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Arlen Bensen: Good morning. It's the morning of October 15 [2009], and I'm Arlen Bensen, a graduate assistant in the USF School of Library and Information Science. And I'm very fortunate to be here this morning, and excited to be here, with Ms. Bernadette Storck. We are in the Henrietta M. Smith Library room, CIS 2035, in the School of Library and Information Science offices. And before we get started, too, I want to express my grateful acknowledgement to Professor Derrie Smith at the library school, whose inspiration led to us being here this morning—Derrie Perez, excuse me. Thank you. It's embarrassing, especially when you're trying to thank somebody, but the thanking is the key factor involved there.

So, thank you for being here this morning, Ms. Storck.

Bernadette Storck: Okay. We can—let's talk about my history.

AB: Okay. Yes. That's exactly—

BS: Where did I come from? Where did I come from?

AB: Where—yes. We're going to start with your family and your history, and I'm looking forward to hearing that.

BS: Now, some of the things that I will tell you are just based on old photographs of grandparents, who were alive during my young years. My grandfather died in 1955, I think it was. Let's see, I had a copy—

AB: You have that—

BS: —to show you. (shuffles papers) Blah, blah, blah.

Anyway, my grandparents lived in West Tampa. My grandfather was a cigarmaker and a fisherman. My grandmother was a homemaker. My family was bilingual. Everybody in the family spoke both Spanish and English when I was a child, all my aunts and uncles and most of my cousins. So, therefore, we grew up in this culture of knowing that our family was more than just a bunch of Florida crackers growing up together.

I am—I was one of twenty-seven first cousins. My mother was one of seven—six girls, one boy—and they all grew up in West Tampa. They went to school in West Tampa. They started their lives in West Tampa. And then they went on into the great wide world of other areas.

But, as a family, the fun things I remember are sitting on my grandmother's front porch in a big rocking chair and watching the boys play ball out in the street. And the neighbors just had to get out of the way, 'cause we were a tribe! I mean, we were all there, and if somebody wanted to come out in the street, they'd better be prepared to either duck or play ball.

But life is a very, very strange thing, you know. You look back at your heritage—and what I'm looking at right now are pictures of my mother and some of her sisters. And this is my mother. Obviously, you can't tell from old black-and-white or sepia-tone photos, but that's what there was at that time. My mother had red hair and freckles. And, though her father was Spanish, my mother's Irish and French heritage seemed to show more at that time.

AB: They look beautiful, very (inaudible).

BS: Yeah. Isn't that gorgeous? My mother was married to a fellow named Charlie, alias Carlos Rosas. They were sweethearts, and they weren't married very long before Charlie died. When they got married, they knew his health was failing.

AB: Oh.

BS: So, it was a short while later when my mother, as a young widow, went to St. Petersburg to stay with some friends of the family, and she worked over there. They would go to Williams Park on Sunday, to the Sunday afternoon concerts. And, lo and behold, there was a baritone who sang with this band in Williams Park. He had come down from Michigan, where he sang with the Detroit Opera Company, among other things. He had come down as a Gray Line Tour conductor, bringing people to Florida, and got a job, sang in Williams Park, met my mother, and that was the beginning of the end.

AB: (laughs)

BS: He stayed. He never went back. (both laugh)

My father had been an adopted child, and a lonely child. He only had one cousin that he knew of. And he always resolved, when he married and had family, he would not have one child. Well, he held to his word: there were five of us. I'm the oldest. And we are all, thank God, still surviving, all five of us. But many of my aunts and uncles and cousins are gone, now.

My grandparents were wonderful to be with us, and spend as much time with us, as they could. And, of course, they looked after us when we were children and our parents had to go to work. So, you know, you grow up in these multigenerational households. Um—

AB: Let me ask, before we get too far away from West Tampa, did your family move to St. Pete at that time, or your mom just worked there or commuted there?

BS: My mother lived in St. Petersburg. When she was widowed, she moved over there and lived with some old friends of the family.

AB: Okay.

BS: And she was living and working in St. Pete, and this young family would go down to the concerts in the park. One of the men in that family became my godfather and, subsequently, was a teacher at the University of Chicago.

AB: Oh, that's wonderful.

BS: So, we had this—you know, everybody kind of went off in many directions, but the roots were still there.

AB: Yeah. I had wanted to ask if, when you were in West Tampa, or when they were in West Tampa, if the—most of the family, at that time, was within walking distance of each other. I mean, did they all live close by?

BS: Yes. All my aunts and uncles lived close by.

AB: Oh, that's wonderful.

BS: You know. Of course, people had cars in those days. (laughs) It's not that long ago, in the early thirties [1930s]. But—

AB: Right.

BS: But, yeah, they lived close by, and Mother's Day and Christmas and Thanksgiving, we all gathered, three generations, at my grandmother's house. And that's where these big ball games took place, out in the streets, with my cousins commandeering the streets.

But this is my mother's only brother, Johnny. He was in the United States Navy. And he had these two girls, Sylvia and Suzie. And then, later on, he remarried and he had two more daughters. So, that's four cousins just in that one strain. This is my Aunt Rose. She is still living. She is ninety-two years old, and she lives here at University Village. She had five children and all of them, bless them, are still living. And they are all in Tampa, every one of them, still in Tampa with their families.

My father, as I said, was a Grey Line Tour conductor when he came to Florida. My father had a gorgeous voice. He was a good baritone, and he also had a good speaking voice, a very disciplined voice. He conducted the tours for Grey Line, and I have pictures of him in front of the bus with all of his passengers. One of his passengers was a lady named Mrs. Grismer. There is a book that a lot of us old librarians in Tampa refer to called

Tampa, and it's written by Mr. Grismer.¹ Mrs. Grismer really enjoyed my father's tours, and she took several of them and wrote her memoirs, including discussion of this fine young man who gave beautiful tours about Florida.

AB: (laughs)

BS: And she crocheted a leash for me. It is red and green, Christmas colors. She crocheted that leash for me, so when my parents took me out for a walk I wouldn't wander too far. I still have it.

AB: (laughs)

BS: I still have it, many generations later.

But Daddy's favorite places to go on the Grey Line Tours were Bok Tower and Lake Wales and the gardens: Cypress Gardens, of course, came along, and there were beautiful places to see all over Florida. And then, after a while, Daddy came back to work strictly in Tampa, as he was raising us. My father was a salesman, and he sold for Tampa Radio Sales for many years. One of the things he also did was decorate store windows at Christmas time. All the downtown merchants would hire Daddy to decorate their store windows. So, that's how he earned extra money for Christmas for his five children.

But I'm a Florida cracker, obviously: born and raised, you know. Here we are, all of us together. There's my first horse ride and my last horse ride, a pony picture. Every kid in Tampa must've had their pictures taken on that pony at some time or another.

AB: (laughs) That's a pretty handsome looking pony, too.

BS: He was pretty, wasn't he?

AB: Yeah.

¹*Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida*, written by Karl H. Grismer and published in 1950.

BS: And then, as you can see, brothers and sisters. My oldest brother's name is Lewis, and he went to Jesuit High School in Tampa. He worked for Maas Brothers as a stock boy when he was sixteen and retired many years later, having always been in the retail business. He, at one time, was the Arrow shirt man. He was also the model for all the wedding shows that Maas Brothers put on. They had a tuxedo and everything tailored for him, and he would be the groom. It didn't matter if he was eighteen and the bride might be thirty, but he was always the groom.

AB: (laughs) Now, for listeners who might not know, Maas Brothers was sort of a high-end retail.

BS: Oh, the major department store in downtown Tampa.

AB: Yes, exactly.

BS: Subsequently bought out; it became Jordan Marsh and then it became Burdines, which it is now. It was absorbed by Burdines.

AB: But it was a local institution.

BS: Right. That's right. Yep.

And we all grew up—you know, in those days, you could walk to the park and walk home and feel safe. And you could play tennis in the park in the afternoon, and nobody felt threatened or anything. So, there was always pictures of all of us kids out playing, running around, doing all kinds of things.

As I said earlier, my parents both loved music, my dad particularly. This is my dad in his Coast Guard uniform. When the Harbor Patrol started up in Tampa at World War II, Daddy and my Uncle Fred volunteered. And then, the Harbor Patrol was absorbed by the Coast Guard, and they were disciplined and trained as officers. My father taught firefighting. He went to Fort McHenry in Maryland, where the firefighting school was held, and he taught firefighting for the United States Coast Guard for a while. He also retained his love of singing and music, and I have pictures of the Sacred Heart choir with Daddy and Mother both in it, and subsequently all three of us. We all sang in the Sacred Heart choir for quite a while, and that was fun.

AB: Was your mom—your mom stayed home from working, then, after she started the family, or she continued to work?

BS: No. She stayed home for the first few years, and then, when we were about middle school age, she went to work. But she went to work right by our school, so she could keep tabs on us. (both laugh) And then, we could all go home in the evening.

This is—these are old photos of Mother and Dad. They were married fifty-two years. She died in April; she died the week of the Florida Library Association convention, one of the hardest conventions I ever had to attend. And I was chairing it for—you know, the planning and everything. So, I was there. I went from—right after her funeral, after the next day, to work on that convention. And then, my dad died in December. He just lived a few more months. I think he missed her so much he didn't really have much will to live.

AB: Oh.

BS: But that's the way life is.

AB: After fifty-two years, they'd bonded quite well.

BS: Yeah. That's right.

I graduated from Sacred Heart Academy.

AB: Now, were you—you mentioned you had an older brother. Now, out of the five of you—

BS: No, no. No, I was the oldest of the five.

AB: You were the oldest, okay. That's right.

BS: Lew was the next one. He was the one who went to work for Maas Brothers. John was number three. John graduated from Hillsborough High School and went into the

United States Army. He was in various posts in the United States Army, though he never went overseas.

AB: Right.

BS: And then, the next one is Margaret, my sister. She left school in the tenth grade, and she was an elevator operator at Maas Brothers when they still used to use elevator operators, and subsequently married a fellow from MacDill [Air Force Base]. She lives in Mississippi and they have several children, and they're still alive and kicking.

AB: Great.

BS: The youngest of my brothers was Charles. Charlie graduated from Hillsborough High School and worked as a stock boy for a while, and then he went into the Tampa Police Department as soon as he was old enough to carry a gun. He was a police officer for several years, decided—they had two children. [He] decided that, maybe he should do something else instead of being law enforcement for a while. He became a salesman for a while and he said, “Oh, the heck with it.” He was born to be in law enforcement. So, he went to work for the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Department, and he retired from the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Department and now lives in Alabama, where he can hunt and fish. We always kid him and say, you know, “You know how to use a gun, but I don’t think you ever shot a thing in your life,” ’cause I don’t think he’s the world’s greatest hunter. But he is enjoying his retirement.

AB: (laughs) Good. That’s great.

BS: And I graduated in 1953 and went to work for Tampa Public Library two weeks after graduation. I worked in the basement of the old Carnegie building. It was my job to type, on stencil masters, library cards for patrons.

AB: Now, while we’ve just made the transition to libraries, we should probably back up a little bit, maybe, and talk about your first impressions that you remember of libraries, your first awareness of libraries.

BS: Okay. That’s easy enough. When I was a little girl, my mother was an avid reader. And when we lived—for one year, we lived in West Tampa. This was during the war. We lived in West Tampa for a year, and the West Tampa Library was there, the old

Carnegie library on Main Street in West Tampa. My mother and her family had gone there as kids. That library was built in 1913.

AB: That's great.

BS: And so, we would walk over there, Mom and I, particularly, and then as the other children grew old enough to be interested, some of them would go, too. And I remember climbing those stairs up to that typical and traditional-looking Carnegie building. You expect to see Fred [Astaire] and Ginger [Rogers] come dancing down, you know. They're so—charismatic-type stairs for the entryway for the library. And it was such fun to borrow books.

