

UC Berkeley

"Librarians Navigating Change" Oral History Project, UC Berkeley

Title

C Lee 28-April-2025

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5mf493gz>

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Publication Date

2026-02-02

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“Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project

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

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Corliss Lee

Interviewed on April 28, 2025

By Ann Glusker

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

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

This is Ann Glusker interviewing Corliss Lee on April 28, 2025, for the “Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project. This is a remote interview. Ann is in Seattle, Washington, and Corliss is in Berkeley, California.

So, Corliss, it sounds like you actually have some stuff that you just would like to start with. I've been saying to people, “Can you tell me about your background and how you came into librarianship?” But I feel like maybe you'll be addressing that, so take it away.

[00:01:17](#) **Corliss**

All right. Well, like most people, I didn't know what librarians did. When I graduated from Berkeley with an English degree, back in the Jurassic period [Ann laughs], I thought, “Well, I don't really want to type little cards. Is that all they do?” And two people I knew from the co-ops where I lived, both classics majors, weirdly, had gone to library school, and they were cleaning houses. So, that was not an inspiration to make me go to library school. Years later, a friend of mine happened to work in a library, as people do. And they said, “Oh, you should become a librarian.” He became a librarian, and he told me what being a librarian was actually like. I was a legal secretary at the time, and I realized, I managed information in a low-level sort of way, so maybe this is for me. I went and visited, and I ended up going to library school. And that friend is still a colleague. We co-edited a book together. So, I'm going to say it officially. It's Brian Lym's fault I'm a librarian, so blame him.

[00:02:12](#) **Ann**

Okay, I will [they laugh].

[00:02:15](#) **Corliss**

I got my MLIS at the Berkeley Library School in 1990, which was one of the last classes before it became a School of Information. During library school, I was an intern at Moffitt [the Moffitt Library at UC Berkeley] and at the American Culture Center [at UC Berkeley]. And as you see, in some ways, I never left any of that. I was temporary for two to four years through the cleverness of my supervisor, Ellen Meltzer. You were only supposed to be a temp for two years, I think, but I don't think she can get in trouble for this now, so I'll just say, thank you, Ellen. And in terms of change, I want to talk about some of the early years. This is going way back before my time. But between 1875 and 1992, there had been seven University Librarians, [the

director of libraries on campus] [and] one interim University Librarian. There's a list on the library webpage which I can send you. *

00:03:00 **Ann**

Oh, cool, that's amazing!

00:03:00 **Corliss**

In my first decade, between 1991—I think that's when I officially started—and 2001, there were six permanent University Librarians and one interim. Now of course, the first one had been there 14 years and just happened to leave in 1992. The last one started in 2000 and stayed for 15 years. But in between, there were three University Librarians who stayed for two to four years each, plus an interim who stayed a year. This is not normal in academic libraries. People used to apologize to me and Margaret Phillips—we went to library school together. We started at the same time. We were both at Moffitt.

People would apologize to us for the chaos, and we're like, “We know no other way, it's always been like this since we started.” Things got so bad that even the [campus] administration figured out there was a problem. They commissioned some sort of report from a high-level committee, and eventually [the] University Librarian left. They brought in an interim University Librarian who was a retired librarian of Yale, Penny Abel. And she was wonderful. I think the reference department of Doe [Library] had three different names in that time period. I don't even remember what they all were. Each University Librarian would come in, make big changes or start to make big changes and then leave. So, as soon as you learned how things were going to be, soon afterwards things would change. So, you could say that Margaret and I were trained to expect change. We didn't know that academic libraries were great behemoths that didn't change course very well, because [from what we saw] it was changing course all the time.

We were in the Moffitt Library reference department, and that was about to experience some change. But before that, I was the editor of “South Hall News”, which was the [Berkeley] Library School Alumni Association newsletter. Normally... you've seen these newsletters, but I think the school was undergoing a regular review. All the schools on campus go through review every whatever period of time. My interpretation of events is that they realized that [the Library School] didn't have any rich alumni. But I'm sure there was more to it than that. [Anyway,] there was talk of closing the School. So, I spent some early part of my career sending out calls for action on listservs. Not everybody was on all these listservs--this was sort of a new thing, if you

can believe it. I also sold T-shirts. But, we did a call to action. We jammed the Chancellor's fax machine and we made a lot of noise... but what we ended up doing was, as I feared, winning the battle and losing the war. We saved the School, but we were powerless to prevent them from going in another direction, going to [being] a School that didn't go for Library School accreditation. As far as I can tell, according to the general catalog, which [has been] digitized, the last library school classes were '95-'96. It reopened in 1997 as the School of Information Management and Systems, SIMS. So, that was one big change early on in my career.

In about '93, you know, there were huge budget cuts, as we periodically have, and they essentially dissolved Moffitt [Library]. Moffitt had been a unit... it was like a division level. It was on the same [level] as the Science and Social Sciences [divisions] and so on. It had a head, it had an assistant head, it had two administrative [assistants], it had a cataloging department, a reference department that I was part of, and circulation, this sort of thing, and the reserves unit... I'm sure I'm forgetting some people. Anyway, administratively it was merged in with Doe [Library], which was problematic in some ways. But, I'll give credit again to Ellen Meltzer. She created the Teaching Library. So out of that chaos, the Teaching Library was born. She had allowed any library staffer to apply to transfer from other library units. So, it was a place for people to start again and change focus. At first it was like a two-year program. I didn't even remember that. But I was looking at CU News [General Library of the University of California, Berkeley, newsletter] and there was me, Margaret Phillips, Mari Miller, Tracy Seneca and JoD Wright, along with Ellen. That was the beginning. And then of course other people [joined later] and so on.

[00:07:11](#) **Ann**

Do you mind me interrupting for one second? Can you say a little more about what the Teaching Library [was] like? What was that vision?

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

Sure. Well, I mean, it was to do instruction. And what we ended up doing was the instruction that Moffitt had done. So, all the other functions became part of Main [the Main Library, Doe], but we became a separate unit that essentially did undergrad instruction, especially lower division instruction [for foundational level courses generally taken by freshmen and sophomores] that previously the Moffitt Reference Department had done. We all had the title "Program Coordinator", which [meant] we were supposed to probably coordinate a program for specific departments like in Spanish or something like that. That didn't work out. But the term "Program

Coordinator” has followed me around for quite a while. People sometimes still think I'm the head of the Teaching Library because I'm a “Program Coordinator.” I think [I'm] the only one left. No, Tim Dilworth—I don't know if he still has that title. But for a long time that title followed me around. And I think in like the middle of the 2000s, we became Doe-Moffit Instruction Services, something like that, and [then] became [the] Instruction Services Division, I had to look it up, in January of 2014. And I've been [the] American Cultures librarian since about 1991. I started as an intern.

So, in some ways I've had a lot of consistency where maybe others haven't. We [my unit] haven't been majorly reorganized, and I'm not a selector, so I'm sheltered from the budget cuts somewhat, although of course it affected our unit staffing. So, we've had a lot of chaos, but also I've had a fair amount of consistency when I think about it. Even though of course it doesn't always feel that way. I've been doing instruction for undergraduates and occasionally graduate students since I began. And also reference. And also I'm a liaison to various campus organizations that have come and gone over the years, especially a lot of them, the Academic Support Units, as we call them. I'm no longer with [the] Student Learning Center, but I used to be. Tim does that now. I'm liaison now for [the] Graduate Division, the Visiting Scholars and Postdoc Association, Summer Sessions, Berkeley International Office. Oh, I'm going to forget a few. Sorry. For a couple of years, I was a selector for Film and Media Studies, but that's the only time... Well, I did a Moffit reference [selection stint] briefly, early in my career, and then Film and Media Studies for a short time in the 2000s, I think, or 2010s.

And I've been coordinating instruction requests for a long time. That means monitoring the... There's a form, on the website, [which] is just for a catch-all. Most people, of course, go to their liaisons. But there's a form just in case you're new or you're wandering around [the website] or whatever. That used to be a busy task. But now that's tapered down to almost nothing. I remember when Teaching Library started, people sort of resented us because we were the shiny new thing. We got a little more support while other units were cut. We knew this, and we understood it, but it's hard to know what to say to your colleagues: “Sorry, the thing you've been working on for 20 to 30 years isn't as interesting to the administration as our brand-new thing that's been around six months.” You don't have these conversations, but it was a thing. And now, of course, I've been on the other end of it.

Well, let's see. I mentioned the things that deteriorated in the library in the mid-90s, mid-to-late-90s. We felt there was no emphasis on public service. I think they got rid of the library-wide

committee. There was a lot of bad feeling around the staff about the lack of visibility for public service. Phyllis Bischof was a famous African American studies and African Studies librarian. She and I started a [LAUC-B] [Librarians Association of the University of California- Berkeley Chapter] Public Service Task Force. We just had meetings, and this is what librarians do, right? There's an old joke about the Titanic: "As soon as the ship started going down, we formed a committee." [Ann laughs] We came up with subject headings and so on, we formed a task force, we had meetings, we held events, we tried to make public service visible. Finally, we met with the interim University Librarian, Penny Abell, [who], as I said, was wonderful. She suggested, "Well, why don't you make a prioritized list of public service actions you want to see happen when the new UL comes [that they were planning to hire], you'll have your list." That might be where I learned that bringing attention to an issue is great, but it's even better to have a plan of action. We did, in fact, compile a list which was given to the new Public Service Council when it was established. I didn't track whether they followed everything [from the list] or not, but that was their first... that was the thing they got in the beginning [from which] to make a list of priorities.

So, from about 2000 to now, there was more stability in terms of University Librarians and structural things. But obviously there were a lot of big changes that happened in that time. I'm not sure when the first library website came into being—I'm guessing mid-90s—and before that we were on Telnet [a client-server application protocol that provides access to virtual terminals of remote systems on local area networks or the internet (Wikipedia).] Melvyl I think started in '77 [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)]. I remember when I graduated, which was '78. I remember going to the library and I'd see these computer terminals sitting there and going, "Gee, I wonder what that is." But I never went near them. So, Melvyl started [in] the late 70s. It was a pioneer. And then, GLADIS [General Library Automated Database Information System], I'm not sure when GLADIS started. I'm guessing the 80s. They named it GLADIS to sort of go with Melvyl, and Melvyl was named after Melvyl Dewey [Melvil Dewey [was] the library pioneer who invented the Dewey Decimal System (Wikipedia)]. There's a history of Melvyl that I think I've sent you the link to. *

So, there were the Telnet catalogs, and [then] everything was Telnet. You did email, you did dial up. I think there were like three computers in the Moffitt reference area and we all shared

them, if you can imagine. Then eventually, big change, there were the web catalogs. There was a web version of Melvyl. And I think the first—I'm trying to remember—the first web catalog [for UC Berkeley materials] was Pathfinder.

