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“Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project

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Dean C. Rowan

Interviewed on April 10, 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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00:00:10 Ann

This is Ann Glusker. I'm interviewing Dean Rowan on April 10, 2025, for the “Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project. This is a remote interview. Ann is in Seattle, Washington, and Dean is in Berkeley, California.

So, Dean, if it's okay, I'd love to start with just telling me whatever you want to about your background, but especially how it led to librarianship and something about the decision to become a librarian.

00:00:43 Dean

Of course. The first milestone, I would say, was when I was pretty young, four years old, maybe five maybe, and my father briefly would go to church, and I went with him. I don't have a spiritual bone in my body. I love thinking about religion, I love some of the cultural artifacts of religion, but all the theological questions and so forth are completely irrelevant to me. But this is important, because it was in [a] church where there was a library, when I realized, “Wow, this is cool. They let me take these home and bring them back next week, these books.”

Fast forward then to—I mean, I remember using the library with my parents when I was in elementary school to do homework and that sort of thing—but fast forward to high school, 1976. My calculus teacher at the end of one class called me up to the front of the class after everybody had left and said, “Hey, would you like a job at the public library?” I was like, “Sure!” and the connection was his wife was one of the associate directors of the Whittier Public Library. I went in for the interview and applied and all that. It was a part-time page position, which is often where people start in the library, and it was a marvelous experience. I was there for probably only a couple years. And then I got an opportunity to work at a record store. I'm sorry [Ann laughs], you know, you got to take it where you get it. But I stayed in touch with that library.

I'll continue then with the biographical milestones here. Out of college, I worked in private industry for a stock brokerage firm. It was engaging, interesting, I learned a lot, but after four years, I was like, “This is not for me.” I left, did a little bit, a tiny bit of travel, came back and said, “Okay, I have to find work.” I started looking through the classified ads, which is how we did it back in that day, this was 1984 I want to say. I said, “Hey, there's a lot of classified ads.

I'm only going to look at the ones for libraries" because I'd had such a good experience at Whittier Public Library.

I found an opening at a law firm library in downtown Los Angeles: Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton. I interviewed and got the job. A year or two into my work there as a library assistant, my boss said, "You should go to library school." I had either UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] or USC [University of Southern California]. There were no remote offerings at the time or none that I was aware of, and UCLA seemed most appropriate even though the attraction to USC for me was that people I knew at the public library were all USC grads.

[00:04:34](#) **Ann**

Oh, interesting.

[00:04:36](#) **Dean**

It was as clear as day to me that that was part of my calculus here, but I think [USC's] program was absolutely full-time. Where[as] UCLA, that one semester, the fall semester for which I was applying was the one opportunity in the history of that library school, I think, that they offered part-time attendance or enrollment. I got in, and it took me instead of two years, two and a half or three years to get through because I was part-time. They quickly decided they weren't going to be able to sustain a part time program, but they grandfathered me in. Obviously.

I had a blast. I just hung around and took classes in the law school, and in gender studies, and in the English department, that augmented and supported the professional education I was doing in the library school. I was still at the law firm working part time, got the degree in '89 and then in '90 or '91, Whittier Public Library, where I had started as a page, had an opening for a head of technical services. So, I applied, I got the job, and I was there for 11 years. It was just a dream job. It was fantastic. I was the head of technical services, [and] one of the earliest projects I was assigned was introducing Internet and performing, or conducting, or however, I don't know what the verb is, doing a migration, so that the city of Whittier, who were sharing an ILS [Integrated Library System] with the city of Downey nearby would amicably separate, and we would be running our own show on our own system following the migration.

So, I had the pleasure, and it was, of seeing a migration from one ILS to another, and introducing Internet, and I had time on the reference desk. For me, a generalist to a fault, it was spectacular.

And then the next step would have been coming to Berkeley, after going to law school at Berkeley.

[00:07:36](#) **Ann**

I'm finding that really interesting. I read the bio from your 2004 paper, and it did say that you went from the public library, then did your JD, and ended up at Berkeley. But maybe you could tell me more about the... in your dream job at Whittier Public Library, you had worked at a law firm library. Did that connect with your decision to get the JD or what was that decision about? How did that work?

