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“Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project

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Michael Sholinbeck

Interviewed on April 23, 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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00:00:00 **Ann**

This is Ann Glusker interviewing Michael Sholinbeck on April 23, 2025 for the “Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project. This is a remote interview. Ann is in Seattle, Washington, and Michael is in Richmond, California.

So, the way I've been starting with people actually is to say, could you just fill me, us, in on your background? Anything you want to talk about related to that, but especially how you came to librarianship.

00:00:50 **Michael**

Yeah, well, how I came to librarianship is actually kind of a good story, and maybe that's common. I don't know. So, at the normal age, I was an undergrad, and I then went to grad school and got a master's degree in geography, which was my field. I never really got a job in that field. I was living in Oregon, and I ended up moving back to California, the Bay Area, and I was living in San Francisco. I ended up working in a hospital in the business side of things, and I kind of kept moving up. And eventually, it was a thing that, like, the salary was good, it was one of those jobs that you could turn off at 5 o'clock and not think about. Although, in the back of my mind, I always thought I was kind of on the wrong side of healthcare, because I was, like, trying to get the money in. And then at a certain point, this hospital, like every hospital in San Francisco, and maybe the whole country, got absorbed into a big hospital chain and I got a new boss and we despised each other.

It was really uncomfortable at work, like, literally physically uncomfortable. This was after 12 years of working there. Finally, it got to the point where I just up and quit. I was like, “Okay, now what am I going to do in the meantime?” Towards the end of this time, I got married, so I was lucky to be kept during this little unemployment period. I actually went to a career counselor and I took those tests that you take that are like, what are you good at? And librarian bubbled up to the top. I was like, that makes perfect sense. I never thought about doing that, but it made perfect sense to me at the time. This was in 1998 or something. Because I thought I want to work with people. But my wife was a social worker and that was like too much people. So, I thought, librarian is just the right amount of people.

So, I went to library school, and as part of one of my classes, we were supposed to go to a quote unquote, real library and observe. I had a friend who was in the DrPH [Doctor of Public Health] program at Berkeley, and she said, “Oh, come to my library. They're nice.” And I'm like, okay.

So, I called the [UC Berkeley] Public Health Library. They're like, "Sure, come and observe." So, I sat at the reference desk for a couple of hours with someone. And then they're like, "Oh, you know, if you want to just come in for a few hours a week and help us with stuff we can't get to, why don't you do that and we'll pay you, we'll call you an on-call library assistant." And I'm like, "Sure." I just pretty much showed up when I felt like it, I worked probably 10 hours a week on various projects. And then when I got my degree, they're like, "Oh, now we'll call you an on-call librarian. You can keep coming in." Meanwhile, I had a few other library gigs, at other places I was doing for money, you know, little part time things. And then at a certain point after, oh, I don't know, a year or less, a position opened up, because one of the librarians was leaving and moving out of state. I applied and I got it. It was just literally like the path opened up in front of me, with really hardly any effort on my part.

And my friend was right, they were nice at the Public Health Library. Back then—I don't know, we might touch on this a little bit more later—the UC Berkeley Library was a very federated kind of thing. The individual libraries at the time—there was probably 24 or something—they could do a little bit whatever they felt like, more than was happening towards the end of my career. So, the Public Health Library could do this thing of having an on-call librarian without going through... I mean, they pretty much told HR, "Oh, we're having this guy come 10 hours a week." And HR is like, "Sure." It was just very easy to do that kind of stuff back then.

[00:05:51](#) **Ann**

Hard to imagine now.

[00:05:53](#) **Michael**

Yeah, hard to imagine now. I just pretty much did what they said, in terms of little projects that they couldn't get around to. So that's my falling into librarianship story. And it was way better than being on the wrong side of the US healthcare system. Although I will say that that knowledge that I got did help in my public health life at UC Berkeley, because I had a pretty deep understanding of the way insurance worked, of the way the health care system worked, and hospitals and doctors and that side of things, which is not exactly public health, but it's a very helpful piece of knowledge to have. Medicare and all those kinds of things.

[00:06:43](#) **Ann**

Yeah, a lot of serendipity there.

[00:06:48](#) **Michael**

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Yeah, there's even more serendipity, that's probably more of an aside, having to do with the fact that this friend who got me there was also mostly a friend of my wife's. And then my wife ended up getting a job with her husband, who also worked for public health. And so, the four of us were one big public health thing. We all sort of worked in public health because of each other. Just kind of an amazing series of coincidences.

[00:07:24](#) **Ann**

So, as I looked at your CV... I love getting this origin story because, then looking at your CV, I have sort of four or five different roles that kind of emerged in the course of your time at Berkeley. Can you say a little bit about how those shifts happened?

[00:07:51](#) **Michael**

Yeah... So I'm not sure exactly which four roles...

[00:07:56](#) **Ann**

What I have is that you originally did document delivery, and then you were doing outreach instruction along with being Assistant Head Librarian, and then you were the Public Health Librarian, but then you're the Public Health and Optometry Librarian.

[00:08:11](#) **Michael**

Okay.

[00:08:11](#) **Ann**

What I'm seeing, hopefully that's all accurate.

[00:08:13](#) **Michael**

So, I was hired as what they call [a] document delivery librarian. The Public Health Library at the time, and this might all predate when you came to UC Berkeley, but anyway, we had a contract with the State of California Department of Public Health, as well as a smattering of other public health entities that were State of California entities. This is another thing that a library at UC Berkeley could do back then, and there's zero chance of it happening now. That started because a huge cohort of scientists in the [California State] Department of Public Health were schooled at UC Berkeley School of Public Health. This was back in the 1950s. And when they left, the Department of Public Health was really growing its scientific personnel at the time. They're like, "How are we going to do this without the resources of a library?" So, there was this

creation of this relationship which I think started in 1956 or something like that, which turned into a contractual relationship.

