Laura Kane: Thank you so much for submitting to an interview. Hopefully, it won’t be too painful. (Laughs)

Anne Robichaux: Thank you for asking us (Anne and Ken).

Ken Robichaux: (Jokingly) “How much are we being paid for this?”

Anne Robichaux: Yeah (Jokingly).

Laura Kane: Zero, sorry! (Laughter)

Anne Robichaux: Oops!

Laura Kane: Yes, we are making an effort to capture everybody’s story and I hear that in particular, Ken you have a lot of fun stories.

Ken Robichaux: (Laughs) None of which I can tell you.

LK: I think we’ll start off by asking you each to describe your careers and you can describe how you became interested in librarianship and how you became a librarian. Ken, you can talk about your career path and start from there. Would you like to start, Anne?
AR: Sure, I’ll start. I kind of had a family connection. I actually started out as a social worker after college and graduated in the dark ages when women were either social workers or librarians or teachers. So, I started out in that field (Social Work) and almost went back to school in that, but my mother had gotten interested in libraries and came to spend a summer with me at Chapel Hill, to go back to school and get some courses under her belt. So, I thought, “well, that sounds interesting.” And while I was in library school, Myrl Lua-Francis Ebert was one of my professors; she was at the medical library at Chapel Hill-UNC. She was so enthusiastic about her career that my favorite subject was the Health Sciences Literature course she taught. And Warren Bird was one of my professors and he was at Duke Medical Library, then. So that was what made me start thinking medical libraries as maybe a possibility. Actually, that had never been on my horizon, I was thinking social studies, anthropology, or something. But anyway, I ended up applying for a job here in Charleston. I looked at a couple of other libraries, but I applied here. In 1969, Buz Sawyer called me and said he’d gotten my application and said, “You have a job, if you want it. You don’t even have to come interview.”

LK: WOW!

AR: And I said “I think I’ll come in and interview.” And it turned out the reason he did that is that he knew the professor who had been my advisor in library school, had talked to him about me, apparently. But, I came here in 1969 and spent my entire professional career here, retiring in 2000 at MUSC*. I did look around in the early 70’s at a couple of other jobs, but I would come back here and my job changed and my salary was increased so I ended up staying here.
KR: You were acting director for a while.

AR: Well, I was acting director for a while. I started out in technical services and cataloging. For four years, we actually processed materials for the College of Charleston and I really went into administration...well...I became the Associate Director in 1976, so I was an associate director for a long time. I was acting director after Buz Sawyer** died in 1989, until Tom Basler came in 1991. (*Medical University of South Carolina) (**Warren A. “Buz” Sawyer)

LK: Buz Sawyer was one of the founding members of the Southern Chapter, I think. Is that right?

AR: Well of CONBLS, of the Consortium of Southern Biomedical Libraries. Actually Desmond Koster, who pre-dated Buz as director here, was one of the founding members, I think, of the Southern Chapter. She was director of the library here from, I think, 1949-68, when Buz came. Buz had been here a year before I was hired. One great thing about Buz was his soul. He didn’t like group meetings, so early in my career he had me go to the RAC meetings, the regional meetings, to represent the library. So early on, I felt like directors of other libraries were my peers, so it was a great opportunity and a good career. I enjoyed it.

LK: Ken, you’re not a librarian but you may as well be, right? (laughing) That’s what I hear.