[00:08:09](#) **Dean**

There were a couple important factors. One was, yes, working at the law firm library. I had the enviable task of receiving the mail. And that meant getting all the law journals that the firm was subscribing to in print at the time. That meant I got to scan the tables of contents and find interesting articles, articles interesting to me at least. So, I did a lot of reading in legal scholarship back in the late 80s, working for Sheppard Mullin. I've always been interested since then in the substance of legal scholarship, legal analysis, that sort of thing. At Whittier I met my wife and we got married in 2000. So, we're heading toward our 25th anniversary this summer.

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

Congrats!

[00:09:10](#) **Dean**

Thank you. I had never anticipated that I would marry, let alone have kids, which I have. So, that sort of turned my head around, maybe to an extreme. I mean, after a year of being married, or not even a year, I thought, "Hey, these sort of life-altering moments aren't that bad. You know what? I'm getting old. I think I better go to law school now rather than think about this and weigh the advantages and disadvantages. No, I'm going to go." So, I applied and got into law school and went through that, and was of course hanging out with the librarians. Took a course with the International, Foreign & Comparative Law librarian on research related to those areas. I also worked at a law firm for the duration of my law school experience. A small firm down in Oakland, and it was, I think, probably the ideal situation for a lawyer. Even given that I was not particularly satisfied or thrilled by the prospect of doing that day in and day out.

[00:10:37](#) **Ann**

Can I just clarify? That work at the law firm while you were in law school, was not in the library, [right?]

[00:10:43](#) **Dean**

Oh, right. I was a student associate.

[00:10:46](#) **Ann**

Got it. Thank you.

[00:10:47](#) **Dean**

[So,] you're not supposed to do that. You're not supposed to work during the year, at least during your 1L year, your first year. But I didn't care. I was an older student. I didn't care. It informed my sense of what the practice of law is about, and for this firm, it was, as one of the name partners would remind me, "This is not the dark side. You don't want to go to the dark side." This was a plaintiff firm suing insurance companies and suing health benefit plan advisors and that sort of thing. It really was a much more robust experience, I think, as a student associate than big law gives to students whom they're courting over the summer, [where] there's wining and dining them and all that. This was shoestring budget, relatively speaking, but it was a great educational experience. So that was how I connected the legal dots.

[00:12:17](#) **Ann**

And then did it feel like a direct line then, from [having] your MLIS and your 11 years at Whittier Public, and you then had your JD? Did the Berkeley thing come pretty soon after, or...?

[00:12:33](#) **Dean**

Oh, immediately. I mean, the only time I took off was to take the bar. I had not explored jobs. I hadn't, really, vigorously explored jobs at a law firm because I knew I want[ed] to stick to being in a library. I took a little time off [to] study for the bar, passed the bar, because I thought, "If I decide two years from now I want to try this being a lawyer thing after all, I'm not going to get up to speed with the bar as efficiently as I [could] the summer after graduating." And then I started. It was August of '04.

[00:13:24](#) **Ann**

So, you have your 20-year anniversary at Berkeley.

[00:13:26](#) **Dean**

I did, almost twice the time that I spent at Whittier. But still Whittier looms large. That felt like a career... I did not want to leave Whittier. I just felt, "I will be sacrificing... call it a last-minute opportunity to get some formal education," that I was seeking at the time.

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

Got it. So, now I'm going to sort of dive into your time at Berkeley. But I'm just sitting here feeling really glad that I asked you, because I do feel like, as I'm listening, my assessment (and maybe I'm not allowed to say this as the interviewer) is that you are not averse to change. Like, you are willing to take professional risks, and look at professional arcs, and big picture, and shift direction. Would you characterize yourself that way, or...?

[00:14:35](#) **Dean**

Funny. I was about to say, "I don't think I would characterize myself that way."

[00:14:38](#) **Ann**

Oh, funny. Okay.

[00:14:40](#) **Dean**

But I hear what you're saying, and maybe what I should do is embrace what you said, and say, "Well, yeah, actually, I'm not afraid of change." Almost to the point where I have a hard time empathizing or sympathizing with people who are afraid of change, which can be a source of conflict, occasionally professional conflict or personal conflict. Having said that, I do have a great deal of empathy for people in general. Individuals in general, I should say, and I think that's part of what I really love about being a librarian, is every person who comes to me with a problem. Scare quotes, "problem". I get to have that problem. I get to make it mine. That's what drives me to help them resolve the problem. Having said that, it's not, in fact, my problem, so I don't have to dwell on it later that night trying to get to sleep. But I really do... no question, no particular weird circumstance that arises in an interaction with a patron really bothers me that much, if at all. "Come one, come all."

