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An Interview with Laralee Nelson

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

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Preface

Laralee Nelson and her four sisters were born and raised in Provo, Utah. She was raised in a Mormon household, her parents worked at Brigham Young University and she attended BYU. She was nearly thirty years old when she moved to Las Vegas with her husband. The move was the first real move away from her Utah home base. She fondly recalls summers at an archaeological dig in Israel while studying for her undergraduate degree. But these were nothing compared to relocating to Las Vegas.

Laralee's mother was a librarian at BYU and an obvious inspiration to her career choice. Once she arrived in Las Vegas, she applied for a cataloging position at UNLV. From 1982 to 2010, it was her first and only position. From that span of years, she witnessed monumental changes in the library. Changes in leadership, a move from the old Dickinson Library to the new Lied Library, and the impact of technology.

Laralee's anecdotes, especially one about the professor with the red wagon and another about her father clearing a rocky path on a family trip, reveal core success of a library built to serve the university community.

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project



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Laralee Laralee Nelson

Name of Interviewer:

CLAYTEE D. WHITE

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Laralee P. Nelson

Signature of Narrator

4/20/2010

Date

Claytee D. White

Signature of Interviewer

4/20/2010
Date

This is Claytee White. I'm with Laralee Nelson. And we are here in Special Collections.

Today is April 20th, 2010. And we are in Michael Frazier's office doing an interview.

So how are you today, Laralee?

Oh, pretty good.

Great.

Counting down the hours.

I know. So first -- and this is really off the track -- tell me what it's like right now that you've decided to take early retirement.

I do a lot of grinning. I'm going to miss the people, but it's just nice to be thinking that all of these things that I have wanted to do and that I haven't had the time or the energy that I will hopefully be able to get to do. And then I think about I've really got to discipline myself now because I'm not having to get up and go to work and having this schedule. So I've got to discipline myself to schedule myself. That's going to be interesting to see how long it takes me to do that.

Tell me about your early life. Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Provo, Utah. My parents both worked at Brigham Young University. My mother was a catalog librarian, as I am, at the Harold B. Lee Library at BYU. My father worked for the university press for most of my growing up years. And then he worked for the student newspaper, The Daily Universe, until he retired.

Any sisters and brothers?

I have four sisters. I'm next to the youngest. No brothers. So my father was surrounded by females all his life. He didn't seem to mind.

Where is the family now?

My oldest sister lives in West Valley, Utah. The next one is in Mesquite. They've retired to Mesquite, although they still keep their home in Orem. Sister number three lives in Farmington, New Mexico. And my youngest sister lives in Lehi, Utah.

Tell me about your schooling as a young girl and then college.

Okay. The elementary school I went to was Wasatch Elementary. It was just down the hill from where I lived. So we used to walk to school most of the time. Then we would walk back up through the neighborhood to home.

My junior high, which is what it was called -- it wasn't middle school; it was junior high -- was Farrer, called F-A-R-R-E-R. I can't remember what it is now. The building still exists, but it's no longer a junior high.

And then I went to Provo High School for my high school. It was a three-year high school, but they had what they called split shifts. Instead of the year-round, which a lot of the areas do, the seniors came early and left early. And then the sophomores and juniors came two hours later and left two hours later. So there was only one period in the day when everybody was in class. And they had three lunch blocks. It let people use the facilities, but still gave us our summers off. So it wasn't a bad arrangement, actually, because I know that there's always challenges with the year-round schools of trying to schedule vacations and family time and things like that.

So your mother inspired your career?

Yeah, I think so. She was a stay-at-home mom until my little sister and I were in elementary school. And then she worked part time. And she always tried to be home when we got home from school. When we got a little older, she went to work full time, worked on her degree and got her master's in library science the same year I graduated from high school. That was kind of exciting.

When I was a freshman, I used to -- the high school was west of Brigham Young University just down off the hill. And we lived east of the university. I would walk up to the university and wait for her because I got off school around 4:30. And I would wait for her and we would walk home together. And, you know, I would sit there and waste her time, which I hadn't realized I was doing until I did realize I was doing that. Then we would walk home together. So, yeah, it's kind of in the blood to, I guess, be involved in libraries.

Actually, as a child I never used the library because that's what our home was. Every single wall in the house that didn't have a window had books. My mother was a very big reader of books and buyer of books. We had lots of books in the home, mostly science fiction and fantasy, but some other things. So I didn't need a library; my home was a library.

Oh, that's great. That's wonderful.

Even in the hall there were shelves wide enough for paperbacks. So even the hall had bookshelves.

So you don't know any other way to live.

Yeah. In books.

What is your home like today?

I don't have nearly the books that my parents had. I actually don't do a lot of reading of books because the computer arrived. So that's what I do most of my -- I will occasionally get down and actually read a novel or something. But most of what I do is done online now. I'm actually not the reader of books that I used to be.

Am I correct guessing that you're from an LDS family?

I am. Many generations worth, actually.

Wow. Tell me about family night.

We weren't one of those families that succeeded at doing that very well. Other families have done much better at that. But from what I gather we weren't unusual in the fact that it was a really big challenge for children to want to do that because there was always other things you could be doing. You know, you'd watch TV or you could be doing your reading or you could be out with friends or whatever. We tended to give them sort of a hard time the times that they attempted it. So we didn't have regular family home evenings.

Oh, that's what it's called?

Family home evenings, yeah, abbreviated FHE usually. If you ever see it in the literature, that's what they call it. But we did have regular family prayers at night. We all would gather and have family prayers and stuff. At least the younger kids -- there was a five-year gap between my next oldest sister and me. So there was sort of a two-family kind of thing in terms of ages. But we went to church regularly together. And the meetinghouse was usually within walking distance. So it was usually a walk to church and a walk home. So that was fairly common. That was just part of my growing up experience.

Tell me about college.

I went to BYU. Strange surprise there.

I was going to ask if you had gone away.

Yes. I went to BYU in part because I never really thought about going anyplace else and part because, with my parents living there, it was like half-price. I wasn't paying for my own education

at that point. My parents had the funds to take care of it. I never even really thought about doing that. I took a lot of things for granted because I was at the point in time with my parents' financial positions that I didn't even think much about that. So I went there.