AR: He’s become a librarian actually, in his retirement! (laughing)
KR: Well, yeah, sort of. I graduated from Marquette University in Milwaukee. I had been working part-time for a B. Dalton bookstore. So I became manager of a B. Dalton store and that is when they were just getting going; I think they had 25 stores, back in the Middle Ages. I think we still hand wrote all the books, I’m not quite sure how that was done. I eventually went and became the book buyer for the wholesaler there in Milwaukee. Then moved down to Atlanta, GA, and became the book buyer for the wholesale agency there. One day we had a Random House representative come in and he was just calling on all the book people in Atlanta. He said he had just come from Majors. And I said, “What in the world is a Majors?” He said, “Oh they distribute medical books.” And I knew zip about medical books. But their warehouse was located about 4 blocks from where my kids went to school. I said boy that would be great, I could go to work, drop my kids off, then go to work and be right there. So totally unannounced, I walked into Majors one day. Don Bowers was the manager there. And I said Don I’m happy where I am and everything, but you are located perfectly for where my kids go to school. We started talking and it turned out that our backgrounds were very similar; he had come from Baker & Taylor. So we were exchanging old stories. He said I’d like you to interview but the only thing I have open is a job where you would travel. I’d never traveled before, and I said well I’ll try anything once. You can’t die from it or anything, maybe you can. So about three months later I interviewed for the job. I didn’t realize there was anyone else interviewing for it; turns out there were 5 people interviewing for it, which I only found out 2 years later. I think it’s good I didn’t know. Anyway Don wanted to hire me. So I started traveling for Majors, Majors Scientific Books. Their headquarters is Dallas, TX, and it’s a family owned business, or was a family owned
business. It had been established in 1909 so it had been around for a long time. And I covered pretty much everything east of the Mississippi that was my territory. We really only had 3 people at that time traveling for Majors: me in the east, Bill Majors did the whole south central part of the country, and we had one person on the west coast, and that was it. It was a different time. The country was unofficially divided up and we kind of had unofficial territory. It was very illegal to do this, but there was no formal agreement or anything. Majors was kind of in the South, and there was Matthews and there was Rittenhouse. There was a distributor in NYC called Elliot and they handled New England states. I think there were 8 medical book distributors in the country when I started with Majors. Everyone had their own areas, you would go a little into the other areas, it was just friendly competition. We all offered pretty much the same services. But in those days shipping things was a little bit harder than it is today. It didn’t make a lot of sense for someone in New England to buy books from us in Atlanta. In fact when we would get orders from them we would often send them to Elliot in New York City and say why don’t you fill this, they are in your area. None of this would happen today.

LK: That wouldn’t happen today.

KR: There weren’t computers, we were not computerized. When I first started with majors, all of our customers wanted all these cards. Every book we carried was on these cards and it was all alphabetized. Everything was done manually. It was a cumbersome process and computers made it much better. But we didn’t computerize for a while. Shortly after I came to Majors we did start issuing a microfiche of our database. We would print out our database and put in on microfiche and offer that free to our customers. This was the first time that something was updated monthly that was available
to customers. It was one of our big selling points and our competitors very quickly went to similar things. And then computers came along, but I remember very few libraries had fax machines when I started. This was 1978. I remember going to a state meeting in Alabama and a hospital librarian came in and she had just gotten a fax machine and was thrilled. And everyone is saying how does it work? How much does it cost? The bigger libraries had them probably, but the smaller hospital libraries couldn’t afford them. The internet was really just email. That’s all it was. There were different types of programs that would sort these emails. One was called Archie, one was called Veronica. All these different things, I guess they just handled the email differently. The World Wide Web that we know with pictures and graphics and animation, didn’t really start, well it wasn’t invented until 1990. And it wasn’t until 1993 that the first web browser was invented. I can’t remember what that was, it’s now called Netscape.

AR: It’s not Gopher was it.


KR: I think Gopher was another one of those email things. And so that’s when the Internet suddenly blossomed from being just an email server, going into other things. And now it controls our lives apparently. I can remember reading in the late 1980’s an article in a computer magazine on why laptop computers would never become popular. Because it was hard to read the screens, the screen wasn’t in color; it was only in – if you had a really nice one, in amber, and black or green or whatever the letters were. I guess they didn’t think it would advance or get any better; they didn’t have much memory. I
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guess our generation is the generation that went thru the transition from a non-
computerized library system to a totally, almost digitized library system now.

LK: There have been a lot of changes.

KR: I just think the generation that did that deserves an awful lot of credit because it was
difficult. We didn’t grow up with computers. A computer to us, you saw it on Buck
Rogers, or it was Univac.

AR: At least you had a TV, we didn’t have a TV.

LK: Oh you saw it on TV or something?