[00:16:34](#) **Ann**

Awesome. Well, thank you for that. See, I already feel like, "Okay, I should not have been characterizing you, I should have asked you what your characterization was." So, thank you for that learning experience for me. Then, thinking back on your years at Berkeley, which is still your current job, I'm guessing that your roles changed somewhat over the 20 years, but maybe they didn't? But, how your work at Berkeley changed over the 20 years, how librarianship, [and]

how law librarianship changed, what is that kind of arc? If you could comment on that. It's a lot. Sorry.

[00:17:24](#) **Dean**

No, no, no. This is introducing some of the series of questions that I almost feel—I know this is the point of your research here, but—I almost feel like that's just so hard for me to express or to capture or define.

Obviously, technologically motivated change is a huge, huge deal. I had the marvelous good fortune at Whittier of being responsible for a system, being a system administrator essentially, continuing to work with the public directly as a reference librarian, and eventually joining the management team. [It] is what prepared me when I came to Berkeley to start as a reference librarian, and within, it was I guess four years later, four and a half years later, I became a part of the management team at Berkeley.

So, there is that technology, and all of the ramifications. The so-called virtual aspect of information, delivery of information—which I don't buy for a second, there's nothing virtual about it at all. It's a bad metaphor. It is very real, palpable. It occupies a lot of space and it weighs a lot. If you see the expanses of server farms and so forth that are delivering this stuff to us, that's a lot of real estate. Therein I am exhibiting my propensity to be a contrarian. Like you could tell me, “Well, it has all changed so radically,” and I'm like, “No it hasn't. It isn't that much different.”

Sort of an exceptional case that kind of in a way undermines what I just said, because it is a very exceptional case, but in public libraries back at the time, and I assume also in academic libraries, we indeed did acquire content that we licensed, books that we licensed. These were few and far between, but the notion was you didn't own the book, you were obligated to withdraw it or return it to the publisher when the new edition came out. And so even pre-internet, although the Internet [using the capital I for the early iteration] started like in the 60s or something, but pre-Web, these commercial relationships were being established. So, the fact that now we license masses of electronic books and so forth, in bulk, well, it's a scale. It scales very differently, but it's the same thing. You don't own it, or the degree to which you own it or the mode in which you own it is very different from what we think of as traditional ownership. So that's a change.

I'm not a political economist, and I'm not really much of a political animal, but I think capitalism has ramped up quite a bit over my lifetime and certainly over the last 20 years. That can only be a bad thing for a social, cultural steward of information like a library or a museum. That's something that over the years, increasingly I have just become so discouraged about. The ethos of a library is so communist, in the best sense of the word, and that's going to be stifled. It's not going to be to anybody's benefit except a very, very slim percentage of people who are somehow for some weird reason so ambitious about accumulating money.

[00:22:54](#) **Ann**

Those are big words. I have much to say, but it's not my place [as the interviewer]. But I appreciate them and I appreciate you for saying them. Anything else strike you as you think of the arc of your time at Berkeley? Like maybe how your role changed or...?

[00:23:10](#) **Dean**

Okay, maybe if I try to characterize the Berkeley Law culture at the Law Library. [It's] very much a collaborative effort, a team effort, not a heavy top-down kind of vibe. Everybody supports everybody else, at least as much as in the best situations I've worked in. So, that has not changed, but it's now going through—and by now, I mean like these last weeks, months and so forth—it's now going through a change that I think is largely due to bigger issues in the world, bigger issues at the university. The technology is not helping. We have a new director who has a slightly different approach, which is understandable because she's not familiar with the Berkeley way. She is, I think, appropriately trying to adjust some of the dysfunctional behaviors that arise out of being more tolerant of a fluid kind of organization.

That's definitely what I align with, the more fluid, more collaborative. This is an anecdote from working at the public library, this experience informs so much of how I think about organizations and the workplace, [at the] public library. People at academic libraries, even at public academic libraries in my experience, seem like they don't have thick skins when it comes to dealing with people. [If] you work in a public library, you won't survive if you don't have a thick skin, or you're not adaptable, or you're not empathetic, the way I think I am. The director [at the Whittier Public Library] was this marvelous mentor who actually did have a kind of a top-down approach, but the organization wasn't that big and she wanted to cultivate morale and she did, supremely well. I got the story that there were human feces adjacent to the card catalog on the floor out there. I told the director, and she said, “Well, go ask a page to do it. But if the page doesn't want to do it, tell the person that I, the director, will go out there and do it.” And I kind of split the

difference, I did it myself. I cleaned it up myself, right? Because I took the message she was giving me, and I wasn't going to ask a page. I was, by then an adult [while] the pages were high school kids. And therein is a parable of providing library service and working in a library, at least to me it is. That is why I continue to subscribe to the notion that we are all in this together. And really, if I could dispense with the hierarchy altogether, I would do it overnight. I think hierarchy is so destructive to almost everything. I mean, I'm sure there are select cases where you need to have hierarchy. Maybe the military. I don't know.