I got my undergraduate degree in archeology, actually. And then got my master of library science at BYU as well. They had a program there for a while. They don't now. They stopped it a few years after I graduated.

At one time did you think of doing something other than library science?

I took archeology because it was interesting. But I don't know that I ever really thought ahead far enough to what kind of employment opportunities would be there. I hadn't really considered, well, how am I going to work in this field? I said, you know, I don't know that I really want to do fieldwork. Then you'd go and you'd teach or do other sorts of things. At that point you had a full-time job at the university in cataloging. I said, well, you know, this is a good profession. So I got my degree, part-time, usually taking evening classes. It was a one-year program and I got it in about three. Took me about three years.

The example of my mother and the fact that I enjoyed working in the cataloging department and doing things with that it seemed like a good career choice.

Wonderful. Did your sisters feel the same way about school?

I only have one other sister that graduated from college. That was sister number three. She graduated in home economics. I can't remember if that was what it was called at the time. And she went off to Mexico to teach high school. So that's what she was doing.

My oldest sister was trained as a nurse, although she wasn't in that field for too long. She married and started having kids. She's been through several relationships now, but right now I think she actually works as a security guard. So that's sort of an interesting change of position.

Sister number two, she became a beautician and did hair. She actually did some very good work and she worked in that field for a while. Her husband made sufficient funds that it wasn't economically wise for her to be earning much money. So she did some work-in-kind kind of things and she worked at a shop that did upholstery and drapes and things like that and got fabric instead of money. They're the ones that are retired and have the home in Mesquite and then the home in Orem.

And then sister number three, she did get her bachelor's degree. She has been working on master's degree, but she has yet to finish it and I don't know that she ever will.

And then my youngest sister also got a beautician's degree, but has been mostly a stay-at-home mom, too, when she got married.

So how did you get to Las Vegas?

I married in 1975. One of my husband's good friends was down in Las Vegas doing work as a stockbroker. And so he had been trying to talk my husband -- his name is John -- into coming down and working with him. I met John while we were both -- while he was getting an anthropology degree, I was getting an archeology degree. But we met at BYU. So we were thinking after we both got our advanced degrees because he got his -- actually I ought to get it right. We both got archeology degrees. And then he went on and got an advanced degree in anthropology.

I see.

I haven't been divorced that long. I should remember that. I do remember his bachelor's degree -- his diploma is actually in the cornerstone of the Harold B. Lee Library.

Why? How did that happen?

When they dedicated the new building that was one of the things that got added to it. So it's supposed to open it up 25 years. Well, actually, no, that was his master's degree. They're supposed to end -- let's see. When are they supposed to open that up? I don't remember. But if we're still alive then, we've got to go get it so he can finally get his diploma.

That's great. That's great.

So he had friends that wanted him to come down here. I said, well, you know, let me just look around and see what's available. I looked and there was a library here. One of the associates of his friend -- his wife worked here. She was the dean's secretary, Dotty Edleman. And so we sort of had connections there because I was looking for library work. And she said, to talk to her.

We had come down for some reason. I think it was just for a visit. I said, let me see what the library's like. Myoung-Ja Lee Kwon, who was head of non-book at the time, actually gave me a tour. This was just shortly after they pretty much completed the rectangular building. But we couldn't go see it because this was right after the MGM fire where the fire codes and everything

got redone. They had to redo that building before they could open it. So the opening was delayed. And so, she walked me through the round building, the Dickinson Library. And she told me, well, this is the tunnel and there's the new building, but you can't go see it yet. So she was actually the first person I met at UNLV was Myoung-Ja because she had given me the tour.

And then I don't remember how I found out that there was a position available in cataloging. But I inquired after it. My interview consisted of a phone call. Billie Mae called me and talked to me over the phone. And a few days later they called me and offered me the job. Things have changed.

Yes.

But, yeah, that was a nice way to interview, actually.

Yes, it was.

And she did express at the time of the interview a concern, because I had spent most of my life in Utah, whether I would feel comfortable moving someplace like Las Vegas because they are quite different environments. And I said, I don't think I'll have a problem. I can't say for sure because I haven't done it. But she was a little concerned about that. But I'm still here, so I guess it worked out.

Yes. Did you have the job prior to the move?

Yeah.

How long did it take you to actually get here?

Basically they offered me the job and I said, that I should give two weeks' notice. That's all I gave. And so we came down here. I think it sort of sunk in because I remember bawling along the way because I said this is the first time I'm actually living away from my family and planning on living away from my family for who knows how long? That lasted for a few miles, but I got over it. But it was a big change.

Yes.

I had experiences living out of the country, but it was only for short periods of time. This was the first real serious "out of the place of my childhood" that I had ever done.

Tell me about living out of the country.

During my bachelor's degree in archeology, there was a joint project between Brigham Young

University, North Carolina Chapel Hill and University of Pennsylvania where we went to Israel to Be'er Sheba, which is one of the biblical terms. That was the southern boundary of Israel because you went from Dan to Be'er Sheba. So it's a biblical site. We were able to excavate there for a couple of months each summer. Did that in '74 [1974], got married in April of '75 [1975], and then went back that summer. That was sort of our honeymoon. That's where my husband, John, decided, yeah, you'd be a good wife. So we went back the second time for that.

And then had a little bit of experience the summer -- the first year I went to Israel, that same summer I had spent two months in Mexico on sort of a mini study abroad project for the university. I was there for a couple of months. Then I had the weekend and I went off to Israel. That was a busy summer. Then [we] went to Israel again the second year. And we had a few stops coming back, just little one-day stops in Holland or England and things like that.

Oh, that sounds interesting.

It was.

So tell me about your first impressions of Las Vegas.