KR: I remember the day we got our first TV, I think I was 12 years old. Computers were
these building sized things that required special cooling systems and things like that. We
have come so far in one and a half generations it’s almost unbelievable how technology
has changed so rapidly. So I ended up in Majors, I started there in 1978 and retired in
2003.

LK: Do you remember, Anne, your first Southern Chapter meeting? Where it was and
what year?

AR: 1970. I don’t remember a lot of these dates, but I remember that one. It was actually
in Houston, TX. That was when we were the Southern Regional Group, not the Southern
Chapter. That was the meeting where I met Mark Hodges, because it was his first
Southern Chapter meeting. He had come to Emory from Harvard and was new to the
region. I guess I had been working for about a year when I went to that meeting. Don’t
remember a whole lot about that meeting per se, but I remember the Hotel was called the
Shamrock. It looked like - it had all this land around it like it was in the middle of a cow pasture or something. I’m sure this is probably my memory playing tricks, but I just remember seeing the horizon of the city from a distance away. Unlike most meetings now the hotel is right in the middle of things, with a lot more activity going on. That could be my memory playing tricks.

But I actually went to my first MLA meeting before Southern Chapter. That was held in the fall of 1969, in Louisville, KY. I asked someone later on how come. I guess that was maybe the only time MLA had been in the fall, but it conflicted with the international meeting or a world congress meeting that was taking place in the spring. So they had that meeting that year in the fall. So I had been at work for about a month when I went to that meeting.

LK: Wow! That was a big one to start with.

AR: Yeah, I know, I was like the little country girl come to town. I roomed with Desmond Koster, and she unpacked her suitcase and pulled out a flask. And I thought (and I grew up Southern Baptist, I was still sort of a young girl here) and I thought Oh, Wow, is this what you need to do to get in the swing of things here. Pack your own liquor?

KR: There was a lot of drinking that went on at all the chapter meetings.

AR: A lot of drinking and I think the chapter, to me, it seemed like it was at the core, a party group. I went to other chapter meetings over time and they never had the same feel. But I think we just all liked to socialize and we got along so well.
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KR: I think Southern Chapter has always been unique. I went to other chapter meetings as a vendor, and when librarians from other chapters would come to a Southern Chapter, they would always comment that it was unlike any chapter they… Because it really was and still is a big family. Almost everyone knows everybody. When you get a new job it’s usually within the Southern Chapter, so you are kind of just moving around in the same chapter. I never got the feeling in other chapters it was a family. It was more of a professional organization, you went there, you did your thing, and then you went back to your library. Southern Chapter has always had a great social element to it and was a lot of fun to go to. Always, still is.

AR: I have a story related to that if it won’t interrupt your series of questions. When we hosted the group here in 1982 and I ended up, Buz ended up taking care of the program and I did the local arrangements. He actually called me the convention chair for that meeting. At the banquet we had a Charleston ‘20’s party; we had Charleston Flappers, a dance group that came in. And Sam Hitt was there, who was then the director of the Health Sciences Library at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He was sitting at the same table where I was sitting. We were getting up dancing to the Charleston music and this kind of thing. Not Sam, he was just sitting there.

KR: You were dressed like a Flapper.

AR: Our host group, we all dressed like flappers. And when I went back and sat at the table Sam said to me “Annie, when is this chapter ever going to get serious?” He was the only one that ever called me Annie, too. I said well we just enjoy having fun. I said it’s not that we aren’t learning anything from each other.
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LK: Just do it in a fun way! (laughing)

AR: Do it in a fun way.

LK: Is that how you see what sets Southern Chapter apart from other professional library associations? The atmosphere?

AR: I think so, the underlying current of friendship. It’s more than, I think, collegiality. We all seem to genuinely like each other.

KR: I think it really works to the advantage of all the libraries in the Southern Chapter. When you are running a library and you call some other library asking for help you are not just calling a colleague, you’re calling a friend. And there is a whole different interplay that goes on there that I think people are much more willing to bend over backwards and help each other, do things together. I really think it works for the benefit of all.

