Kay Smith: Hi, this is Kay Smith. I’m in Mobile, Alabama, on October 27, 2014. I’m here with Judy Burnham to conduct her oral history interview for the Southern Chapter and we’ll start. Good morning, Judy.

Judy Burnham: Good morning.

KS: Please describe how you became interested in librarianship and give a brief overview of your professional career.

JB: I worked in a library when I went to community college and found it very interesting. Of course, I just did the shelving and that kind of thing but it just really perked my interest. I also worked as a paraprofessional at Mobile Public Library, where I held a variety of positions. I worked in a book mobile that was parked in a parking lot of a shopping center. I also worked at the children’s department at one of the branches; I worked in the circulation department and ended up being head of circulation at the main library. I enjoyed my work there. I also worked at the United States Sports Academy as a paraprofessional. I worked as a receptionist/librarian, which was kind of an unusual position. And then, I was in the library full time. And that really made me decide that I wanted to go back to library school and get my degree. It was at that point that I went to the University of Southern Mississippi, and received my degree. I worked as a graduate assistant while I was at Southern Miss, helping in the media lab, helping teachers develop different forms of media. My first professional job was with the University of South Alabama. I worked as an instruction librarian and started out at one of our hospitals at the University of South Alabama Medical Center and worked there for several years and then moved to campus where I worked as Assistant Director for Regional Services in charge of our outreach
program that we had at the time. Then I was appointed Assistant Director for Administrative and Regional Services being responsible not only for the outreach program but also worked with budgeting and other administrative tasks. I was appointed Associate Director in 2005 and when the director left, I was appointed Interim Director, and became Director in 2007. I’ve remained in this position since then.

**KS:** Quite a career. Let’s talk a little bit about your Southern Chapter activities. Do you remember the first Southern Chapter meeting you attended and what details do you remember about that one?

**JB:** It was in Jackson, Mississippi, my first one, and I just remember the welcoming atmosphere. I was a newbie right out of library school, but everybody was just so welcoming and I just felt like it was a really friendly and supportive group.

**KS:** That’s cool. Do you have any funny or interesting stories you might recall about Southern Chapter meetings you’ve attended?

**JB:** Well, that first one, in Jackson, Mississippi, the thing that really stands out in my mind is when Ada Seltzer did the strip. [Editorial note: this took place in Birmingham, AL, 1993 meeting]

**KS:** I’ve heard so much about that.

**JB:** It just really stands out in my mind, that’s just all. It was a tribute to one of the directors that was retiring, and so she did that. It was a very tasteful but a little unusual.

**KS:** Well, I hope it was flattering.

**JB:** And then the meeting in Savannah, my husband went with me to that one. It was the first one he attended with me and again, everybody was so friendly and so welcoming and seemed to enjoy his company, so that was pretty special. Of course the ones in Puerto Rico have been
special because it’s such a beautiful place and a place that you might not get to go to otherwise, so it was fun to go on the Puerto Rico trips. Of course the meeting in Mobile – I think it was in 2004, ‘06? Something like that. [Editorial note: Mobile meeting was in 2000]

KS: I was pregnant.

JB: So that was memorable because of all the planning that went in to it. I was in charge of the program for the meeting in Charleston and of course that one was memorable because of the responsibilities, and then the next meeting in 2008 in Birmingham I was chair of the chapter, and then of course this one where I’m local arrangements chair has been really memorable also.

KS: Sure, it’s a beautiful place here. So, you can definitely hear the whispering arches though. So, can you talk about how the Southern Chapter has evolved through the years?

JB: As technology has changed, our meeting presentations just seemed to follow the trails of technology. Technology become much more important. When I started my library career back in the early 1990s, CD-ROM was cutting edge technology, there was no internet. So technology is really driving not only the keynote speakers and the CE classes, but also the papers and posters that are presented as well. And you see the younger librarians replacing the older librarians and that’s exciting because we need to encourage the younger librarians to take a role, to become involved in the association so that we can prepare them to take the leadership roles when the old guard moves out. But through it all, it’s still that networking and that connection and that support in the association. It’s always there no matter what the trends are, how the technology changes, or who comes or who goes, you still have that supportive system.