I'm trying to remember if the first time we came -- John and I drove down together, but he wasn't going to be able to come down until later in the year. We drove down together. I can't remember if it was dark or not. But I remember one of my first memories is just coming over the hill from Utah and seeing the city spread out and all the lights because it had been so dark up till then. I don't remember if that was the first impression. But this was 28 years ago. It was a whole lot smaller than it is now. I remember the big streets. But I was not unaccustomed to that because Mormon settlements have big streets generally anyway.

I think I was somewhat excited. I didn't really know what to expect because it was really the first time I had planned on living anyplace else other than Utah. But it didn't seem to be any -- I don't remember having any strong feelings one way or the other, other than being impressed at the city when it was spread out, you know, how spread out it was and stuff because it's not really constrained by mountains and lakes and things like Provo. And the fact that, well, you do have mountains, but can you really call them mountains compared to where I lived, which was basically in the foothills? And you go up a street and there's the mountain. You know, you go up one block and there's the mountain.

So that was 1982?

This is 1982.

Where did you live when you first came?

We lived with John's friends, John and Pam. Was it Pam? I can't even remember. Meyers. I remember the last name and his first name. But they had a house down on Clydesdale, which is just south of Tropicana and off of Eastern, actually a little bit south of Hacienda where we lived. So it was fairly close to the university. We stayed in their spare room. We actually stayed there for nearly a year while John and John, because he was John too, were getting established and stuff. And then we moved to an apartment, which was north of campus called the Neopole Apartments. It's just on Twain off of Maryland. And we were there for about a year.

And then we moved to our first house, which was down on Count Wutzke, which is just south of the university. John's father had always given him advice that says mortgages are deductible, mileage is not. So we always tried to live close to at least a place where one or the other of us worked. And his first -- when he was working their office was just off -- well, they had one that was just off of Flamingo. But I don't remember if that was the first one. But it was fairly close to here, too. So we ended up being fairly close for most of this.

And then we moved over to Florence, which is again just south of Tropicana off of Eastern. So we've always stayed fairly close in range to the university.

Great. So tell me about your first position here and your first supervisor.

My first position is the same position. I've been a catalog librarian since I got here. Billie Mae Polson was my boss. She was good to work with. She was one that you could disagree with her, but you never felt like she felt threatened about it. And that was nice. You know, that's not the case with everybody. Sometimes people get defensive when you don't agree with them. But you never felt that.

In our department meetings we could disagree, but we weren't ever disagreeable or contentious. We could get some interesting discussions going. Our meetings were usually not run by an agenda, but basically we would go around the room and say, okay, what's going on? What concerns do you have? And then we'd discuss them. That was kind of nice.

She knew all sorts of things about all sorts of things. She had been here since the 50s

[1950s] I think or the 40s [1940s]. I'd still like to get her interviewed before she forgets everything because I don't know that she ever has been.

Is she still --

She's still alive. She lives in a retirement community. I talked to Kathy Rankin. They go to wine club together and stuff still. She's in contact with her more than I am. But it has been suggested -- I don't know how far up the chain or whatever -- that she should. She's one of the very old-timers for the university and for the city. Kathy says she's starting to not remember as well as she used to. But she would be a good one to track down because she could give you hours worth of stuff if you were willing to listen to them.

I'm willing to listen. That's great. Thank you so much for that. I'll get in touch with Kathy Rankin.

That was your only position.

It's been my only position. Now, the position has evolved over the years.

And tell me about that evolution.

When I first came I was hired as a catalog librarian. The job description was to do copy cataloging, which is basically you catalog books with copy that already exists. You don't have to create it yourself.

Where did the copy come from?

In those days -- I have to make sure I separate how we did it here from how I did it because I worked six years as a classified staff at BYU. And at BYU we would get what they called proof sheets, which are little flimsy cards with catalog copy on it. You would just get those. And if you had a book that matched one of those, you would go check the proof sheets. And you'd do it. And then you'd make your copies from that.

Here we worked with a home-grown system. The card catalog when I got here had basically been closed. We weren't producing any more cards. What we were doing was we were entering data into a home-grown system on machines that had no monitors. You had a printout. It was a hard copy printout. So you would enter data and you would see what you typed, but it would be printed out on paper. And then the computer response would be printed out on paper. You didn't have computers with monitors, or we didn't for doing this.

I can't even image.

Yeah. It's not the only thing. But what we had, we couldn't do that. We could access some other databases and they did have monitors. They were green monitors, green and lighter green for the colors. We would enter this data and then it would print it out. And what they would get was they would get some sort of a tape load and they would load the data. And then as we found things we would enter information into it. But what we produced was a microfiche catalog. It was only produced every six months. So you had this six-month gap, or potentially a six-month gap between when you got an item and before the patrons could find it because we would only produce this catalog every six months. Things have changed.

If someone would have come in and they wanted a book that you processed three weeks ago --

They might have to wait till the next fiche came out in order to be able to find it in the catalog.

What would happen to the book?

It would go out on the shelves. So you could browse the shelves and find things. But in terms of if you wanted to find out what was in the catalog, you wouldn't be able to find it. That was not an ideal circumstance. But this was one of the first attempts to actually use a computer to produce some sort of finding aide for the patrons. And things evolved. That wasn't the best way to go, but that's what we had at the time.

What was the next step?

We did have CLSI fairly early, which was a circulation system. And I wasn't directly involved with that. But that was our first automated system in the library in terms of patron access and patron services. It was Computer Library -- I don't remember what it stood for. But it was a circulation system. And basically you could check things in and out with it. That's pretty much all that it did.

We had a project at one point to take a lot of -- well, to take our shelf list, which is the cards that we kept that was sort of the master record. It was in call number order and it showed what we had. And then the cards downstairs would be arranged by author and subject and title and things. But the shelf list was arranged by call number. It told us all we had.

We had a project with a firm called -- well, the acronym is UTLAS, U-T-L-A-S. And I

can't remember what it stands for right now. We actually had several projects and I'm trying to keep track of the order in which it is. If you ever get Marilyn up here, her memory is very good. She'll be able to get it right when I don't get it right. But we've had various projects where we could send the information -- I think one of them was -- and I think the UTLAS one was we could send them our shelf list, or a copy of it, and they would key in the Library of Congress card number. And then they would send us electronic files of those records. And that was sort of the seedbed for electronic database.