LK: Now Ken how did you become involved in the Southern Chapter?

KR: The warehouse I worked out of is Atlanta. And Majors, I think, was one of the founding members. We were one of the founding people.

AR: We had a tradition with Majors. I think because this group started in New Orleans and Majors was right next door.

KR: Louisiana used to be part of Southern Chapter.
AR: Majors traditionally hosted the welcome reception or a big reception prior to the banquet. They were one of the vendors that got involved at the beginning helping foot the bills for the meeting or paying for the party.

KR: We were, the whole company, always felt very close to SC for many reasons. It was very unusual for there to be a Southern Chapter meeting that I would attend as a vendor and not have at least a couple of the Majors here also. We often, I know at national we had 8 people there. And it was John Majors, Bill Majors, John Majors’s son, we called him Jam, Al McClendon, who was their nephew… they all would come. They would never do that to another chapter, it was only Southern Chapter they ever did that. Because we felt very close to Southern Chapter, we were part of the family and they were part of our family.

AR: We actually did not have formal exhibits until I guess ‘83. I think the meeting we had in Charleston in ’82 we invited vendors to participate and help pay for functions and things like that. There were a couple of tables where vendors could put literature but no actual booths or exhibits.

KR: And we usually bought the wine for the banquet. Which was a very big bill, I might add.

(all laughing)

LK: I’m sure that was popular. I know that traditionally, at the SC meetings they have the Majors walk, which is a little bit of exercise. Can you tell me about that?
KR: The Majors walk, it actually started at the New Orleans Meetings. Was that a joint meeting? I’m not sure whether that was a joint meeting or not, in the late ‘70s.


KR: It was going to be a health walk, but it was called the walk and run. We actually had 3 groups. We had people that were going to be jogging, we had the fast walkers and the slow walkers.

(AR: the turtle group, I was usually the turtle)

KR: We called the slow walkers the turtle group; the fast walkers were the rabbits. We had names for everybody. We had t-shirts; very quickly we only did t-shirts for the national meeting. At that time we did t-shirts with New Orleans and Walk and Run, we had little footprints going across it. I think we only had about 15 people show up for it, because I know we had a lot of t-shirts left over. I was in charge of getting rid of all the extra t-shirts. As people got out of the elevator I was handing out free t-shirts. We quickly stopped doing the jogging because we only had about 2 people do that. So we had the fast walkers and the slow walkers. Pretty much everyone is a slow walker.

It started in New Orleans. One funny story, there are a lot of funny stories with Majors walks and I’ll give you 2 of them. One was at national MLA I believe in San Francisco, it was out west somewhere. We had a guy working for us from CA, his name was Jerry Potter; Jerry Potter was one of the quickest wits I had ever met. Just a very funny person, but it was just instantaneous. The day of the Majors walk it looked like it was going to rain. Jerry Potter came down with this parka on, had a hood over him he looked like a little hobbit. Bill Majors looked at him and said, Jerry you look like Goofy. And Jerry
immediately said, “Well thank you, Bill I’ve never been compared to a movie star before.” (laughs)

The Southern Chapter one I remember most was in Savannah, Savannah, GA. The morning of the walk it was pouring outside, just a downpour. I forget who I was rooming with but I said do you really think we should even go down, no one is going to show up for the walk.

AR: You were rooming with me, we were married by then. How soon we forget.

KR: Oh really! It goes by so fast…I really didn’t think anyone was going to show up for the walk, but we all went down there. I forget, Al McClendon was there from Majors in Dallas and we may have had 4 or 5 people there. We are all standing there and said no one is going to show up it’s just an absolute downpour outside. Then about 25-30 people showed up and they say, let’s do the walk. We are going to get a little wet here. As soon as we walk out you were totally drenched, so it didn’t make any difference. We were walking through the historic part of Savannah splashing through the puddles; we were seeking out the puddles. Because we were so drenched it didn’t make any difference. I was talking to Tom Basler; it was the only walk he ever went on. And he said there were some slower people in the back and he decided to go walk with them because they didn’t know where we were going and we were losing them. We were trying to walk slowly through the rain. Anyway that was a fun walk, turned out to be one of our more enjoyable ones, actually getting drenched.