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

Can I just poke in for one moment? You did use the word dysfunction. And the minute you used that word, my thought was, “In whose eyes?” Because it sounds to me like what you're describing is a functional system, but it's encountering change, whether that's external or internal. But you tell me.

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

No, no, no, you're right. So, what becomes a kind of a norm or an accepted practice by virtue of just the way we do things, can, with just the slightest adjustment of perspective, become clearly, “Oh, this is not... It's not my opinion that it's a problem, it is objectively a problem.” Communication is a good example. As we all know, it's very difficult to communicate, particularly to a large organization, and to do it consistently and equitably and make sure everybody kind of gets the same message. Right? We operated fairly smoothly for the 20 years when I was [at Berkeley], and people who were not getting the message were tolerating that fact because it wasn't causing a crisis. Right? But now, you're right, in the face of change, I think it's a much clearer, and maybe it takes an outside observer to come in and see what's going on and what could be just tightened up a little bit or, we add some air in those tires and this will be up and running smoothly again. I think I'm capturing what I'm trying to [say].

[00:29:48](#) **Ann**

It makes sense to me. Thank you for that. So, I'm not really hearing you express that there were huge pivot change points. I mean, many people would say COVID was one. Some people are saying AI is one. But are there any that... when I say that I'm seeing a little reaction... do you [have more]?

[00:30:14](#) **Dean**

No, no, no, this is good. Certainly, I did think of COVID and the reason I didn't continue with COVID is because I think technology is so obvious. You don't need me to tell you, “Yeah, yeah, likewise COVID.” Although, I will say that COVID is one of the few, call it, episodes during my life that I actually sort of was taken aback, and said to myself, “Ah, you're living through a real moment of history here.” Like, presidential administrations come and go, and recessions come and go, and depressions come and go, and that's life, you know? But COVID seemed like, this is really weird, in an existential way, because it was... First of all, it was just the extent of it, the spread totally, utterly global, was unprecedented, I think. And secondly, it was the relationships. It imposed such a shift on just ordinary social relationships. Like, you go to the coffee shop in the morning, and now you're standing six feet behind somebody and you've got a mask on, and they have a mask on, and it's all very bizarre. Everybody's dangerous. They're not packing heat. They're not carrying guns. They're carrying some weird, toxic virus that could lay you out for good.

Ironically, though, because I often will note this when I'm writing memoranda about various situations, COVID for libraries *qua* libraries maybe wasn't that big a deal. Because it took nothing for us. I'm minimizing here, but for the sake of making a point, it took nothing for us to say, “Oh, okay, you want this, remotely? You want this virtually? Yeah, well, we've already been doing this, for how many years?” So, it changed the workplace and it proved, or it demonstrated, that leadership of large organizations like the University of California don't know what the fuck they're talking about. They don't know what the fuck they're doing. COVID helped expose some of that, perhaps, but I think a lot of people already understand that.

[00:33:07](#) **Ann**

And do you mean in terms of, like, what libraries do and what the pronouncements mean for libraries? Or do you mean in a more general sense?

[00:33:16](#) **Dean**

Well, certainly in a more general sense, but as well... I have no illusion, the leadership of the university, they have no idea what libraries do. Not the slightest. They're just magical. Libraries are magical to these folks. And that's just such a backhanded compliment.

[00:33:41](#) **Ann**

That's exactly what it is.

[00:33:44](#) **Dean**

That's right.

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

So, let me ask a different question then. In your role, you're going along, and you have things pretty much in a nice running order, and change comes down, whether it's from on high or it's a collaborative change that the team believes, "We really have to do things differently now." You had that big time at Whittier because the ILSs were kind of getting split off, and you were in charge of that. But, when you would see a change like that coming, can you give us a little window, or give me a little window, into how you ramp up for that or prepare for that? Did professional development play a role at all, or did you sort of wait and see? I'm interested in the strategy, if any.