And then we had another project with Amigos, which is an OCLC vendor now. It was another retrospective project where we could in-house key in the Library of Congress card number and then we would get records back. And that was another seedbed. And, of course, they all had their share of issues. But that was sort of the start of the online catalog. We've been through several of those catalogs.

I picked Marilyn's brains for some things, but I didn't pick her brains for these and I should have in terms of what came first, in terms of the order of these sorts of things.

But we were getting fledgling online catalogs from when they first started showing up, as far as integrated library systems. We didn't fully integrate really till the 80s in terms of having everything work together. We had CLSI, which was standalone system. And then we moved into -- did we have a DYNEX product? I think we may have for a time. Sometimes I can't remember whether we accepted them or if that was just one of the ones we reviewed. But we could do cataloging with. And then OCLC started coming out with ways to access their database.

Even from the day I started we had access to AARLIN, but as a search tool only. We didn't actually subscribe in terms of contributing copy. But we could search their database and use their records. So we had that. And then we got OCLC as a way to get records available.

Our systems evolved and we had one and then we added another and then we added another. And it was I think not till 1989 that we got the Innovative system. That's what we've had since then. The only reason I remember the year for that is because there's a lot of records in there that had that date, 1989. So it reminds me what we did.

But we've had systems where you did things in batches and it would only update overnight or whatever. So if you did something that day, you had to wait until the next day to find out if you

did things the way you wanted. For a while we were still producing microfiche because there wasn't a public option on some of these systems as a public catalog. So there's been a lot of changes.

I started my professional career in the day of cards. And that was one of my jobs as a classified staff at BYU was filing cards every morning. As a student I'd file the cards. And then when I became classified staff, we'd go out and check what the students filed and drop the cards and all that kind of stuff. And then we went to automated systems and automated databases and evolution of online systems and public systems and things. It's just evolved over the years.

Tell me about the supervision over the years after Billie Mae.

Billie Mae was my supervisor from the time I started until she retired I think in '89 or '90 just before we came into this building. I've got a list of people. That's what I picked her brains for.

Okay, good.

So Billie Mae, it was '98 or '99 that she left, just before we moved here. And so from '82 --

She worked here until --

Yes. She had worked here quite a few years before I started. And then she retired in '98 or '99. Like I said I think we moved here in '99 and she retired before we moved here. So, yes, a lot of years. So '82 -- so that's what? Seventeen years or so she was my boss.

And then after Billie Mae, the next head of cataloging was Brad Eden.

I don't remember Brad.

He had come out of a music background, but he had an MLS and he had a Ph.D. He was our head of cataloging for a while. I can't remember the years. Three or four years. I think he's director of something or other now. I don't really follow what he does.

At another college?

Yeah. He's moved on into other management directorship, assistant directorship things. I don't know exactly what he's doing now. But he was a fairly prolific public writer of articles even when he was here and he still does. So you'll probably find him in the literature here or there.

Okay. So he has published a lot.

Yeah, he's published a lot. That was one of the reasons I think that we hired him is because he had a good publishing background. The whole nature of the profession has been evolving. Like when

I was hired it was a phone interview and I got tenure with one article in a fairly obscure sort of publication. That's not the case now. So there's a lot more things that librarians have to do in order to be considered qualified for the job.

Right.

For better or worse. I have my own thoughts on that now and again.

So do you think librarians should have to get tenure?

I've been looking at the model that BYU uses. And I don't know precisely how it works. But they have an option where in certain areas of the library you're expected to get tenure, but in other areas you can opt to have what is called a continuing contract. I don't know how the workload and the expectations differ. But I suspect that one is required to publish and the other one you can do it or not, as you choose kind of thing. There are also differences. You're not going to be qualified for certain things if you're in the one category that you are in the others. There may be a lot of similarities, but I haven't really been able to see how much they differ.

But I'd like that kind of a concept because there's a lot of -- you know, perhaps for the public librarians, the expectation to publish is a reasonable one. In other areas of the library it may not make as much sense. But you don't want to really have -- it seems to work well there. But BYU's a private institution and they have certain different things. It's a church-run college. And so what would work there may not necessarily work in other places. But sometimes I get the impression that we do it because we're afraid of what might happen if we don't rather than because we feel that it's really important to the growth of the profession or the growth of the individual or the value of the individual.

I remember Christian Yae, who was head of collection development for a time, shortly before he left said, you know, if I had known when I was hired the amount of time getting tenure took away from my other professional duties, I might not have considered doing it because he says he felt personally himself that it made him a less effective employee to have to do that. And I know from some other people -- I don't talk to a lot of other people -- but just comments that I've heard and things that people do it because they have to do it, not necessarily because they think it's of value to them or of value to the profession. But it's just something that's expected that they have to do, you know, the hoops that they have to jump through for the privilege of working at a

university library.

I see. Okay.

You know, I don't know the answer to it. A lot of it would depend I think on the atmosphere and the environment of a place as to whether it's really that important. If it's tenure as the protection that it's supposed to provide in terms to be able to say what you think is important to be said and write what you think is important to write and collect what you think is important to collect and if you think tenure is the only way to get those protections, then it's definitely worth doing it. If there are other ways to get those protections for the profession, then I don't know that the tenure route is necessarily the best route to go.

If you were to ask the faculty and the students that we serve is tenure important to a librarian, they might say for me it's important that you do the job that you've been hired to do well. You know, I don't care one way or the other whether you publish. And so much of what librarians publish is just this is how we did this. And how much value does it provide to the profession? You know, I can't really say. Personally I don't know that what we get out of it is worth what we put into it.

Who is your next supervisor?

We have Brad. And then we went Judith Carter. So we're up into --

Yes. Recent times because Judith Carter just left -- 2009?

Yeah.

And now who is your supervisor?

Tamara Hanken. She's the head of technical services. And for the foreseeable future there will not be a head of cataloging because that's one position that's probably just not going to be filled. And depending on what happens over the course of however long, technical services may not have separate units in terms of having separate supervisors eventually because they're doing a lot of rearranging.

