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“Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project

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Margaret Phillips

Interviewed on April 14, 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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[00:00:03](#) **Ann**

This is Ann Glusker interviewing Margaret Phillips on April 14, 2025, for the “Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project. This is a remote interview. Ann is in Seattle, Washington, and Margaret is in Berkeley, California.

So to get started, could you please tell me whatever you'd like us all to know about your background, and especially how you came to librarianship?

[00:00:40](#) **Margaret**

Okay. Well, before we do that, I want to list some of the things that I want to talk about today, and that is one of them.

So, I did want to talk about my education, how I got into librarianship, and then an overview of my career.

[00:00:57](#) **Ann**

Perfect.

[00:00:58](#) **Margaret**

32 years of it. And I think in that process of talking about my career, you had one question about, “Did I ever think about leaving librarianship” that I might draw on, and, “How did you find passion in the field?” So, I think I'm going to insert that in my outline of my career. You also have a question about legacy. I can answer that in about 30 seconds. But there's also, “What do you hope for the next generation of librarians?” So that's another thing I wanted to cover. I think a big thing, and this probably fits in with your theme very well, is technology and navigating change, and that's a big part of what I want to say today. And then, very briefly, a little bit, you had some questions about administration, so I had some thoughts about structure of the library. But again, I didn't want to get too much into that. But that's sort of the things that I was hoping that we would talk about

And ask that same question again?

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

Okay, so number one, you just hit all the high points. I'm so excited. Number two, you just take it away. I mean, if you want to just flow through those things, and they'll flow into each [other] however you want to handle it—you are the narrator, so it's yours. Yours.

[00:02:18](#) **Margaret**

Okay. Well, the first thing I want to do is talk about framing. I'm guessing this is something that will come out with everybody you talk to. But I loved being a librarian. And I loved my career, and I feel so lucky to have spent 32 years at UC Berkeley, like, the best public institution in the country and I got to be a librarian there. So, it's all a bit accidental, and, like I said, lucky. I loved being in a library. I love library mission in a public university. I love being around young people. I love being around books. I mean, that's a bit reductive, I realize, but, anyway that's just the whole framework here.

[00:03:08](#) **Ann**

Fantastic.

[00:03:09](#) **Margaret**

Yes. I love being part of education. I mean, I feel pretty confident we weren't changing lives, you know, the whole “we're not an emergency room” situation, but we weren't extracting things from the earth or anything like that [either]. We're doing good stuff in the library. Anyway, that's just one thing I want to say.

I got into librarianship fairly randomly, I would say. I thought when I was in my 20s, right after college, [that] I wanted to be a journalist. Not that I'd had any experience in journalism, but I'd done a couple of internships and realized I didn't like deadlines. It seemed like it was going to be stressful. And I had met a couple of librarians. I didn't think of it as a career. “Oh, that would be a nice, non-stressful job to have” [they laugh]. How naïve! By good fortune, I got accepted at UC Berkeley in their library school, Library and Information Studies program, in 1989 or something like that. That's when they had a library school. And while I was in library school, I did a couple of internships, and one of them was with my professor of [the] reference [class]. Her name was Norma Kobzina. I don't know if you ever heard of her.

[00:04:48](#) **Ann**

I have, yeah.

[00:04:50](#) **Margaret**

She was the Natural Resources Librarian for many years, and she taught in library school, and she [was]... a real mentor of young librarians. And for some reason ...honestly, I think she just liked me. [At] that time Moffitt [Undergraduate Library at UC Berkeley] had an [opening]. They traditionally had hired two-year part-time reference positions. So, I got hired as a part-time reference librarian—no, full-time reference librarian, on a temporary gig, for Moffitt.

But let me just stop there and say about my career in general—32 years. I divide it up into three parts: the first part was Moffitt, undergraduates; [the] second part was Electronic Resources Librarian; and [the] third part was Social Sciences Division. So that's sort of the big picture.

But going back to Moffitt. So, I was hired as a temporary librarian. (That's the same time Corliss was hired, around then.) Then there was a hiring freeze. But I was on the books at that point and so, they managed to— “Well, we'll keep her beyond the two years because we can't hire anybody new.” I was in the right place at the right time, and people liked Norma, who had been my reference. So, I mean, it was really a fluke that I got it, and that I stayed.

So, yeah, I would say through the 90s, Moffitt, and then Moffitt kind of morphed into what was called the Teaching Library, which is now called [the] Instruction Services Division. But it was a lot of reference. 20 hours a week of reference, meeting with students doing bibliographic—what we called “BI” in those days, “bibliographic instruction.” It was during that time that I also started working at Melvyl [“Melvyl was the online catalog of the University of California's library system...[and] began as a library automation system in 1977... Online access began in 1980 as a prototype for library staff. In 1981, library patrons were able to access an online electronic catalog of UC library books using a computer terminal (Wikipedia)]. Like, I was “on loan” at what they called the Division of Library Automation. And that was at a time when they were creating a web interface to Melvyl. It was DIY. We did it in house.

[00:08:27](#) **Ann**

Wow.

