested in a small amount of budget to buy California detective fiction for the library.” And we got to the second floor, and the California Detective Fiction Collection had been created. So, it literally was in an elevator, right?

[01:00:07](#) **Ann**

That’s the best elevator talk ever.

[01:00:10](#) **Randy**

They said, “Well, put together a list of authors that you think we should collect.” They basically, they carved out \$5,000 a year out of the Western Americana budget that they set aside for detective fiction. I’ve been able to stretch that \$5,000 really far. A lot of times, most new things aren’t that expensive, and when there have been some high-ticket things, I’ve been able to get supplemental funding if necessary. But I’ve also been very successful in building the collection through donations. This isn’t really happening now, but when it first started, so this was in 2013, I was still pretty involved at that point with the Rare Books and Manuscript Section of ALA [American Library Association]. I had been the chair of the Bibliographic Standards Committee. I was at the time on editorial boards for descriptive cataloging of rare materials, for serials and for maps and other things. Professional development money at Berkeley only goes so far, and I needed it for, you know, for this work that I was already committed to, but as a curator, the curators every year were sent to the California Antiquarian Book Fair. It rotates every other year. It’s [either] in Northern California, here in the Bay Area, or in Southern California. Obviously when it’s in Northern California, there’s no expense to get there, it’s either in San Francisco or Oakland. But when it’s in Southern California, it’s quite a chunk of change to send one person there, to stay in the hotel and all of that stuff. And that’s not really a great place for

me, for collection development. There were [some] vendors who had mystery fiction and detective stuff and really cool stuff, but that wasn't really my primary focus.

So, I asked, Peter and Elaine Tennant, the director at the time, “Look, in lieu of sending me to the book fair, how about you send me to the local mystery conference instead, where I can actually meet authors, find out about new books, new authors, make connections, talk about the collection, blah, blah, blah.?” And they were like, “Yeah, that sounds great.” And Elaine was like, “Yes, but we'll still send you to the book fair.” I was like, “No, no, I don't want to go to the book fair.”

[01:03:14](#) **Ann**

You're the only librarian who ever said that.

[01:03:17](#) **Randy**

I was actually able to attend several conferences using collection development funding. So, I didn't have to use my LAUC [Librarians Association of the University of California] funding for that, [but am] using my LAUC funding on ALA things now. I actually just went to this conference, in March, where I used my professional development funding to go. [In other words, when I first started attending mystery conferences on behalf of my job, I was still attending ALA conferences regularly. Now, I've cut back on ALA attendance, so I can use my LAUC professional development funding to attend mystery-related events].

But anyway, that was great, that's been a really good way to engage with the community, and to accomplish all of the things that I said it would do, which is meet new authors, find out about new books, have people find out about me. I always volunteered to moderate a panel or do something. It's been a way to do something that I would love to do anyway, and to make [it] a part of my professional portfolio.

[01:04:25](#) **Ann**

I love that. So, I have two kind of threads to follow up on. But usually I've been asking people the legacy question [last], like, what would you like the legacy of your work to be? But I do feel like, having just talked about the detective fiction collection, I'd like to ask you now how you see the legacy of your work, not just the detective fiction collection, but also your cataloging work. And I know a lot of teaching as well. How do you see that taking your work into the next generation, or however you want to frame that question?

01:05:06 Randy

There are definitely those two aspects. For the cataloging, I feel like I've set ridiculously high standards for myself, which, you know, is a good thing. But, you know, sometimes it's like, "why can't you just let that go, and not spend all that time trying to figure out who this printer is? Nobody cares!" But I feel like the quality of work that I've been able to do throughout my career has been very high. I mentioned earlier, when I first got started, a lot of libraries were having their catalogs converted from cards to computers. The only way to do that at scale was to send your cards to a vendor and have them input the data for you. Our former rare book librarian, Tony Bliss, always used to [say] we had to do that: "But, it makes me mad because they only input information from the front of the cards, and on the back is where all the good stuff [is], like the binding description or the provenance, and whose book plate that was and whose signature it was."

So, we're constantly revisiting old records that were not very good, because they were done by machines or by people transcribing them or something. It's a record of what we own, and that's fine, but it's just not a very good record. It lacks a lot of the information that people want and people need. You can spend a lot of time re-cataloging. I could spend my whole career doing nothing but things that have been done before. I hope that my legacy is that if I've done [it], [it] doesn't have to be done again.