The librarian there's name was Marian Stewart. I remember her very well. Marian the Librarian she was not. Marian Stewart was a chunky little lady who looked like the traditional librarian, and she did say "Shh!" sometimes. But she loved me and I loved her. And when we moved—my mom and dad finally bought a little house in Seminole Heights, and when we moved to that house, we were about six blocks from the Seminole Library. And we walked over there to discover that Marian Stewart was the librarian there! And so, we struck a chord.

My first library job—I don't remember how old I was; maybe twelve, maybe eleven. My first library job was to go with Ms. Stewart to knock on doors to collect overdue books.

AB: Wow.

BS: And so, she had one of these wonderful old cars. I can't remember what make it was, but the kids around from Hillsborough High School would always gather around Marian's car. But anyway, she would take me and the cards out of the books that you used to file that told you who had it and when it was due, and she would drive up in front of a house, and I would go up and knock on the door and say, "I'm here from the library to pick up your overdue books." The fine was two cents, and I got to keep a penny for every book I collected.

AB: Wow.

BS: So, that was my first paid library job.

AB: Fifty percent commission.

BS: Fifty percent, I'll tell you what! (both laugh) It was fun. And then, I—you know, all through school, from the time I was in the seventh grade, I worked in the Sacred Heart Academy library as a school person.

And then, two weeks after I graduated from high school, I went to work for Tampa Public Library. At that time, it was a civil service job, and you had to take a test. And I'll tell you what I think, is that some of the people who apply for jobs in libraries now, while they're in high school or right out of high school, couldn't pass that test, because you had to have some knowledge of library functions, and some knowledge of what various tools to be found in the library had to offer. What's in an atlas? What's in an almanac? What does a dictionary give you? You know—and they were on that test.

So, anyway, I passed it easily. (laughs) I'd always been in the library. I went to work for Tampa Public Library in June, and that was 1953. And in 1954 I was married, and my husband had just come home from Korea. Within a few months he was due to be discharged from the Air Force, and we moved to New Jersey. It was his home state and he was homesick, and he had a job waiting for him up there.

AB: How did you meet your husband?

BS: At the dances at MacDill Air Force Base.

AB: Okay.

BS: That was one of the fun things I was allowed to do as a teenager. The people—Tony Garcia was the head of the USO [United Service Organizations] in Tampa at that time, and he and his wife were absolutely wonderful. The base provided a bus, and it would come into town and pick us up and take us out there. They were the chaperones and the guardians, so my parents allowed me to go.

AB: That's great.

BS: And I had—I was brazen at that time, so if somebody asked me to, I would sing with the band. (both laugh) I met Bill there and we were married shortly after that. And, as I said, then we moved to New Jersey.

My first child was born at MacDill Air Force Base. And I must tell you, the base hospital of 1954 was nothing like the base hospital of 2009! It was old barracks buildings joined together by wooden walkways, and it was very, very primitive compared to what they have today. But it was a happy place, because all of us were young—most of us were very young—having our first children, with husbands who came marching in off of duty in the afternoon. And I have to tell you, rank didn't mean a thing, because there was a WAC [Women's Army Corps] major there who was in charge part of the time, and none of us took any guff off of her. We didn't care, you know; we were all civilians, so what the heck.

AB: Right.

BS: So, anyway, Lydia, my oldest daughter was born at MacDill. Then we moved to New Jersey, and as I said, Bill had a job waiting for him, so he went right to work. He worked for the A&P for a while. He worked for Bond Bread for a while. And, in the meantime, he signed up—

AB: For those who don't know, A&P is a grocery store chain.

BS: Yes, it is. Yeah. It still is. In some places in this country, there are A&Ps.

AB: Right. Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company.

BS: Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, that's right.

So, then, we lived—you know, as I said, we were living in a little town called Ashland, New Jersey, which was later absorbed into what is now Cherry Hill, a very large area in New Jersey. My husband had applied to join the state highway patrol, and he was accepted. While he was waiting to go into the highway patrol, he was working for a tool and die company that made things out of Teflon, including the little door rings that back the handles on automobile doors. They would shape these things and take a tray of them to be placed in an oven to cook them, to make them hard.

AB: Cure.

BS: Yeah. So, he had the tray in his hand, put it in the oven, and the door closed very quickly and cut off the top of his left thumb, which disqualified him from highway patrol, because you had to be ambidextrous. You had to be able to fire a gun with both hands equally as well. So, they said, “Don’t give up. We still want you.” And at that time, the State of New Jersey, and I imagine they still do, had a division called the Motor Vehicle Division. They did all the auto inspections and they patrolled, et cetera, et cetera. So, he went into that division. And a little while later, we separated, were divorced. I came back to Florida with my children and lived here.

Shortly after I came back to Florida—I stayed home for a little while. You know, you have three children, you’re busy making friends in the neighborhood, being Mommy, and I was bored to death! So, I asked my parents if they would—you know, if they would mind if I went back to work and looked after—if they would help me look after the kids. Both my parents were retired at that time and said sure, my dad particularly: he retired first. My dad was losing his sight, so he only had partial vision, and he stayed home.

My children were—two of them were born in New Jersey, one in Tampa. We all came back to Tampa to live, and I went back to work at the library, and it was fun. And the director got a kick out of my coming back and wanting to be there. My first job when I returned to the library was at Seminole Branch Library, where I had gone as a child. And that building was an old WPA [Works Progress Administration] building, kind of a long, narrow, rectangular-shaped building with a porch. And on the porch were rocking chairs.

AB: That’s wonderful.

BS: And people would come over to the library and sit in the rocking chairs. Squeak, squeak, squeak, squeak, squeak. But they could read out there.

And then, Interstate 275, known at that time as Interstate 75, was to be built. That building had to be torn down, and a new building was built on the front edge of that area, which is Central and Osborne Avenues, across from Memorial [Middle School] and Hillsborough High School in Tampa. I was in charge—

AB: What year would this have been around?

BS: Nineteen sixty-four. Sixty-four [1964].

AB: I was going to say, I think I remember reading about the Central Avenue neighborhood, the 275 construction being part of what disintegrated the whole Central Avenue community that was there.

BS: Right, right. It just cut us in half.

AB: Right.

BS: You know, it ran right through—on one side was Central Avenue. The street closest behind that area was Taliaferro [Avenue], which was one of those old streets with big oak trees, big shade trees. And then, the next major road to the east was Nebraska Avenue.

AB: Right.

BS: And it just went right through there and took out a lot of those beautiful old trees, and cut the streets off in dead ends, and so on and so forth. So, it became like a whole different area. And it's only been in recent years that a lot of those Seminole Heights bungalows have become places for restoration. And they're now, in some cases, beautifully restored: their porches are back, their trees are grown, and it's a handsome neighborhood to live in now. But I remember it as a child, you know. A lot of my schoolmates lived in those areas there.

AB: Now, you talked about your first library job, and the porch sounds wonderful. I think we could probably use more of those today. But in the library terms, how would you describe your duties in your first library position when you came back?

BS: When I came back to work?

AB: Yeah.

BS: I was a circulation person.

AB: Okay.

BS: I did everything: registered patrons, checked the books in, checked the books out, filed the cards. Remember card catalogs?

AB: Cards, yes.

BS: Yes. One of the fun things about Seminole in those days, when we opened the new building—I talked the library director into letting me have a perfect opening. I wanted everything on its shelf where it belonged. So, he did. He gave me a week, and he put on his jeans and his cowboy boots, and he came out and we put every book—with other help—in its place. The day that door opened, that library was ready to go. Every card was filed; every book was in its place. I never had that happen again in my life, but it was perfect.

But I did everything. And, because I was in charge at that branch, and I was a pretty experienced library person by then, people hired to go into some of the other libraries in Tampa were sent there to be trained.

AB: Oh, lovely.

BS: So, I started doing some of that at the same time. I was working at Seminole, and that's about the time the new library downtown was in the works. Here's—I have, in my album, as you—you're able to see it. Who's listening can't see.

AB: I'm looking at the album, yes, as we speak.

BS: Lots of pictures of me, my family, my children. This is the day I left to go to FSU [Florida State University] to work on my master's degree.

AB: I should say in all these pictures everybody looks happy, which is great.

BS: Yeah.

AB: A lot of happy moments.

BS: Yep. A lot of happy moments.

AB: They're terrific.

BS: Yep.

AB: Now, when you were working at Seminole Heights, would you typically walk to work? I mean, were you close enough?

BS: Oh, sure. Sure. I didn't drive for a long time.

AB: Oh, yeah.

BS: I wasn't driving when I went here to get my first degree.

AB: So you were in the—you were way ahead of your time in terms of a green existence, then. You weren't contributing to global warming. (both laugh)

BS: No. Couldn't afford a car, didn't know how to drive it. (both laugh) But this is when I left to go to FSU. I went downtown to the library that morning and was telling people goodbye and getting all ready to go. I graduated here, USF, in 1971.

AB: So, you went while you were working at the library: you went and got your degree.

BS: Yeah, full-time. I worked in the library full-time while I was getting my undergraduate degree. And I worked at the Leon County Library half-time while I was getting my master's.

AB: Had you spent any time in Tallahassee before you went there to school?

BS: Nope. Nope.

AB: So, it was a whole new world.

BS: Well, now, let me take that back. I had spent time there. Once a year I went to Library Day, and you know, we would go up from Tampa, a group of us, to lobby the legislature. So, I had been to Tallahassee. I hadn't lived in Tallahassee.

AB: Right.

BS: But it was great fun. I went to work at the Leon County Library when I arrived there. Verna Nistendirk was the director at the library. My boss here in Tampa was Cecil Beach, and they got together and decided I should have a job. So, I went up there, I started working, went right into school, and one year later I finished at Florida State and came back. I'm condensing a lot of this stuff.

AB: Maybe we should talk about what the program was like a little bit.

BS: At FSU?

AB: Yeah. Give us an idea of what that master's program entailed.

BS: Well, one thing it entailed was the fact that, because I had all these years of experience and had run libraries—branch libraries at that—I was exempted from some classes. So, I was allowed to go into other colleges and take some classes. I knew what I would eventually be doing was running a library, but I needed to know more about other aspects of it. So, one of the classes I took was a course in adult and community services at FSU.

AB: How wonderful.

BS: And learned all kinds of things about social services for adults, and what kinds of programs adults liked, and how they dealt with bureaucracies, and that sort of thing.

AB: That seems like it would be a propos today, because libraries seem to be more social work oriented than at other times.

BS: Right. And it came in handy later, and I'll tell you that in a few minutes, too.

AB: Okay. Good.

BS: Another course I took was a course in the College of Business Administration. One of my best friends, Linda O'Connor was at USF—at FSU—at that time, and we both signed up for this course in the College of Business Administration. We went into this seminar room, and seated around the table were all these bright young faces. Linda was quite a bit younger than I, but I was not young. And we were sitting around this table, and these soon-to-be MBAs wanted to know why librarians were taking business courses.

At that time, I had been head of the main library for a while, and supervised several departments, and had a budget well over \$100,000 for book buying. And I just looked around and said, "Well, gentlemen, I have X number of staff, I do their evaluations, I manage a budget, and I guess that's business." And Linda kind of laughed, and we never got any more flak.

AB: You mentioned something that makes me—and we could keep going on this and then back up. But I've missed the transition from when you were at Seminole to when you got to the main library.

BS: Oh, okay.

AB: So, we skipped over some progress in there somewhere—

BS: All right.

AB: —and we should talk about you working your way up a little bit.

BS: When the main library—I've skipped over that. You're right. The main library was built in 1968, and I was transferred from Seminole to the main library to be Head of Circulation. And I was working in Circulation, and that's when I started school.