[00:08:27](#) **Margaret**

I worked with Lynne Grigsby at the time. She was a programmer, and we were developing [an] interface, a web interface to Melvyl. The term user interface design didn't exist. But I got

involved in that. I don't know if you remember... well, you remember, it was all like, you had to enter codes, “find title, blah, blah, blah, find keyword.” So there was the online catalog, there was MEDLINE [MEDLINE is the National Library of Medicine's (NLM) premier bibliographic database that contains references to journal articles in life sciences, with a concentration on biomedicine (https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medline/medline_home.html)], [which] was part of Melvyl—and then I think we had something like Current Contents [This was “a reproduction of the title pages from several hundred major peer-reviewed scientific journals, and was published weekly”, eventually online (Wikipedia)]. Anyway, I was part of that team to create the web interface—that was kind of fun and different and groundbreaking. And then I got excited about electronic resources. So, they created a job called Electronic Resources Librarian. The first [anywhere], it was before they had them. It was like maybe one of the first in the country.

[00:09:29](#) **Ann**

Wow.

[00:09:30](#) **Margaret**

And I applied for it. I had a really bad interview, but the person they wanted to hire turned them down. So, they hired me [laughs]. So, then I was Electronic Resources Librarian for let's say, 10 years, a decade more or less. That [was] not a great position. It wasn't what I hoped it would be. I really was no longer working with patrons so much. It wasn't the exciting part of the Internet from the 90s kind of thing. It was doing licensing, negotiating with salespeople. I mean, I tried to make it a very librarian-y job, and I saw myself as there to serve selectors and help them get stuff. But, oh, I didn't love it. At that time, I was able to ask to do some selection. So, I did Gender and Women's Studies. I thought, “Oh, I need to do some traditional bibliography” you know, and then [the position of Electronic Resources Librarian] was also a way of getting involved with scholarly communications issues. I was our scholarly communications officer for a while in about 10% of my job. Now it's a department with I don't know how many people, four or five people [but then] it was just 10% of my job. But that was the interesting part, you know... open access. I was into that whole thing way back when, and thought that was fun and interesting — cutting-edge stuff, the early Internet thing.

Also, at that time, my supervisor [the Associate University Librarian for Collections/Head of Collections] —I had a couple of supervisors—but one of the supervisors ... had been in charge of Library IT, and was not a selector. I didn't ... love that experience. [The Head of Collections]

didn't have this intellectual engagement with the collection, which kind of bummed me out. So, it was at that point that I was ready to leave the profession. I was like, "I'm done. I don't need to do this anymore." The thought was, I was going to leave and work in a bookstore.

[00:12:09](#) **Ann**

Do you mind if I inject one question here?

[00:12:11](#) **Margaret**

Sure.

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

I don't hear in the calculus there that you were thinking I should get a different librarian job—you actually were thinking of leaving librarianship?

[00:12:19](#) **Margaret**

Oh, no. Okay. That's a good question. Yes, I was. I wanted to get back into what I had thought of as traditional librarianship, a bibliographer role. And I did apply for the job that David Eifler got [Ann gasps]. Yes. Yes.

[00:12:39](#) **Ann**

Oh, my.

[00:12:41](#) **Margaret**

It was a half-time position. And I thought, okay, I could do [this]. ...but obviously I didn't get it, and they made a much better choice, and that was fine. I [just] was really unhappy at that time. I remember having a conversation with a couple of people, one of whom was the head of human resources. Notice I'm not using names here. I said, "You know, I'm really looking for other things. I really am not happy as Electronic Resources Librarian." And this person said to me, "Well, you can always look for jobs somewhere else." And I was fully insulted by that. It was sort of a love it or leave it kind of situation, and not recognizing, "Oh, she's been here 15 years, she's contributed quite a bit, and this is where her life is..." It's like, "You can leave." I suppose that's maybe a very HR perspective. But, I thought maybe she would offer me some advice on, "Oh, well, maybe you should try doing this" or... So, that kind of bummed me out a little bit. I'd had a couple of conversations with [people], seeking advice about how I could change my career at that time. So that happened.

But then, what had happened was, the person who was the education librarian retired. I was on vacation at the time. I was in London. I wrote to Susan [Edwards], who was the head of Ed Psych [The Education-Psychology Library] at that time, before the division structure. I said, “Hey, so I see [there’s a position] ... Is there a possibility?” And she's, “Oh, you interested?” So, I got back from my vacation and made some inquiries, and was told, “Well, there's an opening at Anthropology and there's an opening at Ed Psych. Which one would you rather have?” I thought, well, education. I [was] sort of involved in some of the stuff at the public schools with my kids. I thought that would be interesting. Anyway, then I started doing that. So, two things. My analysis of that is, I think probably they also thought I wasn't a good fit for Electronic Resources Librarian, and they wanted to rethink that [position]. So this was their opportunity to do that.

Also, they were not going to be doing a search for an education librarian. They weren't going to be hiring anybody.

So those are the three parts of my career. I felt like I left on the best part, being [a] sort of traditional librarian, where I got to engage with a collection, I got to work with students, I got to work with faculty in interesting subject areas.

[00:16:32](#) **Ann**

I mean, that was my vision when I decided I wanted to really do this project, was to hear about that traditional setup. Of course, I'm hearing about a lot of other things, but...

[00:16:44](#) **Margaret**

Yes. And I feel like I'm really grateful for the institution for allowing that to happen with me. That one particular... those couple of bad conversations I had with people [who] said, “You can always leave” kind of thing, was outweighed by people [who] said, “Okay, well, here's some other options.” And maybe recognizing I still had something to offer. I mean, I don't think I was a bad Electronic Resources Librarian. I think it just wasn't a great fit. Yeah.

[00:17:19](#) **Ann**

Well, sorry, because I did say you could just sort of take it away. But I am going to ask a little clarifying question...

[00:17:28](#) **Margaret**

Sure, of course.