[00:13:12](#) **Ann**

Is Telnet the same as Internet?

[00:13:16](#) **Corliss**

Yeah, it's an Internet protocol. I can't believe I'm saying this. You're basically typing: T space, something, something. Or like a GLADIS command would be F space, ti space, color purple.

[00:13:28](#) **Ann**

Got it.

[00:13:28](#) **Corliss**

It was all text based. Okay, and of course... Yeah, so those were the commands. F, space, ti space, color purple would be: find—title—color purple.

[00:13:42](#) **Ann**

Got it. Oh, oh, got it.

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

Okay. And to make things worse, the commands didn't always agree. So, there was: F PN [=find personal name] Walker comma Alice. And in Melvyl, I think it was F PA. What did PA stand for? [It turned out to be “personal author”] Well, anyway, they didn't even agree, right?

[00:13:59](#) **Ann**

Oh no, oh no.

[00:14:01](#) **Corliss**

And Melvyl didn't have Circ [circulation] holdings, and GLADIS did. So, you would find something in Melvyl because it had title and keyword searching. And then you go back to GLADIS to see like, “Do we actually have it? Is it checked out?” So, crazy times! I like to say, job security for instruction librarians [Ann laughs].

And at some point we had Telnet GLADIS [and] Telnet Melvyl. I think [the web versions were called] Pathfinder and Web Melvyl. And I remember Margaret and I, we couldn't even agree how many catalogs we had! Did we have two catalogs each with two interfaces? Did we have three catalogs because the Melvyl's [two platforms] were more alike than GLADIS and Pathfinder were? Or do we have four catalogs? And I think that's a bad sign. Your staff can't figure out how many catalogs you have. But those were the days, man.

[00:14:44](#) **Ann**

Wow.

[00:14:45](#) **Corliss**

We also taught workshops on the World Wide Web, which was obviously the main game changer [The World Wide Web is a subset of the Internet consisting of websites and webpages that are accessible via a web browser. It is also known simply as "the Web." While the terms "the Internet" and "the Web" are often used interchangeably, it is important to note that the Web is a collection of sites, documents, and resources that you can browse; the Internet is the network itself that also carries other types of data and traffic (<https://techterms.com/definition/www>)]. Now you say that word to even our library colleagues, and they're probably like, "What are you talking about?" Yeah, but that was a major game changer in the mid-to-late 90s. The classes we taught on the World Wide Web were of course much more popular than any other classes we taught.

And of course, this is the trend, right? Something comes up, the staff has to be trained. They have to get used to new technologies. Some staff are better about it than others.

Back in the Telnet days, Melvyl also gave access to databases, which was I think a fairly radical idea. So, you'd type CC and you'd get to something called "Current Contents", which was just tables of contents of important journals. Or you'd type MAGS to get to a general interest database that's similar to Academic Search Complete [a current library database]. The UCs were early in this, obviously. Eventually there was access via the third-party companies and access [via the web], so those databases went away. But have fun explaining [this] to students. "Okay, you go to this thing, you type these characters, but if you type these other characters, you go to this other place. What's this other place? Well, it's articles instead of books. What?" So, like I say, job security for instruction librarians.

We gave these classes on how to search the Internet. I remember there was a time when, yes, Alta Vista, that's the best search engine. I don't know if you remember, Alta Vista...

[00:15:20](#) **Ann**

I do, I do!

[00:15:26](#) **Corliss**

And Yahoo was like a directory to the Internet, so you actually used it if people wanted that kind of structured approach.

When I started, I don't remember, there might have been 28 to 30 libraries [on campus]. There were a lot of consolidations, one of the big ones being, the Biosciences [Library] was created from five libraries. It was a Biology library, Agriculture, Forestry, Forest Products, and Entomology, but their departments merged. ...

[00:16:35](#) **Ann**

There was an Entomology Library? Wow...

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

There was an Entomology Library. I don't even know if I've ever been there. Well, that was a long time ago. Their departments merged, so the libraries merged too. And of course, years later, they added Optometry and Public Health [libraries]. So, various libraries have disappeared over the years, [that's another change].

There, of course, have been several waves of budget cuts. You can see them in the serials catalog records, the whole bunch of journals ending in 2008, that sort of thing. We transitioned from a bunch of people [librarians] sharing three computers to everybody getting their own desktop. And now, of course, eventually to everybody getting laptops. There was a big thing when the public desktop computers appeared. I remember being on a task force to decide things like, "What should the welcome message be? Do you 'press any key?'" So, [as I said to people], it was sort of like gang-writing a haiku. "You guys had a task force to do what?" So that was a thing...

So, there are a lot of technological changes, and of course, I don't know, let's see, it's like maybe 2014, 2015, we had this big change organizationally. Instead of having unit heads—the head of

the Music library, the head of Bioscience library and so on—and then above them, I don't remember what the layer was, now we flatten the chart so that there aren't any unit heads. You have divisions. You know, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, [what] was Life Sciences and Physical Sciences [but] now they've merged to Sciences, and there were operation managers for each cluster of libraries. The advantage of this is there were fewer people in charge of facilities. So, instead of the Music librarian, the Head of [the] East Asia [Library] and the Head of Biosciences, and all of that, all dealing with floods and fires and famines and pestilence and all this sort of thing, you had operation managers doing that. And the division members can support each other. So, as you know, when there are vacancies in Social Sciences, other Social Sciences librarians pitch in and all that. But on the other hand, nobody's looking at each library as a whole. And somebody I know, who will remain nameless, who is a big proponent of this change, now feels that that's a problem because nobody's looking at, you know, “name of library” as a whole.

It's just like this happened in the mid-90s to Moffitt. Moffitt became part of Doe. Moffitt Reference became part of [the] Doe Reference circulation [department]. So first of all, the Moffitt people didn't talk to each other anymore. The circulation people [are] over there but we have no idea what's going on. Nobody was looking at Moffitt as a whole. We became Doe-Moffitt, which I complained sounded like a medical syndrome. And you know, we got used to it. You get used to all those changes.

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

But I guess I'm not completely clear what you mean looking at the library as a whole. Like what is an example now? Like maybe [the] Life Sciences Library?

[00:19:41](#) **Corliss**

Well, I don't want to pick a specific library because I don't work any of those libraries, so I don't really know... But nobody is looking at the library to unify like reference and circulation and so you don't really talk to each other. So it used to be the Moffitt circulation people would tell the Moffitt reference something, and then you'd know this or that, whereas as now they all report to different people and eventually you probably hear about things, but it's not really the same.

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

I get it.

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

Now is it better in some ways? I can't say, because I don't work in those libraries. With Doe and Moffitt [merging] I used to worry that there wouldn't be the emphasis on undergraduates. But you know, undergraduates are such a big population that they remain a big [focus]. For better and for worse. They probably occupy a lot of the Head of Doe-Moffitt's time, let's just say. Did we lose something? Possibly. But you know, change happened, and we lost a lot of staff. When I first started, I think there were 600 staff members. I used to joke that on every given opinion you had, I don't know... well, okay, I can't remember what that was. I'll remember it later. [It was: among the 600 staff, on any given topic you'd have 800 opinions.] But anyway, colleagues of mine, who are older and have since retired, told me that they used to have library-wide meetings in Wheeler Hall because that was the only place big enough on campus. So there were a lot of people. Now we're down to something like 300 plus. And you know, some of that change is inevitable. There was one gentleman I remember, very nice guy, whose job had apparently been to go around and fix typewriters in all the different libraries. Now eventually, by the time I came along, he did other things. So, there were different things, some of which aren't needed anymore. But the reduction in staff is not [happening] because someone [looked at things strategically and] said, "Oh, we don't have an organized need. Blah, blah." They just slash [the] budget, and we're like, "Okay, this is what we have left. This is what we're doing. This is the way it is." [And it] isn't just the library, obviously.

There were many, many changes. Obviously the biggest recent ones would be, there's that, there's COVID, which is a whole thing that we can talk about, and then there's AI. So, I don't know. I guess I was going to go ahead and talk about COVID if that's okay, because that's a major one.

[00:22:04](#) **Ann**

Go for it.

[00:22:06](#) **Corliss**

I remember that there were rumblings, right? You know, of course you heard about this virus, and okay, one minute it was like in China, and then it had made the leap, and then there were more people and then... and it seemed even though you'd been hearing about it for months, then, the call came out and said, "Okay, we're all staying home." I remember my boss, Nicole Brown, grabbed me and showed me how Zoom works. I hadn't... I've always been the least techie person around. Back in the day in Moffitt, I remember one of the techier people would always come to my computer because he could guarantee that the older versions of everything were there and so

he could test everything on the older versions. So I'm the least techie person in the unit. Oh, that's traditional. Anyway, and so they showed me Zoom and said, "Don't come in on Monday." And I had to get a trade for my Bancroft reference desk shift. Of course the person who took it was even older than I was. I was like, "Why am I staying away because I'm middle-aged, when this person who's even older than I am is taking it?"

But anyway, that happened. For many years, of course, we could do some work from home, once everything was on the web, [and] especially [when] more and more of us had computers and laptops at home. You did some work at home. [But] mostly we came in. There was a time I had hip problems that eventually required surgery. I remember I thought it was a big deal to ask to work from home one day a week during that time. One day a week, one day a week! Four days a week, I was getting rides to BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit], taking elevators, limping to shuttles, limping around in pain all day. Now, it seems ridiculous, but you just didn't think, the standard was to work from the office.

Then suddenly we weren't. I guess I thought it would be for, like, a few weeks, so don't come to me for predictions of the future, because clearly, I don't know. We already had [online] chat reference, thank goodness, so we could just continue that service. It was stressful trying to learn how to do classes on Zoom. I don't know if it was for you, but I hadn't done that before. Of course, in the beginning, you just replicate what you do in person. You show your slides. You could talk, you know, sharing links was actually easier. So that was good. Eventually, I learned to put people in breakout rooms. You try to figure out some way to make things interactive. We do polls and all that sort of thing. And you did it because you had to. And we often taught in pairs, which was Nicole's idea and which was really helpful. I remember getting through some slides at some point and wondering, "Is anybody there?" You don't worry about that in person. You see that [they] might be asleep, but they're there, right? [On Zoom,] I was sitting there, "Am I just talking to myself? Have I lost connection?" So, really helped to have another person to back you up or when there were problems, which didn't happen often, but once in a while would happen, the other person could take over. You know, there's just terrible silence. Me talking and advancing slides and wondering, "Am I alone in the world?" I remember getting 20 minutes into an orientation of graduate students before someone told me I was displaying my notes and not my slides.