So when I was hired in 2001 or [2002], I was in charge of the document delivery service, which is one of the things we did. We supplied documents which we got from publishers, copyright clearance or various other entities. There was some limited use of the UC Berkeley collection, and it was a highly valued thing. This was like on the cusp of things getting available online, but you can imagine in the 50s, 60s, 70s, etc. there was no such thing as “online”. We also had a system where we had an agreement with the Library that we gave our folks library cards, so they could check out material which went through us to them. We basically paid a courier to deliver books or other things to them, or print out printed articles, photocopied, to them with their library cards. We also included, not really document delivery, but in our suite of services was [doing] literature searching for them. They would give us a subject and say, “Give me citations on whatever”, and we would do the work, and we would give them citations. It really helped them, because first of all we were expert searchers and they weren't. And then they wouldn't have to take the time to find the stuff. They could just go through our lists and whatever they wanted to get, they could get. That was actually very fascinating, because the range of subjects covered was everything from analyzing shellfish for toxins to looking at racial equity in maternal health. Everything you can imagine public health is, we covered... from very scientific to very psychological/social science. So it's fascinating to learn from that too.

So that was document delivery librarian. My first role. That included being a supervisor of two staff and a smattering of students. I was thrust into a supervisor role, which... the library was very supportive. My boss was very supportive of taking all those classes one can take on management that are offered at UC Berkeley for new managers, as well as in the professional librarian associations. I was active in SLA [Special Libraries Association]. They also had a lot of professional development resources and stuff for new managers.

So, I did that for some number of years. Then, another librarian left who was kind of more the instruction guy, and my boss at the time, Debbie, was like, “Do you want to do instruction... More instruction?” Because I was already doing some. I'm like, “Yeah, that seems more like what I want to do.” So, then I basically moved into this job [of his] and then we opened up my old job. This is another thing that was easier to do back 15 or whatever years ago, where we just... I can't even remember if it was an open... if the position was even advertised that I moved into. I can't even remember if I just changed roles and changed titles. But then they opened up

my old position and we hired someone, and I was still involved in the literature searching. I also was involved in developing this web portal for our contract clientele which we moved from a system—basically our old system was, they either used a paper form which they would send us through a courier or in the mail, or even via fax—then we moved to this kind of email system where we had basically just an online form that turned into an email to us that said “I want this article.” Well, then we developed this web portal, which was more akin to what folks are used to when you request like an interlibrary loan or something, where you have to put in the citation and [it] creates a record in a database instead of just creating an email. I worked with a programming contractor, outside contractor, and we created this thing. It was very cool because then they could keep track of what they ordered. And we could post the stuff to the web. Instead of just faxing them this article, we would post it to a password-protected web portal. I was hugely involved in that, I would say in the years around 2007, ’8, ’9, ’10.

I was up to my ears in this work. It was relentlessly busy getting this thing, to get it right and expanding what it could do. So I did that. Well, then our contract disappeared. After whatever 60 years, the library administration decided they didn't like it. Part of me can see why they didn't like it, because we were contracting as if we were our own entity. And this whole federated system of the libraries was moving more to a centralized system. On the other hand, I feel that we were doing a huge public service to the California taxpayers by giving these public health scientists the information they needed to do their work. And by the end our document delivery was waning a little bit because so much stuff was online and they could find it. Finding stuff also became easier too. Google Scholar and all that. So, we then moved to instruction. We really ramped up the instruction. We went to the work site of these state employees, and we did classes in searching PubMed, searching Google Scholar, using resources like EndNote. We did classes on like, more subject-based things. Like if you're interested in toxicology, we made a class for finding the good stuff or, or on health promotion, [that] kind of thing. We had a few subject-based things, and we did a lot of special classes where a group would get together and say, “We want a class on whatever”, and we would design classes. So, we were doing classes all the time for them. Driving up to Sacramento.

[00:18:07](#) **Ann**

I just want to interrupt for one second and ask, when you say “we” did, was it you and other librarians, or you and other people in their health department, or...?

[00:18:17](#) **Michael**

Okay, so I should step back a little and say that the Public Health Library, most of those smaller libraries at UC Berkeley, at the time basically supported one librarian. The library paid the salary of one librarian and one library assistant and then student staff. But we had this big contract from the state, and we had anywhere from four to seven librarians, and something like four or so staff, and a lot of students... although the student work declined over the years because the labor became less a matter of physical labor of getting a book from the chemistry library to pointing a link to someone to get something. So, our [number of] students went down, but we had a lot of librarians there, and we would all take turns doing the instruction. By the time our contract ended, there was, I think, three-and-a-half librarians. No, actually maybe four. Well, depending on how you count. But three or four or so librarians working. All but one of them were paid through the contract. 100% of my salary was paid by the State of California, not UC. And that was the case for most of the people working at the Public Health Library. So, the “we” was all of us. And even though we had like, I was the instruction and outreach person and there was a document delivery librarian and a head librarian and a smattering of part time librarians, we all kind of took turns doing the classes and, and the other stuff.