In March of 1968, I began taking classes here at USF. And, of course, when I signed up—you know, you're always given this advisor person who tells you what you should do. He was a very, very nice fellow, and he was absolutely bound and determined I was going to be a teacher. And I said, "No, I'm a librarian. I'm going to continue to be a librarian." Well, he enrolled me in the College of Education, anyway, and so I started taking courses

in the College of Education. And I really—I learned some things in those classes, which, of course, always benefits you. You can learn in any system.

AB: Oh, yeah.

BS: And the really, really neat thing is I met some faculty members in the College of Education who were so enrolled and wrapped up in teaching and the formalities of teaching that they really weren't too tuned in to the roles of libraries in the education system. So we had this mutual respect thing going. And one faculty member, whom I really adored—he was absolutely wonderful—I would check out books for him. He would tell me he wants to read a book, and I'd just go to work the next day and get it from the public library.

One of the other benefits of working all the time I was getting my degree was I had access to everything I needed to write my papers while I was at work. I spent very little time, I have to admit, in the USF Library in those days. Now, you have to remember, the USF Library was growing, and didn't have as many curricula as it does now to offer. So, I was very, very fortunate. While I was here going to school, I was working full-time. My mother and father were helping me with the children.

AB: So, your children were fortunate to get to know your parents.

BS: Oh, yes, indeed.

AB: Which is a lovely thing.

BS: Yes, indeed.

AB: That sounds great.

BS: And working at the library downtown and watching how Tampa was growing at that time, and we were beginning to build some new branches. A little later, of course, federal money came in, and we expanded to more branches at that time.

AB: And the size of the—relatively, the size of the collection you were managing, circulating, at the main branch versus Seminole, was it a huge—

BS: Oh, about three times as big.

AB: Three times as big.

BS: Yeah.

AB: Okay.

BS: Seminole was a nice community library. The building was 6,500 square feet, which was not huge, but it was a building that was built to replace the old building torn down by the interstate progress. So—yeah. And to go downtown—as I said, my first job down there was to be Head of Circulation. Subsequently, I did a lot of other things. When I came back from graduate school—leaving Tampa, going to Florida State, working at Leon County Library—

That was a lark, an experience. The Leon County Library was in an old club building: an Elks Club, I think it was. And so, it was divided into several areas, and it had no elevator. My first job was to go into an area that had been a bar area and was designated as the young adult area in the Leon County Library.

AB: (laughs) Perfect.

BS: And Verna Nistendirk, the librarian that was there, said, “One of the first things I’d like for you to do, since you are familiar with young adults and young adult literature, is clean this place up.” So, my first job at Leon County Library was to reorganize this area set aside as a young adult area. It had just had things poured in there: books stacked up, library cards not filed, just everything. So, I did that, and that was a lot of fun.

And then, after I got that done, she said, “Now we’re going to move you to Reference.” And that was a lot of fun. Remember, this is an old wooden building and people had to come upstairs (thumps table top) clunk, clunk, clunk, clunk, to get to Reference.

AB: So, they had to want to ask you a question.

BS: Yeah. They had to want to come up. The children's area was in the basement level. If somebody wanted something in the basement level, you had to go down to get it. If you wanted something in Reference, you had to come up to get it. And you had to carry it.

Now, Verna's rule was, if you were down in the basement level—part of what was down there was shipping, receiving and cataloging. You didn't dare go up the stairs empty-handed, because somebody had to carry that stuff back and forth. So, if you went downstairs, you never came up empty-handed. You carried a load of books or magazines or whatever.

Working in Reference at Leon County Library was fun. You have to remember, this is the state capital. The State Library was there. But there were times when somebody in the legislature couldn't find something in the State Library, or the State Library was low-staffed and couldn't help 'em. For some reason, they could call us at the Leon County Library and ask us questions.

I remember one time, one of the representatives called, and he had a question. And the lady who was in charge, Cody Allen, was not there. I was in Reference, sitting at the Reference desk. He called, and he asked me a question, and I said, "Well, just a minute." I went browsing around, and I couldn't find the answer. I went back and I said, "Mr. Tucker, call Tampa Public Library, ask for the Business, Science and Technology Department, and you will get your answer. You know, I can't call for you. We're not allowed to make long distance phone calls." So, Don Tucker, Speaker of the House, called Tampa Public Library to get the information he wanted.

AB: That's great.

BS: And that—you know, every teeny tiny little bit of information that a librarian absorbs, it's lying dormant somewhere. And you never know when it'll be handy, or when you'll be able to use it.

So, anyway, that's my experience. While I was—before I went to FSU to get my master's, I worked full-time at Tampa Public Library. While I was at FSU, I worked at part-time at Leon County Library. Then I came back to Tampa, and I was able to get the ideal job. Tampa Public Library was growing and was doing wonderful things, interesting things, and by then Cecil Beach, who had been our director, had moved on to become State Librarian.

AB: That's great.

BS: Leo Meirose was then the director at Tampa, Caryl Fenton was the Assistant Director and the personnel person, and the three of us sat down when I got back from graduate school. And they said, "You know, we're growing now and we need to promote the library, and we want to create a new position called the Community Relations Librarian. And you're it."

AB: That's great!

BS: So, Caryl and I wrote my job description. We were approved. The board approved it. And, all of a sudden, I set up an office called Community Relations. It was fun.

AB: That is great.

BS: It was fun. I had a woman named Lisa Gorham, who had been a newspaper reporter, was retired. We contracted with her to come in and write press releases, and she'd come in a couple of days a week. We had a Hillsborough High School student who learned how to use the press to make posters. And I had a secretary, a very, very nice woman, who later on got her master's degree and became a librarian. And we had great fun. I was able to work with Kiwanis clubs and Rotary clubs, and go out and speak at all kinds of events, and also set up speaking engagements for the library director and other staff members.

One of my most fun and memorable events during this was I was asked to speak to a club, a Sertoma club. The young man who was a member was stationed at MacDill. He was an air traffic controller. And he asked if I would come and speak to his Sertoma club about how you get a library card and the advantages of libraries, and so on. So, I said, "Oh, sure." So, he drove up in front of the library one day, just before noon, and he picked me up and we went out to a Sertoma club meeting. It was a pretty good-sized group of people, and I was on the agenda to speak right after lunch, I think.

So, anyway, they had their ceremony and their greetings, and just about the time the program is to start, there's a noise in the hallway. The door slams open; a person comes in carrying a boom box, followed by a belly dancer.

AB: (laughs) Oh, no! Oh, no.

BS: One of the men in the group was having a birthday that day, and his wife surprised him with a belly dancer. I don't know who else has been expected to speak about libraries following a belly dancer, but that was a challenge.

AB: (laughs) A tough act to follow.

BS: A tough act to follow, but fun! But fun, because I'm a great ad-libber. And I said, "Okay, now you've had a demonstration of one of the things you can learn in the Fine Arts Department of Tampa Public Library: the history of belly dancing." And I had those people. I mean, they were there. So, we talked about all the kinds of things that create life and make it interesting: work things, and fun things, and art things. And that young man never forgave himself for not knowing that there was going to be a belly dancer. And I kept telling him, "It was great. I loved it! It gave me a great lead in."

AB: It worked out great.

BS: So, anyway, those are some of the kinds of experiences I've had over the years as a librarian, and it's kind of fun. And I've done a whole lot of other things. You know, I cannot tell you how many library conferences I've been involved in, and how many times I've been involved in libraries, and where I've worked.

While at Tampa Public Library, of course—after Community Relations, for a while, the director thought it was time to shift things around a bit. And he wanted somebody new to take over the main library. So, I became head of the main library, and we had some fun challenges there. It was departmentalized, far more detailed departmentalized than it is now, where reference librarians now kind of move around and do a little bit of everything, including a lot online.

But we had a Business, Science and Technology Department. We had a Language, Arts and Literature Department. We had a Fine Arts Department. We had a Government Documents Department. And all those department heads reported to me. So, that was kind of fun.

Pause in recording

AB: We have just left off at her promotion to the director of the main library at Tampa Public Library. And, during the pause, I asked about Mr. Cecil Beach's move to the State

Library and Library Days, and was informed that Library Days is forty-four years old. Is that correct?

BS: I believe it's forty-four this year. I can check, but I think it's forty-four years old. Library Day was originated to take library supporters, library board members, et cetera, to Tallahassee one day, during the legislative session, to really make a strong pitch for libraries and what they had to offer. And we would go up and have a briefing. This has been going on now, all these years, and we still do it. We go up each year.

Cecil Beach, Leo Meirose, and David Kantor, and Ed Sintz, the old guys, they were—all the library directors of any importance many years ago in Florida were all men. I was, I think, the first library director who, as a woman, was invited to sit in on this august group, because they would get—well, I was—you know, by then I had gone to Pinellas County.

AB: Right.

BS: But in the early days, in the early days, when Library Days started, there was this strong group of library directors who led the major systems in Florida: Broward County, Miami-Dade, Hillsborough County, Orlando. Daytona was David Kantor; Harry Brinton was Jacksonville. These were people who knew the future of libraries and could see that future. And Cecil Beach was probably one of the best of the lot, because Cecil had a natural ability to look at politics and to figure out how to work it. And everybody else looked to him for some leadership in this political arena from the standpoint of where libraries ought to go.

AB: He had vision.

BS: He did have vision. And when he was asked to take over the job as the State Librarian, we in Tampa thought, "Oh, this is just wonderful. We're going to miss the heck out of him, but he's our leader. And he will be a strong advocate for us, as well as the other libraries, in Tallahassee." And he was there during the transition of the State Library from the basement of the Supreme Court building to having its own building.

AB: Right.

BS: So, he was the one who knew how to talk to the lobbyists, knew how to talk to the legislators, and began a strong state support. A lot of bills and rules and statutes had to be

revised to accommodate some of the changes going on with libraries and library development.

I can leap all around in all of this, and it drives me crazy, because I like to keep my train of thoughts on one track. But I can't.

AB: Well— (laughs)

BS: There's too— (laughs) I can't! There are just too many episodes and too many occurrences that, at the time, were kind of like little jewels. You set 'em to the side, but you don't want to forget 'em. You don't want to lose them. And then they come back when you do one of these narratives where you talk about the evolution—

AB: Well, I want them. The jewels are great.

BS: —of something, the evolution of things that happened.

AB: Right.

BS: When I was with Tampa Public Library, and working for these wonderful people, for Cecil, and then Leo—my first director was Bill Frieze, William Scott Frieze, and he's the one who hired me in 1953. And when I came back from graduate school, when I finished at—I'm trying to get my act together here. When I came back from—well, wait a minute. When I finished at USF in 1971—

AB: Which is pretty good, to have started in sixty-eight [1968] and finished in seventy-one [1971] while you were working full-time.

BS: You bet. Three years.

AB: That's terrific.

BS: Three years to get a degree. Anyway, one of my jobs when I came back, as I said, from Florida State—we'll just go on with Florida State. When I came back from Florida State, I was Tampa Public Library's first Community Relations Librarian.

AB: Right.

BS: At that time, my first boss, William Scott Frieze, was no longer the director of the library. He was in charge of the printing facilities. His avocation was to be Benjamin Franklin. So, he loved gadgets. He loved printing. He loved books. During his tenure as library director, every new book that came in the library was rolled into his office on a book truck. And sometimes, we wouldn't find them again for a month or two, because he wasn't through with 'em, and we were waiting for them.

But, at any rate, this man loved books. He loved printing. So, as the library grew and changed, and the library board saw the need to bring in new blood and new energy as the director, Bill said, "Okay, I'll run the printing facility." Well, he had this sophisticated equipment, for its time. And, as a result, the City of Tampa said, "Hmm! We bought that equipment; we want you to do our printing, too." So, Bill was the city printer as well as the library printer.

