

Voices of SLA

Kitty Scott (KS)

Interviewed by

Anne Caputo (AC)

May 7, 2009

AC This is Anne Caputo. Today is May 7th, 2009. I am visiting with Kitty Scott, in her home in Washington, D.C. And we're going to do the oral history of Kitty's ideas, recollections, remembrances, and suggestions about SLA.

Kitty, how many years have you belonged to SLA?

KS Since 1955; 53 years.

AC You may be the record holder, I'm not sure. But that's a long time, isn't it?

KS Yes. I joined as a Student Member.

AC Where were you a student?

KS Catholic University

AC And who was the dean when you were a student?

KS My goodness. I can think of Father Barnard Theall, my mentor, but he wasn't dean.

AC And what did he teach?

KS He taught reference. But anyway, he was very instrumental in planning my career. See I went there as an undergraduate.

AC Did you? I see.

KS So I took a couple of library courses—Rev. James Kortendick was the dean. So both of them were very encouraging. I took another course, Introduction to Cataloguing.

AC Oh my word, and you stuck with it?

KS Not with that, no. But with Library Science. ‘Cause I was in the English, Speech, and Drama Departments. They all said “You’ll never make it to Broadway.” But it helped. It helped in my career—Communication.

AC And what was your first library job?

KS My first job was in the Library of Congress. I was in high school.

AC Really? What did you do?

KS It was during the war years. They needed people that had taken Spanish, and I was taking Spanish that year, in my senior year. So they recruited some of the students from St. Cecilia’s Academy on the Hill to work a little in the summer. I worked in the Government Printing Office too, for three summers, in the Poster Division, during World War II. That was quite an experience too.

AC And then, eventually, you went to the Smithsonian?

KS Well, that was way later. My next job after that was during the summer, when I was in graduate school at the time. I worked in Export-Import Bank of Washington (now known as the Ex-Im Bank). For one year that was a full-time job. The librarian at the time became ill. I was just her assistant. So I had to take over the library for a whole year. It was quite good experience.

AC It was a wonderful experience.

KS And then I went into the Association world. I had some government—semi-government—experience. So with the Library at Commerce (US Department of Commerce Library) you count that too. One summer I worked at Army Corp of Engineers Library, also part-time jobs. And then I went into the Association business, and helped start the National Association of Homebuilders Library, known as the National Housing Center. I worked there a long time, seven years. Quite an experience too, when I was assistant librarian. I started off in reference. But I helped start it with Dr. Karl Baer, when he was president of the SLA Washington Chapter and a consultant. He was also very active in IFLA. I was researching all kinds of stuff for him. Baer attended meetings all over the world, so I got interested in the international sector early in my career, and I was in IFLA later in my life. Anyway, he was quite instrumental in my getting active in SLA.

AC That was a very good day for SLA, and for you, I would say. (Laughter)

KS I guess so, yes. But then I took the big leap and I left Homebuilders, and went to start a library for AT&T and Western Electric, better known as Bellcomm, Inc., in assistance and engineering support for the NASA manned space program. And then that was being phased out ten years later. I went from there to Smithsonian—as the first librarian, full-fledged library at the National Aerospace Division, to organize their collection, which was stored all over--all kinds of warehouses.

AC Let's ask about your advice. What if you were talking with someone who was just joining the profession, what would you tell them?

KS Do what I did. Get a varied career. Don't stay—don't stick always with the first job you get and stay there forever; move around. Get the broadest background and

experience. And learn—don't be afraid to do things new. Innovation is the name of the game.

AC Well, you've proved that I would say. We talked about how you started being involved with SLA. How important has SLA been?

KS Very important to me. I took a series of steps, within the Washington Chapter. I did all kinds of stuff. I was chair of the Sci Tech Group of the Chapter. There were some very famous SLAers in this area that were very active in that group. The most important person I remember getting as a speaker was Sen. Eugene McCarthy. Politics was my special interest. I was a delegate to two national GOP conventions and was elected secretary to the Republican Platform Committee in 1964; the Goldwater years and the Nixon years. So out of that, I also was appointed by President Nixon to the National Commission on Libraries—the only special librarian, and the only librarian in the first group. They were all library trustees, presidents of universities, newspaper editors, and friends of libraries. That was quite an experience. I was there six years and that's where I met Joe Becker. He was another one of my mentors. Later I got him named as an Honorary Member of SLA.