Meanwhile though, my work with the School of Public Health started ramping up. So, even though I was paid under contract with the state, my work with the state started decreasing, past 2010 maybe, mostly because they were being much more self-sufficient... in a way we succeeded ourselves to oblivion—they were becoming much more self-sufficient. Plus, newer folk... these scientists who had been there since the 70s were all retiring, and these new folks who are just coming out of school and used to finding stuff online were coming up. So, our services were declining, but I found myself getting far more involved in the School of Public Health. Our contract ended, I believe in 2018, and that's also when our library, the Public Health Library, closed and we got absorbed into another library on campus, the Bioscience... What became the Bioscience, Natural Resources, and Public Health Library. A lot of words. Then I became Public Health Librarian. I was no longer Instruction Outreach, because that was a contract-facing role. Even though, to be honest, the percentage of time I was working on state stuff was for sure less than half my hours, and much more involved in the School. And then at a certain point I got Optometry, basically because of other people leaving. Optometry went through a series of librarians who were around for like a couple of years, and then finally they're like, “Michael, you just take it too.” Which was completely manageable because Optometry—unlike Public Health, where I had a really strong relationship with the students and they came to me a lot and I helped them a lot, and the kind of projects they were working on were projects where they needed to find stuff—Optometry was more like, they're in clinic all day. Like, 8 to 6,

they're in clinic, and all they do is write up case reports pretty much. So as long as they can find their journals, they didn't need a lot of hand holding except for a few of them who are like more research-based, you know, or special projects for some of the faculty. But, they just didn't need me very much.

So, I'm not sure if I really covered the four or five roles, but that's kind of the evolution of things. And it got to the point where I got very, very enmeshed in the School of Public Health. To the point where lots of folks, until the day I retired eight months ago, thought I was an employee of the School and didn't realize that the Library was this... Like, they knew there was this Doe Library, this other library and stuff, but they thought I was an employee of the School because I was there all the time, or a lot of time.

[00:23:52](#) **Ann**

I just feel like that's kind of the old way. I mean if you're a liaison and your expertise and your background and your knowledge base are so connected to where the action is, you go where the action is. Yeah, it's not as much a centralized model, but that's a whole different discussion. But no, that was a super great overview, because I feel like there's a lot of change just in that, just in the way you described things. I had been thinking to ask you what you thought was the most sea change, like, big game changing kind of event during that time, [but] it sounds like the ending of the contract might be the answer. But maybe you have a different answer...

[00:24:39](#) **Michael**

I mean for me, for my personal career journey, the ending of the contract might have been that. One of the things [was], when I was this contract librarian, so for my whole career [until then], which was like until 2017 or so, I didn't do a lot of the stuff that librarians traditionally do at UC Berkeley—although a lot of the librarians these days are more... [there are] fewer subject-based but more functional [librarians], it's changed a little bit—like, I didn't have a collection, I didn't do any collection work, which is a big thing for most subject-based librarians. It's like one of the biggest things they did. So, the ending of the contract meant [the] beginning of me being the selector for public health and optometry. Optometry was easy. I just bought every book practically that came out that seemed relevant. There's just not that many. But public health is so as you know, transdisciplinary, that it was great fun, and enjoyable, being the collection person.

So even though I was really sad and even a little mad that the contract ended, getting involved in collection development starting in 2018 was great. I loved it. I felt, first of all, “I have this

power to buy stuff that I think is cool and useful, and whatever they ask too.” I was exploring all kinds of subjects, and I would sometimes see... be about to buy something and it's like, “Oh, look, anthropology bought this.” Or, “Oh, look, someone else bought this, because we crossed boundaries so much... Oh, it's at the Law Library,” or whatever. So it was really interesting to get into that. I would say that that might be [the biggest thing]—the coincidence in time of the contract ending, and the role changing to include the collection, which was probably the biggest thing that I didn't do for [the] first part of my career up till 2017, that most librarians at UC Berkeley were doing. Because also before 2017, there were far fewer of these functional-based [jobs], like data or scholarly communications. All those things are newer. Assessment. All those things—well, most of them, not all of them—were newer than that. Now, of course, there's more and more of those, and fewer and fewer of the subject-based, but still some subject folks, obviously.

[00:27:46](#) **Ann**

I will say that part of what really interested me about this project originally, it was just going to be about some of those changes from liaison work to functional work. But then I thought, “That's too narrow of a topic.” But, I see that continuing. I don't know if it affected your work at all because you still were... you almost went from functional to liaison, in a way?

[00:28:12](#) **Michael**

Yeah, kind of. I mean, the function was more like a service, and this was why we were all in the Public Health Library involved in SLA as opposed to like MLA [Medical Library Association] or ALA [American Library Association], because we felt that we were a library service for government employees. We also helped the students, and all that stuff. We had a reference desk and went to their classes like one does, and their orientations. But that also ramped up hugely for [me in] the second half of my career, even while I was still doing contract work. The amount of going into the classroom and meeting one-on-one with students really just went up a lot. If I had access to my statistics I would be able to give you the numbers, but I can't...but maybe you still have access, you can look... Anyway, at least it felt like it. I'm pretty sure the numbers reflected a great increase in one-on-ones and the number of instruction sessions I did compared to earlier.

So yeah, that's I would say within the field more broadly. The thing I was thinking about that was such a change in that time was kind of an increased self-sufficiency. I kind of hinted about [it] with the contract people, but I didn't relish the role of librarian as gatekeeper. Like, “I will open the door of PubMed to you and teach you how to find stuff.” I'm glad they made it easy, so

that people could find what they needed, mostly what they needed to get by. That was made easier both by the way the databases worked, and the fact that things like Google and Google Scholar got better, and even things like Wikipedia got better. You might remember at the beginning of Wikipedia we were like holding our nose, and then it was like “Oh, Wikipedia is like one of the better ones” by the end, for at least for certain subjects. Maybe not things that are controversial and changing, depending on who's editing it. But [it's] really good for chemistry. Anyway, so seeing that happen with the students... Like at 10 years ago, when I would show people like Zotero or EndNote [Zotero: a citation manager; “a free, easy-to-use tool to help... collect, organize, annotate, cite, and share research”—Zotero.org][EndNote: a commercial reference management software package, used to manage bibliographies and references when writing essays, reports and articles (Wikipedia)], people were like pulling their hair out about, “How amazing! Oh my God, I can't believe this thing!” [But] by the last couple of years, it was like they all knew it. Just like these sorts of tools that I thought were the coolest thing on earth. [I'm] like who here uses Zotero? Everyone raises their hand except for a few, handful, of people. I'm like “Oh, okay, well there goes my lecture.”