Tony Bliss—I had two conversations with him that are particularly memorable. One was very shortly after I started. Like I said, when I started at Bancroft, I was not a rare book cataloger. I could catalog anything else, but I wasn't a rare book cataloger. So I went to Rare Book School. I took cataloging. David de Lorenzo, my boss, was very supportive of that. He was very much in favor of Bancroft having good rare book cataloging. He supported me in becoming a good rare book cataloger. But when I was having conversations with Tony in those early days, he was like, "You know, rare book cataloging is fine, but it's really probably a waste of your time, because, anybody who cares about this stuff wouldn't believe anything that they see in the catalog anyway. They would call me or they'd email me and have me look at the book and give them the information." So, I kind of took that as sort of *carte blanche* to do whatever I wanted [they laugh] because I had the rare book librarian on one hand saying, "You don't have to do this" and I had my boss saying, "Yeah, you should do this." So it's like, "Well, if I want to, I will, and if I don't, I won't."

I usually sided with the “Yes, I’m going to do this.” That was early, that was like within the first year of me working at Bancroft. Tony was saying, “You don’t need to spend your time on this.” Then several years later, I believe it was, probably somewhere around 2008 or 2009, Tony said to me, “You know, your work is so great. Now when people call me and they ask me questions, I say, if it’s in the catalog, you can believe it because Randy put it there.”

[01:09:32](#) **Ann**

Wow, okay! That’s a legacy.

[01:09:34](#) **Randy**

Yeah, so that’s my cataloging legacy. My curatorial legacy: I have thought about this too, because I’ve actually had donors who I’ve had this conversation with, and they’ve asked me questions like, “You know, what’s going to happen after you retire or if you leave?”

And, the answer to that is, “I don’t really know.” Again, because it’s just a very, very small portion of my job, if I retire, I would hope that they would hire a new head of cataloging. [But] I wouldn’t expect that they would hire a new California detective fiction curator, and, our current literary curator who, while he has no objections or any problems at all with anything that I’m doing, and is supportive, and every once in a while will say, “Hey, I found this thing that you might be interested in”, or he brought in a collection, [if it] includes some detective fiction, “You’re gonna love this”, so I know that, you know, he’s excited and supportive... But I don’t think that he would take it on, right? He might do it very passively. If all of a sudden something like, “Oh, this first edition of *The Maltese Falcon* and we don’t have it”, he might say, sure, we can get that. But he wouldn’t be out there collecting the weird little self-published things that I’m finding, from obscure authors...a lot of retirees who in their retirement turn to crime fiction writing, especially in the Bay Area. I don’t know why. In some ways, well, maybe it will be what it will be, and it will become frozen in time. Or maybe not... if I can integrate it at least enough into what Bancroft collects, that even if there’s not somebody who’s sort of dedicated to it the way I am, at least when opportunities present themselves, they won’t be turned away.

The biggest collection that got away, which was years before I ever was even thinking about this kind of stuff, was the Anthony Boucher papers. Anthony Boucher is a towering figure in crime fiction, full stop. He lived in Berkeley. He lived a block and a half from my house. He got his master’s degree at Berkeley. He met his wife at Berkeley. He lived in Berkeley. You know, his collection should have come to Berkeley. It’s at Indiana. And the story was that when the family

approached the Bancroft, Jim Hart, the director then, was like, “We don't collect that kind of stuff. He's a mystery writer and a science fiction writer, and we don't collect that.” He [Boucher] died in 1968. So, that was in the 70s when it happened. So. But, hopefully if something, after my retirement or whatever, if something, like that was offered, hopefully somebody would say, “Hey, this is the kind of stuff we collect. And, yes, we'll take that.” We certainly take things [for which] we don't have subject expertise on the staff, but we know that these are things that fit in the collecting scope. So that's what I hope my legacy with that will be, that it will continue to grow, if not quite as aggressively as I would like, then at least [somewhat.]

01:14:02 **Ann**

Thank you, Randy. You know, I have the questions all laid out here, and actually I feel like interwoven in all of your relating of your life as a librarian, [now] I have content on most of them. I do feel like one thing that I haven't really asked, and this is a question, by the way, that several people have said, “I don't really want to get into this in the interview”, so it's a little bit of a sensitive question, fine if you [don't want to] talk about it, but it's the role that admin plays in your life. So, your position in the structure of the library, like, who is your boss? Who is director of the Bancroft? You just told a story about that... Who is the university librarian? I don't know if you have any comments about that impacting your work, creating change.

01:15:01 **Randy**

I don't have any problem talking about it. I just, I'm not. I'm just trying to think, like, what might be pertinent... Well, so, the way that the Bancroft Library is structured, in Technical Services, there are five different units in Technical Services, cataloging being one of them, and each one of those has a unit head. I'm the unit head of the cataloging unit, and I report directly to the head of Bancroft Technical Services, which, like I said when I first started was David de Lorenzo. And then after he left, it was Mary Elings. And now, after she retired, it's an interim, Lara Michels, who is also the unit head of the archival processing. So, I basically have had three direct supervisors the whole time I've been here, and every one of them has been incredibly supportive, of me, of my work.