[00:34:42](#) **Dean**

Right. I'm not a strategic person, which is sometimes the source of problems for me. I am a go with the flow sort of person. Although I do have my own little fetishes that I want to entertain now and then. But, the only example that comes to mind is when, for example, we were changing the service hours on the desk. It doesn't so much require strategizing, it required exercises in scheduling a desk. Reminds me so clearly of taking the law school admission test [LSAT]. I mean, it's just this weird logic question. Like, it's exactly like some of the questions on the LSAT, which is [where] you're given, like, a population of five or six people, and you're given restrictions like, B can't be with C, D must be with E and F, that sort of thing. And that's what you're doing when you're scheduling the desk. But the reducing the hours—there is an aspect of change that, I think, I was even vocal about it, which I'm not always vocal about. I don't always complain when a change is being made because I realize there are a lot of interests at stake and mine don't have to be paramount, but I really don't like cutting back hours. So, for me, it's just like personally having to deal with it. "Okay, we're, we're never going to be 24/7", which would be ideal as far as I'm concerned. The financial reality is we have to, we have to cut back, and the traffic isn't there. But then that becomes for me an unfortunate kind of feedback loop, because if you're not staffing the desk, then of course the traffic isn't there, and so you're only... What's the word? What's the term I'm thinking of? It's like a fore-ordained conclusion almost.

But let's see, other kinds of change... Well, the biggest, a big example for me and for the library, sort of a totally "duh" one, was in 2023 when the three top administrators in the law library, the

director and the two associate directors, retired. One of those associate directors ascended to the director position, but then that person had to retire for various reasons, unrelated to the spectacular job that she did. So, then I got to take over as the interim director. And that did sort of nudge me a little bit more toward being methodical and strategic and making sure that I was spending useful time with a broader swath of the library, operations and the people there. I got to know a lot more about what people do on a day to day basis. [I] couldn't take for granted that it would get done and get done properly. But that's not like a historical evolutionary change, that's just routine that happens in any organization at any time.

I keep going back to technology too. Certainly not at Berkeley, but at Whittier the migration was a big change and a huge learning experience for me. At Berkeley Law when we also migrated from one vendor to an entirely different vendor, I wanted to insinuate myself in the process and knew better than to do that, because it really wasn't my job. I left it to others to do what they do best, and plus we were experimenting by moving to this new vendor at the time. We were an early adopter. And I thought that's great. That's so typical in my experience of libraries to be early adopters of new technologies.

[00:39:53](#) **Ann**

That's partly what has me interested in this... There's kind of a popular conception of us as fuddy-duddies. And when I look at almost any librarian that is retiring, like, what they have done over the course of their career [I'm amazed] ... Not everyone, though. Not everyone.

[00:40:11](#) **Dean**

Not everyone, But it's not even the individuals. It's the organization, institutions. I remember installing a CD tower back in the 90s, early 90s, at Whittier. I picked an amazing vendor—I wish I could remember their name—and got to meet with them and the folks doing the installation so that I could learn about how to troubleshoot and that sort of thing. He said something about how, first of all, this technology, we have this technology because of the military. Which sort of goes without saying, we have most technology because of the military. He made a comment to the effect that it's telling. I'm totally paraphrasing and this is the vaguest of memories, but it was impressive to him that libraries were jumping on board with this then-new technology, relatively speaking, new technology, and I think that has been the case for a lot of technologies.

AI certainly confirms that libraries are—first of all, we can't afford to be wholesale adopters—but we are very aggressively exploring the contours of whatever this new variety of AI is, and at

once looking at the technology, or what it is and what it can do vis-a-vis all of the hype that we have to cut through to get to that observation. And at the same time recognizing that this is not just about a relationship of the library to the technology. This is about a relationship of the library kind of intermediating or—I'll think of a better verb at some point—the library recognizing there are going to be social expectations about the technology that the library is never going to be able to disabuse people about. And so, we just have to be prepared to deal with that, and that's how we adopt technology.

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

Oh, there's so much more to say. Actually, if you don't mind, this is a little bit off the topic—I'm really appreciating how thoughtful you're being, like, to sort of stay with change, change, change—but I think navigating change, there's lots of aspects to that. I think I [have] in common with quite a few librarians, reference is the most beloved part of my job. I'm interested—do you feel like your users have changed over time, and their questions have changed over time? Like, that actual part of your job? Have you felt there was change in that? [Or] maybe not, which would also be kind of great.