[00:24:57](#) **Ann**

Oh, no!

[00:24:58](#) **Corliss**

So now I always ask, “Do you see my slides?”

[00:25:02](#) **Ann**

I just have to tell you quickly, Corliss—I'm inserting myself. There's a particular thing that I teach with Elliott [Smith] and Anna [Sackmann], about responsible conduct of research. We taught it on Zoom all the way through COVID. And then when we went back into the classroom, we did something that we do every single time, and [this time] people laughed. Oh, but on Zoom, you never heard them laugh, right? So shocking to be in a room with people laughing at the thing, right?

[00:25:29](#) **Corliss**

No, it's. It's. It's wonderful.

[00:25:31](#) **Ann**

It was wonderful.

[00:25:33](#) **Corliss**

It's wonderful to be able to see your audience. I mean, they might be bored, they might be, whatever, but at least they're there. You can sort of tell what their reaction is. [But on Zoom] you really can't. You still, to the day, can't tell. With Zoom, you try the little things, you do the icebreakers. You ask people to give you [their reactions to] all the things. But, it's harder to be... Sometimes I think it's even harder for students to interact and to feel engaged. So, that's a challenge.

[00:26:01](#) **Ann**

Yeah. Yeah.

[00:26:02](#) **Corliss**

Anyway, we had meetings on Zoom. Of course, Instruction Services met frequently. Nicole is really good at keeping us connected to one another. And fortunately, I've been there a long time, and I knew a lot of people, but I felt for people like my colleague Jen Brown, who started just a short time before the shutdown. And there were people who started a few days into the shutdown. That would be very, very strange. And, of course, the library had to frantically figure out protocols. And I feel vaguely guilty because I didn't have to be part of any of that. People

were, “How do we get the book return boxes empty?” Because people were frantically returning books before leaving town. And I remember helping someone through chat who had a Graphic Arts Loan Collection print, and was trying to return that before fleeing town. I think Scott Peterson had [to] come in and meet him, and some staff were coming in to deal with all this, which was stressful.

I felt a little guilty [that] I wasn't doing that. But, they didn't want you coming in. In the beginning of the pandemic, we didn't know what was what, and was it safe. I remember that we thought COVID might be spread through contact. Remember when everybody's wiping down their groceries? So they had a whole thing about putting the return books somewhere and letting them air out or whatever it was before staff could even deal with them. We were learning new things every week, so talk about change.

And I resented that some of our colleagues were required to come in. The Bancroft staff eventually had to come in and open the library, so some folks could, I don't know, finish their dissertations or something. And I remember resenting that, like, “Why were my colleagues risking death so someone could finish their dissertation?” I mean, this wasn't COVID research they were doing, but, you know, I had no say in any of that.

They got the HathiTrust emergency temporary access thing going, which was great [Emergency Temporary Access Service permits special access for HathiTrust member libraries that suffer an unexpected or involuntary, temporary disruption to normal operations, such as closure for a public health emergency or natural disaster, [making] it possible for member library patrons to obtain lawful access to specific digital materials in HathiTrust that correspond to physical books held by their own library]. Whichever books that were digitized that we had, could be made available to our patrons. More confusing stuff to help patrons with. So, “If you're looking for something, see if it's an e-book and then see if it's in the HathiTrust thing.” It was great to have, but there was so much changing every week... There was that link on the top of the library website, that link to the latest updates, which I really appreciated. Everybody appreciated. I think that was a lifesaver.

And the [Library] Town Halls, I don't remember if they were monthly at that time, but that was an important way to disseminate information. We started that during COVID and we've kept it up since then in a monthly fashion. I don't remember how frequent they were during COVID. Do you remember, Ann? Or maybe it was just when they needed them.

[00:28:22](#) **Ann**

I'm not remembering. I mean, [they were] more frequent than now. And I think part of it was that things were changing so quickly, like, protocols and information you had to have. So, they had to have a Town Hall because everyone had to have this latest information. There was very basic stuff about day-to-day life.

[00:28:41](#) **Corliss**

Exactly. Every little thing changed. And I felt like I was a pretty expert at all the things that were true in the library in February of 2020. But from then on, it was changing constantly. And I was constantly... I mean, thank goodness for the library website. And, you know, I'm old enough to not take the internet for granted, right. So, I remember thinking, "Okay, I know we hate Zoom. We're all spending too much time on Zoom and so on. But thank goodness for Zoom. Because if the pandemic had happened earlier, there'd be no teaching, no library instruction, no meetings online. We would not have been able to carry on." So, thank goodness for "Das Internet" and for Zoom specifically. We had parties by Zoom! When I won the Distinguished Librarian Award in 2020, everything was by Zoom. It was weird, but it's no weirder than everything else, you know? So, yeah, they were very strange times.

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

Did you feel like it was... I don't know how to put this, because I'm putting words into your mouth... Well, I better just say at this point, but I was very comforted that they still had the Distinguished Librarian Award.

[00:29:46](#) **Corliss**

Yeah.

[00:29:47](#) **Ann**

That it wasn't like, everything was lost.

[00:29:50](#) **Corliss**

Right. They tried. I mean, people tried to continue doing the things they could do. I think you might remember the [Wikipedia] Edit-a-thon was like the last event that happened in the Library [in 2020], practically before things shut down. But the next year, we just did one on Zoom. We figured out a way to do it on Zoom. So, people tried, to the extent that they could, to do the same things in some way. And, you know, Zoom made it possible. If we had just been in, I don't

know, the early 2000s, where we had the web and we had email, but we didn't have Zoom, [there might not] have been a chance. We would have figured... We would have done what we could, but, it's not the same. And goodness, if it was just Telnet, I think we would have just packed it up. I don't know what. Or pre-Telnet, right?

So, we came back, I guess it was fall 2021. Was it? Does that seem right?

[00:30:45](#) **Ann**

August of 2021.

[00:30:47](#) **Corliss**

Yeah. And, there was, and probably still is, a divide between those of us [who] could work hybrid and those of us who couldn't. I don't know how to bridge that. Not that it's my job, but you know, what I would do? You know, it was totally against state law, but I would love to give folks, folks who have to work on site during something like a pandemic, an extra stipend. Because I remember talking to them, and they'd say, "Well, you know, we had to come in, and then, you know, I couldn't park, so I have to run out every two hours and feed my meter." And I'm like, "We can't even give these people parking?" So I don't know if we ever have [another] pandemic, the first thing I'm going to do is email the Chancellor: "Give the people who have to come in free parking." I know that's not, you know, that's hardly the most important thing, but sometimes it's those little things, that kill you, you know?

[00:31:27](#) **Ann**

Yeah, definitely.

[00:31:30](#) **Corliss**

So, it was confusing coming back, because people were around different days and times. Most meetings continue to be on Zoom, no matter where people are. And that can actually be a challenge because if you're inside, as you know, in 212 Doe [a staff cubicle area], where I am, now we have open cubicles. So, are you going to talk a lot? Are you disturbing your neighbors? There's no place where I have... The only place where I have a monitor and privacy is at home. So, if I want to do teaching or if I want to do meetings that are more confidential, I try to do them from home. Because at work you can have a monitor, if you're at your desk, you can go to a meeting room if you want privacy—although not too much privacy, because actually the walls tend to be porous. But, you don't have a monitor [in the meeting room], and so on. And with

Zoom, you really want to have a monitor, and like a laptop or two monitors or something like that.

Anyway. So, those sorts of things have changed. Students were running around looking for places where they could Zoom from, because some of their classes were still on Zoom. Of course ,, We have all sorts of things, but we do not have privacy for individuals. We have group meeting rooms, we have group study spaces, we have individual carrels. [But] we don't really have... Some people actually use those old phone booths, you know, the ones in Doe Library, and they're really tiny, and they're squished in there with their laptop and that tiny little desk. I sort of feel we should fix those up and give them better internet, all this sort of thing, but of course, that's not going to happen.

Anyway, so, especially fall of 2021 was confusing because some people were still doing Zoom things for various reasons, and you were just getting used to all of this. I learned to color code my calendar, because I would be on Zoom and my student would be waiting in person somewhere, or vice versa. It was very hard to keep tabs on who was where, doing what, and now people expect both, right? Some people, they expect you to be able to... I mean, I think instructors have this, where some students are expecting to be able to Zoom in, [but] I think maybe now that's settled down a little bit. Classes are pretty much in person, but people were expecting both for a long time. It's stressful on instructors. It's stressful on us, because it made scheduling more complicated for a while. Like, okay, the thing I can only do in person, so that has to be on this day or this day, right? We're all supposed to have a regular schedule, but honestly, I didn't, because the class was on Friday, [so] I came in on a Friday. There was no saying, "Oh, no, we can't do the class" [just] because I don't come in on Friday. So I came in whenever we needed [me] to.

One thing that happened, and I don't know why, and I think I've talked to you about this, is there are fewer instruction requests than there were before COVID. Multiple librarians have said that. I don't know if instructors fell out of the habit, or the complexity of dealing with students who are on site and some who want to be remote doesn't leave room for [library] instruction, I don't know what it is. It makes me sad. I haven't figured out a way around it. I don't know the reason. And most library classes, I think, are in person. Most are in person, although I have done a few classes where I'm talking to people on site and then also to this laptop where somebody is zooming in. The difference in instruction is that we started the Research 101 classes [for Reading and Composition classes]. So instead of individual classes for reading and composition

classes, it's a standard set of slides and curriculum, although we can do individual variations. Many of those are on Zoom, some of those in person. We do those in pairs. That's a holdover from the Zoom days, the COVID days. I used to spend a ton of time juggling classrooms, and now I rarely do that. We have one classroom that most of us use, and it's mostly available. We just go there. But I used to spend a lot of time juggling classrooms and coordinating instruction. Back in the day, you'd get email requests. I think I'd send them out by email, but I'd have little checklists where I'd check off, "Has somebody said yes? Who is it? Have I gotten a room? Which is it? Have I confirmed with everybody?" There was this whole thing, and now there's a lot less of that.