If you're cataloging for certain areas in the library, then you'll report to a person who covers that area, maybe? Is that the way they'll do it?

Well, what we're doing right now, we're not getting a lot of materials at least that fall into what I would have been doing, original cataloging, for which there is no copy in OCLC or other sources.

There's not that much of it just because you get a few things, but most everything -- especially with a limited budget, you know, there's a lot less coming in and we're getting a lot more electronic. There's just not that much material that requires original cataloging.

In order to maximize our talents and expand the way we can help things, a lot of the copy cataloging, which is usually done by classified staff, is also being taught to the people in acquisitions in MOR so that they can also do that as well. And because we have a shelf-ready procedure, most of the material that we order from Yankee, which is our primary vendor for books, comes with catalog copy already. So there's not that much that we actual have to do in-house in terms of cataloging materials. Things that come from other vendors like a lot of the CML materials, gifts that we get, that still has to be done in house.

Who are some of your friends over the years that you've worked with here in the library?

Most of them are people in cataloging that have been there almost as long as I have. Marilyn came two years or so after I did.

Okay. That's Marilyn Vent.

Marilyn Vent. Kathy Rankin came in the 90s I think. I don't remember how long she's been here. But we've all been here quite a few years now, 20 plus years. Lamont Downs, I helped train him when he first came here from the public libraries. And so I know him fairly well. But most of the people that I know and associated with have been in cataloging.

Good. So tell Lamont that I'm expecting to interview him. I know he's hesitating.

Well, I will try. We were thinking about this. I said, you know, I don't know whether he will do it or not. I think he should do it, but I don't know if he will do it.

Yes. Right. Tell him it's not going to --

I have no authority to tell him to do so, but I will suggest it to him.

Right. It's not going to hurt.

No, it's not painful.

Tell me stories, library stories over the years, fun things that you talk about when you're telling your friends about the library.

Oh, gee. Billie Mae used to tell about the time she found a rattlesnake in her office. This was when the round building was one floor. Her office was down there and I guess there was a

rattlesnake in her office one morning. I don't know much more about that. So some of those stories are fun in the fact that Maryland Parkway ended here and it was dirt roads past there and things like that.

In truth, none of us really do a lot of socializing outside of the library in cataloging. I know others in the library like to go out together. But most of us, we have a separate social life outside of the library. Kathy and Marilyn and Pam, when she was here, they used to always eat lunch together. I was usually off doing something on the computer. So I didn't go to lunch with them too much. So I don't know what kinds of things that they discussed other than I think they tried very hard not to make it work related.

Which deans do you remember?

I don't really remember the dean that was here when I started. It was Hal Erickson I think or Jack Dettre. Mary Dale Deacon was the one that was here for the interview process. So she's the first one that I really remember.

Okay, good.

And then we had -- Myoung-ja [Kwon] was associate dean for a number of times, but she also served as interim dean. And we think through some of this, through some period of this time, but we don't remember exactly when, that Billie Mae may have served as interim as a time. I know she did for tech services at least once.

Let's see. Who came after Mary Dale? Where is he? I didn't even write that one down. I'm trying to remember. But we had a dean that was sort of -- we'll hear stories about him, whichever one he was, that Special Collections inherited until he got his retirement.

Yes. I can't remember his name. It will come to us.

Yes. But that one. And then Dr. Marks and Patty Iannuzzi.

So who is your favorite dean?

I knew Mary Dale best probably, but it's in large part because it was such a smaller organization. I really have very little interaction with the deans now. So I don't have a lot of strong feelings one way or the other. Mostly a good dean is one that lets you do your job and doesn't try to micromanage. My recollection of Mary Dale was that she wasn't much of a micro manager. So that worked very well. Patty isn't much of a micro manager. At least in terms of how much

trickles down to us, I'm not really aware of anything like that. So those are the kind.

I don't mind getting visions for what they'd like us to do, but really the implementation of things and if you can justify why it's a good thing and not just because it's the latest buzz word, give us good reasons why this is a good thing to do, then we usually don't have much problem with finding ways to accomplish it. But this I want it done this way because I want to write a paper about how you get from here to there, that's not necessarily a good reason to make a change just because you want to become well known as the person who made this change happen.

The move from Dickinson to this library we're in right now, Lied, how did it impact you and how did it impact morale?

We spent a lot of time getting this place built. Myoung-ja was one of the prime movers of it. And we were all involved -- actually this is another good thing you can jot down if you ever get Lamont up here because he actually wrote a program for the construction of this building that helped identify where everything was and where everything needed to go. It was sort of a database. I think it was built on an access database, but he helped design it. So if we needed to pull out, say, okay, how many data drops are there, he could do a search and he can find out that there were this many data drops and where they were and everything. He was actually instrumental in helping things get organized in this place.

Good.

The planning was fun. Shelley Heaton had a lot to do with the planning of it. I do remember making one suggestion during the planning. Based on the Dickinson Library at least in the rectangular building, when you would come in, you could see the elevators, but you could never find stairs. They were basically emergency stairs only. And from BYU to get to the elevators you had to walk past the stairs. So you could see them. And I remember making the suggestion -- I don't know if I was the only one, but I'll sort of take credit for it -- to make stairs visible so people can see them and can use them and that they're not just the emergency things. So I know Shelley made the comment and said that's a good idea. And we do have stairs where you can see them in this building. So maybe there was some influence there.

We were the second group to move over, cataloging was. Special Collections I think was -- were they last or first? But anyway, we were the second group I think. So we were over in

this building basically by ourselves. Things as we did them got put on the shelves here. But they figured this was a good unit to move over first. So we came over here. We were in this great big building with nobody in it, all sorts of empty. But it was kind of fun. You could go out there and sort of holler and hear your echo.

I was part of the committee -- I don't even remember what we were called -- to help people get familiar with the place. We had meetings and we had little challenges that you had to go find these places or answer these questions or things like that just to get people a little bit familiar with it.

I love it.