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

Again, I tend to be conservative, again not super political, I don't mean it in the probably derogatory sense in which that might be received, though I think that's a mistake. But that's, that's a tangent... Conservative in the sense that there's nothing new under the sun. We've seen this before. So, I think maybe there are differences in research habits that might then generate different kinds of questions. But not really. I mean, I'm teaching advanced legal research this semester, and at least a couple times I have started a class recounting an interaction with a student or a faculty member who had a research question that was exactly emblematic or exemplary for what we were going to talk about that day. [So,] what we were going to talk about that day was informed by new developments, but largely by, “This is the core process of doing legal research. Like this is, this is the heart of it, and these are the kinds of questions you're going to be encountering” and that, that's the accretion of decades of practices. So, it's always helpful if fortuitously a student comes up and says, “I need to know about federal legislative history of this and that” and the next day I'm talking about federal legislative history in class. I'm saying, “This is exactly what we've been trying to prepare you to deal with because it will arise.”

[00:45:57](#) **Ann**

I don't know if this is too lightweight or surface of a perception, but it seems to me that legal research is so invested in looking at past events and precedent. It's a little different than some of the questions we get, which [are] really not that interested in the past. It's much more snapshot kind of questions.

[00:46:19](#) **Dean**

I think you're totally right, that that is partly what informs the skew of legal research. But we also work on the sort of cutting-edge topics that policy-focused researchers are going to be embarking on or social justice kinds of questions that are in the moment today. Although even those have a lot of historical precedent, that needs to be unpacked if you're going to succeed today.

[00:47:05](#) **Ann**

Yes. So, Dean, I'm about to ask the sort of, "What you see in the future, and advice for young librarians" question. But is there anything else before we go there? That maybe you wish I had asked, that I haven't yet, or that you just wanted to be sure you talked about? I feel like your answers have been pretty wide ranging. So, as I'm looking over my beautifully prepared list of questions... Haha... you've covered a lot of them just in the course of talking about what you've talked about, but anything else you want to touch on?

[00:47:45](#) **Dean**

That's a nice way of saying that I have problems staying on [topic]...

[00:47:48](#) **Ann**

No, no, the opposite! It's been great for me, I can just sit here and just bask.

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

Nothing comes to mind. I mean, my relationship to change is, I think, not as salient as it is for some people. I sort of assume change, but I assume change within a fairly narrow range of human capacity and human behavior.

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

I love that. Thank you. So, that said, then, I wonder if even asking the question of what changes do you see coming down the road, or the future of librarianship, which is so much in question... I'm almost wondering if that's the right way to ask that question, given your approach?

[00:48:53](#) **Dean**

I hope you do.

[00:48:55](#) **Ann**

Okay, I'm asking it [Laughs].

[00:48:57](#) **Dean**

I have a contrarian answer to that because...

[00:48:59](#) **Ann**

Go for it.

[00:49:00](#) **Dean**

Many times I have skimmed the programs of annual conferences and stuff, and such, and this is including in the public library. There's always the program or two or a dozen that are focused on, "What is the future of our profession, what is the future of this kind of service, what is the future of that?" And I just... I don't care. I don't care. I'm more worried about, "What are we going to do today?" Okay, so, yeah, we need to plan for what's coming, but who the hell is going to plan for AI? We have no basis for planning for AI, right? We know little bits of information. Most of it is mediated by interested parties who have no interest in letting us know anything concrete. So, I always get a little bit kind of irritated when I see these, "What's the future of this or the future of that?"

I don't know. We'll see if libraries aren't going to be funded anymore, right? Well, then we can predict fairly surely what the future is for them. But that's been a problem for a long, long time. I remember in the 90s at the public library, public patrons coming in and going, "You know, you guys are screwed because the internet's going to take it all from you." And to some extent, that person was right. But to another extent, that person was totally blindered and had no idea what kinds of work was going on in libraries, never mind what kind of work was being done with the web. So, I feel like I've gone back to change again as a topic. But, yeah, I can't predict. I just have no idea.