[00:17:28](#) **Ann**

Which is, you're saying that it wasn't a [great] fit, but I'm also hearing that if you did that for 10 years, things were also sort of changing around you. So, could some of the fit issue have been that the job needed to be different than it was when you started it?

[00:17:46](#) **Margaret**

Yes, yes. I think the job was never fully conceived of, because there wasn't a model for Electronic Resources Librarian. I tried to make it fit into my values of providing support for selectors. And here's an example. So, one of the things that the Electronic Resources Librarian would have to do [was], if there was a breach of our resources... we'd get a message from the vendor saying, "Somebody is downloading too much information." The approach was, one of the [Library's] business persons was like, "We need to kick this person out of school and they're wrong, we're going to yell at them." And I was like, "No, I think this is an educational opportunity, and I'm not here to police the vendors' bottom line because people are stealing their stuff. I'm here to provide them resources, and tell them ways that they can not violate our resources." So, I mean there was that. Selectors liked that about my approach, that it was like an educational opportunity, not an opportunity to police people.

[00:19:01](#) **Ann**

Because you were supporting the relationships.

[00:19:04](#) **Margaret**

Right, exactly, exactly. And we're an educational institution. Right? You know, they weren't doing it maliciously. They just didn't know. [Also] there [were] a lot of rules about what we could purchase. I felt like "The selector has thought this is something we need so we're going to get it for them" as opposed to, "But that's against the rules." So, there was that sort of thing. I had to sign all the license agreements. I had like... I went to two workshops just to learn how to do license agreements. I was not very well trained, but I had sort of a general notion of what I was [doing]. My main approach to license agreements was I did a risk analysis. And in most cases, I'm like, "I think this is a pretty low risk. I think we can go with this. Nobody's going to sue us. The worst they're going to do is say 'You shouldn't do that.' We're like, oops, sorry."

[But] I think they wanted somebody who was a little more rule bound. And I get that. I mean, that makes sense. But the main part about the position is that I felt like I was no longer in service to our patrons. I wasn't doing that kind of one-on-one. That's where the bad fit came in.

[00:20:33](#) **Ann**

Got it. So, thank you for all that. Really, really great context and so, so interesting. No one has a sort of straight-line path through any of this.

[00:20:49](#) **Margaret**

No, no, no. And that's what's interesting.

[00:20:56](#) **Ann**

Yeah. So where would you like to go next?

[00:20:58](#) **Margaret**

Oh, yeah. So, okay, I have the list of things that I want to talk about. I think the last question in your list was legacy. "How would you like your work to be remembered?" And, I don't feel the need for a legacy. So that's that. I recognize the kind of ephemeral quality of what we do. On the other hand, I did buy books, and those books will be in our collection forever. And that's kind of cool. But part of that whole legacy, one of the sub-questions you had is, "What do you hope for the next generation of librarians? And [what is] your prediction for the future?" And again, very briefly, I am really excited about all the new people that the library has hired, and the new people I see coming up through the profession. They're much more—what's the word? —this whole concept of critical librarianship ["Critical librarianship offers a framework for thinking about our work that asks how library structures came to be and what ideologies underpin them. Libraries, like all institutions, are produced in and through systems marked by racism, patriarchy, and capitalist modes of production." From "What is Critical Librarianship All About" by Emily Drabinski (CUNY) https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_pubs/537/)]... [the new librarians] sort of embody that in ways that, when I started off, I really didn't know what a librarian was. I think I thought a librarian was a library clerk. And honestly, I would have been happy [to be one]. You know, what is a library clerk? I don't even know, but, like, just sort of shelving books, you know? [laughs] I think [with the newer librarians there is] this sort of a deeper engagement and thoughtfulness about where library information and knowledge fits in, that is different than when I started off. That's sort of my basic thought. ...

[00:22:49](#) **Ann**

No, no, that's great. Did you want to add any advice? You needn't, but...

[00:22:58](#) **Margaret**

No.

[00:22:59](#) **Ann**

Okay, cool.

[00:22:59](#) **Margaret**

I can't think of any advice. I mean, my advice would be, "Don't listen to me. Make your own path. Make your own mistakes."

[00:23:12](#) **Ann**

Yeah, we all did [they laugh].

[00:23:16](#) **Margaret**

Okay, so then I do want to talk about technology and navigating change, which I think you probably do, too.

[00:23:26](#) **Ann**

Yes, very much so. Love to hear.

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

And for me, in this conversation, when I think of technology, basically I'm thinking in terms of the internet. I don't know if that's what you have in mind, but that's sort of how I'm looking at [it]. Just because, if you think about my career, I started 1991. I was at Moffitt. I don't know, there was five or six librarians there. There was one terminal that everybody used email on.

[00:24:01](#) **Ann**

Wow.

[00:24:01](#) **Margaret**

They shared a terminal to do their email [they laugh]. Email—I think then they'd only just started having library email. Not that long before I started, I don't even remember what the interface

[was], it was like this Telnet [a client-server application protocol that provides access to virtual terminals of remote systems on local area networks or the internet (Wikipedia)] kind of thing. So that just sort of sets the context of when I started.

I was fresh-faced and enthusiastic about being a librarian. I felt so lucky to be working at Berkeley. And I remember, they had us shadow some of the librarians in the big reference room in Doe. That beautiful room? And it just felt like, “Oh my God, this is the peak of librarianship. I’m providing reference in this beautiful room in this beautiful collection.”

[00:25:01](#) **Ann**

I felt like that in 2019. I felt the same thing.