AC I remember him myself.

KS Joe Becker?

AC Becker and Hayes? Their textbooks.

KS Yes, Becker and Hayes. Well, the Hayes was not doing too much in SLA. And actually neither was Joe. But Joe is very fond of special librarians as a group. So

Joe and I remained friends for years. Andy Aines with the National Science Foundation and Carlos Cuadra the only semi-library information scientists. .

AC You think you helped them understand what special libraries were?

KS I think—listen; I dragged Efren Gonzalez, who was president of Special Libraries Association at one point. Arranged a meeting for all of the commission members, and Joe Becker sponsored it at the Army Navy Club. So we all got together.

AC Right. That's very powerful.

KS But well, in between though. I mean I was president of the D.C. Chapter.

AC What do you think were major issues for SLA when you were very active in the Chapter and then later as the association president?

KS Well, when I was the president of SLA, my theme was "visioning". I'm very proud of that. Even though the visioning statement didn't have all those plugs for networking in it. The first visioning statement was very crisp. The Association Board revised it slightly.

AC So you were the one who started us talking about visioning?

KS Visioning. Yes, that was my theme.

AC And how was that accepted?

KS Well, I guess it was. It was picked up by a lot of the Chapters. Actually the Divisions didn't do as much as the Chapters. We promoted it. It took a long while for them to get in—geared up, 'because it's quite a task, developing a visioning statement. Bill Fisher was instrumental; I appointed him chair of a visioning task force. I was president-elect when we got this going. I wasn't supposed to be doing it so early, especially with Guy St. Clair as president, with his own agenda.

AC He was the president before you—just before you?

KS Yeah, he got in there ahead of me. (Laughter) But he soon learned who the boss was. (Laughter). Sorry, sorry Guy. I follow what he's doing too.

AC Yes, he's still very active. You know, he wrote the SLA history....

KS I've read some of the history. I loved it. He never interviewed me, so I'm not too sure he understood all of the history, except from his own perspective.

He was not that active before he became president. He was in New York. 'Cause in New York they thought they ran everything at one point. But I was under the tutelage of somebody who also was very difficult. That was our Executive Director Frank McKenna. I don't know if you know that name.

AC I've heard his name, yes.

KS That's before David Bender. David and I were good friends. I mean we had our controversies, but we were good friends. We still are.

AC Did David become the Executive Director when you were active? Were you involved in selecting him?

KS In selecting David? No. I had something to do with the appointments of his successors. But David and I were close colleagues. In other words we worked together pretty well. I don't know whether he agreed with everything I wanted to do. I'd kick butt, and he's put me in my place.

AC Well, he's been interviewed for this oral history project as well.

KS I know. By a very mild, wonderful man, Lyle Minter.

AC Yes, Lyle. Love that man.

KS Though I'm not sure Lyle took everything out that David ever knew.

AC Why do you think people should join SLA, or join in a professional association at all?

KS For their own advancement, for very selfish reasons if nothing else. By their networking; obviously networking is the name of the game. Regardless of what you see there in visioning. It's not just plugging in to networks. There are a lot of reasons. Friendships, colleagues are very important. And the friendships you build and the connections that you make. Some of the other people who are friends I have worked with are Jean Scanlan, who is working on this project with Susan DiMattia. Susan and I are good friends too. She's a good person. Barb Spiegleman should have been president. Elizabeth Usher would be the epitome of the New York Chapter. She was a wonderful librarian. And Bill Walker. He went from Washington and the Smithsonian to the MET. He was the art librarian. Sylvia Piggott was SLA president and a good friend. Judy Field, another past president, has been very active and supportive of the profession in her association work and in her work with students. Barbara Semonche also did a lot of work with student chapters. She retired recently, but I'm sure we'll still see her. I value her friendship.

One thing we liked to do in this business is bring in or make "honorary" special librarians. People like Raymond Kurzweil. OK, that's one. Roger Summit of course. You do know that name.

AC He hired me for my very first job.

KS Well there you go.

AC I know him very, very well.