So, people have just gotten more used to doing stuff and finding stuff. I think what they used me for more [later] was higher level stuff, which was great. You know, “I'm doing a systematic review”. No. We can get into the fact that they weren't really doing a systematic review, okay, but what they were doing was they were trying to do a good search. They weren't just like putting words in the box and getting 20 articles that looked good. They were trying to do a good search, at least, with some criteria for exclusion and all that. There was way more of that in the last five, six years of my work than there was before, where people were doing like really good searches. Whereas before it was like, “How do I get into this PubMed thing? How do I do it?” That, to me, was a big change I saw that was probably happening everywhere over the years, and I didn't even notice it until looking back it's like, “Oh yeah. I used to have to really open the door to get these people into the databases.”

[00:32:29](#) **Ann**

You know, it's so interesting. This is inserting myself a little bit. But I became a librarian much later [in my career], so I didn't really get my first job as a librarian until about 2010. By that point you really could do almost natural language searching in PubMed. You didn't really have to create a beautiful, beautiful hedge [“Search hedges are pre-defined comprehensive combinations of search terms used to retrieve journal articles. They are most often used to retrieve articles by study type (e.g., systematic reviews) or research topic (e.g., HIV/AIDS).

Hedges are typically created by librarians and composed of controlled vocabulary, such as MeSH (Medical Subject Headings), in databases like PubMed and CINAHL” (<https://researchguides.uic.edu/SystematicReviews/searchhedges>)). But the old timers were still teaching expert searching, and those incredible strings that they could create that were so unassailable, logically perfect. Isn't it interesting that it's kind of coming a little bit full circle, that that ability to create a logical search string is getting more valued as people do more systematic reviews?

[00:33:18](#) **Michael**

Yeah. And it is true that, I mean, I tried, even when people were doing these so called systematic reviews...

[00:33:29](#) **Ann**

Air quotes.

[00:33:30](#) **Michael**

Air quotes. I mean, sometimes their topic was such that they could get away with six keywords and they were pretty much going to get everything. But then sometimes people had very broad topics that really needed to have a good search because otherwise they would have tens of thousands of hits. And that included using geographic hedges. So, I had a lot of people who are like “Oh, I'm only interested in the United States.” And I'm like, “Well—PubMed—there is no good easy way. You can't just write and United States, it doesn't work.” So, we had these huge hedges that listed Alabama and Alaska, like every state and region, and even some of the big cities, so, this huge thousand-character thing that they would stick at the end of their topic to bring back hopefully [just] United States. And even that wasn't perfect. I'm like, “Well, we could restrict it to title word or abstract word so it doesn't pick up the author address or whatever. And some of them were like, “Yeah, let's do it.” They would really work on these really strong good searches that I was like, “Oh, good, I'm glad you did that.”

So it's true that there [were], in the last few years, more and more students and faculty—and staff as well—who are trying to do these really good searches. Even though, as much as I cringed when they would say systematic review, I essentially had to give up, because the School called them that. They had various options as a big final project, like a capstone project, and one of them was [doing a] systematic review. I finally just would say, “We're going to call it a systematic review-lite.” And maybe this is a digression...

[00:35:40](#) **Ann**

I'm going to use that! Yeah, no, go ahead...

[00:35:44](#) **Michael**

This might be a digression. But there's a lot of debate in the library and world about this. Like, some people I talked to said, "You've got to teach them the real way to do it, otherwise you're doing them a disservice, because if they do it in the future, they're not going to know how to do it for real." On the other hand, no one is going to be making a clinical guideline from the student's systematic review that they concocted in 2 months when they were trying to graduate. Right? I don't have to worry about some surgeon cutting off the wrong limb because they looked at this "systematic review". Not that they did those kind of reviews, but anyway... So, I was more of that camp of just like, I'm gonna tell them, "Most of the time when you do a systematic review, it's a team. It takes a year, all that stuff. We're just gonna do this project and you can call it what you want and I will help you. Just know that if you think you want to publish this thing someday, you're gonna have to redo it, for real." Because even though they're not going to become clinical guidelines, a lot of them might end up wanting to publish these things. And so those, the ones who are really serious students, were the ones who tried to do it more for real and had a team and a faculty advisor... Although the faculty themselves weren't that great either about this, and realized it would take over a year and blah, blah, blah. So, we had a few of those. But anyway, I could go on about Systematic Reviews forever.

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

That would be super fun from my point of view.

[00:37:30](#) **Michael**

Yeah, I know.

[00:37:31](#) **Ann**

But I think we should move on [laughs].

[00:37:33](#) **Michael**

Yeah, let's move on.

[00:37:33](#) **Ann**

One question I have, actually you've touched on, which is... in the questions I sent, I said, what were some of the Berkeley-specific changes that you saw? And one big thing is budget. Were you protected by the state contract from the budget stuff, or did it impact you?

