

Voices of SLA

Dorothy McGarry (DM)

Interviewed by Rita Costello (RC)

November 16, 2009

RC Good morning. Today is Monday, November 16, 2009. My name is Rita Costello, and it is my pleasure today to be interviewing Dorothy McGarry. Because of her long history of involvement with SLA, and the profession as a whole, Dorothy has been chosen to be interviewed for SLA's oral history project, Voices of SLA: An International Oral History. The project is an initiative of the Fellows of SLA in partnership with the SLA Centennial Commission. Dorothy and I have been -- are talking today in the Rosenfeld Library on the UCLA campus. Dorothy McGarry, retired head of the cataloging division of the UCLA Physical Sciences and Technology Libraries, is the recipient of the 2005 Margaret Mann Citation, presented by the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services, Cataloging and Classification Section of the American Library Association. Even though Dorothy is officially retired, as Librarian Emerita, she volunteers her time to work on clearing up the bibliographic database

for the UCLA Science & Engineering Library. Dorothy has been a member of SLA since 1971 and has held a variety of positions in the association, including being a member of SLA's Committee on Cataloging and its predecessor, the Cataloging and Access Committee, and SLA's representative to IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Her areas of professional involvement are in cataloging, the organization of information, and in the sciences, with participation ranging from all levels: national, international, to local. Dorothy has been selected for numerous SLA awards, such as the John Cotton Dana, SLA Fellows, Hall of Fame, Physics-Astronomy-Mathematics Division Achievement Award, Southern California Chapter Continuous Service Award, as well as the Billie Connor Award. I am especially pleased to have been asked to conduct this interview since I've known Dorothy for some 23 years, both as a UCLA and as an SLA colleague. Good morning, Dorothy.

DM Good morning, Rita.

RC Let's start with an easy question: how, when, and why did you become involved with SLA, and how has your involvement met your expectations?

DM I became involved in SLA originally because I had an instructor in the Science and Engineering Libraries course

in library school who talked a lot about SLA and expressed how interesting an organization it was. I joined in 1971, which is when I also graduated from library school. SLA offered in-depth sessions on the physical sciences and included many committed librarians who were knowledgeable and welcoming to newcomers. I started out on chapter activities and got into division activities later. My first annual conference was in 1976. And yes, my involvement has met my expectations. I came to have many occasions to discuss issues of interest with colleagues, and a number of colleagues in SLA became friends.

RC In your opinion, what do you think were some of the major issues for SLA when you were on the executive board?

DM There were a number of things that were the same as came up every year, but a couple of major issues when I was on the board included determining a new name for the new journal that would be replacing the journal called *Special Libraries*. Also, work was done on the logo because there was some feeling that the logo should be changed from the traditional one. An outside firm was hired to design a logo, and that went very poorly and did not have a positive outcome, so then some SLA members were chosen to design the logo, and that worked much better. Getting more members involved is always a major issue, and so is greater

communication between the staff and board and the members as a whole.

RC What rationale would you give other professionals for both joining SLA and also for taking an active role in SLA?

DM SLA is *the* association that I know of that has in-depth discussion and consideration of the physical sciences. And I know SLA is broader than that -- it has arts, it has education, and so forth -- but my background being physical sciences, this is what's most common to me. Many librarians come from specialized university library units and from other types of research libraries. It gives librarians a chance to interact with others in the other kinds of libraries -- corporate, government, university -- and it gives people chances to grow and develop their knowledge in any organization, and to get some different perspectives on what they're working with. In any organization, taking an active role means that the person grows in working with the groups, then in leading people in being chairs of committees or discussion groups and so forth. It adds to what someone gets out of the association by giving to the work of the association.

RC Dorothy, you've been an SLA member since 1971. During these past 38 years, what SLA accomplishments do you view as the most significant to you?

DM Probably one of the most important is increasing internationalism of SLA. In addition, a number of new divisions have been formed allowing members interested in the activities of those divisions to have a closer relationship with others interested in the same aspects. Another significant change was a change in the dues structure several years ago, and I think that was a good move because lower dues for some categories of people allows people with less income a better chance to join SLA, to contribute to the different perspectives involved in the organization, and to get something out of SLA.