[00:25:04](#) **Margaret**

Yes, absolutely. I still, you know, I love the sound I just love that room. So, I was shadowing another librarian and a patron came to the desk. [Actually] I don't think I shadowed, I was on the reference desk as well, and [the patron] said, “I need help.” We had some CD-ROMs. We had the MLA [Modern Languages Association] bibliography on CD-ROM [Compact Disc Read-Only Memory, a physical disc that, after production, could not be written on or erased]. And there was a couple others on a dedicated machine. I don't remember what [other CD-ROMs] we had, but there was a couple and [the patron] said, “I need help with the MLA.” And this librarian said, “Oh, I don't do computers [Margaret and Ann laugh, a lot]. And imagine me, a young, enthusiastic librarian, going, “What? You're not helping [with] something?” This person had said, no. It was too much. She couldn't help that person. Luckily, I was able to help them.

But anyway, so that's a little bit about the context of when I started out. Mosaic came out 1994 [NCSA Mosaic is a discontinued web browser. It was instrumental in popularizing the World Wide Web and the general Internet during the 1990s by integrating multimedia such as text and graphics (Wikipedia)]. Is that right? Is that on your timeline?

[00:26:29](#) **Ann**

I don't remember, to be honest. But I mean, somewhere around the mid-90s.

[00:26:34](#) **Margaret**

Yes, yes. Okay. Probably prior to that, there'd been Gopher [Gopher was an early internet technology developed in 1991 at the University of Minnesota [which] allowed users to search and retrieve information through a text-based interface <https://techterms.com/definition/gopher>]]. We were trying to get on top of that. And, it was a super exciting time. There was like this Internet. You could look at things on the web. I wouldn't call myself like, really techie by any means, but it was exciting. So, I learned HTML [Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is the standard markup language[a] for documents designed to be displayed in a web browser. It defines the content and structure of web content (Wikipedia)] and I created my own web page. I saw the great promise of the web. This was before you could Google, [and] search engines. I mean, they, they just had indexes. Do you remember that?

[00:27:23](#) **Ann**

I do.

[00:27:23](#) **Margaret**

Yahoo was a list of resources.

[00:27:26](#) **Ann**

I was a grad student using POPLINE [For over 45 years, POPLINE has provided access to the world's population, family planning and related public health literature to diverse clients worldwide with a primary intended audience in developing countries (popline.org)] back in the day. Oh, and that was mind blowing.

[00:27:33](#) **Margaret**

Yes, yes. I mean, it was so cool. We had these workshops. And this is what the workshops were like—and even I knew that they were... it was wrong: “Let's talk about the history of the Internet.” They would start off saying, “Well, you know, DARPA [The Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) was the first wide-area packet-switched network with distributed control and one of the first computer networks to implement the TCP/IP protocol suite (Wikipedia)] began in 19 something, blah, blah, blah.” And I'm thinking, “I think people just [want]... to be able to use the web, I don't think they need [the history].” But there was this sort need to teach people the whole context of it, and how it worked. And, like, “And then you're dialing up to...” And it would just get people more confused.

But that was the fun, kind of exciting time of the web. Then I started working with Melvyl and creating a web interface. That was super exciting and I was really open to it, and a bit dismissive of people who... “How come they can’t handle this change sort of thing?” I saw change as like, a really cool thing, and exciting. Why wouldn't everybody want to do that? That's what we are as librarians, as we deal with change...

On the other hand, I also learned reference with print sources, and I am so grateful for that experience. This is gonna sound like, “Well, I like the feel of books” kind of thing, but there's something about walking to the section of the reference room, and saying, “Oh, there's a bunch of stuff on this particular topic; that must be an important topic.” And then opening the encyclopedia of whatever and saying, “God, there's so many pages on this”, or there's not much. That kind of content provides context. The person who taught me how to do reference, who first started [me out, was] Bill Whitson, who wrote that thing [the Berkeley chapter of the book on the first 25 years of the history of the Librarians Association of the University of California (LAUC)] *. He had this [adage], like, “Remember that there's always multiple doors to a research topic. Is this writing about women's suffrage? Well, we could look at the women's studies section, or we could look at the history.” You know, that kind of real basic thing. And I still, working on the reference desk [even into] the 2010s, I would still use the collection. The only problem is, things are not really produced in book form anymore. But I am grateful for that as kind of shaping my perspective of information. Things like, you would go to the Reader's Guide [to Periodical Literature], and the section on *braceros*, you know, worker programs, was really dog-eared. These are the kinds of really cool things that you lose in a digital resource. Obviously, there's so many wonderful things about digital resources. There's so much more, especially some of the primary sources, but there's other things that are kind of lost. And that's been going on 25 years. Because one of the things I did at Moffitt was, we had a program for giving library staff an opportunity to work on the reference desk. I was in charge of training them. We'd have people sit at desk, and everybody would just use their computers to help with the reference questions. I was one of the last ones to [say], “Let's go find this book.” So, I'm grateful for that, having had that, and I feel like that sort of shaped me.

One of the things I often did in my classes in the more recent years was to ask people, “Do you prefer e-books or traditional books?” Have you ever asked your students that?

[00:31:57](#) **Ann**

I haven't really asked. By the time I got to Berkeley, my first year was [just] before COVID, and that would have been when I would have asked, but I was still very new. And then there was COVID, and it became kind of a moot point.