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

Yeah, I'm trying to see if I wrote anything about that. So, we were and we weren't, because we were affected by the state budget. It was a little bit separated, though not entirely, but a little bit separated. Since the library only supported one librarian and one library assistant and a really not very big collection budget, which is another story that we may or may not get to. But anyway, we were kind of insulated from that. But of course, every year when the state budget came out, especially the head librarian of [the] unit, if it looked like there was going to be cutting to [the California Department of] Public Health, you know, it would trickle down. And it did occasionally. So, of course, you know, with these kinds of things, the staff is overwhelmingly most of the money. Like, the state gives us whatever they give us, and like 80% of that is to pay for the staff. So, the things we did to cut the budget were little things. For example, one of the things we did under our contract was, we paid for a suite of online journals for the state to have, for the State Public Health [Department]. There was a small IP range and a password they could use to get into the journals. So, at one point we cut a bunch of the journal titles. But you know how these things are. It's like, when you get 30 titles, you cut 10. It might hardly make any difference, and you sometimes can't even cut them. Sometimes we were getting like, these ridiculous titles that no one cared about just because, well, if you want *New England Journal of Medicine*, you also have to get the *Journal of Blood Transfusion*, which who even cares, right? But it's part of the package. So, it was very weird. We did little things to cut the budget like that. For example, we used to even do ILL [Interlibrary Loan] for these people, which cost money. We had to pay the Library for each ILL. So that's another thing the Library, of course, hated was all of that. So, we cut these little things. And I think at one point we did cut staff. We probably cut our student staff, and maybe even we cut one staff person or I don't know, because that wasn't me. I wasn't the contracts person. So. But we did have to jiggle things around or justify why we needed this many people and blah, blah, blah. So we were affected by the state budget. And you see, even though we get some money from the state and UC—probably we got a little more from the state back 15 years ago—it wasn't as direct. When UC was cutting, they couldn't cut our positions because they weren't paying for them. So, we felt safe in that regard. The Library was very good over the years in not laying people off, but even things like hiring freezes didn't really affect us, I don't think, the way they affected the Library or campus in general.

There was like a big budget thing in, I don't know 2000 [something], I can't even remember... a couple of times there were big budget things that you see, and it just didn't seem like it was that big of a deal to us. But I was also insulated from it because I wasn't dealing with a collection or paying for staff or anything. It was all someone else.

[00:42:05](#) **Ann**

Okay, that's such an interesting picture. Really different than what I've been hearing from others. And then what about technological change, anything? I think you've touched on a lot of different things, but is anything coming to mind, as you cast your mind back?

[00:42:26](#) **Michael**

Well, I mean, generally speaking, this thing that. I think I'm not the only librarian to go through this. It's like as things came out, I'm like, oh, my gosh, I have to now I have to learn this thing. You know, I remember, like, when R [a programming tool for statistical analysis and data visualization] started becoming, like, bigger and bigger, I'm like, "Oh, gosh, I have to learn R." And I didn't know anything about this kind of stuff. I could barely deal with Excel, and actually, I couldn't deal with Excel, and so I'm like, "I gotta learn R." I know I took some like self-guided course, and then it just hit me that I don't need to know R, I just need to know the people who know R, so I can tell students go to the D-Lab ["D-Lab helps Berkeley faculty, staff, and students [with] research in data intensive social science...[through] in-depth consulting and advising access [and] training (dlab.berkeley.edu)]. Because the D-Lab was splendidly coming into fruition around that same time. They were a lovely resource for me, because it was like all of your statistical needs, just send them there. And there were a few other places too, like the Geospatial Innovation Facility for GIS [Geographic Information Systems]. Before the Library had a GIS thing. They were there for classes and for computers, with programs and stuff like that. So, coming into the realization that I didn't have to learn every new technology... Now search technology, that I felt that I had to like be on top of, but all this other stuff, statistics and data and GIS... and I retired just in the nick of time to not have to learn anything about AI.

[00:44:07](#) **Ann**

You're not the only person to say that [laughs].

[00:44:10](#) **Michael**

I know, I know you talked to David. Anyway, so you know all this technology stuff. But another thing though, technology-wise too that happened during my career was that when I first started

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working and for several years, we had all these computers in the library. All the libraries had a bunch of computers, and there were times where we had to tell people to leave because other people were waiting to use the computer. Well obviously, by the time I retired, everyone, every student, including almost every undergrad, had their own laptop. It was required. And I remember at a certain point where the School of Public Health said that grad students are required to have their own laptop.

[00:45:08](#) **Ann**

Oh, wow.

[00:45:08](#) **Michael**

That started in, I couldn't tell you what year, but maybe 2010, or, I don't know, somewhere around there. So of course, these library computers became relics that hardly anyone used, and this coincided with the increasing ease of finding stuff online. So the students became more self-sufficient both in terms of their skills, and the fact that they had the hardware to do it anywhere they happened to be. They didn't have to come to the library. [Earlier,] people would come... you would know when a class got out, because they would all come, run into the library, check their emails, do this, whatever they were doing, in the 15 minutes and then leave... Or, some of them would be there for hours on the computers, in like, 2004. So that was, to me, a bigger change than things like programming, like for example, R.

Now AI maybe is different, because it's such a big deal. AI might be more analogous to the change that came with being able to do searching online, which really started with the kind of beginning of the internet... well, no, I wouldn't say that... By the late 90s, people were searching online for stuff, right? That's when I was in library school. Now I think one thing that kind of changed in the early 2000s, one of the things I did in early my career was I created these pathfinders, right? On subjects, like, "If you're interested in maternal and child health, here's this three-page paper document with a list of books, journals and websites you can go to." And we really felt the web was a manageable thing. Like you could find pretty much all the good stuff on maternal and child health, to use that example, or nutrition or whatever you like. All the good stuff could be reduced to this two-page piece of paper listing them. I mean, you might remember those old Yahoo Guides. Yahoo. Animals, pets, dogs, poodles, right? You just follow the arrows and like all the good websites on poodles would be there, all 10 of them. Obviously, that is really different. And so, to me, that was a big change that I saw early in my career—the notion

that the web was a manageable thing, and it quickly became so unmanageable that there was no way we could provide a piece of it to students, although we still tried.

We did these web guides. The Public Health Library had a slew of them, which then of course morphed into LibGuides [Library research guides (LibGuides is the proprietary software they are currently hosted on)] eventually, which the Public Health Library had way more than anyone else, because they were all relics of these paper guides that we had in the '90s for all of our subjects.

[00:48:28](#) **Ann**

I've always wondered that, thank you!