LK: Sounds like fun playing in the puddles. Did you all meet through the Southern Chapter? I don’t even know how the two of you met.
AR: I don’t know if it was through the Chapter, or through MLA.

KR: Well we kept ending up going to the same meetings obviously, because I was a vendor and she was there.

AR: I remember a New York MLA meeting in the mid ‘80’s I think, Ken invited me to join a group to go out to eat.

KR: We had 4 people, and we always went out together.

AR: We had 4 people and we were not a Majors customer by the way, I figured this was just a ploy. But I would see him twice a year.

KR: Who were the other two? I forgot who they were.

AR: I think Carol Jenkins, Susanne Grefsheim.

KR: The four of us would always get together at MLA and do something. Like in Boston we went to the Boston Pops.

AR: It was more than dinner and a movie, it was something nice.

KR: We always did something kind of neat. I kind of wanted to be with her but I didn’t want to be obvious about it.

A: He would say things to me like if you are ever in Atlanta give me a call. And he thought this was courting, and I just thought I was one of many customers he had in every port. And then in 1989 at the Southern Chapter meeting in Johnson City, I went with Ken and Al Brandon and Bill Leazer to Jonesboro, I guess it’s the historic town.
K: Al Brandon at that time was working for Majors, part time, he was kind of semi-retired. He was our consultant and helped us with our reports that we put out. With that he got medical coverage, and that’s really what he wanted more than anything else.

A: We ended up just spending the afternoon together, the four of us. Then later at the banquet Ken sat by me. And I found out that he… (I knew he had been married or was married). I didn’t know what his situation was. But after every meeting that I’d spent time with him I’d come back here and say what a nice guy, why can’t I meet somebody like him in Charleston. But anyway at this meeting I found out he had actually been divorced for 5 years, and he seemed open to a relationship, so I zeroed in on him.

LK: Good For You!!

KR: We got married at the Florida State meeting in Palm Beach, FL.

AR: Six months later, actually.

KR: They had their meeting in a beautiful hotel in Palm Beach

AR: Brazilian Court –

KR: Brazilian Court Hotel. It was so pretty I said why don’t we just get married there after the meeting is over? So we invited some of the people at the meeting to be there, we got married right after the meeting. A lot of librarians stayed for it. It was real nice.

AR: We had the wedding out in the courtyard. I really wasn’t sending out invitations to it. We knew we had a time we were going to do it. But a couple of my friends from Charleston came down, Nancy McKeehan who’s still at the library here, Dee Boggan
who was then working at the library, and another friend not in the library profession. But we came back here and had kind of a big reception and invited a bunch of people.

KR: We’re still paying for that, I think. (laughter)

AR: That was in 1990 so we’re still newlyweds.

LK: Yeah, that’s great! Well I’m sure you remember a lot of fun stories about people within the Southern Chapter, or Southern Chapter meetings are there particular stories you’d like to share with us, anything funny or interesting?

KR: (To Anne) You have funny stories, I can’t tell all my funny stories.

AR: A lot of them I can’t… Well, I’ve already told one about Sam Hitt, but at that same particular Charleston 20’s party I just remember when I was dancing a dance with Dick Frederickson, who was then director of the Health Sciences Library of University of Alabama, I somehow slipped and fell on my back and I was just mortified. I could almost feel like everybody in the room sort of went AH!

KR: What was that show you were in at that joint meeting up in Winston-Salem?

AR: The joint meeting, that was in 1985. We had members of the chapter, the Southern Chapter and the Mid-Atlantic Chapter that decided to do the entertainment for the group. And Jim Boyer actually spearheaded this with Ada Seltzer, from Mississippi. Jim at the time was working – was he still at Majors?