There are still a few places that if I have to go to and I haven't been to it before I've got to figure out, okay, where is this? I knew it for that, but then I haven't had reason to go there much since. So trying to remember where things are anymore can be a challenge sometimes.

Do you think the move caused morale to decrease?

I think there were some concerns just based on the layout of the building because it seemed like we went from a very cramped space -- the place was packed and then some -- to a very large space, but it didn't seem like that we were using the space well because we had all this area that you couldn't put anything into, you know, floor to ceiling this great big atrium. And so we had some concerns about [it]. We've got this huge new building, but how much more actual real space are we going to have and how long will it last us and things like that. There were some I guess commitments that we made to get the funding from the family in the fact that this building was going to be used for 50 years. Something to that effect. And how are we going to store it over -- even with automated storage and retrieval, how are we going to handle everything that we might be getting? And this was in the days when electronic resources weren't really something that you had to deal with. So you were talking about physical items. Was there going to be room to house everything that this university was going to need in a library for 50 years even with that storage? So that was a concern.

There were concerns about noise and stuff, noise from the first floor going all up and down the floors and everything because of this great big open space.

And I think most of those ended up being not the problems that we thought they were

going to be. There is still a space issue. With electronic, that's mitigated it some. But we still have less space in the retrieval system than we anticipated having at this point in time. A lot of Special Collections' stuff went in there. I think it was Dean Marks [who] wanted to put even circulating things in there. So some of that's in there. That policy got changed. It didn't last too long. But there are probably still some materials in there partly I think because I don't know if they just didn't want to weed or didn't want to lose the numbers or what their justification was for doing that. But that became part of an issue.

The automated storage is not a bad concept, but you've got to be very careful that you check things in and check things out because if you miss doing that, especially if you miss checking something in, you'll never find it again because it sort of slots it into a bin. And if you forget, one, the fact that it's back in there and you just stick it in the bin, it can't find it. It doesn't know where it is. There's no tagging, no identification to ever find that again unless you actually inventory everything in LASR. And that's not likely to happen in our lifetimes, not with staffing the way it is.

That's true because it is dwindling.

Yes. And you've got a few more people to add to your list I see.

That's right. I think it's seven of you getting ready to leave this time.

Yeah. And who knows if there aren't going to be more?

That's right. There might be more.

And rumors that there will be more than that.

Wow.

Which makes it hard on the institution, too, not just a challenge for you.

That's right because it's probably happening all over, not just here in the library.

It crunched the university before and it crunches it even worse now because the whole point of it is to save money, which means you haven't replaced those positions.

That's right.

And the second year of it is even worse than the first. You can sort of struggle along for a year on short staff, but to try and do it on shorter staff for another year or however long, you're just going to have challenges.

And who knows however long?

Tell me about organizations that you belonged to in the library on campus dealing with libraries.

For a lot of years I was a member of Nevada Library Association. In fact, I was the one that set up the list serve for the Nevada Library Association. I'm busy trying to pass it on to somebody else before I leave. I haven't been a member of NLA for a number of years, but I still maintain the list. So I said I'm not going to be here; you're going to have to do something about this.

I belong to MPLA, which is the Mountain Plains Library Association for a number of years. I was never really interested in joining ALA.

Why not?

I didn't really feel like it addressed my concerns or that it had much bearing on the viewpoints that I held in regards to librarian and how involved librarians should be in political matters and the directions that it felt that the members should go as opposed to my own thoughts on subjects and things like that.

Do you want to tell me what your thoughts are?

It's fairly common in academia -- educators and librarians and stuff -- that they tend towards the liberal side of the spectrum. And I'm fairly conservative. Then when they have issues that I feel like are not really specific to libraries that drift over into other political arenas, for better or for worse, I don't necessarily feel like that that's where we should be spending our money and our time and our energies. You want to avoid censorship and you want to avoid things that are detrimental to libraries and that you should be able to represent all viewpoints there, but you shouldn't necessarily take a political stand in terms of other things. Plus I didn't really feel like I ever wanted to spend the money to go to a convention. Why should I be a member if I wasn't going to take advantage of that? Spend that money for a magazine that I get once a month.

Did you ever work directly with students at all?

No, not really. I never served on the public desk at least in terms of working at the library. I've had interactions with the students that have worked in cataloging or in BMS over the years, but I've never supervised them directly or worked with them directly.

How do you see the significance of this library to this campus?

Oh, I'm the librarian. I figure it to be very significant. And in terms of when I go out and see the usage, I think it's something that is very much beneficial to the institution. Again, like so much of -- well, the world in general has evolved over the years. It's not a place just to store materials that you have to come to because it's the only place you can get it. But it's a collaborative place. And I see a lot of students working together and working on projects together and working on homework together and discussing issues together. And I think that's a very good thing. I think that is a good way for the institution and the library to evolve.

I still think it needs to be a place where you can find books, where you can find people that can answer your questions, where you can get a better answer than just going off to Google it and trying to plow through everything or calling KGB or whatever that ad is to try to get an appropriate answer. The Internet is good for finding snippets of information. If you really want in-depth stuff, I don't know that it's necessarily the best source. As a starting place, it's good. But we're still not yet to the point where I'd feel like people would really want to sit down and research a whole subject or topic or read books just online. At least I'm not to that stage yet.

How do you feel about the growth of the library from 1982 to today?

Well, it's quite a bit different. Even in '82, I think we had definitely outgrown the round building. That building was designed originally -- it was one floor and then they added two floors afterwards. But it was designed originally for the stacks to go out like spokes, which makes sense in a round building.

That's right.

But that didn't last very long because there wasn't room. You ended up putting the stacks together very narrowly, top and bottom shelves full, everything cram packed. The compact storage down on the first floor, which had originally been designed for -- I don't know if it was government publications or just for non-circulating things or whatever, but ended up needing to be for everything.

We had one professor and I do not know who he was. But he had a little red wagon because anything that hadn't circulated for X amount of time would end up going down into the compact storage on the first floor and he objected to that. So he would go down and grab just loads of books and check them out. Turn around and check them back in so that they would go

back up on the stacks because he didn't like having to deal with compact storage or he didn't think that the materials should be down there for that reason. So he made sure that they circulated. He'd check them out and then check them back in. And they would go back up on the regular stacks rather than down in compact shelving.