KS: Right, some things don’t change.

JB: That’s right.
KS: In your opinion, what sets the Southern Chapter apart from other professional library associations?

JB: I think that we have fun while learning, and we network, and we support each other. I’ve heard MLA people say that they wouldn’t miss the Southern Chapter meeting because we always have the most fun. And to me it’s because it’s a smaller group – you can get to know each other better. MLA is so large that, unless you’re active in a section, it’s really hard to get to know anybody very well, but Southern Chapter gives you that opportunity to do that.

KS: Cool. Okay, well you’ve had several roles actually in Southern Chapter, do you remember what other committees you served on, besides volunteer roles?

JB: Well, I wrote them down because I could not remember them all.

KS: Okay good.

JB: I was on the Awards and Honors Committee, a member from 2010 to 2014. And then I ended up being a chair of the Strategic Planning Committee in ‘08 to ‘09, following my role as chair of the Chapter, I was chair of the Strategic Planning Committee. I was Chapter Chair from ‘07 to ‘08, chair elect and chair of the Program Planning Committee from ‘06 to ‘07. I’ve been a research mentor since 2003. I’ve served on the Communications Committee and was chair of that committee from ‘03 to ‘04. Served on the Conference Committee for Mobile, the meeting here in Mobile and then on the Program Committee for 2000. I’ve been a member of the Research Committee and a member of the Nominating Committee, and this year I’m chair of the Local Arrangements Committee.

KS: Wow.

JB: So, a lot of different committees and roles.
KS: Yeah, that’s a lot. Well, it’s good that you were a research mentor because I know you’ve done a lot of research, so that’s great. Do you know much about the founding of the chapter or about chapter related events of historical significance?

JB: I really don’t, when I read that question I tried to think – I guess because I’m not, I’ve been a member for a short time when you think about the historical part, and I really don’t know a lot about the history of it.

KS: Alright, after our experience with the fire alarm, we are back and we can now talk about how the Southern Chapter has impacted your professional development throughout your career.

JB: Well, I keep talking about networking and support, but it all goes back to that. There have been people that have mentored me who were older and wiser not only in librarianship but in leadership as well. And so that support is always there. The education aspects of it, the CE courses that you can take as well as the keynote speakers and getting ideas from the posters and the papers, it’s just a continuing education process to help librarians keep up with their skills. And then, the opportunity for leadership development. If you want to become a leader, Southern Chapter will allow you to become a leader, and will mentor you and help you to become the kind of leader you should be. You can start off with leadership opportunities in small committees and then just go from there.

KS: Alright, so, what are some of the names of some of the people who contributed to your professional development?

JB: Barbara Shearer, who is now at the Alabama Osteopathic School, was my first supervisor and a real good mentor for me in South Alabama. She not only taught me about the library, and helped mentor me in that way, but also politics, which is so important as you’re working in an academic library to know, the politics – who to go to, who to avoid, who has power and who doesn’t, that kind of thing. Jan LaBeause has always been just such a supportive person with her hugs and her friendly smile and she’s just a – she’s been a support to me personally as well as professionally, so I’m going to have to mention her. Sandra Franklin is another one that I would have to mention, because she’s always been so supportive and a good mentor to watch her
leadership skills and to try to adapt mine to match her leadership skills. And Suresh, who is just recently retired, is another one that has had a great impact on me. Brett Kirkpatrick who is retired from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston was my mentor during the AAHSL/NLM Fellows Mentors program and he taught me a lot too, again, about politics. One of the things that – one of the goals that I wanted to achieve while I was taking part in that program was how to work more within the system to achieve the things that I wanted to do and he was great at that. I could watch him and get ideas of how to be more politically savvy within my institution, so I think I’d have to mention those.