KS Well, we got him as an Honorary Member. Frank Spaulding and I used to work on this every year. We took great delight in doing that. We got the librarian in the Bell Laboratories first. I think SLA has dropped honorary memberships, and I think that's a mistake. I think they should still be looking at the people from Google, Oracle, Dow Jones, Lexis Nexis, wherever. They shouldn't close the door. And Bill Gates.

AC And he really entertained us royally when we went to Seattle.

KS I remember that. Well, after he did all that for us, we made him an Honorary Member the next year.

AC Why do you think that's so important?

KS To make them, information scientists or entrepreneurs, whatever you want to call them—aware of special libraries.

AC What do you think is the most important thing SLA has done in the time that you have been active? What is our biggest accomplishment, do you think?

KS Well, in my day, it was membership. We grew, and grew, and grew, and grew, and grew, and grew.

AC And how did you do that?

KS I had a very good national membership chairman, Elaine Rosenthal, and I really am very devoted to building membership, touching bases wherever you can, and offering programs at a local level as well as the Division and Association level. So as a Division Chair I did it.

AC Which Division?

KS Aerospace Division. And then Aerospace became a section of the Engineering Division. Unfortunately I think it should be the other way around. Some of my best friends were in the Aerospace and they were go-getters. I liked Betty Stone, and all those people. Betty was a close friend of mine. We went to Australia together for an IFLA conference.

AC Did you now. It must have been amazing.

KS Yes, it was. So Betty and I were close friends. I'd say she was another influence. I don't know who influenced who in this case. She was ALA President (American Library Association) after I was Special Libraries President.

AC Right. She was my boss when I taught at Catholic University.

KS Oh, you did teach there?

AC I did. I taught there for 20 years. So membership is important?

KS Well membership growth. And sadly I don't see a lot of it now. Though it may be the times, now is rougher. Why is it that librarians are always the first ones to go?

AC I don't know, that's sadly the case though, I think. If you were president now, or if you were president-elect now as I am, and you were thinking of membership growth, where do you think we should be looking to grow our membership in a time like this?

KS Well, students of courses are very important. I mean, what there are out there. I mean because they may be interacted, depending on their school. I would say the schools of library and information science have their own set of problems. Schools, not just locally where we went. Where did you go?

AC I went to San Jose State.

KS Oh, that's Bill Fisher territory. Bill Fisher and I are very close buddies. He is a good sport. I'm close to Cindy Hill also. A very sweet girl. She left Sun Microsystems you know. I find the leadership is very important too. Not just membership, but leadership. That's important, for those people to realize the goals that they have and the influences they keep.

AC How do we develop good leaders, do you think?

KS Well, that's a good question. Confidence counts a lot. Click University sounds very specialized, you know? It's not really developing leaders. More management I would say. I would guess that maybe more emphasis on issues would help. Maybe they are doing it, I don't know. I mean I look at *Information Outlook* and I see all kinds of practical articles in there, and I think most of them are job oriented. I worked for corporate and they insist upon the fact that you don't just relate to your own profession or whatever you might be—an economist, an engineer, or whatever. You also take management courses.

AC Of all those places you worked, which one prepared you the most for being SLA President?

KS Bellcomm. Bell Systems. No doubt about it. They had very, very strong libraries. I know the girl who ran against me for president, Ann Talcot, who came from Bell Labs.

AC And your advice about having many, many jobs, I think is very good advice.

KS If you can see from my career changes, I wasn't afraid just because I'd worked for a financial library, to hop from a financial library to a homebuilders, homebuilders to science, pure science and technology. And then on to a museum.

And another challenge was that museum environment, that was like a step backward.

AC How was that?

KS Because the libraries were more traditional in their management approach at that time. And the librarian didn't—it wasn't his fault, it was the atmosphere. Russell Shank was a very good librarian, but he was very reserved. He didn't want to ruffle the feathers. So I'm afraid I did a little of that. I can't say he had all to do with my being hired either. I was at Bellcomm, and it was closing up, and guess who came to visit me to see what a library is supposed to look like. The new director of the Aerospace Museum Library, Michael Collins, astronaut.

AC Oh my word.