And you don't remember who that was?

No.

That's a great story.

Nancy might. Marilyn might. But I don't remember the name.

Well, good.

But there are others that would probably remember who it was. This is one of the stories that I heard. I didn't interact with him again directly. So I don't remember the name. But that's one of those fun stories.

I love those stories.

The professor with the red wagon.

Okay. Tell me about the growth of the university since 1982.

I'm mostly aware of that just based on how the layout of the university has changed. I've been involved in some university committees and things like that. But my interaction with the university community mostly consisted of that, going to committee meetings or being involved in committees when I was doing that on a more regular basis.

But just to see all of the construction going up and all of the remodeling going up, I don't think there's a building on this campus that was the way it was, even the buildings that were here when I was here that are like that anymore. Everything has been torn down, built new, or remodeled significantly. There's not an untouched building on this campus except maybe EPA. But that's not really under the university's auspices. But I think everything else has had something major done to it since I started.

Tell me about the biggest change or the most important change or the most memorable change you can remember about the libraries. Either way you want to look at it.

The first thing that comes to mind -- and, again, it's because I'm approaching it from a technical services background -- is the fact when we actually were able to have real-time integrated library

system where even though it was still -- it wasn't even Windows based at the time if I recall, but it was basically a way for a patron to see what we had, to know where it was, to be able to check it out, check it back in, and all of this tied together. So anybody in the system would be able to say, okay, I can find this book or, okay, I can't get to it because somebody else has it. For a patron to be able to -- and this was even before they could look at their own stuff, but be able to get notifications and have all of this stuff all accessible in one way and that everything talked to each other and that people could real-time pretty much. There would be a record for what they wanted probably even before the book got down to them instead of this -- especially coming from this microfiche thing where there may have been six months between when we did it and when they saw it. So they had something real-time.

Right.

It also made a big difference in the era of the cards also in this era of microfiche. The expectation of a patron would be, okay, I can find something by the title, I can find something by a subject, and I can find something by an author. And those were their expectations. And now they want keyword access and now they want table of contents access and all this stuff. The more you can do, the more is expected that you will do. And so that has evolved what we've been able to provide and what we've been expected to do and what we can do. As the technology has advanced, the ability to provide access to our patrons and information to our patrons has also increased. You know, you go outside the library and you have Google and things like that. But that kind of concept has been around for a long time that you want to be able to access the information in a record anyplace information is available.

Now we add table of contents information. Used to be the only place you could get it was if somebody bothered to add that table of contents note to a bibliographic record. But now once a month we load thousands of table of contents information to enhance the records that we've already got. That's a service we get through -- Blackwell provides it, but Innovative is the one that we get it through. We pay for that. But it is another way of doing it.

And that's part of your job to work with that?

Yeah. I'm notified once a month and I load that information. I can pretend that it's difficult, but it isn't really.

It sounds like it anyway.

And the electronic materials and the full-text articles and all that kind of stuff. From my perspective, the technology has allowed us to do a whole lot more than we ever dreamed we would be able to do and hopefully made it a whole lot better for the patrons. We provide a whole lot more information, but are they getting better value as well, or are they just getting more stuff? Is it stuff that's useful to them or not? And do they take advantage of what we can give them if they knew that we could give them that?

The more they learn are they taking advantage of it?

Yeah. You'll always have a mixed bag. The generations coming up now, they're used to the instant answer and the quick answer and the Google answer or the KGB-type answer. And that may be all that they're interested in. I think part of our responsibility as librarians is to educate them that there's a lot more out there that they would find of value and that they would enjoy knowing about if they were to be shown how to find it and be willing to use it when they did find it.

What contributions have you made that you're the proudest of?

One of the things that I do that's sort of hard to quantify is because it's -- you would only notice it if it wasn't done. It's something that you only become aware of if it isn't happening. And that's database maintenance, quality control, authority control. When people go in and search for something, the philosophy that we have as catalogers is to be able for people to find everything that they're searching for in one place. So if they search for dogs, all things about dogs will come up where they're looking for it. And if it's not there that there will be ways to direct them to find things under canines or under Doberman pinschers or whatever. But if that information isn't there, you will not realize that you're missing it. And that's why it's sort of hard to quantify because you're not aware that it's lacking because you don't know that it is lacking.

That's right.

And you take it for granted when it is there that it's there and that it's valuable and that it leads you into directions that you want to find out. But if it's not there, you don't know that you're missing it, if that makes sense.

Yes. Okay.

I like to tell a story about my dad. He was a person that would do a lot of things for others without any expectation of acknowledgement or reward. The family was big on deer hunting. And he had brothers and the cousins would all go up deer hunting. But he would usually go up the week before to where we typically would set up our camp up Spanish Fork Canyon. At least one year I went up with him. And what he would do is drive up this dirt road in the car. He would be doing it like five miles or ten miles an hour. But he would have his car door open. And any large stones that were on this dirt road, he would pick up and he would toss to the side. And I did that one year, too, on the other side of the road. But mine was off the cliff, so I didn't toss so far. But he would do that. And nobody knew coming up after him that he had made their way easier. I knew it and I knew that it was a valuable service. But they would have only known that he hadn't done it when they busted their oil pan.

Right.

So I sort of equate that kind of service with the kind of thing that I'm doing. People don't know you're doing it, but there's value there because you did.

Yes.

It's sort of one of those invisible benefits of what I do.

I love that story. Thank you so much.

Dead air space.

There are a couple of other things. What do you see as the future of UNLV with the budget cuts we're going through now?

Oh, I think UNLV will survive. I don't know what we will be in five years because I haven't -- well, presently we talk about it at the town hall meeting whenever that is, you know, what units are going to be cut and what things are going to be scaled back. They paint a scenario that, well, we'll never recover from some of these things if we have to do them. And never is rarely the case. But how long will it take you to recover and will we learn to be better at money management and we will be able to do things differently?