RC Is there something that you think SLA should have done during your years of membership?

DM Well, SLA has done many things, and that's why I'm still a member after all these years, but one thing I wish it had done was put more effort into recruiting academic librarians. I think academic librarians used to be more common in the association than in the later years. At times when a librarian from a university library has retired, his or her successor does not join SLA because the person doesn't realize the value of the association, and I wish that the SLA membership had put more effort into making people aware of the value of the association to university as well as corporate librarians.

RC And how did your participation in professional organizations of any kind influence your career?

DM Participation has improved my career greatly. My work with SLA has led to a deeper understanding of people working in public services and collection development in the physical sciences and engineering so that I could become a better cataloger at UCLA. In terms of other organizations, participating in ALA led to my being involved in major changes that have taken place in cataloging rules, and participation in IFLA led to my being involved with international cataloging events, such as being a member of the study group that produced the *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records*, being on the International Standard Bibliographic Description Review Group for a number of years, and being involved with major changes happening in the cataloging community in general. I think all of these have made me a better cataloger at work.

RC Dorothy, today, November 16, is an important day for SLA and for its membership in 2009, SLA's centennial year. As you know, the association's board of directors has proposed that SLA change its name to the Association for Strategic Knowledge Professionals. All SLA members are encouraged to voice their opinion on this controversial issue by casting an electronic vote in the special referendum that begins

today, November 16, and ends December 9th. Would you care to address any aspect of the name change issue?

DM I regret the feeling of the current board and several past boards and the CEO that the name should be changed. I think Special Libraries Association has stood the association in good stead for many years, and I know John Cotton Dana said that in lack of anything better, this was the name they chose. Well, I'm not sure there has yet been anything better selected. I'm very concerned that changing to a name that has no meaning for many of the members will result in academic librarians, and perhaps government librarians, and others in corporate settings who consider themselves librarians and not, quote, strategic knowledge professionals, unquote, might tend not to renew their memberships. If that happens, librarians who were interested in what SLA has stood for, and worked for, for many years, would have no association that can replace SLA because there is no other association that I know of that provides the type of interaction, the type of commitment, the type of learning experiences, that SLA has provided for so many years.

RC Dorothy, let's talk about some of the individuals in the profession, SLA members or not, who were significant or influential in shaping your professional beliefs or your

career. Who were your mentors?

DM Betty Baughman was my cataloging instructor, and she was very important, both in that she taught me cataloging and later sent me a series of *excellent* library school interns, many of whom I still see to this day and work with to this day. Rosalee Wright and June Armstrong, two of the finest reference librarians I've ever met, were mentors as I joined the UCLA library and worked with the physical sciences and engineering. Didi Pancake was chair of the conference committee when I was chair of PAM, and I learned much from her then, as well as enjoying her teaching of parliamentary procedure in the officers' training sessions. My first supervisor, Irene Struffert, was very important in my career, not just because she selected me for the cataloging position and introduced me to how cataloging was done in her department, but she wasn't interested in library-wide committees and sent me in her stead. The first such committee on which I served was a working group on public catalogs, and I still have friends based on the people I met serving on that committee many years ago. I was very impressed, of course, by David Bender when he was executive director, and he gave me very good advice when I became involved in IFLA, as well as about this association, of course. I received valuable advice from many others

over the years. I hesitate to start naming names in that I may very well forget some that were important. I'll mention a few: Susan DiMattia, Judy Field, Jo Ann Clifton many years ago, were just a few of the people that have had an influence on my involvement in SLA. For instance, as just one expansion, Judy has such a wonderful corporate memory. She sees how things fit together and recognizes important things that need to be done. There were a number of others who appointed me to committees and worked with me on committees, but there are too many to name at this time.

RC Dorothy, what advice would you give those joining the profession today?