KS And so I had other connections. Along with it came General Elwood Quesada who was the owner and president of the L'Enfant Plaza Corp. where Bellcomm was located. Quesada was very proud of the Bellcomm library and he introduced me to Mike and said "You ought to take that girl (me) to the Smithsonian. She'll shake it up." Shank was looking for a librarian. Collins told Shank he found me, so this sort of closed the case for Russell too. I guess I proved it could be all right.

AC We talked about how your jobs influenced the way you were able to be a leader at SLA. Would you say being a leader at SLA helped in your jobs as well as your career?

KS I had confidence in SLA and what I was doing. I started getting comfortable in my jobs.

AC Switching gears just a little bit, I don't want to tire you out, so tell me when you think you've said all you want to say. We talked about people. You talked about Joe Becker and Raymond Kurzweil and Roger Summit and Bill Gates. We talked about who your mentors were. Can you name other people that you think are best thinkers, or innovators at the time you were very active in SLA? Other people that we should be aware of beyond the ones we've mentioned already?

KS We mentioned David Bender. He certainly took it on, with some resistance from the membership too. He had to go ahead and do his best as an executive director. Regardless of what the current president—they moved in and out.

AC But where do you think we are headed? Where do you think SLA is going?

KS I have so many people. I mean I know that they were good librarians, but also leaders, SLA itself. I mean in her own way, Didi Pancake, who is no longer a member, which concerns me. She's a past president. Vivian Hewitt, who was very active in the New York Chapter, was the first African-American president of SLA. If you can capture that special library emphasis in student chapters, I think that's kind of important. And then in the corporate sector, we don't have as much corporate. We have more government, unfortunately [in the DC Chapter]. I say unfortunately because some of those people I admired as good friends, like Elsa Friedman and Signe Larson. We were all good friends, so it's hard to pick them out. Not all of them were presidents. Some of them are lost, like a good friend of mine, Roger Haley. He was head of the Senate Library. He lost as president of the association. But we lose good people by elections too. Somehow I think we ought

to be reaching out to them. Find something good for them. You defeated a very good friend of mine.

AC Did I?

KS Yes. Janice Anderson. She's terrific. She's an innovator. If you go back and look at all of the contests, you find other people there too. Buzzy Basch. He's a vendor with his own company. He has a lot to offer and has dedicated himself too. I mean I noticed the ones that they picked for oral history interviews. I think I would have picked Buzzy out.

AC Well, we're going to do more interviews. We just had to start somewhere. Back to the question of where you think the profession is heading and where do you think SLA is heading?

KS I think they're heading out, doing all right. They're doing the right things. Gloria Zamora (president in 2009) is a good leader. She was on the Board with me. I don't know some of the current Board members, but the local ones I know somewhat. Greta Ober-Beauchesne, for example. People like that should be encouraged. Those who have done things at a local level should be attracted to the Divisions.

AC You think Divisions are important?

KS I think it's important that you have a balance, and that's why I said Aerospace was my Division, Washington DC was my Chapter. Frank McKenna was a big promoter of the New York Chapter too, and I can name a few that were there too. They're more the corporate sector, and I guess we were sort of considered the government types. We were rivals. Friendly rivals. I noticed that Guy St. Clair, in

his articles, he features the New York offices of SLA. The Washington Chapter was very proud to get the offices out of New York. One of my victories. How did it happen? They found the right building. Bender put his sights on Washington and that's why we're down here.

AC I'm just going to ask you one last question. If you had to do it all over again, would you....

KS Would I choose it as a career? I knew you'd ask that question. I think so. But I had marketing set up. Merchandising, marketing is my other love. I was a model when I was in high school and I was interested in fashion, so I often have that little tug. But I couldn't have stayed in Washington. Merchandising and marketing would have been New York. And I had ties in Washington—fourth generation.

AC So you think you had a good run, a good career?

KS I don't think I could have done any better, really. I mean I've gone to the highest. I've been to the highest. Including the Presidential appointment.

AC You did, all the way. Is there any last thing you'd like to say that I haven't asked you about? Or anything we haven't touched on that you'd like to say?

KS Well I haven't mentioned the Retired Members Caucus. I was a convener of that. Some of those people are still very active. Dorothy McGarry I see every time. Mary Park and Kenlee Ray.

AC Thank you for agreeing to do this interview.

KS And thank you for the flowers. (Laughter)