It's sort of unfortunate -- but I don't know that you could ever resolve it -- that states in general -- you know, some states can do it, and I don't know quite how they can do it. But states in general, the taxpayers get on states and universities and other places that are funded from public

sources, get on their case if they've got a surplus. They say, okay, give it back to us, which means that when you do have tight times that you don't really have any resources to solve the problem.

I grew up in an environment -- it's something that the LDS Church focuses on very strongly -- of self-reliance and taking care of yourself and having sufficient resources to do so if something happens. If for some reason I was out of work without any income and didn't have an income to rely on, do I have enough in savings to take care of me for a few of months? If I'm in a situation where I have to flee my house, do I have something to take with me that I can take care of myself for three days or whatever? I've grown up in that sort of culture.

And unfortunately, at least with government institutions, the citizenry generally doesn't appreciate you having enough money to save, which puts you in really tight binds in situations like this, which will always happen. There will never be a time when you don't have this kind of stuff happen. So you end up getting stuck. You get squeezed because you don't have the authority to have a surplus to take care of critical issues when they come up.

What change would you make about the library or about the campus if you could?

I'm trying to think. Probably I'm a little resistant to change simply because I've been doing things a long time. But the reality is technical services, at least when it first started, was actually on the cutting edge of things. We were the first one to get computers. And I'll get back to that. But here's another story that just came to mind. In fact, when we were in the old building, we had a choice at one point of getting computers at our desks with Internet -- it was basically the phone and the modem -- or getting new phones similar to what we have now. Tech services opted for the computers. The rest of the library opted for the phones. And it took years before we got decent phones after that. But we had been in automated systems and changing automated systems and growing automated systems long before the rest of the library was ever involved in it.

But in terms of what I would change now? I don't know how much it occurs in the library, but I know it happens on campus. It's part of the whole American culture and the whole global culture now is just the fact that we are so focused on what's wrong and that we need to remember there's a whole lot that's still right. If we would talk about that a little more often, we would probably remember it. And we would accomplish a lot more I think if we thought about what's right as opposed to what's wrong just because when you gripe and complain about what's wrong,

you rarely actually do anything about it. You just gripe about it. You say, well, this is good, but how can we make other things good? It's a more productive attitude and a more productive mind-set. So if we'd just talk less bad and talk more good, I think we would -- if we weren't able to accomplish a whole lot more, we would still have a lot better attitude about everything.

Yes. What do you like best and at least about Las Vegas?

The summers.

Oh, you like that best?

No. I like that least I think having spent two summers in Israel where the only air-conditioning was the tent flaps were open and the wind was blowing. And it gets as hot there as it does here. Most of our work at the dig site was done -- like we'd get up at four in the morning when it was just starting to get light. We'd have a light breakfast. And then we would go up and work for a few hours. We were done by two in the afternoon, so we could sit there and die in the heat in the tent rather than up on the dig. There were a lot of years after that that I didn't mind it. I got used to it. But now with a vehicle, from an air-conditioned house to an air-conditioned car to an air-conditioned office, being out in the heat I just start going, you know.

What I like best? Even though I don't take advantage of too much of it, I just like the fact that there is so much that is available, you know, 24-hour grocery stores and buffets. Some friends and I went last night to Alex Boye. He was doing a revue show at South Point. He was a member of a boy band in England. He sings with Mormon Tabernacle Choir now. He says I always wanted to do Las Vegas. But this was the benefit concert for the Desert Chorale.

Oh, that's great.

And so we went down to that and that was kind of fun. And we ate at the buffet there. I says, you know, this is the sort of stuff that -- some things you can find elsewhere, but just all in one place you can't really find too many other places. Even though that's the first time I've been to a buffet probably in years and the first show I've been to in years, just the fact that they're available and that I can do it.

That's right.

I shock people because the car that I own we bought in 2001 in December after the September 11th terrorist attacks because they had the zero-percent financing and stuff. And that

car has just barely turned over to 28,000 miles because everything I need is -- I drive to work. I drive home. All my shopping is close to hand and everything. So why do I need to go further?

So your carbon footprint is really light.

Yeah. I'm better off in that than probably a lot of people that drive hybrids.

That's right. You are.

We lived close and there's shopping close, so I just don't do a lot of driving.

What do you plan to do with all of this wonderful retirement that you're getting ready to embark upon?

At the end of this month I'm going up to two genealogy conferences because they're back to back up in Salt Lake City. I'm involved with FamilySearch Research Wiki. FamilySearch is the LDS package of genealogy things. In fact, I came up here just from a meeting that we have once a week with them. I've got genealogy of my own that I want to do. I've got family histories to write. I've got oral histories I want to maybe do or at least transcribe if other people are willing to do them. Let's see. There's other things on that list. Most all of them are involved with family history, genealogy sorts of things.

Wonderful.

Oh, I hope to serve a church service mission for my church, which allows me to stay at home. And I would basically answer questions people have about the FamilySearch Wiki or the new FamilySearch product or FamilySearch indexing that they do or any of those things. It's basically I spend two to four hours a day at home answering questions from my computer.

Oh, that's interesting. And I think that's wonderful.

Over the course of my lifetime those are the kinds of skills I've developed. So I said that's a good way to use them.

Great. Before I ask my last question, are there any other stories that you've thought about or any other memories that you want to recount?

I will remember them after I finish.

Of course.

Of course. But, no, I can't think of anything else right now.

So what is your favorite book?

Oh, goodness. Actually, the one I read most often is the *Book of Mormon*.

Wonderful.

Yeah. Most of my nonreligious reading these days is rereading things that I really enjoyed as a child or as a young adult. I haven't read a lot of new things. Some of my old favorite authors I will read and reread. When my parents died those are the things that I got from their book collection. Things that I wanted most are my childhood favorites or my young adult favorites.

That's wonderful. I thank you so much. And thank you for agreeing to do this.

Yeah. I figured if I don't agree to do it myself, I can't really expect others to do it if I ask them later.

That's right. Yes.

Or ask them to ask their kids later or something.

Yes. Thank you so much.

You're welcome.