When I came back from graduate school, as head of Community Relations, Bill worked for me. I was—part of my responsibility was the printing facility.

AB: Oversee the printing.

BS: So, that was a lot of fun. And he was just such a classy Southern gentleman. He always wore cowboy boots and a string tie and a Stetson. He had the most beautiful Stetson. But my experiences working with these people with these various talents is all part of what I am and what I became as a library director. When I left Community Relations, I was head of the main library, and I did that for quite a while.

AB: You know, I was going to say, in terms of—you talked about all the people, but also—you almost articulated it. And it may be worth noting that, when you went to Leon County, too, that it continued to broaden your range of experience within the library: you included reference now. So, you were well-suited to be the Community Relations person, because you'd had such a broad range of library experience that you could bring to promoting all of it when you got there. Then that broad breadth lent itself to becoming director, I think, which is just great.

BS: And being Community Relations Librarian, in relationship to what I was talking about as far as Library Day is concerned—I had all the media contacts. I knew how to

write the press releases, and I wrote the press releases. I contacted people, and I lined up groups of people to go to Library Day. And, while I was there, I would schedule the groups, call the offices of the legislators and make dates with them, or with their aides, many times. So, all of that kind of added up.

While I was head of the main library, I worked still with a lot of the community, but I had to concentrate on furthering the staff development of people coming into the main library. We were then able to hire more professionally-trained librarians.

AB: That's great.

BS: See, when I went to work for Tampa Public Library, I think there were two people with a master's degree in the whole place. But now we were beginning to hire and train all these wonderful and eager new librarians, and it was my job to see that those departments got the support they needed, that they worked together. I shocked some of them, because I would say, "Okay. You may be a fine arts librarian, but next week you're working in business, science and technology, because you've got to learn more than just your niche. I mean, there's going to be a day when somebody's going to be out sick, and you're going over there."

So, that was fun. And then, later on, I was involved in sending some of those people who worked in the ivy tower main library to work in some of those places known as branches.

AB: Ah, out to the provinces.

BS: Out to the provinces. So, after I was head of the main library for a while, we had— Leo had retired and gone on back to Ohio, and we had a new director named John Adams. And John wanted me to take over the branches. We were growing. We had new branches; you know, some of that federal funding that had come in with both Model Cities and subsequently LSCA [Library Services and Construction Act]. We built branches in various parts of the county. And it was great fun, because I got to play in the branches. I got to work with the people again.

As head of the main library, I didn't have many opportunities to sit at a reference desk, or to wait directly on patrons. When I would go out to the branches, as the head of the branches, if somebody was out sick, I would just go out and work. I mean, I'd go check out the books and do the reference work and do a story hour for the kids, or whatever. I'm kind of an everybody librarian.

AB: And your heart's still in the service, it seems like, the service avenue.

BS: Oh, yeah. I loved all that kind of stuff. And so, that's what I was doing, supervising branches, when I decided that it was time to think about another position. I had always thought, because I loved Pinellas County, "If they ever get their act together over there and form a county library, I'm going to apply for the job."

AB: (laughs) Uh-huh.

BS: I did.

AB: Okay. So this would have been what year?

BS: Nineteen ninety.

AB: They formed the Pinellas County Library System that year?

BS: They had worked on it. They started in about 1985, and the librarians in Pinellas County wanted to find a mechanism to allow them to develop a system. But their individual and respective cities didn't want to give up their—their!—libraries. So, instead of forming a single system with one library director and one board, et cetera, they came up with the idea of a cooperative.

AB: I see.

BS: And they put a referendum on the ballot in Pinellas County asking the population, "Would you be willing to tax yourself for library service?" This was people in the unincorporated area, which was the largest of the populated areas in the county at that time. And they got an outstanding—over 75 percent—vote in support of an added tax to buy library services from these municipals that had library services.

AB: Right.

BS: In order to do that, they had a mayor's council over there. They all got together and they worked through, and they appointed a board, and they drew up a proposal with the help of the State Library. One of the consultants came down and helped them, because this was a departure from state law.

AB: To have a cooperative?

BS: To have a cooperative. So, they got their act together and they formed this cooperative, and they developed their first set of bylaws, et cetera, et cetera. And then, they said, "Well, we've got to have somebody to run this thing." So, they announced it, they opened it up, they interviewed several people, and I got the job. And I moved over to—my retirement party at Tampa Public Library was held at Valencia Gardens, now departed, which is a shame. But I retired with a big party on May 9. I started working on May 1 in Pinellas County. I just was on vacation at the time.

AB: (laughs)

BS: My first office in Pinellas County was in a little office in the county courthouse around the corner from the County Administrator. And that was very interesting, could not have been better. I had all the support: the Assistant County Administrator, the County Attorney, everybody was in that building. And they all knew what the goal was, and it was to form this strange new creature that did not exist at any other public libraries in the State of Florida and to make it work, because people in that county wanted library service.

AB: Okay. And let's just hold on to that. That's awesome that everybody was—everybody was on board for the mission, is what you're saying. But you highlighted, as you said, that Florida—that there was no other cooperative in Florida.

BS: Right.

AB: Two points I just wanted to check with you on that. Because of your work in libraries—and I'm presuming also, at this point, by this time, with professional associations—and having gone to library school for libraries, were you aware of cooperatives in other states? I mean, was the model of a cooperative something that you'd been aware existed outside before?

BS: No.

AB: Okay. You don't know Los Angeles, right?

BS: I mean, there may have been.

AB: Right.

BS: But this was new to Florida. And it was a challenge—

AB: And new to you, too.

BS: And new to me, as well. And it was new to some of those librarians over there, too, because I had known them—you know, I could do a whole separate life with the Florida Library Association. I'll get more into that.

AB: Yes, we do need to—that is a big, important part.

BS: Yes, we'll talk about the Florida Library Association. But this part of my working life, my professional life, was a challenge. And it was a challenge to some of the librarians in Pinellas County because they knew me, and some of them were a little afraid I might come over and take over, because I do have a rather strong way of approaching things. So, I had to assure them that I had no intention of meddling in the day-by-day operations of their individual libraries. That was not my job.

AB: Right.

BS: My job was to go over there and be their advocate, to be their organizer. The most important part of my job at that time was to get all of the paperwork and all the documentation in order. I prepared the application for their 501(c)(3) IRS [Internal Revenue Service] status. We got that off. I got the state sales tax documentation off. I filed all the bylaws and the charters and all those legal documents with the state. And then, the other part of it was the state statute for public libraries had to have some modification, had to be rewritten.

AB: Yeah, I was going to say, as you mentioned 501(c)(3), all of a sudden I started to shake my head, because I'm trying to picture—since you weren't—as an independent corporation, then, you're not beholden to certain bodies. And so, I'm trying to make sure of what the relationship is with the county government, then.

BS: All right. As part of the development of the cooperatives, there was a board appointed.

AB: Okay.

BS: And that board started out with seven people, I believe. And the way it worked was the member entities, these libraries that signed an agreement to—

AB: To participate.

BS: —form the cooperative, were allowed to choose a representative. And the county administration appointed a representative. And I'm—I can't remember the exact—how it was organized. But there were seven members, and they were designated to represent the county and those municipalities that agreed to form this co-op.

AB: I see.

BS: Okay. That board hired me. So, I reported to this independent board. And that's one reason we formed as a not-for-profit corporation, which means I had to file for the 501(c)(3) to allow us to do business as a not-for-profit within the State of Florida. I had to file for the tax exemption so we could buy things—

AB: Federal government, yeah.

BS: —within the State of Florida. Yeah. And all that paperwork had to be done: which, when it was done and accomplished with the eyes on the State of Florida on us, allowed me, then, to accept and manage county, state and federal monies.

AB: Right.

BS: So, a lot of people would say my most important job, then, was to do the accounting and bookkeeping for county, state and federal monies coming in for the support of libraries.

AB: Well, that's the point of a 501(c)(3) corporation, is that the assets of the corporation are held in trust for the public.

BS: That's right.

AB: Somebody has to have fiduciary responsibility.

BS: Right. And, as I said, the statute had to be slightly rewritten and the State Library was so helpful and cooperative at that time. It was just wonderful. We got that through, and then we began to look at how we can get the services.

As I said, I went over there in May. By October 1, we had agreed on one library card. A design was developed that said Pinellas Public Library Cooperative. The only city library that did not join was Clearwater. At that time, the library director at Clearwater had her people pretty well convinced that if they joined the co-op, the people from all those other areas would raid the Clearwater Public Library System, which was the best in the area, and there'd be nothing left for the Clearwater taxpayers.

AB: (laughs)

BS: Well, a couple of years later, she was gone; she had moved on to another position. And a new director was brought in and sat—and came to our meetings. And I explained to her, I said, “Well, you know, if Clearwater belonged, you'd have gotten \$600,000 in support last year, and you probably could have bought a whole lot more books.” She was floored, literally floored. “You mean they've been turning down money?” Yes, because they didn't want to sign on to allow all these other people to use their library. Well, that changed in a hurry.

So, anyway, then all the libraries, the existing libraries in Pinellas County, belonged to the co-op. And we set about doing some other things. We set about doing some cooperative children's programming and some cooperative displays and shows, and bringing in guest speakers and sharing resources. And it just—

AB: Cooperating.

BS: Yeah, cooperating. I mean, it was like a whole new ballgame, you know. And, fortunately, most of the management entities over those city libraries, city commissions or whatever they were, city—you know, and such. Many of them had city managers in the library before this. They began to see the benefits, fortunately, because until the co-op formed, they were not eligible for state aid. And they couldn't get federal grants, which come through the State Library, because they didn't meet the criteria.

So now, all of a sudden, we begin to see progress. The year I—

AB: To serve as an umbrella organization for libraries.

BS: Exactly. The year I was in Pinellas County, Seminole Library had already begun to build, and so on and so forth. One of my first jobs with a library building was to help the Seminole Library, which was under construction, look at its budgets and determine where to buy its furniture and how to go about getting the best bids, and so on and so forth.

During the time I was in Pinellas County, we doubled the size of the Gulfport Library. We built a new library in Safety Harbor. We built a new library in Dunedin. We built a new library in Tarpon Springs. The Pinellas Park Library was renovated and expanded. The St. Petersburg—we didn't have a whole lot of—we didn't do a lot with St. Petersburg construction, because they already had several libraries. But we helped them with grants to improve and renovate their facilities.

AB: And that building of libraries is something we'll come back to later in the interview, since that's—you're still involved with that now.

BS: That's what I'm doing now.

AB: Yeah.

BS: Yeah. (laughs) Okay. So, anyway, I stayed in Pinellas County. When I went over there and they hired me, somebody said to me one day, "You know why we hired you?" And I said, "Well, I hope it's because I'm a good librarian." [They replied] "No, because you knew state politics."

AB: Ah! (laughs)

BS: I said, “Well, yeah, I do play in that a bit, don’t I?”

AB: Well, you know, I was going to say that it almost seems like—you were talking before about the men’s club of library directors that all dealt with the legislature, and that you were the first woman to break that circle. And it almost seems like they had to let you in, because if you’re writing press releases for Library Days, you knew where all the skeletons were buried, so to speak—but in a good way. You had already been so active [that] they needed you to just continue and move right into that position.

BS: Well, and because Pinellas Public Library Cooperative became one of the largest library systems in the State of Florida. So, the amount of money I was dealing with—and it’s always coming back to money—was equal to Orlando, was equal to Jacksonville. Therefore, my board and our work had the same balance in the eyes of the state legislature as those other major systems.

AB: Right.

BS: So—and you know. I mean, hey, that was fun for me. I really enjoyed it. I mean, hey, you know—I started in all this stuff a little later than many people, but I never got bored with it. And those people knew me. They respected me.

AB: That’s great.

BS: And they knew that—

AB: That’s the way it should be.