Anyway, so, there were changes. It is great to be back on campus and see people, but it's also sort of weird. As you know, 212 Doe is sort of... I call it a cubicle plantation. There's just a bunch of cubicles. And it's good that the walls are high so you have some privacy, but also you have no idea who's around. I used to call out, "Is anybody still here?" I'd turn off the lights before I left. And sometimes there were three people there, and sometimes there were zero people there. And you don't know. To this day, you still [don't] know, "Am I in the room with, like, 12 other people or, like, zero other people?" So, it's great when you do run into people, but you have to hope that they're headed to lunch or the bathroom or something, and then you can actually see people.

[00:36:25](#) **Ann**

Yeah. It does make a big difference that you can't assume that any given person is on campus at any given time.

[00:36:31](#) **Corliss**

Right, right.

[00:36:33](#) **Ann**

Doe 212 worked fine before COVID. I mean, everyone was in their cube. So, you knew that people were there. Like, you knew if you had a question, you could walk around, and so-and-so would be at their desk, unless they were off teaching or something.

[00:36:47](#) **Corliss**

Right, right. Well, yeah, people were often away for teaching and meetings and so on. But still, there was a good chance there was someone there.

[00:36:53](#) **Ann**

Yeah. Yeah.

[00:36:55](#) **Corliss**

So, that doesn't do justice to the pandemic, to say the least. But I'm just talking about how it affected my tiny little world of work. In terms of AI, the other big, current, recent change, the pace of change is accelerated even beyond what we're used to, when, as you can tell from all the things I've talked about, we're used to a fair amount of change. But, it's sort of the usual. This is usually what happens. Individuals learn what they [can] on their own. [For] some people who are interested there might eventually be a sharing event. So, you and I and Kristie Chamorro and Sarah [Rosenkrantz] organized, like, what we know about AI for instructors. This was ages ago. I think there was another event organized by others, just sort of checking in about AI. And then recently, [Library IT] did an overview of AI. By then there were campus initiatives. There's a campus community of practice—it was organized, [and Library IT was also] involved in some things, and so on.

I think individuals vary widely in how they're addressing it. As you know, I'm retiring in June of 2025, so I'm not going to really resolve anything about this. And also you know, in most of my classes there's not really time. You have 50 minutes, or if you're lucky, an hour and a half, to deal with everything. AI can't be the focus. So, I mention it [AI] and [that] it's not good for searching. I talk about the hallucinations. In my LibGuide [Library research guide (LibGuides is the proprietary software they are currently hosted on)] I link to some organizations that cover societal impacts. I hope that they get reminded about that. The Research 101 classes mention it briefly as sort of a tertiary source. There'll be more to come, but I won't be here for it.

I'll be interested to see how everybody handles this. It's a major sea change, like the Internet [was]. Every time something happens, people fret about students copying. Students will copy from the internet, students will copy from Wikipedia. Those are easy to check. [But] AI is another quantum leap forward and all that. AI can be wonderful. I [attended] a presentation where people talked about using it to get more accurate transcripts of events for accessibility reasons. I think there are a lot of great things [that can come from it]. But it is an existential threat in terms of [the] teaching of writing. [As] you know, I'm the liaison for the College Writing Program. So, this is something that we think about. I don't know.

I haven't talked to instructors recently about what they do around this. Everybody, in typical Berkeley [fashion, handles] it in various ways individually. On Teach-Net [a campus listserv, "Teach-Net is a forum of more than 1,000 Berkeley faculty & staff to discuss teaching and learning." (from the email footer)], there's constant postings about AI. Not practical things mostly, but just things. At some point, there were a lot of sessions about it at the latest ACRL conference [Association of College & Research Libraries, part of the American Library Association], right? And someone there said something interesting. They said you should use AI only for things you actually know a lot about. Which I thought was an interesting way to look at it. Because if you know a lot about it, you know whether the thing that's coming out is good for you. You shouldn't use it for things that you don't know anything about, because as with the Internet, but even more so, you have to check everything. So if I were to continue teaching, maybe I would spin it that way. I do tell students that if they don't learn how to do something better than AI, they're going to be left behind by it. I don't know if I'm right, but I've been saying that—we'll see, stay tuned. You'll have to tell me what happens. I mean, it is going to make a fundamental shift. One of our problems though is, again, just in terms of instruction, there's not time to address [everything]. Even if you knew much more about AI than I do, you don't have the time to address all of that, because you're trying to teach them to search. One of the main things I've been saying, I've said in my last few classes, is that it's not a search engine. And I realized they're using it as a search engine. [But] it's totally not a search engine. It's not designed to be a search engine. It's designed to generate stuff. And unfortunately, they left out the part about generating something that's accurate. I don't know why, but accuracy doesn't seem to be a thing. Anyway, I'm looking forward to hearing what all of you say. I think one colleague of mine said, "Oh, good time to retire. AI." Good time. And I'm sure 30 plus years ago I had colleagues who said, "Oh, the Internet, good time to retire."

00:41:16 Ann

I'm sure you did. But I will say, I think I said this to you and if not to someone else, that as I was pulling together a timeline of librarianship across the last 30 years or so, I was using those ACRL "Top Trends" reports that come out every other year. I did not see, ever, a three-year period where you had the kind of sea changes that you got with COVID and AI.

00:41:46 Corliss

Right, right.

00:41:48 Ann

That was like basically a three-year period. Both those things happened. Yes, this is quite a time right now.

[00:41:55](#) **Corliss**

It is, it is. It's insane. You know, I think one of the questions was, what advice would you give to younger colleagues about change? And I'm like, they know change better than any of us. They have lived with nothing... I mean, to some degree I've lived with [nothing] else but change in the library, but they've really lived with nothing else but change in everything.

[00:42:12](#) **Ann**

Yeah.

[00:42:13](#) **Corliss**

So, I don't have any advice to give them. They have advice to give us.

[00:42:17](#) **Ann**

Yeah. Well, and now there's the, what the ACRL report calls the politicization of libraries.

[00:42:25](#) **Corliss**

Yes.

[00:42:25](#) **Ann**

And we don't need to talk about that here now. But that's another factor that they're going to be facing.

[00:42:32](#) **Corliss**

Yes, that's true. I didn't think to add that, but that is, that's actually a big concern for me because I do a lot of EDI work and that's something I'm going to continue somewhat after I retire. That is squarely... You know, that's, that's their target. That's one of, that's one of the reasons they're targeting us. It's not the only reason. For years we all joked about how libraries were like, America and apple pie. Everybody loves them. They don't really want to fund them, they don't pay a lot of attention to them, but generally, they say they love them. Well, now we're getting attention and not the good kind. And that's an existential threat also. I don't know where we'll be with that along with the rest of the world. You see me roll my eyes and say, "Oh, yeah, another budget cut. Yeah." But, the national situation is... also the international situation, something that

we've never had. It's unprecedented. And to have three unprecedented things happen in a five-year period...

[00:43:46](#) **Ann**

Feels like a very uncertain time. Uncertain. Unstable. I will say that. I have heard you say, "Oh, budgets." I've said to quite a few of the people that I've been talking with, "Yeah. Part of the reason I started this project was Corliss [but I didn't say your name] having such equanimity when I was like freaking out about what I was going to do about this very severe budget cut." You were like, "Oh, yeah, budgets. Somehow we always get past it."

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

I don't mean to minimize. It's very painful.

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

No, no, I just felt like you were saying, "I've seen it before. We will be okay "

[00:44:18](#) **Corliss**

Really. Just look at the catalog records, a whole series that happened in the '90s. There's a bunch in 2008. I can't even remember if we probably had another one at some point. And it's not fun. I saw a colleague of mine just before she retired who said, "Well, I just spent the last few months undoing all the work of my career", because there's weeding and de-accessioning and cutting serials and all this sort of thing. It's awful. And I don't mean to minimize that at all. I hope, though, that we will persist. That the library continues. I'm sure for people whose libraries are closed, that felt, like an existential crisis. And it is, and I don't minimize that at all. But, I don't know, it happens whether you want it to or not.

[00:45:07](#) **Ann**

Yeah. Do you have more that you want to...?

[00:45:21](#) **Corliss**

Well, one of the things I was going to talk about is, I started to think about what was a typical day. That was one of your questions. I actually remembered a bunch of little details about how things were different. But I don't know if you want to go there now or you want to do something else. It's totally fine.

[00:45:35](#) **Ann**

To be honest, I would love to hear those things, because I feel like these interviews aren't that long, really. Like, [for] a classic oral history, I'd be talking to you for five hours, and these detail things would come out in the course of things, but not many people are getting into these little detail things, and I find them fascinating, and you have a great memory for them, so I would love to hear.

[00:46:04](#) **Corliss**

I don't know if I have a great memory for them, but I'll tell you some of the things I do remember. And it's pretty random—you think you're gonna remember the most important things, [but] I don't always know that's true. I've been thinking about our conversation for a little while, so here are some of the things I remember.

I remember that back in the day, there was a lot more walking. People used to think, “Oh, librarians are so sedentary.” [But] I'm constantly walking from here to there for meetings or, you went places for meetings, you went places for classes. We did reference. We went to reference desks, and we would bring reading with us. We circulated. You remember those—what are those called? The slips that sort of circulated?—you know, there was a little slip. It would have everybody's name on it. You check who things were supposed to go to...

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

Distribution list?

[00:46:48](#) **Corliss**

Routing slips, maybe.

[00:46:52](#) **Ann**

Routing slips. Yeah.

[00:46:53](#) **Corliss**

Anyway, we'd have that. I remember, [you] go to your mailbox. I mean, [when was the] last time I looked at my mailbox. Go to your mailbox. You get a bunch of stuff, and you'd be on... it's my turn to read, whatever, and you go out to the desk. I remember seeing one thing—this is early on in my Moffitt days—going, “Oh, this is kind of interesting. Who circulated this?” Of course it was me. So then, as now, there was too much information. On the reference desk, I remember, well, of course, the directional questions, bathrooms, the Moffitt classrooms... As you might remember, there's a separate section of the building that's Moffitt classrooms. So,

people inevitably [asked], “101 Moffitt, where is that?” “Well, it's actually—Exit, go to your left, go to the other entrance, go downstairs, blah, blah, blah.”