KS: Well, that’s a great group. What do you recall about some of the MLA meetings you’ve attended?

JB: Well, my MLA home is NAHRS*, that’s the section that I’ve chosen because MLA is so big that I think you have to choose a group to be a part of. [*MLA / Nursing and Allied Health Resources Section]

KS: That’s true.

JB: So you can be a part of a smaller group in NAHRS, and as I was thinking about preparing for this interview, I think it’s more the people and the events that I remember more than the posters or the papers or the keynotes even. I mean, I’d take ideas back home with me, but it’s those events that you attend, it’s those friendships that you make, it’s the people that I think have impacted me more. And to me, attending an MLA meeting or even a Southern Chapter meeting is like going to a pep rally for medical librarianship. You come back from a meeting, and you’re so enthused, you have all these great ideas, and you just are very enthusiastic about your future.

KS: Sure, I agree. So how has MLA impacted your professional development?

JB: I think - basically the same as Southern Chapter - the opportunities for leadership. I chaired the NAHRS section, and then I was elected a section counsel rep for the NAHRS group and that lead to me being chair of Section Council which led to me being on the MLA board so it just
gave me a lot of opportunities that I wouldn’t have had otherwise.

KS: Wow, just kind of backs it up. How has the medical librarian profession changed through your career and what developments in the field of librarianship have had the greatest impact on your professional life?

JB: Well, as I said earlier, CD-ROM was cutting edge technology when I begin my career, so technology has changed so much. Everything was in print back then and so it changed collection development because now we’re trying to get as much in electronically as we can to make it more useful to other people. There was no internet when I started, getting it [internet] was just starting to come in our field. When we would search Medline, we’d have to use the 300 baud modem so that’s changed a big deal. And when I first started searching Medline, when I was working for the United States Sports Academy, I had to go to the National Library of Medicine for a one-week training class to be able to get a passcode to be able to search Medline and now of course it’s available and open to anyone, anywhere, so that’s been quite a change.

KS: Sure has. What advice would you give to new medical librarians?

JB: Get involved. Volunteer. Step out of your comfort zone and take leadership roles when they’re offered to you or volunteer to take leadership roles. The people around you will mentor you and help you to be successful and a small leadership role is safe. Be a member of a committee, volunteer to chair the committee, and those changes, those volunteer opportunities will lead to more opportunities at a higher level.

KS: Do you have any final things to talk about that you’d want to mention?

JB: Just that how supportive Southern Chapter has been to me, not only professionally but personally. When my husband passed away earlier this year, there was such an outpouring of support from Southern Chapter members and that was so appreciated to know that they cared for me personally as well as professionally.
KS: Yeah, that is great. So, what are your plans for retirement?

JB: Well, I have a bucket list of things I want to do. Of course I have two grandchildren here in Mobile. I have three grandchildren in California, so I want to spend more time with them. I love to take pictures, but I’m not very good at it, so I want to take a photography course. I want to have the opportunity to be a little bit more active in my church, maybe lead some Bible studies, whatever. I want to be a reading buddy at our local elementary school, because I know how important reading is to the success of an individual, and so many children don’t have that opportunity to read at home because maybe their parents work two jobs to keep things going or whatever, so I want to do that. I played the piano when I was younger but have lost that skill so I want to…I recently bought a keyboard and I want to renew my piano skills. My mother has crocheted as long as I can remember and I used to crochet but life took over and no time to crochet so I want to relearn to crochet.

KS: Cool.

JB: So lots of things planned.

KS: Yeah, are you going to continue to come to Southern Chapter?

JB: I don’t know. (Laughs) We’ll have to see.

KS: I understand.

JB: Without the financial support that I have right now, we’ll just have to see.

KS: It’s hard sometimes.

JB: Yeah, depends on where it is.

KS: Yeah, well, we have been blessed to have you.

JB: Thank you.

KS: Best of luck to you in your retirement and thank you for being in this interview.

JB: Thank you.