BS: Yeah. That’s the way it was. That was my life, you know.

AB: Yup.

BS: So, anyway, when I got ready to retire from Pinellas County, I had to think about it three times. And they said, “Oh, don’t retire, don’t retire!” And I said, “No. I’m in good health. I’m going to retire while I have my health so I can do some other things.”

AB: Good for you.

BS: I’d like to branch off and talk about Florida Library Association, my relationship with the association.

AB: Okay. Before we do—let’s do that. But let’s just say what year range you’re talking about when you were—the three times you considered retiring from Pinellas, so we know where in the chronology we are, and then we’ll jump right to FLA.

BS: All right. I went to Pinellas County in 1990, and, when I went, I said, “Well, okay, I will stay about five years, ’cause by then the system should be really built, and you know, I can go do something else.” I stayed twelve. So, I retired in 2002 from Pinellas County.

The first year after I retired, I stayed home and—well, I treated myself to a retirement trip to Spain. I had always wanted to go to Spain. My grandfather, my mother’s father, was from the Canary Islands. He was Spanish, came to Florida with the cigar industry. And my friend Dorothy Field, who had retired a few months earlier from Orlando, had promised herself a trip to Spain. So, the two of us just went to Spain, and we had our vacation trip. Then I came home and I made sixteen photo albums. I finally got around to cleaning up all those photos. So, I made albums for all my children, and the ones that I wanted to keep for myself.

And then, I was bored. I said, “I’ve got to do something.” The school system was crying for substitutes, so I signed up to substitute in the school system, and I said I would work in any elementary or middle school—and I didn’t specify libraries. So, I was in various classroom situations for about a year and a half. And then, I wrote a letter and said, “I’m done with the classrooms. I will only work in the media centers.” So, for the next year, I substituted only in media centers.

A couple of times, I would go to a school, and I would get there, and they would say, “Well, we’re going to keep the media center closed today, because we need somebody to teach health.” And I said, “I don’t teach health. I’m a librarian.” Well, one school, the principal was so rude she wouldn’t even come out and speak to me. So, I said, “Please tell her I’ve gone,” and I left. I was in my car, and my phone rang. It was another school calling me saying, “Can you come? We need you in our media center.”

AB: In the media center.

BS: So, some schools have a lot of respect for their media centers. It's better now, in many cases, than it used to be, but it was not always that way.

AB: I'm just doing a little math in my head, and I may be way off, so I want to check it with you. From the time you returned to Florida from New Jersey and started working in Seminole again to when you retired from Pinellas, we're talking about forty years as a library professional?

BS: Yes.

AB: Okay. I just wanted to make sure that that added up.

BS: Yeah, I had forty-two years of actually working in libraries on a day-by-day, ever-loving, friendly—

AB: As your full-time position.

BS: —full-time job.

AB: Yes.

BS: While raising three kids, getting two college degrees, substituting at the University of South Florida. You know that my first teaching experience at this school was in 1976, when Jean Gates was going off on a cruise. She called me and she said, "I need someone to teach Foundations [of Library and Information Science], because I'm going to take a trip."

AB: Ms. Gates—

BS: Jean Key Gates.

AB: She was a professor, full professor.

BS: She was a full professor here.

AB: Right.

BS: And I said, “Oh, I would love to do that!” So, I taught in March—I think it was March or February 1976. I came to USF to teach Foundations.

AB: Were they an accredited school at that time?

BS: Yes, they were.

AB: Okay.

BS: They had been accredited shortly after I got my undergraduate degree. But I’m glad I went off to get a master’s, I really am. So, I started teaching here, and I taught at USF—I taught for USF. I was one of the first people to go to [USF’s former campus at] Fort Myers, when they used to fly us down in a little bitty airplane they rented from the Brisco Brothers.² And we would go down and teach, and get back on that airplane and fly back to Tampa Air Park. So, I taught in Fort Myers, Orlando, Brevard County, Lakeland, Sarasota and here, all those years. And that was just—that was fun. It was fun.

AB: Were you teaching mostly people who were already working full-time in libraries?

BS: Yes. Yeah. USF has always had this wonderful cadre of people who come back to get a master’s, or they want to change. I had attorneys and engineers and nurses and art teachers—I mean, people who had careers, but they wanted to make a change in their careers. And it was just great fun, because they brought with them these levels of outside enthusiasm and interest. I cannot tell you how many women would say to me, “My children are grown enough now, so I can go back to school. Am I too old?” I said, “Look at me! No, you’re not too old.” And libraries love to get mature employees who

²Jack and Jerry Brisco, the Brisco Brothers, were professional wrestlers in the 1970s and 1980s. They are not related to Jay and Mark Briscoe, known as the Briscoe Brothers, a 2000s wrestling team.

don't have to worry about a child breaking out with the measles or needing a babysitter. We love mature employees in the public library.

AB: And who have a well-established work ethic and a sense of team play, and all that—

BS: Right. Right.

AB: —stuff that they bring. You bet.

BS: And compassion, a lot of compassion. Yeah. That's what it takes.

AB: That's great.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

BS: So, anyway, I taught at Sarasota, and it was a lot of fun. I asked—I said one time, “You know, I'd like to do something other than”—I became the Foundations teacher. But I said, “I'd like to do something else. I'd like to write a course on Adult Services.” So, I did.

AB: That's great.

BS: And I taught Adult Services in Sarasota. There's lots of pictures here.

AB: Oh, yeah. I'm just looking through it, but I don't want to get to the point—

BS: And I don't think there's—

AB: I don't want you to have the idea that I'm not interested in the course you developed about Adult Services, which is a wonderful thing.

BS: I want to see if there's some—this is part two, 1995 to 2002. I was going to see if I could show you some library pictures. Just as an aside, these were—this picture was

taken in my backyard. And these were my mother's three surviving sisters and their husbands.

AB: It's from February of 1995.

BS: Yeah. My daughter—it was my second daughter—was married in my backyard, and since all these people were there, we took these pictures. All three of them [the women] are still living. All three of them are dead: the three men are gone. But I've tried—I'm hoping that somewhere in here, I—this is great-grandchildren, grandchildren. I was hoping that I had some library ones. I have separate albums of library stuff. No, I guess this is just family.

AB: You know, between your grandparents that you knew, and now your great-grandchildren, you're talking about having been actively engaged with seven generations of your family. That's just amazing.

BS: It is, isn't it?

AB: That's great.

BS: You know, if you live long enough, you never know what's going to happen.

AB: Oh, but it's wonderful.

BS: But I was talking to a person—I was looking at cards at Publix. I was looking for birthday cards. And they have birthday cards now that say great-grandmother and great-grandfather. And I was talking to this lady standing near [me] selecting cards. I said, "You know, if you live long enough, you look for cards that say great-this and great-that." (both laugh) Fifty years ago, to live to my time would have been an unusual occurrence.

AB: The life expectancy has—

BS: Oh, yes.

AB: —increased so greatly in that time. Yes.

BS: One of my neighbors [is] ninety-five years old.

AB: I remember in the early sixties [1960s], when I was a child, sixty-five was expected to be a full life at that point. And now, it's common for people to live decades beyond that. It's great.

BS: So, now, in our narrative, I have retired. Two thousand two.

AB: Right.

BS: From Pinellas County.

AB: And you substituted in the media centers, finally exclusively.

BS: Yeah. And then I said, "I can't do this anymore." And by then, my friend Gerry McCabe and I had been working together on a couple of projects. Gerry's been an editor for Greenwood Press and Libraries Unlimited for a long time. Gerry was here, at this university. In fact, he was the person who coordinated the building work as a librarian here, with Mary Lou Harkness.

AB: Okay.

BS: Gerry left here. He was at VCU [Virginia Commonwealth University] for a while. And, when he got ready to retire, he was the Director of the Library at Clarion University in Pennsylvania. So, Gerry and I are consulting partners. But during the last couple of years I worked, I had reviewed and critiqued a couple of books that he was editing for the presses. And I wrote prefaces and introductions for them. Then, Gerry had been doing library consulting for academic libraries. And he was interested in branching out into public libraries. So, we decided we'd work together.

One of the ones that we did that was a lot of fun was a new library for Bradford County. Now, Bradford County is a state prison county up in North Florida. So, we worked on the design for that library with a local architect, Chuck Bayer. And that was a lot of fun, and it just sort of began this string of libraries. We did three here in Florida: Bradford County, Union County, and then the third one. It's in Macclenny; what is the name of

that? Anyway, would you believe they're all three counties whose main industry is a prison system?

So, anyway, we did those. And, in the meantime, we've had a couple of other things. I have done some work strictly on the computer. Hershey [Pennsylvania] Public Library had a nice building. They didn't want to tear the building down and rebuild, but it needed some reorganization. At the time it was built, it was the time of these monumental circulation desks that take up half the room. Well, now you have computers and you have computer checkout, and you have—

AB: Self checkout.

BS: —self check, and things like that. They also just wanted to reorganize their first floor. So, Gerry, who lives in Maryland, went over to Hershey, and he did a lot of writing and he described what was there, sent it to me. And between us, on our computers, we re-designed the first floor for that library. I've never been there. I haven't seen it. And one of these days when I'm up there, I'm going to go to Hershey and see it.

AB: Stop in. Oh, that's great.

BS: But we have worked on several projects in that time, and it is a lot of fun. And the one that I'm getting ready to work on right now, I probably shouldn't discuss until we get into it.

AB: Okay.

BS: But it's been fun. And it's very interesting to be a consultant, because it's like being a prophet in somebody else's land, you know. I mean, you know, if I tell somebody here how to do something, I have a vested interest in it. But if I'm away, I look at it—at least I think—more objectively, because when I leave there, having my name on one of their documents as their consultant, I want to be sure it's something I'm proud of and that they like.

AB: That's great. You know, just to help clarify it, I was—I used to be in the theatre, and artistic directors of theatres always used to love if they got hired to act at somebody else's theater.

BS: Oh.

AB: They could sit out there and watch the whole operation and not have any of the responsibility, enjoy their time, you know, just to get to be an actor for a while, not a director. But that is great.

Now, you had said you wanted to get back to FLA, too—

BS: Yes.

AB: —at some point. And you've been active probably since before FLA was even formed. Is that—am I correct?

BS: The Florida Library—no!

AB: No, it's older? Okay.

BS: The Florida Library Association got its early start in 1900.

AB: Okay.

BS: And I wasn't there. (laughs)

AB: Okay. Oh, yeah. I didn't know—it's my bad for not knowing exactly how long it's been.

BS: The Florida Library Association actually started because a group of people related to the Florida Education Organization thought that it was time to bring in others and to encourage public library involvement. Public libraries in Florida, you know, really got their boost with the Carnegie grants in the early 1900s: the teens [1910s], mostly, 1915, 1913, and so on.

AB: Uh-huh.

BS: So, Florida Library Association really was there, but kind of a shadow works thing. They got together; they talked, et cetera, et cetera. In 1920, I believe it was, I have to remember—I can look it up. But, anyway, that's what I do. I work in those archives.

AB: Sure.

BS: But it began to build its strength in the teens [1910s], like 1912, 1913. In the twenties [1920s], it matured into an organization with a pretty good list of membership, you know, people from around various areas of the state. In the 1930s, it began to solidify and to become recognized as a true organization, not unlike the American Library Association but for a state organization.

AB: Can I ask while you mention that idea that it solidified, was the—do you think that—and this is your opinion, I know, I'm asking for. The economic exigency of the Depression, did that help, do you think, bring everybody together, in your opinion?

BS: Yeah. Libraries are—

AB: They had to stick together more, because they needed it.

BS: Well, they needed each other, and they needed a way of communicating and sharing information and so on. Of course, in those days, they didn't have fax machines.

AB: Right. (laughs)

BS: And Lord knows they didn't have computers!