I feel like it's interesting because they've always been archivists. They professionally have been archivists because David came at management from an archival background. [NOTE: This sounds like subsequent heads of Technical Services were archivists because David had been an archivist. In fact, it is just coincidence that they've all been archivists.] On the one hand, I think that that's been beneficial to me because, I'm going to say this [to] put the best possible light on

the fact that they don't care [They laugh]. It's not that they don't care, but they don't care. Right? They don't care professionally. Just like if I was the head of Technical Services, I would be very into what the cataloging unit is doing. "Are they doing it the way I would want them to do it? I have very strong feelings about this. Things are done a certain way, they're done the right way, and they're done a wrong way and blah, blah, blah", and I would care. Right? And so David especially, not that he didn't care about cataloging, but he didn't have the in-the-weeds knowledge of it that he did with Archival Processing. I always felt like he had a more strained relationship with the archivists, because he had very strong feelings about their work and about the way that they should be doing their work. He didn't have as strong feelings about mine. I hope that it's a testament to the fact that I'm good at my job that everybody who has managed me has not felt the need to get up in my business. Because I know what I'm doing and I do what I say, I do what I'm asked, I do what I'm told, and I can be relied on. I hope that that's what that means. But, it's also that, you know, I'm trusted to just get on with it. Mary [was] the same way, it's not that she didn't [care], she and I would sometimes have, I wouldn't even call them arguments, but heated discussions sometimes about metadata. Because she cared about metadata, and even though she didn't know her way around a MARC record to save her life, she would always say, "MARC is metadata. MARC is metadata." And I'm like, "Yes, but it's different, and so we would have these passionate discussions about how to do things and the capabilities of the systems that we have to do the things that are wanted or needed.

Sometimes it was just like, "Well, yeah, but it doesn't work that way. You know, I understand what you want. I wish that I could do that, but I can't." Lara [has] only been doing this for less than six months...well, now it's almost a year, it's going to be a year sooner rather than later. But, again, we've been having a lot of discussions about what we're going to do now that my unit is down to two people. That's sort of been my relationship with my direct supervisors. And then they report... Well, let's see, I guess it's sort of changed over the years. David and Mary and Lara have all had different places in the structure, they have been sort of different from each other. But Lara reports to the deputy director, Andi [Gustavson], the new deputy director, and then Andi reports to the director, Kate [Donovan]. The curators report directly to the director. But I don't. So, I'm always in this weird... I've got this weird curatorial thing. Where a lot of times they forget that I'm a curator, you know, and sometimes I'll be included when they talk about the curators, and sometimes I won't, which is fine. I like to stay under the radar as much as possible.

01:19:58 Ann

That's a good strategy for change.

[01:20:06](#) **Randy**

I've always had good relationships with the directors, and the deputy directors. Peter was always very supportive. I could go and talk to him about anything, and Andi is very supportive. I've had several discussions with her around staffing issues and things like that. I haven't had as many direct conversations with Kate, but when we have it's been fine. So, I haven't done anything yet to get my hands slapped for anything, but, I'm also at the point in my career where I can be the one to say stuff that other people maybe don't want to say, because I'm not worried. "What are you gonna do, fire me? Go ahead. I'm already at the top of the salary rank, so I really don't get raises anymore. You can't even deny me a promotion because there's nowhere for me to go." So.

[01:21:47](#) **Ann**

Yet another conversation we can have offline.

[01:21:52](#) **Randy**

I know. I [had] some conversation with Jenny Nelson recently, and she was recently the chair of CAPA [Committee on Appointment, Promotion & Advancement], and she was like, "We need to do something about the upper levels of the librarian ranks," because I'm not the only one who's reached the top. And you get to the top and it's like, well, then what do you do?

[01:22:12](#) **Ann**

Wow. Well, Randy, I'm feeling great about this. Do you have anything that you feel I didn't ask, that you'd like to add before wrapping up or?

[01:22:36](#) **Randy**

Not thinking of anything.

[01:22:38](#) **Ann**

Okay. There have been people, which is partly why I just love librarians so deeply, who've said, "You know, what if I'm looking at the transcript and something's a little bit wrong or I misremembered or something?" I am saying to people, "We'll do footnotes. Don't worry." So, you will have the option to do footnotes. There have been a few acronyms. Everybody has acronyms, so, sure, that's a possibility. But anyway!