So, job security for librarians. Just the buildings are nuts, [and] that was even before it joined up with the Main Stacks and Doe, which was another earth-shaking thing. I didn't even mention that the three buildings, you know, used to be separate. Well, the Main Stacks didn't even exist. I tell students I remember when this was a big, big pile of dirt.

[00:47:57](#) **Ann**

When did the Main Stacks come?

[00:47:59](#) **Corliss**

Oh, I feel like it was in the '90s, but I really should have looked that up. I don't know... [It was 1994.]

[00:48:05](#) **Ann**

More recent than I thought...

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

That was just a big pile of dirt. [Before that] the Main Stacks were inside the core of Doe. And they were, as I say, a disaster movie waiting to happen. Undergraduates didn't have access. They'd give you a little call slip, and you know that board with the numbers in what's now the periodical room [the Heyns Reading Room]? They'd light up and you go, “Oh, here I am, 67.” And you'd go, and you'd pick up your book.

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

I tried very hard to find a picture, a photograph of what those old closed stacks looked like. I wasn't able to.

[00:48:37](#) **Corliss**

They were like old closed stacks. Of course, nobody here remembers that, but they were metal. Like being inside a battleship, it felt like. And there were glass floors, which was sometimes used wrongly by perverts. And the Main Stacks, especially back in the day, were crazy. Like the Ps were on three different floors. I don't know why. So, people said, “We're gonna make the main stacks A through Z.” And people were like, “WHAT?” But I don't know why they

objected to that. I was like, *great*. But other people, I don't know, I think maybe there were special reasons why these Ps were here and these... I don't know. But it was like a big thing when they said we're just going to do the Main Stacks A through Z. And I thought that was great. And it's still great. The Main Stacks now are so much nicer. They're lighter, they're bright, they have the light wells. Even though they're underground, it's much nicer there than the old Main Stacks, which were technically above ground, but it was entirely enclosed so that you were in this... Like I said, it was being inside of a battleship.

[00:49:40](#) **Ann**

Yeah. And am I right that they were inside what is now the Newspapers & Microforms section?

[00:49:46](#) **Corliss**

I think so. I think that was part of what's called the Doe Core.

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

You can look up to the ceiling and see where the stacks had been.

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

Yes, right. I believe so. I'm not very good with architecture, but I believe that is the case. We learned the hard way you don't use balloons in that space. We had a little party and of course, you know, the balloons were up at the ninth floor. There were nine levels of stacks, which is also confusing because there's four floors in the building, [but] nine levels of stacks.

[00:50:16](#) **Ann**

Wow..

[00:50:17](#) **Corliss**

It was like you needed a graduate degree to get in. I mean you didn't, but you did because the undergraduates weren't allowed in. So, the Main Stacks now, undergraduates are allowed. And that was one of the reasons that it was thought that the Moffitt collection didn't need to exist anymore. The Moffitt collection existed because the Main Stacks were so crazy. And this was true across the nation—there were undergraduate libraries that were easier to use, and focused on undergraduate needs. But once the Main Stacks was created and then undergraduates were allowed in, of course, everybody thought that was a disaster because the art books will disappear, these books will disappear and, and all sorts of things. Actually, we heard that some art history

faculty broke into the Main Stacks, stole some art books and then ran to the University Librarian's office and said, "See how easy that was?" Anyway, I don't know which professors.

[00:51:09](#) **Ann**

What? I'm speechless about that one.

[00:51:12](#) **Corliss**

Well, that's change, right? So, I thought [about] all the good things of the change, which is, the Main Stacks are much nicer, they're easier to use, undergrads are allowed in. But you know, there are downsides like, more hands on all those precious books that we spent all this money on. I don't know whether we lose more books. Somebody may know that. But also, there was no changing that, because the old stacks were an earthquake hazard, so we had to put them somewhere. And connecting the three buildings is weird. There's no one floor that connects all three buildings. In a way, it's four buildings if you count the Doe Annex.

[00:51:48](#) **Ann**

Oh, I never thought about that!

[00:51:49](#) **Corliss**

Yeah, trying to express graphically, like, where everything is...

[00:51:52](#) **Ann**

That's crazy.

[00:51:53](#) **Corliss**

A continuing challenge. But people have gotten used to it. They're like, "Okay, [the] Main Stacks doesn't have its own entrance. You enter it from Moffitt or Doe. What? Okay, yeah." And you know, undergrads, just, like, they learn to live with all those [things]. That's not even the biggest indignity in undergraduate life, that's just another thing. It's like "You do what?" Okay, so that was a big change that I didn't even mention. See, that was one of the things I've totally taken for granted. But it was a huge sea change.

So, I remember on the reference desk, you'd have those directional questions. We gave away Melvyl passwords. Back in the day, in order to access Melvyl, you had to have a password. I don't even remember why. And Margaret told me that they were actually sometimes sold on Telegraph Avenue. But basically, someone would come to you, you'd verify their ID, there was a

little sticker, and you'd put the sticker on wherever they wanted you to put the sticker. That was the Melvyl password. So that was something we did. We don't have to do anymore.

[00:52:49](#) **Ann**

I love the idea of a black market for passwords, though.

[00:52:52](#) **Corliss**

Well, I don't think it was a huge black market. But Margaret swears. I know Margaret swears there was a little black market. Maybe. Or maybe it was just one person. I don't know.

[00:53:01](#) **Ann**

I believe Margaret.

[00:53:03](#) **Corliss**

I totally believe Margaret.

You would physically sign people up for the Term Paper Advisory Service which was the forerunner of the individual meetings we have now. There was a thing, you'd have a little booklet. I think I might have found it the other day. You'd have the times, people... librarians would say, I'm available this time [and] this time. And then somebody [wanted an appointment,] you'd sign them in, and then you'd have them fill out a form. What was [your] question? And what are you looking for, which class and all this sort of thing. And then you get the form to the appropriate librarian, and they go out and meet them at the desk, and, and there was like a whole standard thing.

This is how I learned to do reference. It was, "Okay, what are the reference books? Bibliographies?" [there was a form you filled out for the student with categories: reference books, bibliographies, subject headings in catalogs, indexes, etc.] I don't know, maybe it was searches and catalogs or something like that, so there's like a whole segment of... a list of things. I wonder if I have a copy of that somewhere. Anyway, so that was a whole thing. The Term Paper Advisory Service, which years later became known as the Research Advisory Service, which was still a big thing. You'd have to recruit people. You had to come up with some sort of, I think we had an in-house online calendar, and the Head of reference at Doe and I would work every year on figuring out the things for the service. We placed ads in *The Daily Cal* one year [short for The Daily Californian, this is "is an independent, student-run newspaper that serves the University of California, Berkeley, campus and its surrounding community."

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(Wikipedia)]. I remember I just came across that in, in my Google folder. Anyway, you'd look stuff up. You'd use the Library of Congress Subject Headings [Library of Congress classifications by subject for classifying materials]. [Using] books, if you can believe that—grab one and look up a subject heading. Sometimes back in the day, it's been a while, obviously... We had vertical files. One of my first projects, I don't know if I was an intern or a baby librarian, was to look at the vertical files. Just sort of [felt] like, “Hey, should we be updating them?” There were rankings of colleges. That was a big thing. There was a folder for the rankings of colleges. I don't remember what the other folders were, but there were various things that people sometimes asked for. You'd look them up. I remember when Hal and I got married in 1990, [I told] a colleague of mine in library school, “Oh, you know, we're looking for locations.” This is before the internet, before the web, certainly. And my friend said, “Oh, go to the public library. They'll have a vertical file with wedding locations.” And so you'd go and you'd copy it and you'd be all happy. They'd done all the legwork for you. So, that was the kind of thing we had.

[00:55:15](#) **Ann**

When you were talking about that, I was remembering the ones I used at The Seattle Public [Library].

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

Yeah, yeah. We had the Quick Bibliographies. These were a Moffitt series of handouts, printed in different colors. On different topics. Immigration... I think Margaret did one on mixed race... I did one on personal names. Because there was some class that was always doing a personal name assignment. Oh, and, there was this huge class. Anthro 160. I still remember it, [with] Alan Dundes, who's a legend on campus in the folklore department. He since passed away, died *while teaching*. I mean, this was very appropriate for this guy. Big personality. He taught this huge class. And he'd have tons of books on permanent reserve, because there were so many of them. People would come asking for the Stith Thompson Folklore Index. I remember that. And for years, I thought Stith and Thompson were two people. But it turns out that's one name. But for some reason, we always refer to it as the Stith Thompson Folklore Index. So, you'd know stuff like that. People would go, “I'm in a folklore class.” And I'm like, “Okay, right over there.”

Right? You used reference books more. Phyllis Bischof, who was a great proponent of the reference collection, and I did a little experiment. How often in the week do you use a reference book? And I think we came up with the same number. It was under 50% [of interactions]. But

she took that to mean we need reference to be near the Doe Reference Collection. And I took that to mean the opposite. Okay, you should appreciate this as a data librarian. There's data, and then there's interpretation of data. At the time we were trying to put the reference service—I think the North Reading Room needed renovations or something—we were trying to put it in the first floor where the makerspace [is now], you know, room 190. We had reference there, and people said, no, no. You've got to be near the reference collection.

Now, of course, I can't remember the last time I used that room or used the reference book in the room [Ann sighs] but, you know, we used to. And when we did, when I worked at Doe Reference, the reference collection was in many parts. There was a ready reference desk. So as one of my colleagues said, you were a book waitress [Ann laughs]. People would say, I need the blah, blah, blah, and you'd hand it over. There was a section for directories, a separate section for grants, a section for dictionaries, a section for atlases. And I forget what else there were. I don't know. There could have been eight or nine sections to that room.

[00:57:28](#) **Ann**

News indexes, that was another one. The News indexes, like the *New York Times*.

[00:57:34](#) **Corliss**

Oh, oh, yes, probably. Yes, yes. There's also a file of reading, so in your spare time you could do reading.

I remember when you wanted to submit to CU News, you would drop off or mail a physical copy of what you were submitting to CU News in the librarian's office.

And then every week, copy of CU News was in our mailboxes. And sometimes they attached other things. Like, if you look at the digitized CU News, you'll see things from CDL [California Digital Library], which was at the time probably [called the] Division of Library Automation... Like Current Cites, you know, so it was a current awareness service around library technology. I miss CU News, because you'd see anything from "Such and such has just been reclassified", "Congratulations to such and such for being promoted to blah, blah blah" or being moved to such and such, "So and so had a baby"... There was all sorts of..., you had a sense of us as a community, and also [of] change. Although it's frustrating looking for things like when did Pathfinder start? And it's oddly hard to find things like that in CU News...