AB: Yup.

BS: But librarians needed the camaraderie and the support of those people who were in power. They needed the support of their local governments. They needed the support of the state government. And the only way to get it was to show a unified front. So, like any other organization, they had to get together. They had to talk to each other, and they would have meetings around the state in various places.

I would like to do a more extended part of this on the Florida Library Association, maybe at another time.

AB: Yes. I think that—absolutely. I think that it's a critical part of why we're gathering, and I'll look forward to it very much. So, thanks.

BS: You know, the Florida Library Association went through what other organizations did. In the 1940s, during the war, they just didn't hold conventions.

AB: Right.

BS: Some of our folks were off fighting the war.

AB: And they couldn't get the fuel, with rationing, to do all the travel—could they?—to attend the meetings.

BS: No, they really couldn't. I'm trying to remember. In 19—I looked at—I have all the programs, of course. In the fifties [1950s]—

AB: We have—we should say, just for the record, that Ms. Storck is the archivist, or oversees the archives, for the Florida Library Association. And they are held, physically, here at the USF Tampa Library.

BS: Right, in Special Collections.

AB: In Special Collections.

BS: Right. So, we'll do a whole segment on FLA. I'll get my act together and be better prepared.

AB: Oh, this is great. This is terrific.

BS: It's—you know, I came back to work and was absorbed into the Florida Library Association. In the early sixties [1960s], I went to—from then on, I've been to every Florida Library Association convention and every Library Day that's been held. And you—if you care, you get involved. And I was always very fortunate because the directors of Tampa Public Library, under whom I worked, encouraged my involvement. And I served on committees, and I ran for office.

AB: That's great.

BS: And, you know, I was president the only year we ever had a joint conference with the Florida Association for Media in Education [FAME], which was a hoot. I think we talked about that a little bit the other day when we were with Derrie, didn't we?

AB: Yes.

BS: It opened on Halloween.

AB: Yes. (laughs)

BS: Oh, what a hoot that was. But Florida Library Association is an organization that has been able to go with the flow, and in good times and bad times they keep going. And our membership stays good and strong. And I'll—I want to really expand more on that.

AB: Okay. Good. Well, we'll focus on that for the next session, then, I think.

BS: Okay.

AB: So, as a result, this may be a good—we may be at a perfect stopping point for this session, then.

BS: I think so.

AB: Okay.

BS: I think so.

AB: Well, thanks. This is—I can't wait for the next one. This is great. Thank you very much.

BS: Oh, thank you. It's been fun.

AB: Okay.

BS: It's been fun.

Part 2 ends; part 3 begins

AB: This is Arlen Bensen. Good morning. I'm here in the FLA archives in Special Collections at the USF Tampa Library. This is the second interview with Ms. Bernadette Storck. I'm delighted to be here again with Ms. Storck. And it is November 19 [2009] at—we're starting at 10:18 in the morning. And thank you very much for meeting with me again, Ms. Storck. It's lovely to see you this morning.

BS: Thank you. My pleasure.

AB: Last time, there were a few things—well, one main thing we did not get to really focus on is the Florida Library Association. I'm looking forward to that. But, coming up in December, will be the twentieth anniversary event of the Alice G. Smith Lecture at the University of South Florida School of Library and Information Science. And so, I'd like to take this opportunity to start by asking you about your acquaintance with Ms. Smith, and then about the history of the lecture itself would be great, too.

BS: Okay. I met Alice Smith when she came to Tampa. She came from Wayne State University. And one of her ideas, in addition to getting the library school off to a really good start, was to emulate the Detroit Book Fair, which apparently was one of her pets, among all the other experiences in her life. So, she and Florence Cleary, one of her former teacher mentor friends, decided to stage the Tampa Book Fair. And that's how I got involved, because I was with Tampa Public Library, and at that time, I think I was doing community relations for the library. So, anything that had to do with programming, outreach and that sort of thing went through my office.

Alice had all these wonderful ideas and techniques for contacting people, and we did the book fair for several years. We started it off with the *Tampa Tribune* as one of our key sponsors. We used H.R. Hunting Company as our book vendor supplier for those first few years. They had a warehouse downtown in Tampa. And Alice knew all these people. She knew authors and editors and writers. And we just had a wonderful time.

The Tampa Book Fair was probably too successful, because we darned near killed ourselves putting this thing on. At that time, we had it in what was known as the Electric Building, or the Electrical Building, on North Boulevard, which was part of the then State Fairgrounds. That building was horrible. Before we could stage the book fair, we all had to go in with mops and brooms and scrub brushes and clean the place.

We involved children in the schools. Dr. Smith was great, working with Juanita Goodbread, who was the coordinator for all the elementary school libraries in the county at that time. And they got classes of children to do artwork: you know, they would choose a book and do a great big poster based on that book's theme. We tried to tie it to authors we knew were coming. But we didn't want to stifle the kids' creativity, so we had posters with fairy tales and so on.

AB: That's great.

BS: Those first few years, it was really a challenge. And it was absolutely wonderful, because we attracted people like Munro Leaf and Walter Farley and Angie Draper and, gosh, Andre Norton: just, you know, wonderful writers. And the kids flocked to us. We had 10,000 children go through the book fair in a week.

AB: Wow.

BS: And at that time, during the early days, the school buses were very generous. I mean, we could book classes one after another, and the school system saw it as a benefit and provided the buses for it. We went through a few years when that was not so good, when gasoline was just a terrible challenge, and the schools just couldn't afford it, so they had to pick and choose which event the kids would go to. And they're doing that now, even, you know, in the schools. They say, "Well, these are the things we can offer this year. What is it you want?"

AB: Right.

BS: But with those early days in the book fair, we all worked real hard. Alice was right in there with a broom and a mop just as the rest of us were. And of course, she also was so creative in dealing with the enhancement of education, particularly for school media people in Hillsborough County. So many of our school media people might've had a teaching certificate, or an undergraduate degree, but Alice tried to encourage everybody, practicing or not, to come out here and get that master's degree. And she was instrumental—she was the guardian angel of getting the library school accredited here. In fact, I was at ALA with her when they announced that the accreditation had gone through. Needless to say, we had quite a celebration.

AB: (laughs)

BS: She and Jean Gates were very, very, very good friends. Jean Gates and Alice Smith had a lot of things in common and some things totally not in common. Jean was the most precise, elegant lady you'd ever want to meet, and Alice would put on a pair of blue jeans and sit on the floor with us so that we could work on things. So, it was a little contrast. But they worked as a team beautifully, and they wrote the program and the presentation that got this library school accredited. And that's great.

AB: Maybe I should ask that—that's a good point at which to ask when Ms. Smith arrived here. Did she come as the director of the school, or—you're saying Jean Gates—

BS: Yes, she was brought here to get the library school going.

AB: Okay. So, she's—so the school was just being founded when—

BS: Exactly.

AB: —she arrived to start it. And do you know about what year that was? I should know this, I apologize. I just blanked out.

BS: I don't know. But I can—we can look it up. (laughs)

AB: But—so, she was the first—

BS: It was in the sixties [1960s].

AB: —director of the library school.

BS: Yes, she was. She was. And she attracted other people to come. And Jean's—Jean Gates was better known as a writer/editor than as a faculty member—to me, at least. In fact, when I started teaching here—my first semester I taught here was spring 1976, and by then, I'd gotten to know Jean pretty well. And she called and said, "I would like to know if you'll teach for me in the next semester. I want to take a trip, and I need somebody to take my class." So, that was the first semester I taught Foundations. And, you know, our friendship went on forever after that.

Alice and I were very, very close. During the last few years Alice lived in Tampa, she lived three blocks from me. As her health declined, my children and I kind of looked after her. Her children were all scattered to the winds, but she was close to me and she was a very dear friend.

As the library school matured, of course, and more courses were offered, and—there was an education program at USF, there's no doubt about that. And part of the education program was to train teachers—I hate the word "training." Training is used to teach animals things. Teaching and learning are human things, in my book.

But anyway, they took all of these people who were working in school libraries and wanted to enhance their backgrounds and enrich their education and make them better professionals. And, at the same time, there was no curriculum to teach people to become public librarians in this area. Those of us who wanted to get a degree to serve in the public library had to go to Florida State University. You know, that's that other university up in North Florida.

AB: Yes, I do know.

BS: Okay. (laughs)

AB: I am aware. In fact, I spoke to a gentleman who grew up just blocks away from here and did his undergraduate work here and would've loved to have come to library school here, but it hadn't started here yet. So, he had to go—

BS: He had to go to Florida State?

AB: Right. And then he came back, and he's taught here as an adjunct since then.

BS: Oh, that's great. Who's that?

AB: That's Kevin Beach down at Manatee.

BS: Oh, of course I know Kevin! His father was Cecil Beach, who was the director at Tampa Public Library and a good friend of mine.

AB: Right. He's a delightful person, but I just remembered the irony of the fact that he would have loved to have gone to library school right here.

BS: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

AB: It just wasn't available then.

BS: Well, I'll be darned. I didn't know he was teaching as an adjunct. That's great.

AB: He had, years ago. In fact, I think he taught at—he oversees collection development down at Manatee now.

BS: And he's a super guy.

AB: Yes, he is, very nice.

BS: At any rate, a few of us got together and decided that Alice's contributions to USF were significant. Her knowledge and awareness of children's books and materials just were top of the line. And one of the things that she was known for was giving people huge reading lists when they took her classes, and you were expected to read and annotate sixty books in a semester or something like that. You know. So, she was a taskmaster, but a wonderful taskmaster. And one of her other things, of course, was storytelling.

And she and Henrietta Smith were bosom buddies, good friends. I had a card from Henrietta this week, as a matter of fact. They would go to ALA conferences together, and one of the funny stories is one of them would get to the hotel earlier than the other and go up to the desk and ask if the other person had checked in. Like, Alice would go up to the desk and say, “Has my sister Henrietta Smith checked in yet?” And, of course, they were salt and pepper here, you know.

AB: (laughs) Yes, I see.

BS: So, people got a kick out of that. But they were such fun, and they worked so hard together.

So, Henrietta was one of this little core group of us who were Alice supporters, defenders, admirers, who decided there had to be something to continue her legacy of devotion to literature, especially to children’s literature. We decided we’d start this lectureship. And there was quite a group of us; I’m trying to remember. Yvonne Ralston—I can’t remember her next name. Yvonne, bless her heart. She was a faculty member at USF, too, but she was dean at the Lakeland Campus when they first started over there. Donna Leone was another one. Mary Lou Harkness was part of the team. Um—I’m trying to remember. I think Juanita Goodbread actually was among the founding group. There was a small group of us, and then a few more that became part of it as a team, you know.

But we started thinking about how to do this, and it turned out to be a lectureship. We would invite someone like Eve Titus to come and deliver the Alice G. Smith Lecture. And Eve Titus was charming and wonderful and a lot of fun. And, of course, we always had them bring their books for autographing and so on. It went on for quite a while, and then there was a break. Due to the changes in administration here at the university from time to time, things got lost in the shuffle. So, there were some years when we did not have the lecture.

AB: Do you remember any specific moments of anecdotal excitement during the lectures where a discovery was made or offered, or just a fun moment that people shared, in particular, from any of the lectures?

BS: No, not really.

AB: Okay. That’s fine.

BS: I remember them as being wonderful, pleasant events. Eventually, some of them featured people who had other backgrounds, other than the devoted interest in children's literature that Alice had. We had people come and talk about computers in libraries, and we had people come and talk about the research and the history of the book, you know, rather than a specific genre or something like that. But over the years, it varied. I was very sorry the years that it was not done, but it was not up to me to have it done. It had to come from within the library school.

AB: I don't want to be putting my personal opinion as part of this history; it's yours. But I do think—you might agree—that it's a chance—that we don't get very much of—for the faculty and the students to all come and celebrate us being at the school together, which is lovely.