[00:48:32](#) **Michael**

We just kept changing the medium, and one of the things I did like crazy in the last six months of my career was trying to get rid of LibGuides, because I had like 70. Or more. Where the next person down had probably 18 or something. And most people had like four or eight or something. So, I was like looking at the data like, "Oh, this one hasn't been looked at more than three times a month for the past two years. Let's kill it. But this one resource, everyone clicks on, so let's move it to some other LibGuide." So, I really cut it down a lot and I was very proud of that. But I think I still left with probably like 40 LibGuides, you know, under my name.

[00:49:23](#) **Ann**

Okay, they're not under your name anymore!

[00:49:25](#) **Michael**

No, they're under Brian. Maybe Krista.

[00:49:31](#) **Ann**

That's, yeah, I'm loving this. So, then here's a different kind of approach. So, you've talked a lot about changes that have happened, and some of them you saw coming. Changes in searching maybe, or changes, I mean, the contract change being a change. But when you knew that you were kind of like headed for a big shift—did you have any ways of approaching that? Like what strategies?

[00:50:08](#) **Michael**

Well, I mean, it sort of depends. Some of what I saw as change was really the shifting focus of Library administration putting a change upon us, rather than a change in the subject or in the field of librarianship, or whatever. Specifically, things like the closing of a lot of the subject-based libraries and consolidation and centralization. That's the Library doing that, not the world doing that. And so how I dealt with that kind of change, especially like when they closed the Public Health Library, which I was, got to admit, I was pretty grumpy about. I couldn't really do anything about it. I realized that. I mean, I did kind of question it... You know, they do the thing they do, or they send out information to the school, the faculty, etc. "What are your comments?" Well, their comments were mostly, "Don't do it", or "What on earth are we going to do?" Whatever, they did it anyway. Part of my way of dealing with it was to be a little grumpy. At first I was like, "I'm gonna like start doing other stuff. Like maybe I can do reference with Susan [Powell] in geography", because that was originally my field, or learn GIS or something, or work at some other library sometimes, to do reference. Well, that got nixed. So, a very wise librarian, in the height of my grumpiness, this was probably in like 2018, very wise librarian, told me, "What do you love the most about your job? Do that as much as you possibly can." And I'm like, "That is it. That's what I'm gonna do."

I think I was used to in my job doing a lot of whatever I wanted. My supervision was, "Do what you have to. Do your job, your primary job, and then whatever you want." And then, my supervisors were very good at guiding, like, "Oh, maybe you want to do this, or maybe you should be chair of a committee", or all that I needed to do to get good reviews and stuff. But if I saw some campus entity that intrigued me, I just started going to their meetings, and became part of that group. I did that a whole bunch in like, I would say, before this library closure, but like in the 2010s, say that stage of my career, the second half, I joined this science education group on campus. And I got involved in this program for foster and independent minor youth on campus. You know, stuff that was... I mean the science one was at least a little bit related to my other job. The other one was pure like service. I could put it down as service, but it wasn't really relevant to my job. And of course, I got hugely involved in the School of Public Health's diversity and anti-racism efforts.

After 2018, when I got these words of wisdom, I thought, "Okay, the thing I like the most is dealing with students one-on-one. So, I ramped up my office hours and I just put myself out there. I put myself in student spaces, I hung out at the school, I went to their events, I went to their seminars, where the students presented like at the end of the semester, [that] kind of thing. I wanted the students to see me, a lot. And it worked, to the point where I was like for the last

couple of years, it was sometimes overwhelming. The number of student appointments requests I would get, it felt overwhelming to me. It wasn't really overwhelming, but I had a hard time sometimes doing the other stuff that I had to do, like which journal should I cancel, that kind of stuff. So I'm not sure if I answered the question, about dealing with change, but that's kind of what it is. Was just getting more deeply involved in what I liked to do.

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

No, that's great. It's just really interesting to me to hear about intentional strategies related to our jobs. It can sometimes feel out of control. Like you say, the stuff comes at us and we are reactive rather than being able to be intentional.

[00:55:28](#) **Michael**

I mean, I was very reactive too, to a lot of things. One of which was, I had to really learn how to say no, which I think one of your questions was about, things to tell new librarians or something. I think figuring out strategies to say no is a good thing, because I was so enthusiastic when I started librarianship, because it was like, "Oh, my gosh, I'm this adult and I'm starting this career I really like." I was saying yes to everything, and it was fine at first, but then it was like, you can imagine that it's like you can get overwhelmed by saying yes to everything. Or I said yes to things that maybe I wasn't really the best person to do. You know, like, "Will you lead this chapter, this division of SLA or something?" I'm like, "Sure", but I was like, "Oh, I'm just not good at that kind of stuff." I had to really learn. I would see something that looked cool, and I would jump in and I would be like, "I have to just not." I think I got good at saying no. But the way I tried to say no was to see, like, "Who here can do this? Who here would it benefit to do this?" I really tried to be bringing other people into things that maybe would be beneficial.

Some of the things I really feel good about that I did was bringing staff in. Non-professional staff. So, when I was chair of the LAUC-B [Librarians Association of the University of California, Berkeley chapter] diversity committee, I'm like, "We should have staff on this committee, not just librarians", so we brought in staff. So, things like that, where it's like, "Let's get more people involved who maybe have a good voice to bring to this, so that Mike doesn't have to just say, yes, we'll do this thing." So, that's a piece of my career that I feel good about... trying to get some other voices involved in some of this stuff.

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

Okay, well, my next question, you needn't answer if you don't want, but it's the question about did you ever think about leaving Berkeley? And in your case, you started out with a situation where you said, "I can't do this, this won't work for me, I'm leaving." So, I know that you can leave... but did you ever have that thought about Berkeley or... ?