Mailboxes, we actually got mail. Sometimes we read mail and remember we told you about the routing slips.

[00:58:34](#) **Ann**

I still had a mailbox when I came in 2019. There was a mailbox.

[00:58:39](#) **Corliss**

I still have a mailbox, we do have mailboxes, but I don't remember the last time there was anything in mine. Some people still get, selectors... [they] still get things. Sheehan [Grant] of course gets a million things as the operations manager.

[00:58:53](#) **Ann**

Actually, can I ask a quick question? Some of the things you've been talking about, like CU News and stuff, were these all Berkeley-specific? Like, I feel like even in the time I've been here, I've gotten more and more aware of the UC, like that we're part of a 10-campus system, but sometimes when I hear people talk about the old days, it's more like it was campus by campus, like much more separate.

[00:59:21](#) **Corliss**

Yeah, yeah, I would say they were. To some degree, it depends on what you do. If you work on UC Library Search, you're probably very aware of the other campuses, and some selectors are very aware of the other campuses for various reasons. Then in instruction, we're not that aware of the other campuses. We should be, but we're not. Despite the Common Knowledge Group system, which is, you know, supposed to bring people together from the UCs.

We had a whole... I think I mentioned the Quick Bibliographies, but we had a whole system of leaflets. There [were] two different series: of library-wide things, [and] guides from specific libraries, they'd have a little designator. There was a whole system. Maybe there'd be a little thing on the back that says it was LG [library guide] and a number, blah, blah, blah, or how many copies had been run. You'd have a whole rack of different leaflets. The library map is the only one that really sort of survives. And even that they're trying to do less of. And the library map—I had some contact [who said], “We just photocopied your library map from last time.” [But] no, you can't do that, the library map changes a lot. So, I hope the University Archives has all of the library maps, because it really shows the changes in the libraries on the campus. And it's funny how often there are changes. Sometimes it's just to the rest of campus, which they've

stopped showing on the library map, because they said they just couldn't keep up. But which I miss because sometimes people need directions and you're like, "Well, I know this building doesn't say it's Walla Walla Building, but it actually is."

[01:00:53](#) **Ann**

I used Google Maps when I first came to campus, to get around.

[01:00:58](#) **Corliss**

And was it accurate?

[01:00:59](#) **Ann**

It was pretty accurate. But like you say, sometimes the names change. So, like, you wouldn't say Barrows Hall anymore, it's the Social Sciences Building.

[01:01:08](#) **Corliss**

Right. But, take Schlesinger Way. I had walked Schlesinger Way for, 20, 30 years without knowing it was named Schlesinger Way.

Oh, you'll appreciate this. My first instruction sessions, I remember rolling a book cart full of books into the North Reading Room, having students gather around... And now I'm aghast. Yes, that's what we did.

[01:01:35](#) **Ann**

I do appreciate it!

[01:01:37](#) **Corliss**

That was the old school way. And then, how students stayed... I guess they stayed awake because they were standing in the North Reading Room. They didn't have a chance to fall asleep. Eventually, it was this big deal that 105 Doe was going to be a classroom. We're like, "A classroom!" And there were a whole bunch of computers. We're like, "You mean there's going to be a bunch of computers sitting in the room not doing anything? Well, obviously I was like, "I don't understand this." And later on, I spent all my time in library classrooms. So, first 105 [Doe], and then eventually, 350C, 450C and 550C in Moffitt. Then, as you know, those got renovated, and then it was 405 Moffitt, and now it's 223 Doe. So, the library classrooms have moved around, but they're stable now. But at the time, we're like, "Why would we have a room full of computers and nobody's doing anything [in it]?" So, so much for predicting the future.

I think we did reference [for] four hours a week. I remember one of my public library colleagues said, “How much reference do you do?” “Maybe four hours.” She's like, “Per day?” Because, of course, in the public libraries you do a lot more. “Well, no, actually.” As you know, I started what was called a rotation—must have been in the '90s—to Bancroft, and I've been doing two to three hours a week there ever since. Still feeling like I don't know a lot, but everybody's always very kind about me asking. That's actually been great because I can now answer a lot of questions outside of Bancroft, about Bancroft, including chat reference and instruction. And, sometimes I will bring [Bancroft] information like, “Oh, by the way, *San Francisco Examiner* is now online.” That's a big thing because they have the *San Francisco Examiner* photo archive. That's been a great thing that I've done all these years.

[01:03:22](#) **Ann**

It's not always that easy to make a connection like that with another unit or department.

[01:03:28](#) **Corliss**

We used to do more, what were called rotations. People would do a rotation in another unit. Of course, that fell by the wayside after—I forget which set of budget cuts.

[But] the head of Bancroft and head of Bancroft Public Services [at the time, Teri Rinne] thought it was a good idea. I think she brought me in, and I don't remember if she went, if she maybe came to instruction, what she did. But then I just stayed. They never got rid of me. The only places that have reference desks now there's Law, there's Bancroft, and then the drop-in reference, assistance at Doe for like eight hours a week or whatever.

[01:04:05](#) **Ann**

Yeah, I mean, ENVI [the Environmental Design Library] did, but that was sort of [due to] David Eifler's “soldiering on” kind of thing. I don't know what will happen now.

[01:04:14](#) **Corliss**

Right. Well, I still answer the phone at Bancroft. This feels very old school. But, you know, people phone Bancroft. First of all, they'll phone and say, “Thank God you answered the phone, there's nobody else answering the phone!” I'm like, “True.” But also, sometimes they have, you know, long complicated questions. At Bancroft, they'll start with, “Oh, I'm such and such, and I'm doing this.” And then they'll get into their thing. And, sometimes you need that context.

You're like, "Why are you...? Oh, because you're part of the historical society. You're the great granddaughter of Such-and- such." Those things actually make a difference.

There are fewer reference questions everywhere... There are fewer reference questions (except chat). There are fewer reference questions at Bancroft. There are fewer reference questions at the drop-in reference desk at Doe. I was a proponent of physical, in-person reference, but post-pandemic, there's just fewer questions. I think with Bancroft, my theory is that because they have to use the Aeon system [to get things] online [Aeon is software specifically designed to provide access to special collections in libraries and archives (<https://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/aeon/home>)], they have to figure out a lot of things before they come that they used to figure out on-site. So, this is more of a pain for the people managing that, but it's easier on the reference desk. But they still insist on having a reference desk. In fact, back in the day, they couldn't open the reading room unless there was someone on the reference desk. I don't know if they still have that policy, but that was the case, and to some degree reference is around, so that it takes the burden off circ [circulation] and ILL [Interlibrary loan], all the people who get the questions if there isn't a reference desk. So, we have the difficult situation now of there's not enough reference questions that it seems like you should have a desk, but there's enough reference questions that annoy the other people [staff] so you want to have something. I mean, we have chat, and that's very vigorous still.

[01:05:53](#) **Ann**

And there's the reference queue on LibAnswers [a ticketing platform where patrons can submit reference questions by chat or email].

[01:05:57](#) **Corliss**

But yeah, sure, sure. But I mean, that's sort of a virtual reference.

[01:06:00](#) **Ann**

You do need to talk to someone, though. Sometimes someone who's coming in and has a specific question, not necessarily Bancroft-related, but some sort of complex reference kind of thing, or even just, "Can I get into the stacks to look at a thing [though] I'm not a UC person?" Sometimes [the answers] can be hard to suss out on the website.

[01:06:25](#) **Corliss**

Yes. Cody Hennesy used to say that chat reference was just the librarian spending more time on the website than the patron can or should or wanted to.

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[01:06:33](#) **Ann**

Good point.

[01:06:34](#) **Corliss**

And really, you know something? You don't get as many “what are the hours?” questions, but you still get those too on chat. I'm always surprised there's not so many “where is the bathroom?” questions, which of course used to be a staple.

I remember we used to every year get your choice of whatever type of printed calendar you wanted, because you had printed calendars. You know, everybody ran around with their different printed calendar. I don't know how people scheduled meetings before email. I'll have to ask one of my senior colleagues that. I'm still in touch with... but we used to spend a lot of time emailing back and forth about meeting times and now of course it's, it's much easier. And we used to travel for meetings. LAUC [Librarians Association of the University of California] division chairs might travel to meet with each other every month. It [was] insane.

[01:07:24](#) **Ann**

And we were so resentful about having to do the online calendar. Remember that?

[01:07:29](#) **Corliss**

Oh, really?

[01:07:30](#) **Ann**

Yeah, like, I wasn't at Berkeley yet, but [we were told] “Everyone must now use their Outlook calendar. We're not going to have any more emailing about meetings.” We all resisted like crazy because you had to learn a new thing, and you were in process and you had like zero minutes in your day. And now I have to learn this new thing.

[01:07:55](#) **Corliss**

I remember that being a transition for me. Also, the calendar I used, I had a personal digital calendar that was different from bCal [the brand name for the Berkeley Google Calendar instance], but something, I don't know. During the pandemic I suddenly switched to be all bCal. I don't know, I mean that was very late in the game really.

[01:08:14](#) **Ann**

But you know, I came in 2019 and I'm still remembering book carts...not for instruction so much, but we had book carts at the Wikipedia Editathon and [we had] physical poster calendars. Like, some of these things just kind of went by the wayside during COVID. They just never came back.

[01:08:34](#) **Corliss**

Yes, it's true. For many years we had drop-in workshops of various types. I mentioned the internet ones, but there were some on how to use the library, whatever the system of the day was. We did a whole thing where we had an advertising campaign, we had posters we sent out all through, all over the place. We had little flyers that you could pick up at the desks. So, we spent a lot of time with [the Graphics office]. Remember, there was a whole series where they used old-fashioned, 50s vintage photos, and some people had mixed feelings about that because that time period wasn't always good for everybody. But we don't do any of that sort of thing now. We don't advertise the workshops much. For years everybody sort of relied on Teaching Library to do their general workshops. They could say, "Well, if you want to learn such and such, go to this."