BS: That's true. We need more of those things.

AB: I think so, yes. So, that's great. And I thank you for talking about Ms. Smith. Now you've enhanced my anticipation of this year's lecture and evening. I'm looking forward to it very much. And we also—before we get to FLA, we also thought we might touch on the subject of the founding of the Florida Chapter of REFORMA. And you might say what REFORMA is, as well.

BS: REFORMA is the Spanish language version of a library organization.

AB: Okay.

BS: Derrie Perez, Dr. Perez, was very active in that organization, and they were going through some *sturm und drang*. She was trying to get them back on the right track with the possibility of even having them come together and meet during the Florida Library Association conferences, so that they would have a session or two—open to other people, of course—at the conference. And Derrie's challenge was to try to bring some order into an organization that was very loosely-knit and, at times, kind of at loose ends, to put it that way. So, she involved me because I happen to be a crazy person who likes to write by-laws.

I mean—you know, I've been writing policy and procedure manuals and by-laws and charters for organizations—gosh, for at least thirty years. At one time, I was parliamentarian for the Tampa Educational Cable Channel [Tampa Educational Cable Consortium]; for—I've always been parliamentarian for Florida Library Association; for

the Southeastern Library Association; for the Girls Clubs of Tampa; for the American Association of University Women, locally. I mean, it was a hobby. And I like structure.

AB: Yeah.

BS: I don't always live with structure, but I do like structure. I like to see things organized so that, when you are responsible for a meeting of some kind, or an organization, you have a formula, a something you can follow to make it so that things proceed in a nice fashion; and that the records that come out of those procedures are, then, easy to access, easy to follow, time to go back. You know, a lot of people keep very, very detailed records. In fact, they keep too much detail, and in this day of liability and so on and so forth, you want to be very careful what you write when you write minutes of meetings.

Now, Florida Library Association doesn't have that problem. Our minutes are extremely well-done and they are proofed, and they are printed and they are kept on file. But some organizations have had a hard time determining what the content of their minutes should be, and that's been one of my things, to teach people how to do this: how to keep minutes that become part of your historical record, and are factual and honest, and that reveal very, very little of the emotional side of the discussion, because believe me, some meetings get really contentious, depending on what's happened. But that's the kind of thing I like, and that's why Derrie involved me in the REFORMA work. We sat at my dining room table a couple of times just going over the stuff line by line, word by word, to be sure that, as it progressed, it was a useful and usable document. And I think it worked out very well.

AB: And it appears that REFORMA has settled down since then and has continued to—

BS: Well, I think so. Yeah. It's a national organization, and I know they have a conference. And I hear no boohoos anymore, so, I guess it's all going along quite well.

AB: (laughs) I'm going to have to figure out how to spell boohoos in the transcript. (both laugh) That will be great. All right. Now, that's terrific, and that probably provides us a good segue into FLA itself.

BS: The Florida Library Association.

AB: Yes.

BS: Nineteen aught-one. (laughs) Nineteen aught-one—I love it. The Florida Library Association got its start at the beginning of the twentieth century because there were a couple of people who were practicing librarians that thought there should be a group for librarians over and apart from the Florida education organization. And George Utley, who was the director at Jacksonville, wrote to people he knew within the FEA and said, “We would like to participate in your conference, the Florida Education Association. And we would like to have some special sessions devoted to libraries and librarians.” So, he and a couple of others kind of tickled the ivories, got the music started.

It went on for a couple of years, kind of loosely-organized, then it just quit. It just died back. Then there are some—sometimes, when something comes up, you see and you hear something, and then, there’s another pause. We have written letters—handwritten letters, of course. There were no computers in 1901, much to the shock of some of our younger generation. But there’s a lot of stuff: written letters, minutes of meetings, old conference programs, which are here in the archives and filed and recorded.

The association rocked along through the teens [1910s]. There wasn’t much; there wasn’t much happening, and people couldn’t afford to travel. And there were not enough librarians, other than those who worked in the schools, to try to really get a new foot up. And then there came along this lady named Helen Virginia Stelle, who was the library director at Tampa Public Library. She started in 1917. And Miss Stelle started rocking the boat. “Well, we’ve got to have some kind of an organization for librarians.”

Early correspondence—also here in the file—between Miss Stelle and others shows the beginning to form a real FLA, a chartered organization recognized by the state. And there are early conference records here, which are a lot of fun to read. Everything was very formal in those early days. The ladies wore hats and gloves, and gentlemen wore suits and ties. And they used graceful and beautiful language in their correspondence, you know. “Yours, of the fourteenth,” and, “With humble respect and gratitude,” you know. I wish language like that still existed, but we’re all in too big a hurry. So we say exactly what we want to say and we get to the point, and that’s it.

But Miss Stelle got it back organized. And there were then a long stream of presidents and others who worked very hard to build an organization of librarians, not just public librarians. But certainly by those days, the twenties [1920s] and subsequently, there was more recognition of the requirement of education for librarianship. It wasn’t just that you came to work in a library to check books in and out, you know. And Miss Stelle really gave that a very strong boost.

(bell rings) Timed out?

AB: No, it's just—it's another application I should have closed. I'll take a moment here to just to close that so we don't get that interruption again. But, uh, thanks.

Miss Stelle, then—in some ways, it's like she—

Let me make sure we're still running first before—yep, still operating.

—that, uh, she had really achieved putting it on the map, in a way—

BS: She did.

AB: —with the formal state recognition, which is great.

BS: The early history was almost too early, but it's worth keeping. We have some interesting letters in the files, you know, of people talking about not being able to travel to the meetings, and how they regretted it, and all that. But starting in 1920, there is a good, strong, long chain of history for the Florida Library Association. We have the programs from the conferences in twenty-five [1925], twenty-six [1926], twenty-seven [1927]. During the war, in the 1940s, there was a hiatus. The organization was still alive and there was still a lot of correspondence, but there were no conferences. People simply couldn't get to conferences. And then, after the war ended, they began again.

AB: For listeners who might not quite have this awareness, during the war, of course, fuel was rationed. Tires were rationed.

BS: Right.

AB: The things that you would use to travel were strictly limited. You had to have coupons to get fuel for a vehicle.

BS: Right. And some librarians were in the military and went off to war.

AB: Right.

BS: So, some of them did not come back. Fortunately, a lot of them did, and they came back to FLA and strengthened its membership and kept going.

AB: That's great.

BS: So, we—you know, the association has—you know, there are people who really are not particularly interested. They say, "Oh, well. That's nice." But it's more than nice, because when you think about other professions and how they recognize the value of their organizations—the ABA [American Bar Association], the AMA [American Medical Association], the American Institute of Architects. I mean, these people use those initials, always, every time they write or sign their names. And we in librarianship have always been a lot more humble, you know. But we need to understand that organizations like the American Library Association, and now FLA—they're important because they offer those links of communication and that value.

There have been times, here in the State of Florida as well as other places, when the need for and the requirement for a master's degree has been challenged. Governments will take a look at that and say, "I don't why you need somebody with a master's degree to check out books. What does that mean? What does a librarian do, anyway?" And it's been up to the Florida Library Association—and, of course, our members—to teach people what it is we do and how we do it and why we're valuable.

AB: Yeah.

BS: The biggest challenge is the modern age. And Florida Library Association continues to develop, through conferences and programs and materials, the idea that even as the computer is seen to have supplanted some of the value of books for research, it cannot replace the mind of the librarian.

If you spend a day in a busy library and you watch people—and I do this at least three or four times a week. I spend hours in the library. You watch people, you watch older people struggling to find information, learning all about the computer, taking computer classes that are offered in a public library. You watch students—I had two the other day, and I just had the time of my life: two boys working on history assignments. "Can you help me find something on the Peloponnesian Wars?" "Well, yes." And so, I showed them how to use the card catalog. Uh-uh! It is a computer. It is not cards anymore.

AB: Right.

BS: I showed them how to use the book indexes. You open the back of the book. You look alphabetically. You find what you look for. If it's not there, it's not there; go to another book. But it's our skill in evaluating and assessing what it is that client, if you will, really wants to know. Somebody can come in and say, "I need a book about dogs," when he really wants to know about hip dysplasia in dachshunds. And we need to, through our skill and our training and the grace with which we deal with these questions, help people find what it is they really want. And that does not go out of style, and it is not replaced by a mechanical device sitting on the carrel in front of you.

AB: I also believe, perhaps, that our—and you may want to speak to this as well—that our commitment to organizing information also remains critical as well because—as an example, I saw somewhere, and I may be wrong in citing this without the information in front of me, but that Google, when they tried to import all these records, that they wound up with three billion errors in their system of trying to coordinate all of these records of different books in their Google Book project. If they had had librarians doing it, it would've been much more well-organized, I'm sure. Cataloging is an example of that, as well, and the importance of headings and controlled vocabulary.

BS: A lot of people think cataloging is a dead art, but it is not. It is a vital art, because there's so much more out there. It needs a whole lot more attention and care now. And the language keeps changing.

AB: Yes.

BS: Every profession has its own jargon, has its own language. And I think in librarianship, our language gets richer and deeper all the time because we, as people who care about knowledge, find a way through this web to the core and find out what it is in that specific area that's important. And you've got to do it with the knowledge of some kind of a language device. I mean, I think of those dear old folks sitting in the scriptorium writing all that Latin text, and I'm thinking, "Oh, boy, that was a challenge." They would have a ball today. They would have a ball. I mean, they'd run out of ink.

AB: (laughs) Yeah.

BS: You know.

AB: Yeah.

BS: But probably one of the greatest contributions that professional organizations make is to keep our clients—and I like the term client. These are people who are paying for our services whether or not they're handing us a dollar as they walk up to the desk. They're paying, through taxes or some kind of other support, the production of information itself. But they're our clients, and we owe it to them to give the best service we can, and to recognize that part of our service is to make those powerbrokers understand and recognize the value of library clientele. One of the greatest things Florida Library Association does for its members, and for people who are not its members, is to work on its advocacy.

AB: Yes. This is timely, because—this very part of our discussion is timely. I don't know if you saw the letter the president of the ALA wrote to the city in California that just closed its libraries?

BS: Closed the libraries.

AB: And about the importance of all the people there, the economy trying to recover, people out of work who need the help to—job hunting and resume building. So, yes, this is a very timely discussion on advocacy, I think.

BS: The State Library of Florida paid several years ago for a study: an ROI, return on investment study. The result of that indicated that, for every dollar spent on libraries, \$6.54 came into the economy. Now they're doing that study again; I understand it's a little harder this time. And maybe it should be a little harder this time. Maybe there are things that were not thought about as impacting the economy because they come through some kind of library service. How many people are sitting at computers in libraries today doing job searches? How many people are sitting at computers in libraries today applying for unemployment, applying for food stamps, registering to vote, you know.

AB: With some community colleges changing to four year colleges, how many now are going into libraries to be able to try to make the standardized test grade they need—they would've had remedial help at the community college, but now they need to go to the library in order to get on to higher education.

BS: Exactly. Exactly.

AB: How important that is. Is it your perception that the word “client” also infers a more—both professional and personal connection—

BS: Yes.

AB: —than “customer” as well?

BS: Yes.

AB: I think so, too.

BS: Since I’ve been working as a consultant for years now, I have clients. I have people who call me, and they’ll say, “Well, we’re in the midst of doing this, and we need to know a good resource, a good source. We’re going to redesign our children’s department, and we need to know some good sources for artwork, décor for children’s areas, prototypes of new computer devices for children.” And they have these beautiful things in children’s departments. They have colored keyboards. They have computers that are shaped like creatures that even little—I have three-year-old great-grandchildren. They each have a computer. It’s a baby’s computer. But they sit down at it, and they punch the keys, and the images come up, and they know what they are, and they’re learning their alphabet. Hey!