[00:32:14](#) **Margaret**

Yeah. So, I mean, somehow it often ended up being a question, and it was always 50-50. I was, “Oh, I prefer to e-books or books. And my conclusion is it's nice to have them both.” Right? You use the e-book to search the [text], you know, the keyword, but then you have the print book to [read]. So, I don't know what I'm getting at, but, that has to do with, digitization.

A couple of other random things I wanted to mention about technology, or basically [the] Internet, is the 90s. The exciting time of the Internet, when it was... before it basically had been commercialized, was exciting. I feel like there's two things now that have failed to succumb to commercialization, and one is Wikipedia, and [the other is] the Internet Archive. That's why it was so fun to work on the Wikipedia editathons. It's like there's this thing that's pure still, that captures that early time. I mean, again, I don't mean to be all nostalgic and blah, blah, blah, but [captures] that early ethos of the Internet.

On the other hand, the internet [the capital I is being used for the early years of what is now the wider internet] provides ...way more people have access to information. You don't have to come to the [library]. I don't need to explain why it's so much better, the digitized versions and all that. Especially during COVID.

[00:33:46](#) **Ann**

Just [a] minor question. Did you feel the shift in reference, the more people use the internet to answer reference questions? Like, many librarians feel that reference questions are getting harder because the easy stuff gets picked off by people [on the internet].

[00:34:05](#) **Margaret**

Yeah. Yes, absolutely. The other thing is [that] the nature of librarian expertise has changed. I used to know all the tools. And that I want to make a [distinction] between concepts and tools. But I was really good at Telnet, Melvyl and “Find this and find that”, and students would go, “Wow, how did you know how to do that? I'm like, “Oh, yeah. [So easy].” And now, by the end, it was like, [library users] would say, “Oh, you can do this in this particular database.” I'm like,

“Well, thanks for teaching it. I didn't know that.” Like, okay, I'm teaching this class on this database, I've never used it. And I would say this to students, like, “I don't have a lot of experience, but these are some of the approaches I take. I look for this, this and that.” And, I would kind of use it as a teaching strategy.

I remember there was a young woman who interviewed for a job a few years ago, and I felt bad. I felt like maybe she hadn't been properly mentored. But her approach was like, “I know this particular software, I know that particular [software]...I know this program, I know that program.” But it's not about the actual tools. It's sort of how you approach them. And I feel like she kind of missed the point on that.

[00:35:32](#) **Ann**

Although I said I would not insert myself, I am going to [take a] moment to say that I think that's what you get from having learned print reference, which I did not, is that you understand the structure of how to think about the question, rather than letting the tool do the thinking for you. Yeah. So you understand what might be missing. You understand a different way of coming at the question because you know the underlying [context]...

[00:36:05](#) **Margaret**

It could be. Yeah, I think so. That may be. At the same time, I also feel like you need to meet the patrons where they're at.

[00:36:13](#) **Ann**

Yes.

[00:36:14](#) **Margaret**

And, in the last few years, I was going to Google. We were doing Google Scholar, even though I felt like it was limited compared to some of the indexing of other databases. I would mention the other ones, but I knew that [Google Scholar was] where they were going, so let's go there too.

Yeah. So then if we think about navigating change, and then, there's Margaret in her 30s, excited, and then Margaret in her 50s, and I could feel myself like, “Oh, this is harder, this change.” I mean, besides having stuff going on in my personal life, learning new things was harder. And like, ugh, adapting became harder. So that person, she was just young, she wasn't a better librarian, she was just younger, you know, and more open to learning things. I definitely saw

that diminishing, which is sort of why I retired at 60. I kind of felt like, I could keep trying. [But] it's harder for me, and I don't have to stay here.

And you have a question about AI, and I'm like, yeah, I can't do that. I don't want to be dismissive of this thing, I think we need to embrace it, but I'm not sure I was able to do that. And a big part—you'll appreciate this—was even when I was [Electronic] Resources librarian, it's like, “Oh, we're going to have to start licensing data. And that's a whole area that I don't really know.” I can kind of take a certain approach to things, but that was hard. That was hard for me to... That was a new thing that I never fully got my head around.

[00:38:21](#) **Ann**

Do you feel like those things, AI and data...? Okay, I'm feeling this way, so I'll just own it. They changed the game so substantially. I feel like, hearing you talk about the Internet, the thread that comes through for me is that you were envisioning ways that it would help what was already going on. So, you would help the selectors do the thing the selectors needed to do. You would help the students and the faculty do the things they needed to do. These tools were directly related to things that [we] were already helping them do, what you felt like you were there and the library was there to do. Data and AI seem to me to be game-changing in a somewhat different way. So, they're changing the underlying [context], but maybe... I don't know if you agree with that?

[00:39:13](#) **Margaret**

I do agree with that. I really can't speak to AI because I got out just in time [Ann laughs], I have to say. But data definitely felt like a game changer—in a good way, though—whereas, I don't know enough about AI to say it's a change in a good way, I guess.

[00:39:45](#) **Ann**

I'll just say one more thing. Sorry.

[00:39:47](#) **Margaret**

Yeah. No, no, please.

[00:39:48](#) **Ann**

I'm enjoying myself too much. This is not good oral history methodology, right now that I'm saying things back to you. But, I will say that I think, Margaret, you left as things [with AI] were

still a little sort of chaotic and up in the air, and they're starting to settle into what looks to me like a classic librarian approach to things. Like, [now] people are sort of getting the tools under their belt and starting to do more sophisticated, “This will help you do this thing that you've always done, and this will help you do this thing that you've always done.” It is kind of resolving a little bit.

[00:40:21](#) **Margaret**

Yeah, okay. Yeah, that stands to reason.