The transition to the Alma and Primo [Alma and Primo are the back- and front-end integrated library system interfaces used by UC Berkeley Library, from the company Ex Libris] was actually huge. I didn't even mention that. But, as you know, it took place partly during the pandemic. And they said, "Well, we're just going to continue doing it. We're not going to stop because of the pandemic." Because the legacy systems were dying, they were too old. So we had to switch to something. I hear a lot of complaints about Alma from people, but [in working with the public] it's amazing to say, "We have one search box, use it," instead of, "Here's the Berkeley search box. Here's the Berkeley catalog. What's a catalog? Let me explain. Here's the UC-wide catalog. What's a catalog? Let me explain. And then here's the discovery tool. What is a discovery tool? Let me explain. And then here are the 1500 databases." So now you can just say, "Here's the one search box. Maybe Google Scholar, depending on your topic, once in a great [while]. And we do have 1500 databases, but don't worry about them too much." [It's great] for first year students especially, and that is still crazy enough, but that's still better than, "Well, we have a Telnet catalog called Gladis and a Telnet catalog called Melvyl and two web versions. What would you like to try? And all these databases." So, one of the questions you asked is about handling change and I thought I should get to that since your whole theme is change.

[01:10:50](#) **Ann**

Well, yeah, so I have some notes...

[01:10:52](#) **Corliss**

We have time?

[01:10:52](#) **Ann**

We definitely have time. And I have some notes [to] ask before, before the interview finishes. "Ask Corliss." And one of them is your, your reaction when you see change coming. Like, how do you kind of get ready...

[01:11:08](#) **Corliss**

I mean it depends. I think for technological change, I would try to dive in and learn about things, and often learn from other people, because I'm not the most techie person. You do the best you [can]. And of course, the library tools, the things that I use every day, of course I'm best at. This is true for everybody. The library tools and the internet, you know, that sort of thing. Structural changes to the library. I'm afraid I was often one of those people holding on to what I thought were the good things from the past. Library school, public service. I accepted the losses, but I do consider them losses. Although I mourn the lack of a library school, and I think the [UC Berkeley] iSchool is terrific, I just wish they also trained librarians. Interestingly enough, they celebrate their 105th anniversary (106th anniversary?) [the 106th anniversary was in 2024.] And this is because they're taking into account the library school as their starting point. I think it's marketing. But anyway, there was the Friday afternoon seminars that you know about, once a month, that were organized by Michael Buckland, who was a senior professor when I was in library school. So, he's been around a long time. He was also a senior administrator in [the] UC system-wide before he was in the library school, I think. And, also Cliff Lynch, who was the head of what was the Division of Library Automation, which became CDL. And of course, he then went to head the Coalition for Networked Information [CNI promotes the use of information technology to advance scholarship and education (<https://www.cni.org/>)]. And they had seminars once a month and they brought in all sorts of people from different corners of the information world. And it's just a coincidence, but sadly the last one is going to be May 2nd because Cliff Lynch just died. That sort of feels like the last connection. I mean, Michael Buckland might be the last connection we have with the old Library School [who's] still around.

[01:12:56](#) **Ann**

Wow. I'm sorry to hear that

[01:12:57](#) **Corliss**

So, structural changes. I came to terms with Moffitt losing its autonomy. It still takes up, like I say, a lot of energy in terms of management. Certainly, people can't... They don't ignore undergrads the way they might have I don't know, long, long, long ago, before my time. But there is sort of a weird full circle [in a] way. Moffitt's being renovated now, but when it reopens in 2026, Nicole Brown [Head of Instruction Services Division] will be the Head of Moffitt. And there hasn't been a head in decades, but it'll be a very different job. The Head of Moffitt before would spend a lot of time dealing with people throwing things at the circ supervisors, and kids getting pizzas delivered, and homeless individuals hanging out, and problems with the reserves, just all those things. She's not going to focus on those things. It'll be very different. But, for the first time in years there will be a Head of Moffitt.

And if I could talk to my younger self I'd probably—which, you know, I don't know that my younger self would have listened—but I would probably sit down, advise me to see if I can find the ways to continue some of the good things we're losing. The Public Service Task force was an example of that. But, see if you can see some of the advantages of the new way. Part of these things were really part of national trends. Undergraduate libraries sort of died, nationally. I don't know much about the change from the [library] liaison model that you mentioned to the—what is the other?—functional model, but you know, that's a national trend.

And I would also say [to my younger self] to stop being a perfectionist. I'm one of those people who feel, especially back in the day, I felt like I had to really grasp something before I could teach it or talk about it. And there's no such thing in this day and age. So, I guess now I can confess that I've been teaching about Wikipedia for years through the Wikipedia editathons, and sometimes guest lectures [in classes], without even being a very frequent editor. Maybe in my retirement I'm going to learn to be the expert editor I always thought I should be before I taught classes. So, those are some of the things that I think I would do if I could do it differently. Was there another question you wanted me to...?

[01:15:11](#) **Ann**

Well, I think you've actually touched on a lot of them because I was actually [wondering]... Do you have any sort of strategies or typical approaches when you see a change coming?

[01:15:23](#) **Corliss**

Well, it depends on what it is. If it's like a technological thing, I'm not the first one usually to learn about things, but I would try to learn about things either. I mean, it helps. Once we had the World Wide Web, of course there's all sorts of information online, whereas before, I don't know, you had to like, look up articles or something. And, we're learning from colleagues, you know, and one of the great things about working at Berkeley is the terrific colleagues and how everybody wants to share information. I'm actually for most of the technological changes that have taken place in our library. The internet, duh; e-books, digitized collections. I think those have increased access, made users' lives easier. They may or may not have made librarians' lives easier, but that's different. That's different from social media—I'm not a fan of social media, but libraries mostly use that for PR and outreach, around here, anyway.

Anyway, I think for me, one of the biggest problems about technology is how other people think about it when it comes along. Administrators, faculty and students, they think that technology should replace everything in the library or has replaced everything. We lose space because people figure all the books are online. “Why aren't all the books online?” That's what students would say. And, “Why isn't everything instantaneous?” which is what everybody says. One problem is that we toss out the old and we don't acknowledge that we still need some of the older things. Some of the best materials are not online. Oops. We just throw the baby out with the bathwater. Top administrators of all kinds, without fail, have little interest in things they didn't create. What's important to them is something shiny and new that can go on their CV. And, if they have to steal funding from older things to make it happen, so be it. Shiny and new tends to be technological these days, but that syndrome predates current technologies. And I'll admit that Teaching Library was a shiny new thing for a while, and we had that same advantage.

Anyway, I don't know, what else was I going to talk about? You asked about the role of librarians. On campus libraries and librarians, I think there's still an expectation that we provide study space. I'm disappointed that units like the Business School and the School of Public Health have reduced or eliminated space for libraries in their buildings, even though their librarians were very involved with them. But I don't know if the feeling is, “We'll still have our librarian, but we just don't have the space.” They expect us to provide study space, but of course then they're taking away some of that space. On the other hand, the new Engineering building is providing study space outside the library. So, that's a first. And I don't know if that's a trend or just a thing.

I would say when I first came, the selector was kind of all-important— you didn't say that, but, it was just a feeling. But now instead of hiring a literature librarian who does digital humanities, we hired a digital humanities librarian who does literature. And they're wonderful. But it's a real shift in the thinking. A chat question came in from a faculty member who needed help, I think, resizing images. And I thought, “Oh, nobody on campus does that.” But our wonderful digital humanities librarian said, “Oh, I thought that was part of the job of a library liaison.”

So, stay tuned. You know, things change. Oh, I want to talk about reference a little bit. So, Moffitt had a reference desk, Doe had a reference desk. Everybody had a reference desk. I remember when I was an intern, I couldn't cover Sunday nights because I commuted from San Francisco and I just couldn't do it. And everybody was sad there would be no reference coverage on Sunday night anywhere on campus. Now, of course, that's like, “What? That was a thing.?” And as I admit, there are fewer and fewer questions at physical reference desks, at least. I don't know about Law, but at Bancroft, for me, that has been the case, and at the drop-in reference desk. So I don't know.

Let's see. You asked about Berkeley-specific challenges. Of course it's the budget cuts. You know, as I said, there have been waves at various times. I don't know if I've ever felt like there was a Chancellor who was pro-libraries. Like I said, libraries tend to be... It's like mom and apple pie. We take it for granted. How well do we fund them? But that could just be my perspective. For all I know, they have protected libraries more than other units. It's hard for me to tell, down in the weeds.

This is another thing [I thought] about. I'm jumping back and forth. I remember when we first got email, I thought, “Who's going to email me?” I remember Gary Handman, the Head of the Media Resource Center, saying, “Oh, get on those listservs. You'll never be lonely.” And of course, he was right. Now I have way too much email. I remember I would print out important emails, which was hilarious. Now, I'm embarrassed to say that. But I do remember that one of the AULs called Gary, we shared a phone, said, “Well, what is the LAUC-B reflector?” [It's like a type of listserv.] I went to my file cabinet and pulled out the little thing and read it to her.

[01:20:14](#) **Ann**

I feel like the search didn't used to be as good in email. Like, now, I pretty much can remember an email and find it by searching. But I remember before, I felt like if I wanted to be sure I had access, I would print it.

[01:20:27](#) **Corliss**

Right, Right. And I don't remember exactly when we got email, but my email address was C Lee at library for over 30 years. I joke that that email address is older than some of our junior faculty. Of course, as you know, in the last year, they killed off the “at library” server. So a year before my retirement, I have to email everybody, “Change of email address.” And then again, I have to change it again when I retire.

So in terms of strategies to navigate change, like I said, it depends. If it's a technological thing, I can dive into it. If it's other things... I'm used to change, as you can tell. I know you've heard me go, “Oh, yeah, we tried that 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago. Oh, yeah, another budget cut”. I don't know if cynicism is a really good strategy [Ann laughs], but let's say getting used to the upheaval, we know no other way.

[01:21:29](#) **Ann**

Well, and also I feel like when I talk to you about these things, you've seen the library come through so many changes that you don't have the same level of alarm or destabilization that some people have, because you just sort of approach it like, “Okay, we'll get through this like we got through the other things.”

[01:21:50](#) **Corliss**

Now, the one thing is that the existential threat to libraries that we have now from the federal government, that's different, that's a thing where, well, I hope we'll get through this.

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

That's not directed by us within the library.