[00:51:28](#) **Ann**

I'll just quickly say—I'm inserting myself a little bit—that one of the reasons I got the sort of brainstorm, if you want to call it that, to do this project was [that] I was freaking out at one point about one of the budget cuts, which seem like nothing compared to what we're looking at now, but it was a big one, like two years ago or something. And I talked to someone who'd been at

Berkeley for 30 years. I'm like, "What am I going to do?" And she said, "Eh, budget cuts. Been through it, seen everything. We'll be fine." I could not! It was like, so opposite to my experience. I just thought, "Oh, there's such interesting perspective to be had here."

[00:52:08](#) **Dean**

Amen to that. That perspective, exactly. Because what we're doing, when we say that we're living in an unprecedented time, we're saying that all those people before us, they don't count that much. They don't know how good they had it. We are condescending to our ancestors, if you will, or forerunners, and I have no stomach for that.

I'm doing some reading. I'm reading Karl Marx's *Capital*. For various reasons, mostly because it's an amazing literary work. But one of the takeaways from it is that he is depicting the lives of what we would today call unprivileged people or marginalized people, and he's doing it in a way that drives the point home. It's like you're seeing mid-19th century England's industrial revolution. This was not a pleasant situation to be in. So, whatever unpleasantness we're experiencing these days, it's happened before.

[00:53:42](#) **Ann**

Last question then. Which is, I'm hoping that earlier career librarians or younger librarians or whatever moniker—because I didn't start my first library job till I was 50—will be interested in these interviews...What is your advice, or words of wisdom, if any? I think they've been sprinkled throughout, but...

[00:54:08](#) **Dean**

I hope at least they've been implied, I guess. I've had occasion recently to talk to younger prospective librarians, people who are going to library school or thinking about going to library school. And there are two sorts of two registers at which I can talk about it. One would be, well, what does the profession seem to be demanding of people these days? Right? So, I would say, "Go out there and learn how to code one way or another." I learned programming in library school back in the 80s—well actually I learned it in high school in the 70s, but then I used it in the 80s in library school, so it ain't that newfangled a thing. We're seeing a need for that. We're seeing a need not just in legal scholarship, but inasmuch as legal scholarship reflects growing demands in the anything-but-the-hard-sciences, we're seeing a need for empirical methods that deal with so-called big data and that sort of thing, or natural language processing. So get up to speed with those.

So, that's one register where, "These are the demands that seem to be showing up in the headlines in the newsletters and at the conferences and so forth." But the other register is, "What are you interested in? Are you interested in the history of printing? Go for it, learn it, study it." To this day I recommend a book to folks that I remember vividly, sitting in the UCLA Library School library—library squared, right? —reading during a break. I just read the whole friggin' book. It was Allan Stevenson's *The Problem of the Missale Speciale*, which is like an incunabula around the time of Gutenberg and that sort of thing. It illustrated how Stevenson the author used the material aspect of the book and of bookmaking to determine the stages in the production of this Missale. So, it's purely academic in one sense. Right? But there have since been technologies, unsurprisingly, that increase the precision with which we can make such accounts of the production of a work. I just think it's so inherently fascinating and amazing that we are able to leverage technology to do something like that. Does it help me as a legal reference librarian respond to questions about looming final exams and that sort of thing? No, but it anchors me to the profession, that there is this historical richness to this profession, and its assorted, associated industries.

And I would say to students who want to be doing this, entertain those little hobby-like interests that you have that can have some bearing on what the profession does. Learn statistics if you want to. If you want to produce more or less reliable surveys and you have a knack for math and you find it inherently interesting, pursue that.

[00:58:46](#) **Ann**

That's fantastic. I think, Dean, that if you're good and I'm good, we can just sort of wrap that up and I can stop recording. Unless there's any other last things you want to say.

[01:00:23](#) **Dean**

Okay, yeah, there is something I want to say. This gets to the question of have you ever thought of leaving?

[01:00:29](#) **Ann**

Yes, Which I didn't ask you. It was in the question list but I didn't ask you...

[01:00:31](#) **Dean**

So, I'm answering it. Yes, but only I thought of leaving Berkeley early on after I started, now that I think about this, because my alma mater down in Whittier was hiring a library director.

This is like 2006. So, two years after I'd started [at Berkeley]. And I was like, "I'm going to go for it." I told all my superiors and they were supporting me, and I didn't get it, which is fine. I've had 18, 19 years since that have been very pleasant, and rewarding. The rewards haven't stopped. Daily I get these great experiences with students and faculty and folks outside the UC [University of California] community who just make my life as a librarian wonderful.

[01:01:31](#) **Ann**

Thank you for sharing that.