[00:40:23](#) **Ann**

I think it's either the chronological generation or the energetically younger generation that's driving it. That's... okay. I'll stop now.

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

Yeah, you know, that's helpful. Like, one thing that happened right towards the end was—I'm] forgetting the name of the new integrated library system, what's it called?

[00:40:55](#) **Ann**

Oh, Primo? Alma? Ex Libris?

[00:40:58](#) **Margaret**

Alma, yes. All of that happened while I was on leave for a year, and I came back, and I just thought, “I can't do the kinds of things I used to do. I'm sure there's things that are better about it, but...” Like I said, remember back in the [day], I used to know all these cool, neat things that you could do with Melvyl and MEDLINE and stuff, [but with Alma] it just became this mishmash. It wasn't something I was committed to really getting my head around. So, I don't know where I'm going with that, but...

[00:41:34](#) **Ann**

Well, it's hard when you're really good at something, and then suddenly you're really bad at something.

[00:41:38](#) **Margaret**

Yes. And, I mean, being really good at something and then being bad at something was sort of a more gradual [shift]. And I saw it happening, and I became kind of comfortable with it. But it

was, it was definitely a shift. And not having an expertise is... nobody expects that of you, but I liked knowing more than some people, but that seemed to be happening less. Which makes me realize, and this is something I've only come to recently—if I'd stayed longer, I felt like maybe where I could have made a better contribution would be probably like, in some ways, management.

Right? Like that sort of institutional knowledge and having a sense of libraries. I had resigned myself, “I'm not going to become a data expert, you know, blah blah blah.” But all of that knowledge could go towards managing. I had no interest in managing, believe me, but I could have, I felt like, without being the old fuddy-duddy kind of thing, if that makes sense. So, I get that kind of trajectory in a career. After you've sort of ... learned everything you're going to do, then you start to like be a more mentor, or help develop people's careers and that sort of thing.

[00:43:13](#) **Ann**

So that does seem like a little bit of a segue. You mentioned yourself—this is not me asking you this question—you mentioned yourself you might have a few thoughts about admin and shifts in leadership.

[00:43:25](#) **Margaret**

So, I think the only thing I want to say about admin is, well, I'm not an administrator so I would never claim to know all of the different pressures they're feeling. I'm sure they feel it from the top and all that. But whenever [library administration] asked, you know, they would send out, “Oh, we need your advice on blah blah,” I always put it in terms of, “Look, I know you have other things [to consider] and I'm only coming at from one perspective.”

But it has to do with the way the libraries were structured. In the end, with our divisions. And we had, say, within the subject divisions, ... all of the bibliographers and librarians would be in one [reporting] line, and the library assistants would be in another. I felt like that really wasn't good for the institution. It created .. a gap between the two [reporting lines], and less of a sense of [shared] ownership over [the work]. I don't know if I'm explaining this.

I mean, it's been happening for many years and it started off at Moffitt. When I first arrived there, Moffitt used to be a standalone library, with a head of Moffitt who was in charge of everybody. Then they kind of divided things. The librarians were in one part and library

assistants were in another. And then ... The sum of the parts is not equal to the whole. In other words, even like our own experience at [the] Social Research [Library], I felt like I wasn't being asked to help with circulation if there was a problem. I think we ended up closing [the] Anthropology [Library] because there weren't enough circulation staff to work there. And I felt like there was a loss. Also, sometimes I feel like—maybe this is just me—management felt like librarians were above it all, and didn't want to messy themselves doing things. Maybe there is some truth to it, but it was also the way we were structured. We didn't report to anybody who wanted us to do circulation, or do some of the kind of other things. So, it just created this divide. I feel like that move, while I understand it, probably was more efficient, I'm not sure if it was best for the library. So that's just one thought. In some ways, it's one of those unintended consequences. When they were developing that structure, I don't think they envisioned that. And I'm not sure that they still see that... I'm not sure. I may be the only one that sees that as a problem. Maybe they're perfectly happy with the way it is, but I don't think that was good.

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

Got it. Thanks. That's another discussion too.

[00:46:50](#) **Margaret**

And maybe there's ways around it. Like I said, I don't understand everything that goes into those decisions, but from my perspective, that's how I saw that as a problem. Yeah.

[00:47:07](#) **Ann**

Yeah, it's hard being a manager, I can tell you, when you say you're getting this stuff from above and you can't communicate it, it's really...

[00:47:13](#) **Margaret**

I get that. I totally get that.

[00:47:15](#) **Ann**

Yeah. I can see you do.

[00:47:16](#) **Margaret**

But, I felt like we were—and I can speak sort of from the union perspective on this one—"Oh, you librarians think you're so special, and you don't understand that there's other people." [But,] we didn't create the structures that created that difference.

[00:47:34](#) **Ann**

Did you want to say any more about your union work? No need to.

[00:47:37](#) **Margaret**

Actually, looking at what I wanted to cover... I think I'll talk about it, but one of them was, "How did you maintain your passion for the field?" Well, first of all, I think maybe we had this conversation at some point. I'm not the kind of person who sort of feels passion for things. As I said, I always loved my job and loved being a librarian, but I'm not sure I was ever passionate about [it]. So, that word might be a little strong, but how did I maintain my interest? I would say, in my work, I always had these outside interests, and this is part of being a professional, is where you do these things. I really enjoyed some of the writing that I did later in my career. Some of that. In the early part, I enjoyed the part that I got to do with developing the web interface to Melvyl, which, by the way, that only lasted for a couple years, [that] web interface, that's another story. Then, yeah, it was really fun to work in the union, because it kind of drew on some of the things that I felt like were great about the profession, in that it was the people and relationships, and being part of the union was all about the people ... [and] building relationships with people. So, I enjoyed that work. What else is there to say?