[01:22:03](#) **Corliss**

Certainly not. No, no. But you know, that, that affects us. Sometimes., change happens, and sweeps away a change. In something like 2008, I was chair of LAUC-B [Librarians Association of the University of California- Berkeley chapter]. There's this big move to create—I forget what was it [called]—Career Compass or something. It was [among other things,] to create, [to] just change the library assistant positions. That's when [the] Library Professional 4 was created. I didn't know if “library professional” was sort of a threat. Here's another weird dichotomy I've always had to deal with. When we were going through the whole library school thing, we wrote a lot of things about what distinguished librarians [from other professions], because we didn't just

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want them to think, “Well, anybody with a PhD could do this.” We wanted to say, “Library work is a separate profession. It has its own ethics. It has its own... all that sort of thing.” But unfortunately, when we did that, we accidentally ended up making it seem like we were distinguishing ourselves from the library assistants, from the paraprofessionals. I had a close friend, Aija Kanbergs, who was... She had a library degree and a [subject] master's, I think. A lot of people who were working as library assistants actually had library degrees. [But] they weren't in the Librarian series. And so, there was that weird distinction a lot of times. In the beginning, I think Berkeley at some point had like 175 librarians. It's insane. And we got down to something like 80. I don't know what our numbers are now. It was more... When we were healthier, it was a little more than 100, but it wasn't 175 for sure. A lot of those jobs were then [later] done by people in different series. Sometimes the library assistant series, sometimes I don't remember the other series that [were] around, but they'd find some excuse, and by people who maybe they had the library degree or maybe they didn't have a library degree. I mean, it all varied. So, on the one hand, there are a lot of really smart, competent people, and you're like, maybe they should be able to do this work. On the other hand, it's like, where do you draw the line and how do you defend librarians? There was a time, I mean, in the mid-90s, when, I think we had a University Librarian who really didn't understand librarians or libraries. And didn't understand why you can't just stick a person with a PhD into this job. And that was the existential threat we felt. So, there was this whole thing, and I was trying to get meetings and get people to understand them, and then the financial crisis hit, and that swept all of that away. We just didn't talk about it ever again. We had LP4s, and then it was just, “Okay, on to the fight.” So I did this whole thing, and people weren't always listening, and then [it was] gone.

[01:24:41](#) **Ann**

I mean, who knows what direction we would have taken if there hadn't been COVID? Like, I feel like things were in the works, and then the world was so different in librarianship and libraries and everything afterwards that you're not picking up that same idea anymore.

[01:24:55](#) **Corliss**

Right, right. So sometimes, change, and then bigger change comes along. So, whatever we were all fussed about in early March of 2020, we completely forgot about.

So you asked, how would I like my work to be remembered? I don't really know that it will be remembered, but if it is, I think maybe for contributions to EDI and libraries. There's the book that Brian Lym and I co-edited [*Implementing Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A*

Handbook for Academic Libraries, ACRL, 2022]. There's a project I'm working on now and will continue working on after I retire. And I have to tell you that sometimes in my head, I'll say, "After I graduate." I don't know why, but in my head, I'm like, "after I graduate".

[01:25:30](#) **Ann**

I love that.

[01:25:30](#) **Corliss**

It's a framework for planning EDI work in libraries. And of course, maybe not the best timing. It was a great idea up until November of 2024. And then all of a sudden, it's like, "What are we doing here?"

[01:25:41](#) **Ann**

No, it's a great idea.

[01:25:44](#) **Corliss**

Well, after years. So, this is something—I haven't even mentioned this, but this is always a through line in the profession, what we refer to as ethnic librarianship in the very beginning, and then maybe multiculturalism. In the beginning, there was, like, a few of us who cared about this in the Ethnic Studies Library and maybe in Moffitt. And then your colleagues would be all the sort of people who thought that, I think there was somebody who would say, "Well, we have stuff about African Americans here," and it was the crime section of the reference collection.

[01:26:12](#) **Ann**

Oh my God, ugh...

[01:26:14](#) **Corliss**

The people who were retiring at the time that I started, and over time... First of all, you'd work on, LAUC-B has a diversity committee, so you'd be on that. And maybe you'd do an exhibit or you'd do a pathfinder. You'd do a this, you'd do a that. There are these little projects, little maybe you do an event, and you were sort of chipping away. Then I think towards the late 2010s, I think we had like a Social Justice Task Force. I mean, you sort of be on these things. That's the way you supported DEI, which wasn't even a term back when I started. But now, belatedly, the library finally had a library-wide task force. After the whole George Floyd thing, like everybody else, they decided to do a thing and make it a library-wide priority. And that's

actually [because] we're very late in doing that. Other libraries have done that years ago, but that's because we already had so much... the selectors... Over time you have people in all sorts of fields who care about this. As I said, when I first began, it was just some of us, but over time, now colleagues who are in professions, you know, parts of the library you don't think are remotely related, care about these issues and that's a big change. And when people think, "Well, you know, do we really do enough here? Blah, blah, blah?" it's like, well, that is an important change. If you don't have that [lots of colleagues who care about DEI], then you don't really have library-wide change. So between that and the fact that there's now a library-wide committee, which Ramona Collins and I were the first co-chairs, that gives me some hope. That's, you know, something that now is really a value.

But it took a while. I'm not like responsible for it. I mean I was just there for it. [Also,] I hope some students and instructors will remember my efforts to help them. I mean, I've received some very nice emails in response to my [retirement] announcement to departments. Once in a while I encounter a student who I helped, who remembers me, which is kind of cool. And you asked about what skills have been most useful to me, and I joke that I use my ignorance. I haven't forgotten what it's like to be a newbie.

[01:28:25](#) **Ann**

I love that!

[01:28:27](#) **Corliss**

And actually, the empathy for users and sometimes the ability to step aside from our jargon, our assumptions, and try to see what people need and want kind of helps. I remember, I didn't even talk about this, but during the first set of Moffitt renovations I lived through, there were so many retirements in Doe Library that [the Moffitt staff] could all fit in the nooks and crannies. You know that meeting room 225—Gary Handman, Margaret Phillips and I shared that. If you can imagine three desks, three computers in that room.

[01:28:59](#) **Ann**

Wow.

[01:28:59](#) **Corliss**

And I remember, we'd sort of look at each other and ask, "Do you know how to spell blah, blah, blah?" Now, we were sitting next to one of the largest reference collections on the west coast.

Did we get up and look? [Ann laughs] Maybe the web wasn't quite so well developed or not, but this reminded me about people's information seeking behavior.

01:29:17 **Ann**

Yes.

01:29:18 **Corliss**

There's another retired professor of electrical engineering who I don't know how we got to know each other, but he emails me about newspapers. So, I'll send him an email about all the databases and the next email I get in “And the *Washington Times*? and the blah, blah, blah, blah?” Does he understand technology? Sure. Could he look this certain [thing] up? Sure. Is it easier to ask me? Absolutely. Would we like them to change their information seeking behavior? Well, sure, but I guess I'm a little cynical about [that]. And students will ask each other stuff. You sometimes hear them talking to each other, rather than asking us.

And also, I used to joke I'm a fast typist, and I don't know this is what my parents had in mind when they paid for piano lessons. [Ann laughs] But it helped especially you know, in the beginning. Now everybody's a fast typist.

And I have some thoughts about the profession, I guess. We were struggling, as I mentioned, [with] the demise of the library school. We were arguing—they hired a new dean, and we were arguing with him about the school that he was building, and trying to get him to keep some elements of library stuff in. And he said, “Well, they'll work in libraries, these people.” [But] that's not the same. I remember thinking that he wanted to build a school for people who would manage information, like for corporations, which to some degree is the case. I remember trying to make the point that the libraries are part of the education sector, and I feel like they should be seen as a public good. Right now of course, that's what's under threat. But, I felt like there was a role for what librarians do, [to] make information accessible to everybody, for the public. And even academic librarians. Of course, it's a smaller role, but it's still the public. It isn't just for specialists. It isn't just for faculty. It's for people who are just getting started. I used to think sometimes this would make maybe a good sci-fi movie. Maybe Hal and I should write it. But maybe generations of librarians have to go underground and provide information to people. I hope this concept stays fictional. Or maybe someone's already done it, I don't know.

So, early in my career, I helped someone find—this is very early, like before the web, I think—I helped someone find information on a topic. He said the topic and I had no idea what it was. Completely technical. I think it was computer-related, but I wasn't really sure. So, he gave me a term. I looked it up in LCSH. Yes, it was that long ago. Library of Congress Subject Headings [LCSH] gave us a couple of “See also”s. And I said, “Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” And he said, “Yes, that's it!” And he went off really happy. And I never knew what he was... never understood what he was talking about, but I was able to help him find what he wanted. And that's when I realized that libraries are structured so non-experts can find information. Of course, the internet has made that part less important, but I think it's still a founding principle.

I guess it sounds sort of old-fashioned, but I just hope that these sorts of things persist. Future librarians may never touch a book in the course of their workday, and actually, when I think about it, I don't touch a lot of books in the course of my workday either. But I hope, public information, information as a public good, as part of the education sector, teaching people to be information literate. I hope that's always going to be the case, and should be defended at all costs. And I guess right now we get to do that-- for the first time. Really. We used to think we were doing that, but now we really have to do it

[01:32:52](#) **Ann**

Yes, now we're on the line.

[01:32:55](#) **Corliss**

So, is there anything else you think I should talk about? I could talk for hours, but, I know it's a lot.

[01:33:01](#) **Ann**

I love that! I am looking... I have a whole bunch of questions on a document to my left and my notes that I've been taking while I've been talking on my right. And I feel really good. I feel like this was really rich. This was so fun for me... I feel like we're good. Unless there's anything else that you feel like we missed? Because you're... It's up to you, but I feel okay.

[01:33:37](#) **Corliss**

Well, I mean, there's probably like a million things I'll think of, but you don't have time for a 12-hour extravaganza.

[01:33:47](#) **Ann**

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You can add footnotes [and links].

[01:33:55](#) **Corliss**

Well, I might add the history of Melvyl and that little history catalog thing I did for you. And even the list of University Librarians is not that easy to find, but I know where it is.

[01:34:02](#) **Ann**

Oh, see, there you go. Uber librarian. I love that. Okay, well, Corliss...

[01:34:12](#) **Corliss**

Well, thank you. And, you know, this has been really great for me too, because in a way, as I wind up my career, it's kind of cool to look back and have somebody care.

[01:34:22](#) **Ann**

I care. I think people that read this will care.

[01:34:25](#) **Corliss**

Well, I don't know how many people will read it, but, you never know.

[01:34:28](#) **Ann**

You never know.

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