People ask that. And that’s part of the knowledge that I, as a consultant, have to learn. I have to learn this stuff in order to share it. It goes right back to the roots of what library’s for. If a library exists because somebody likes to read a book and they want to sit in an office and be a librarian, they’re in the wrong business. Even librarians who work behind the scenes must understand that they’re working for somebody. They’re working to produce something that somebody else will, eventually, take advantage of.

I like the term “client.” I feel it’s a very professional term. I have nothing against using the word “patron,” or “user,” but I guess in my old age, I just kind of like the prestigious recognition that it’s a partnership between me and the person on the other end of the phone line, on the other end of the computer line somewhere, that we’re treating each other as equals and I’m helping them somehow.

AB: That’s great. Thank you. That’s really terrific. If I could come back to FLA again now, for a moment, I wanted to ask if you have any specific recollection of when you

were going to go to your first FLA conference, if you had some anticipation, if you remember some of the people you met there, or any of—

BS: Oh, I remember.

AB: —the sessions you attended. Or when was it, where was it?

BS: Well, I don't know that it was the first one I ever went to. I clearly remember being at the Jack Tar Harrison Hotel in Clearwater, and this was in the early sixties [1960s], I think. And I was invited to sit down at lunch with Dorothy Dodd, who was the State Librarian; with Dr. Elizabeth B. Mann, who was, at that time, a librarian, and I think she may have been, at that time, head of the school libraries in Pasco County, but I'm not sure; [with] Verna Nistendirk, who was with the State Library of Florida; Ruth Rockwood, who was at Florida State University. I mean, these women were all older than I, were all well-experienced and very well-recognized and highly accomplished people, and they welcomed me to sit in their group. And it was just such fun, you know, just such fun.

One of the first experiences I had at an FLA conference was—I used to read and review a lot of adult books—fiction, of course. I love fiction. And so, one of—they were looking for an early morning session, and my friend Caryl Fenton and I said, “Oh, okay. We'll do book reviews”—at seven-thirty in the morning, at the Playboy Club in Clearwater Beach. We packed the house. And some of the people who came in said, “What is going on?” and we said, “This is a library convention.” “You people get up at seven-thirty in the morning?!” “Well, yes.” (both laugh) But it was such fun. And you got to talk about things that you personally like to read, but to interest people in books.

I had a library director tell me once that readers' advisory services were passé, that they were no longer needed. And I said, “Well, I still like the term readers' advisory service, so I think I'll keep using it, you know.” And readers' advisory service is a hot topic these days. We talk about it. We are readers' advisors. People walk up to me when I am working as a volunteer in the library, knowing that I'm a librarian, because I have it engraved on my forehead. And they'll say, “What have you read lately that you really liked?” or, “Can you tell me an author who writes like this one?” you know. And yeah, I do. I still do those things. I still enjoy it.

But one of the things I guess I am best at, and one of the things that the Florida Library Association does best, is advocacy. The Library Day is forty-one years old, forty-one years of friends and librarians getting in their cars, or on buses, and trekking to Tallahassee to promote and support libraries. And this started a long time ago. Cecil

Beach was one of the guiding lights of Library Day. We had—our first advocate was a tiny little lady named Eugenie Suter, and Eugenie would go up to Tallahassee and lobby for libraries, and everybody knew her.

AB: That's a beautiful name, too.

BS: Yeah. She made her way, believe me. And that team, that core of the good ole guys, was Cecil Beach; Harry Brinton, who was head of Jacksonville; David Kantor, who was head of the Volusia County-Daytona Library; Ed Sintz from Miami; Leo Meirose from Broward County, who subsequently was director here at Tampa. That was the core of the men who knew what they were doing and knew how to get it going. Another one was Dennis Robison, who was here at USF. He was an academic librarian, but he got very much involved in the whole idea of advocacy and dedication of libraries. And those fellows put together excellent programs for conferences and brought all kinds of interesting speakers and programs and topics, and they didn't pull their punches.

So, the Florida Library Association conferences attracted people from all over the country. And we worked hand-in-hand with the American Library Association on many things—and with the Southeastern Library Association—to bring speakers, conduct programs, that sort of thing.

AB: It may be worth noting, in terms of advocacy, that just earlier this year, before the conference in 2009, the [Florida] Library Association served well in helping to marshal statewide support when the budget looked quite bleak for libraries—

BS: It sure did.

AB: —for the coming year. And members of the [Florida] Library Association around the state managed to lead a charge that—the Library Association's own consultant was surprised at how effective it was in restoring some of that critical funding—

BS: Yes.

AB: —for libraries for the year. So, it's still active.

BS: Yeah. It's pretty good when you can get the governor of the state [Charlie Crist] to come down and lobby on the floor [of the legislature]. And he came!

AB: (laughs) Yeah.

BS: He came.

AB: Yeah.

BS: Several years ago, we had another challenge. We had a governor at that time [Jeb Bush] who thought maybe he would give the State Library away. He thought, “Well, you know, we don’t really need this up here. We’ll give it to Nova University.” Nova University’s a private university. Had he given our collection, property of the citizens of the State of Florida, to Nova, we would’ve had to jump through their hurdles to have access to it.

BS: So, 400 and some people went to Tallahassee on a cold winter day, with rain in the air—a nasty cold day—and circled the State Library, and when that governor stepped off the elevator with a smirk on his face, he didn’t get far, because they were waiting for him right there. And that subject was dropped in a little while.

Now, I have nothing against Nova: it’s a wonderful school with a great, great library and all that sort of thing. A friend of mine who used to be here in Tampa, at the University of Tampa, is now the director at Nova.

AB: But the assets—

BS: But it was the State Library. It belonged to the people of the State of Florida, and it was created to assist the state legislature, much like the Library of Congress was created to assist Congress to provide their information and their research backup. And we kept it, and it’s still there. And we are very fortunate, now. We have really good leadership from the Secretary of State’s office, who is an excellent leader.

AB: Awesome. That’s very good news. Are there any more pertinent stories about the history of FLA that we should make sure we include; or is there anything overall, in wrapping up our discussion, that you feel is important to pass along as well? There’s no rush. We can take as much time as we need.

BS: Well, I think one of the most difficult parts of life now is the fear of libraries, that they won't be able to continue. And we've seen that. You just mentioned, a while ago, the situation in California. I read recently that Reading, Pennsylvania, was getting ready to close its three libraries and discontinue its bookmobile. I don't know. I think they got past the hurdle, but it was there. Philadelphia—Philadelphia! The Free Library of Philadelphia was talking about closing.

How can we, in an educated society where we have to knowledgeable, well-informed, intelligent, careful people running our world, how can we close down one of their major resources? How can I say this—I get emotional about it. How could I say to my great-grandchildren, “I'm sorry, you can't go to the library today, 'cause it's not there anymore”?

AB: 'Cause we didn't fight hard enough to—

BS: Yeah. Yeah. You just—you can't do that.

AB: Yeah.

BS: Thank you. My children were all readers, and my—I watch my great-grandchildren now, and it's fun. It's really fun. I mean, when a child who never used to like to read will take a book off the shelf that's three inches thick and weighs five pounds and get lost in it, more power to 'em. More power to writers like [J.K.] Rowling and [Stephenie] Meyer, who are making kids appreciate stories, fantasy, fiction, but also language. They're in children's books, especially in the books—for a year, I decided I'd read every young adult book on the ALA best young adult book list, 'cause I was substituting in middle schools. Those books are so well written that they put some adult writers to shame. The grammar, the language, the descriptions: gorgeous, just gorgeous. And I'm so happy to see that.

Television's good. I love television. I watch it for some things I really like. I like *Bones*. Of course, *Bones* is based on books by Kathy Reichs, who happens to be an excellent writer. But you've got to have that quiet time. And to watch a thirteen year old boy (laughs) take a book and go and get lost so you have to call him three times to dinner? I mean, that's accomplishment. That's what it's all about.

AB: Yeah.

BS: That's what it's all about. And that's what—as library schools train and develop people for this wonderful electronic age, they cannot—they have not, but they cannot lose sight of the fact that little kids need books. They need pictures. They need the rhythm of a book by Bill Peet. They need to be able to have a cozy chair and a lap and a beautiful picture book, because that gives them that enrichment of their soul. You can look at a moving image on a screen, and you see exactly what that producer wants you to see. But when you have a book, the moving image is in your mind. And it's up to you, with your own personal background and your skills in deciding what's good and what's bad.

This is another area of librarianship that I haven't talked about, and that is dealing with intellectual freedom. And I have dealt with it many times in my career. I had a parent call me and say, "I don't understand why you would let children check out this film from the library." A fourteen-year-old kid checked out a film from one of the public libraries and went home. And after school, he and his little brother, who was nine or ten, were watching the film when Momma came home, and she didn't like the film. And I said to her, "What did you do?" She said, "Oh, I took it out immediately!" I said, "Would it not have been better if you'd sat down with them and talked about that film in light of your family's personal morals and beliefs and why you didn't like some parts of it? That was a teaching moment, and you missed it." The woman was speechless. I was surprised she ever spoke to me again; she did. She thanked me.

AB: Good. Good. That's good to hear.

BS: So, people who—librarians must be respectful, but we also have to have that self-respect and that discipline that says to others, "I am Librarian with a capital L. I'm proud of it. I work hard at it." And we are the only profession in the world that spends all of our time, all of our money, learning things, doing things, and we give it all away. There are no billable moments on my desk. I give it all away. Now, with the consulting work, that's not so. I charge for that. (both laugh)

But when I was working in the library as a reference person, or working with children, anything and everything stored in my brain was theirs for the asking. And that's what it's about. And that's what—that's the enrichment part of librarianship. That's why people who teach in library schools, like Alice Smith and Henrietta Smith and some of these other dear folks with whom I have had the good fortune of working, make it so valuable. They make it precious, and that's not a word I use easily. They make it precious.

And we, as people who have worked in this field and who share this field and who want to pass it on to others, we need to really show what a wonderful thing it is, that librarianship is a field of lifelong caring, and it's durable and it's strong. But it can be—

you know, it can be so much fun. I mean, I like to walk by a table in a library and hear somebody chuckling when they're sitting there reading a book. Life should have some good stuff. It should have some fun stuff.

AB: I think librarianship is supposed to be one of the jobs that has very high job satisfaction—

BS: Oh, yeah.

AB: —measurements to it.

BS: You know, I used to tell my students, “There are some things you really need to be a good librarian. You need to be patient. You need to be open-minded. You need to be selfless, at times. And you need to have a great sense of humor, because you're going to deal with humanity in all of its various dimensions. You're going to deal with disturbed people who come into a public library. You're going to deal with children who waited till the last minute to do their homework, and they can't understand why you can't find 'em a skinny book for that book report. You're going to deal with people who frighten you sometimes.” You know, we've had very unusual and strange characters into libraries. And the whole business with the terrorists now, and that whole episode of the pilots who were learning to fly and using public libraries to get information down in South Florida, that's scary. But it shouldn't stop you, because we, along with the media, are the last defenders of intellectual freedom.

AB: Yes. Yes, and it's a never-ending battle.

BS: Yeah.

AB: It's always going to be with us.

BS: Yup. And that's my story! (laughs)

AB: Okay. So, that's probably a good place to wrap—unless you have any other last moment to include, I think that might be a good place for me to—I cannot thank you enough. This has been such a joy—

BS: Oh, good.

AB: —to be with you. And I look forward to completing this and making it available to everybody, but it's a treasure getting to know you in this process.

BS: Why, thank you.

AB: And thanks for sharing all that with us.

BS: Well, thank you. I love to talk about libraries and librarianship. (both laugh)

AB: That's completely wonderful. Thanks.

BS: You're welcome.

End of interview