[00:49:14](#) **Ann**

Fantastic.

[00:49:16](#) **Margaret**

It brought me in contact with some of the other groups on campus, and thinking about the mission of our university and that sort of thing.

[00:49:30](#) **Ann**

I just will ask you if you want to comment for a moment, when you're talking about keeping up interest and energy over the span that you did—in the little bio they did of you when you got the Distinguished Librarian Award, you mentioned your exhibits and how rewarding that was.

[00:49:50](#) **Margaret**

Yes. Yes. Oh, yeah. Thank you. Thank you for bringing that [up]. Yes, I love doing the exhibits. I thought it was a great way of making our collections accessible to the world, and showing them in a new light. I love the collaborative part of them because the exhibits that I worked on, I

usually had a group of people. A lot of what we do as librarians isn't very visible. It's like, you have a conversation and they say, thank you. But this was a product that people could see. So, that was, yes, fun and meaningful.

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

Yeah, but it's work too. So, you took that on, and I really admire that.

[00:50:49](#) **Margaret**

Yeah. And it was fun, like people who, once you start doing exhibits, you really like it.

[00:50:59](#) **Ann**

Cool. One quick other question that I'll just poke in. I don't even know what is the right time, but, were you... I don't know what the timing was of the closure of the Ed Psych Library?

[00:51:14](#) **Margaret**

So, yeah, I was there. I was there during that time.

[00:51:18](#) **Ann**

Can you just say a little bit about that? Because you mentioned the closure of [the] Anthropology [Library], and the impact of library closure and as a navigation of change, if you want to call it that.

[00:51:30](#) **Margaret**

So, the building was coming down. Tolman Hall was coming down... Yeah, it was seismically unsafe, but I think that's only an excuse, but whatever. And the School of Education and Department of Psychology were moving to a new site. Real estate is a precious commodity and why would they build space for a unit [the Library] that is owned by somebody else? Right? So okay, I understood. I understood. I understood that, and it made me sad a little bit, but it made [sense]. I didn't take it personally... It wasn't my legacy, the Education Psychology [Library]. But I understood that there was, we had no choice. Like, there was no place—we're losing the building and the room. I think the knowledge that the library was eventually going to close meant that the collection was a little bit...[tired]... you know, it needed to be weeded. It needed a little [refreshing], you know, so in some ways [the closure] improved things. It's like, “Oh, we can get rid of these duplicates and this we can send to NRLF [the Northern Regional Library Facility, now called Systemwide Library Facility-North, is a high-density storage site for

infrequently used items in the University of California Libraries system], so it made a much tighter collection, and that sort of evaluation, which I think we don't really have time to do unless there's a big move.

I think the difference with the Anthropology Library was that the department wanted it. They wanted to keep it, I think. I mean, maybe, I don't know all the [details]... [But] there was a lot of support. Certainly, a small group of students cared about it enough. So to me, I didn't quite understand. There was a building, there was a site. They seemed like they wanted to keep it. So I wasn't quite sure why we made that decision. Well, I do understand it was a staffing issue. It was hard to keep it up. [But] I feel like a staffing issue is kind of a temporary problem. So it was a permanent solution for a temporary problem. Having said that, I want to be on the record saying I did my part in going through the [Anthropology Library] journals, and making decisions about them. Cutting duplicates and sending things to [the] Main [Stacks] or NRLF. I did my part. I was not supportive of [the decision to close it], but I still did what needed to be done. I'm not sure people know that.

[00:54:15](#) **Ann**

Thank you. This whole thing is discussion for another time, but it's really interesting. Contrast the two situations and how they went down.

[00:54:24](#) **Margaret**

I mean, it sort of happened at the same time. I guess the physics library is closing... And again, it's a really easy argument to make that it was better access if it's integrated into another collection. And that department didn't seem to be shedding any tears that they were losing it. But I don't know. We're here to serve our patrons and do what they want. That's just me.

[00:54:49](#) **Ann**

Big other discussion.

[00:54:51](#) **Margaret**

Yes.

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

Okay, so anything else on your list? I just want to double check. And as you think, I'm going to also look through my [notes].

[00:55:09](#) **Margaret**

Oh, one little story, I think. Remember there was the librarian who said, “I don't do computers”?

[00:55:17](#) **Ann**

Yes.

[00:55:17](#) **Margaret**

[This] was like, maybe a few years later. I remember this was when I was at Melvyl. There was a programmer who'd been there a long time, and... she was going to be retiring in a few years and she said to her boss, “I want to stay here. but, don't make me learn any new things. I don't want to learn any new stuff. I'll just keep doing the old stuff.” And again, I remember thinking, huh that's interesting. But now I understand what she was feeling. Again, that's part of the theme of change.

[00:55:57](#) **Ann**

It is. But I don't know any of us that have that luxury. Information and the provision of it—I mean, we don't absolutely get to...

[00:56:11](#) **Margaret**

You don't get to do that. This was not a public service person. And I think maybe she was expressing a wish that wasn't going to be fulfilled [laughs].

[00:56:22](#) **Ann**

And who can blame her?

[00:56:24](#) **Margaret**

Yes. But I guess, sort of that mentality...

[00:56:29](#) **Ann**

Yeah, no, it's interesting.