[00:58:25](#) **Michael**

Most definitely, when the Public Health Library closed in 2018. One of the things I was exploring was that. I thought, "Okay, how far is UCSF [University of California, San Francisco, which has a medical school]? What would it be like to go there every day?" I really was starting to think about it in a serious way, to the point, because I thought if they had a job, if they had an opening, there's a very good chance I could fill it, that I'd be a good candidate. Although some of their jobs are highly specialized. I'm not saying that... I'm just saying there's a good chance that [for] some of their jobs, I would be a good candidate. So, I was looking at that. And I also know that UC Davis had an [East Bay] presence. Then there's UCOP [University of California Office of the President], which had an Oakland presence, although they don't necessarily call the folks librarians there. I started looking, exploring all of that, and I even looked at CSU [California State University], you know, like, "How far is Hayward?"

For a variety of reasons, a lot of them... The two biggest ones were actually, all those places are pretty damn far except downtown Oakland. And they just don't seem to have a lot of jobs waiting for me to apply to. Those two were big reasons, and the fact that my new role that was coming with the closing of the Public Health Library, I was starting to go, "Oh, I'm going to be doing the collection now. You know, maybe this isn't so bad." I had to separate my sort of miffed-ness at them closing the Public Health Library, which I think, honestly, some of the reasons for, I think were more... less because it was a benefit, not a burden on the library, and more because of some interpersonal things that were going on, I'll just say... But anyway, I had to separate my being miffed to, like, "Okay, here's where my job is going. And you know what? It's not so bad. I can now be 100% involved in the School of Public Health." Because, honestly, when I was being paid by the contract, but two thirds of my hours were spent with the School of Public Health, I was like, "Is this weird, or bad?" But I still felt this like, I was doing my duty to the taxpayers. I wasn't goofing off, I was doing a good job. I was at their beck and call. I mean the one thing with working for the state is like I was totally at their beck and call. If they called and said I need a literature search in three hours on this topic, I gave them a literature search in three hours. I dropped everything. Or if their web portal, if there was something broken on it and I couldn't fix it, I would get the programmer and get it fixed. And sometimes that involved using Library IT

staff, which of course the library really did not like, really did not like them working for us. I don't know if we even had to like pay for some of that or pay for. We, we definitely had to pay for our own server. We had our own server, we got permission to go and get a server and put it in the server room and all that.

But I digress. So that one time I felt like leaving really only lasted a few months and then it didn't. And other than that, no, I just loved it. I felt like, even though I started at the bottom of the salary scale, which was kind of annoying, it took a long time to get a good salary, I was really pleased to be working at UC Berkeley up until the end. And then finally at the end I'm like, "You know, I think it's time to be done." It's different when you're 65 and been doing it for a while, and there's someone else out there who's going to take this over and be great. Yeah, so that's really the only time that I kind of seriously thought about it.

[01:02:55](#) **Ann**

It makes a lot of sense. So, I feel like to me, as I look at my questions, you've covered most of the points that I wanted to be sure to extract. But before I ask the legacy question, is there anything else from your own notes that you want to be sure to mention?

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

Oh, let me just take a quick little look here at my notes and see if there's something [Pause]. I think not really. I mean, when I think of what I tell to people new in the field, it's be enthusiastic, learn how to say no, take a day to make big decisions instead of reacting. Because sometimes I would also be angry and react like, "What do you mean?", and I would like, send some email to someone and then be like, "Why did I do that?"

[01:04:23](#) **Ann**

The email you should not send at the moment?

[01:04:26](#) **Michael**

Yes, yes, the email. And I think being adaptable, not so much like going with the flow, but being able to explore things that you think maybe you wouldn't have been interested in. For example, at a certain point, they're like, "Michael, you're going to be our data person. You're going to start getting into data." So I was kind of voluntold to go into this RDM [Research Data Management] thing on, on the library side. And I was kind of reluctant, like, "Oh, I don't want to." But it ended up being kind of good, because first of all, I met some great folks, the research data people who,

you know, were all very nice and lovely. And getting involved in that, even though some of the meetings were like, “What are you talking about?” but it also was good for me because guess who is one of their biggest users, is Public Health. Public Health. I was told by both D-Lab and Research Data, Public Health is one of the biggest users. And I actually, not to like toot my horn too much, but I take some credit for that because I pushed it constantly. Every orientation, every meeting, it'd be like, “Oh, and if you have data things, you should go here, and if you have [this other thing], you should go here.” I constantly pushed these other entities on them, because I feel no Berkeley grad student—I mostly work with grad students—no Berkeley grad student should have to figure out how to do this stuff without guidance. And I couldn't learn it all. So I sent them to D-Lab, I sent them to Research Data. And they love these services, right? So even though the Research Data, I would say a lot of it was—I mean, you were there too—a lot of it was like, “I don't know what we're talking about, and I can barely take this”, in the end, I felt I'm glad I was able to do that. I could also learn a little bit the language of what people were talking about so I would know when it was appropriate. “Oh, you want help on data collecting? I know just the people you need to talk to, because it's really not me.” But also, you pick up enough. I picked up enough so I could at least know what they were talking about. Whereas in 2015, I'd be like, what? I wouldn't even know what they were talking about.

[01:07:26](#) **Ann**

They do flow charts now of, like, “If it's this, go here. If it's this, go there” ... But back then, it was really our networking.

[01:07:31](#) **Michael**

Yeah. And I think that networking that comes... the beauty of Berkeley. It would be really interesting to me to work at a small college or a community college, because I wouldn't know how to do it. Because [at] Berkeley, there's someone who does everything. And that goes from not just data, but there's the research data, the data collecting, the servers, the finding data. There's people who do all those pieces. Lots of people. But then there's also people who—and this is what I loved about Berkeley, too—it's like, “Oh, you need food. You can get free food at Berkeley. You need emergency shelter because you can't sleep in your apartment anymore. We got you covered. You need emergency legal help. Oh, you're facing deportation.” There's, someone at Berkeley for all of this stuff. And I push that on the students as well. I had it on all my LibGuides, here's how to get help. You know, if you're having a mental health crisis. Because they do have mental health crisis. And it was scary. We had a student long, long ago who was kind of suicidal. She came up to me once, outside of the library. I saw her out there,

and she was in distress. I mean, not severe distress where she was gonna go home and do something, but I was like, other than offering soothing words of comfort, I just didn't know what really to do with this woman.