DM I think that people should find a job they expect to like. Don't just take any job. Get to know your fellow librarians; join in an association that will fulfill needs for you, and get involved in the work of that association; listen to what's happening around you; keep an overall view of librarianship as well as your specialty.

RC And now we have a few questions that are future-oriented, I guess you might say. In your opinion, where is the profession heading? How do you think SLA and the profession must change in order to meet the challenges of the next five years?

DM The profession seems to be getting broader and in the

process, losing some of what I consider the fundamentals of librarianship. For example, in library schools, cataloging is often not required, even though I think it is the *basis* of doing any of the other functions well. It's necessary, of course, to keep up with changes in technology that come faster and faster. SLA does need to keep up with technological changes, and it does have courses to help its members and others to keep up with that technology, but it's important, I think, that the basics not be lost in the process.

RC What will be the most important skills or competencies association members will need as they move into the future?

DM You know, there are many new tasks, many new titles, many new avenues of exploration, but I think that members must be familiar with the organization of information, with basic reference and collection development abilities, and with library technologies. The fundamentals must be there for other things to succeed.

RC Dorothy, on a personal note, how do you prepare to change with the changing times?

DM My emphasis has traditionally been cataloging, of course, and I continue to follow the changes in cataloging rules and practices and maintain my relationships with librarians from many countries.

RC And now some looking-back type of questions. What's prompted your choice of library science as a career for you?

DM I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, exactly -- my Bachelor's is in anthropology -- but I thought about librarianship as something I would be able to do. It was something that I felt that I could do well, and I had worked in the library as a student for some time, so I had some sense of what was happening. I did begin at the University of Southern California in 1951 or so, but I had to drop out for medical reasons. Then I had some children, and I didn't work for a long time. When I decided to go back to work, I found I'd have to start all over again at the University of Southern California and decided I would go to UCLA instead. That turned out to be a very big decision because it had some excellent instructors and very good courses.

RC Dorothy, if you were starting all over again by making your career choice, would you join the profession again?

DM Definitely. I have enjoyed the work I've done and have met some great people. It's something that I have never regretted doing, becoming a librarian and working in a specialized library within a university.

RC And what has been the most rewarding aspect or special event in your career?

DM Well, I've served on various committees that accomplished a great deal, and I consider that rewarding. And then I was very honored to receive the various awards I have from SLA as well as the award I received from the ALA Cataloging and Classification Section. But working with people and accomplishing something and having some effect on the future have been rewarding aspects to me.

RC Dorothy, thank you for your time and insights today. We've certainly covered a lot of ground. So my final question would be: what important to you areas have I overlooked to ask you about?

DM SLA has been very important to me because I've met and interacted with very knowledgeable librarians -- including science and math librarians, also. And I've become involved in committees, served on the board of directors, was chair of a couple of divisions and of a chapter. I find it's necessary for a librarian to do more than do a great job at work, and that's been true of the influence of SLA. We mentioned before some parts of my being involved with other associations, and SLA has played a part, somewhat, in these others. I was involved with the Cataloging and Classifications Section of ALA, including being chair at one time, and I was involved when AACR2 was being undertaken, and I've been involved when AACR2 was

changing to Resource Description and Access. Then for the last several years, I've been SLA's representative to the Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access, and so again, SLA has been important in my activities. In IFLA, every standing committee I've served on, I've been nominated to by SLA. I was on the Classification and Indexing Section standing committee, and I served as chair there for two years and secretary for one in the late eighties and early nineties; and then I was on the Cataloging Section standing committee, where I've been deeply involved in International Standard Bibliographic Description work; and then again on the Classification and Indexing Section standing committee, where I've been involved with several working groups. Again, part of the reason that I could accomplish these things was the SLA nominations to these groups.

RC Dorothy, it's been both an honor and a privilege to conduct your oral history of SLA during its centennial celebration. I thank you for your time today.

DM Thank you very much, Rita, for conducting the interview and for doing so much preparation for it. I appreciate it very much.

RC My pleasure. Good-bye.

DM Good-bye.

END OF INTERVIEW