[00:56:31](#) **Margaret**

And in fact, now that I'm retired, I'm like, "What am I missing out on? There's probably like the new version of like Google Docs or whatever that I'm not ever going to... It's never going to be a part of my life." And that just feels weird.

[00:56:47](#) **Ann**

I think there's pluses to both ways of life.

[00:56:52](#) **Margaret**

I still have young people in my life, so they kind of keep me honest.

[00:56:58](#) **Ann**

Okay, so I have one more question, and again, you know, no worries if you're not interested, but one of the moments where I really felt like I wanted to do this project was talking with another old-time Berkeley librarian, when we were having the big serials review, the big, huge budget cut, like terrifying budget cut. It was like my first really terrifying one. There were little ones every year, but a huge terrifying one. And I was like, "What are we gonna do? What are we gonna do?" Freaking out. And this person said, "Eh" [carelessly], and was like, [they] just had seen it all. So, that was such a different perspective to me that I just sort of felt like, "How could you possibly get that perspective?" But I do see it as a perennial Berkeley issue, and reading in the news today about some of the much better resourced private institutions and some decisions that they can make in the current climate that I don't think Berkeley's at liberty to make, I'm just curious. I know this is not a very well-formulated question, but like over the years, how does that whole "budget and Berkeley" thing play into some of this?

[00:58:23](#) **Margaret**

Yes, you know, same old story or whatever the expression is. Every couple of years, big budget cut. I guess maybe I didn't always freak out so much about the materials budget cuts. For one thing. Talk about digitization and really changing things—it's like one subscription, 10 UC campuses, we can all drop our print. All of it. "You mean we haven't dropped the print? We're paying for the storage?" Especially when I was Electronic Resources Librarian, [so] we're getting something through CDL [California Digital Library] and then we're also getting it [in print] through Berkeley? Wait a minute! [Canceling the print of a CDL subscription] was something that should have happened. That was a no-brainer. When I was cutting [subscriptions], I often [was] like, "I'm just gonna cut this down. I'm gonna reinstate it in a

couple years.” I probably shouldn't be saying this on the record, but I'm saying it on the record. I felt like the serials cuts were never permanent cuts, because you can go back and get it and recontinue it. The books were bigger. Like, there'd be like a chunk of books from certain years that we were never going to get, that kind of was a bigger hole in the collection.

[01:00:04](#) **Ann**

So just to double check, you're meaning that if you buy the serials back later, you're getting the back files. So, the two years that you were not purchasing, you fill in [again].

[01:00:12](#) **Margaret**

Yeah. Or you, you buy an archive of it, or something like that. Yeah. So, the digital stuff really created some great efficiencies for libraries. But I'm not sure we got the money back to plan other things.

To me, the biggest—well, first of all, also, we have a really great budget at Berkeley. Maybe not Harvard, maybe not Princeton, but we have a lot of money. And yes, it gets chipped away, but we still have a very good collection if you talk to people at other institutions. To me, the biggest problem with the budget problems was the staffing, losing staff. Once you get rid of a position from the line, you're not getting it back. Again, some of it makes sense. I was looking at the old [files from] when we moved out of Ed Psych. I mean, there used to be like 12 people who worked in Ed Psych, and there were several people who checked in serials. We don't need people to check in serials anymore. So I think that's the biggest loss, the changes in staffing that has resulted, in that part of the budget.

[01:01:50](#) **Ann**

I hear you. Thank you. And this is truly the very last question. It's a little bit out of left field, so no worries, but... I feel like you are very kind of tuned into what's happening and what's coming down the pike. Like, when you saw things coming down the pike that were like, “Okay, this is going to be a big adjustment,” did you have any personal strategies? Did you do professional development or did you create networks, or... like, when you saw something coming, how did you respond?

[01:02:32](#) **Margaret**

Yeah, that's a good question. Well, here's an example. It's not about libraries at all, but it's about higher education. Way back when, I took a class that was being offered through—I can't remember, the Gender Equity [Resource Center]... And it was a class on using pronouns. I kind of thought, “I feel like probably this is going to be a thing. I'm going to take this class.” I mean, it must have already been a thing, because they were offering the class. But, I thought I could use some help... And then after that class, I think maybe Michael Sholinbeck was in that class with me too, we said to Lynne Grigsby, “You know what? We should have pronouns in the staff directory.” That was one thing—I saw this change kind of happening, [and] I thought, “Well, we should get ahead of that.” I think I was on CAPA [Committee on Appointment, Promotion & Advancement] maybe, and I said, “Why are we calling people mister and miss [in our letters]? That seems unnecessarily gendered. Let's just call them by their name, like, by their last name. We don't want to do their first name.” You know, just little things like that, trying to get ahead of it or at least not resist it, you know? That's just one little example. I'm sure I did workshops and all that sort of stuff, all the library stuff...

[01:04:28](#) **Ann**

That's a great example, though. Thank you for that. And off the cuff [they laugh].

[01:04:34](#) **Margaret**

Oh, there you go. I couldn't even think of it.

[01:04:39](#) **Ann**

How are you feeling? I'm feeling like we covered so much. It's just been fantastic. Are you feeling okay? Is there anything else you want to add at the end, or...?

[01:04:50](#) **Margaret**

No. I mean, I feel like that's .. my big picture, my view of the world. Everybody's is different. Again, I feel lucky that I got to be part of it, you know?

[01:05:11](#) **Ann**

Bookend.

[01:05:12](#) **Margaret**

Right place. Right. Right place, right time.

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