Whereas later, I had a student who was accused of plagiarism and was absolutely losing her mind. This is a person who came from another country to get a PhD. She was in her first semester, her dreams were about to evaporate, and I guided her through to the people who could help her do her case. Because you basically go up and it's like you're on trial practically. She came through. And, you know, it was very moving to me that she confided in me, that she found me to confide in, not any of her faculty, not any of her cohort. She ended up changing her focus of her degree, because she found something that interested her more. But she graduated and she got a PhD and she's probably doing some cool stuff out there now, so it was just like, knowing that about Berkeley, that there's someone that you can send people to is just a great thing.

I really felt good about getting good about where to send people to, which is kind of a librarian thing. But it's not just like, “Go to level 2 of Doe Library, that's where the books on widgets are.” It's like, “Call this person right now. They will help you.”

[01:10:49](#) **Ann**

That's just so great. Does that kind of flow well into the question of, do you feel like you have a desired legacy or how you would like your work to be remembered? I mean, I feel like that's a little bit of a pompous question, but, you get the idea, as you look back over your...

[01:11:13](#) **Michael**

I mean, I love it. I got to say that I love it when I get all these thank you notes from faculty and staff and students and stuff, like, “Oh, my gosh, you saved me. This paper. Oh, thanks so much for this help. Oh, no one can do it like you.” I love it. I saved every one of them all for decades. I have all those emails, personal notes, all of them still in a box, in an email box and in a physical box. If my legacy is just, “he's a nice guy”, that is a huge, lovely thing. The legacy that I think I have that I would like is not the guy who sent grumpy emails 10 seconds after someone sent something, okay, some people might remember some of those, but, I didn't send those to students, so... But, oh, for the whole rest of their lives, maybe they'll be like, especially if they're in the professional world, “Oh, I should ask someone at the library, because there was this librarian when I was a master's student who was so great, so I'm going to ask the library this question. I bet they would know.” That to me is like, “Yeah, keep it up. Be a library for life.

And maybe, you know, have little library kids. When you have kids, right?” So there's that piece of it.

And there is something else I thought of, but I know it just slipped in my mind. Let me think for a second... Oh, yes, here's a little thing. I don't know if this is legacy or not, but it certainly made me go see what we can do here. So, at one point, I want to say, maybe not that long ago, but maybe like seven years ago or something like that, they do these student surveys, right? And they did one of grad students, and they ask all these questions, and some of them are kind of library. And it's like, “Where do you go when you need to find stuff?” and it lists all these things: Google, Google Scholar, a librarian, or a subject specialty database or whatever. “Where's the first place you go to look for research on your topic?” Public health was the only subject where a subject specialty database was the top place that people looked. Everyone else was Google something or a colleague or whatever for faculty. And I was like, “Oh, I made them love PubMed!” I mean, the fact that it's free, they can use it their whole careers is a nice thing, but when I saw that, I was like, “Oh, my God, this is going on my review.” So, I did put it on my review. I think I love the legacy of people being critical about where they get their information, and knowing that there's good sources and okay sources and depending on your need. Because, I would never say never use Google Scholar or anything like that. It might be the best thing for you sometimes. Or just Google or whatever. It might be the best thing sometimes. But, when you want to find those research articles on that systematic review, you better be looking not at Google Scholar. So that's a lovely legacy to have. There're some folks out there who are just maybe a little more information literate than they would have been. So, I toot my horn to that.

[01:15:17](#) **Ann**

You know, you should. What a librarian!

[01:15:22](#) **Michael**

I know. It's cool.

[01:15:26](#) **Ann**

Well, Michael, are you feeling okay about kind of saying that's it for now?

[01:15:34](#) **Michael**

Yeah. And you know, it's been kind of fun to like... Sometimes when I start talking, I feel like, “Oh, I'm talking too much.” But in this venue, I think talking too much is probably the right approach.

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[01:15:50](#) **Ann**

Yeah, I'm like, "Please, keep going!"

[01:15:52](#) **Michael**

When do I get to talk this much about this stuff? And people ask me, "Do you miss it?" And I'm like, "Well, I miss the people who I saw a lot, even when they were just little rectangles, and obviously the students, and the amazing students that came to Berkeley. It just blows my mind. I don't miss the spreadsheets, I don't miss the data, like how many reference transactions I did. And I don't miss the meetings, mostly." And I've been oddly not interested in doing any, you know, library-ish stuff now. Maybe that'll change. Like I know some folks who like spend one Saturday a month doing the Saturday librarian at the community college, which could be a thing one could do, because none of the staff want to work on Saturdays, right? So, they'll hire some part time person for nights and Saturday. And I'm like, "Oh, I could do that, but not this month, maybe next year." So, I haven't missed that day to day work, but I do miss the relationships and, that kind of thing, and just being able to talk about this stuff to people who care and are interested, you know.

I gotta say— one thing I really felt for like, oh, the last six months of me working there was like, I'm done. Like I got into this lovely career which was very exciting, and I learned a lot and I was so into it and I feel like I kind of did what I wanted to do. Not that I was sick of it, but just like I came, and I did the thing, and now I want to do something else. And there's some like, younger person out there who's like I was 20 years ago or whatever, and they want to do the thing now, so let's let them do it and hopefully they'll be good.

[01:18:04](#) **Ann**

Fantastic. Yeah. There's lot say but I'll stop the recording.