KR: No, he left right before I got there.
AR: That’s right you came to Majors after Jim. Was he working for Ballen then? We did kind of a pantomime. Jim and Ada were the dancers, and then we had this little group – part from here and part from Winston-Salem. I’m trying to think who all was involved with that. Dick Frederickson, Lynn Fortney were from Southern Chapter; Virginia Miller who was here in Charleston and I. But we just pantomimed to George M. Cohen music. And just acted like idiots.

KR: Pictures of this do exist.

AR: We enjoyed it, they laughed. It was actually fun doing it. It was kind of crazy.

KR: And the funniest story I remember, and probably other people talked about it, is when Ada Seltzer did the strip tease.

LK: We heard this story earlier from Sarah Gable.

KR: I was going to say, I would imagine everyone would tell this story. It was one of the most memorable roasts I’ve ever seen. Ted Srygley, poor Ted Srygley, he didn’t know where to look. Ada’s doing the roast and I don’t know if it was a song or what she was doing, anyway she started talking about something and she just started taking stuff off.

AR: She was showing overheads, this was pre-PowerPoint. And she was doing overhead transparencies to kind of tell a story.

KR: She was wearing tights and leotards to the knees. She started taking off all her clothes.

AR: She had on this suit, very professional attire.
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KR: I think the music “The Stripper” was on. It was hysterical. We were all laughing.

AR: I think that whole performance was videotaped because we went to a meeting in Florida afterwards and had the opportunity to see the thing all over again.

LK: I wonder if it’s in the Archives. I haven’t heard. (all laughing)

AR: I know they had it in… I don’t know if it was the University of Florida or the Borland Campus at Jacksonville. I know somebody in that group had it.

KR: There were a number of copies floating around. It was hysterical. It was one of the funnier things I can remember. Southern Chapters was always memorable no matter where they were. We had a really nice one down in Miami; Henry Lemkau was in charge of it. It was on Key Biscayne where the main hotel was. Vizcaya, is that where we had the big reception?

AR: We’ve done that twice.

KR: I think that’s probably the most expensive meeting Southern Chapter has ever had. I have no idea how much that thing cost. I know he was hitting up the vendors for a lot of money. I know Majors pumped in a lot of money into that thing.

AR: He had receptions there twice. I’ve forgotten the date of the earlier meeting. But the 2003 meeting I think the Chapter is still paying for that party. Or somebody is still paying for that party.

LK: Ken, didn’t Ada roast you at your retirement also?
KR: Yes, in fact I think, I may be corrected on this, I’m the only vendor who’s ever been made an honorary member of Southern Chapter. I not only got that great honor, I really do think it’s a great honor. But she also roasted me in Biloxi. That poor hotel is one of the poor hotels that got – whoosh – wiped away by Katrina. But yeah, one of my more embarrassing experiences, I guess. You’re sitting up there trying to look cool and Ada is bringing up things. I think maybe 30% of what she said was true the rest was totally made up (all laughing). I have no memory of what she was talking about, but it was a great honor and I cherish it to this day.

LK: SURE!! Can you talk about your observations on how the Southern Chapter has evolved throughout the years, 20 years ago or more to now?

AK: I think it probably has become more professional. After Sam Hitt’s comment about ‘when are we going to get serious.’ I don’t really know where the turning point was. When the strategic planning approach was introduced to the Chapter, I remember, I think Martha Watkins was involved with that process when I was on the committee. The structure of the chapter became a lot more concrete. The committee structure expanded and a lot more concerns were addressed. Maybe there became more meaning to the meetings.

KR: In the old days when you had a Southern Chapter meeting in a city wasn’t the library in the city totally in charge of the meeting? Then it evolved that there was more participation.

AR: In the old days that was true. As things became more...of course the programs were developed and more continuing education was introduced and that kind of thing. The
work needed to be divided up among more people. Because I know again in 1982 when we hosted here, Buz and I pretty much did the whole thing, but we divided it up by local arrangements and program. And I remember the 1972 meeting we had here too, I did the registration part. I can’t say we did the whole thing, of course the staff and the library participated. Without them we couldn’t have done it; you could never do it without your staff.

LK: Were you ever a Southern Chapter officer? You were, and you were on a number of committees.

AR: I was actually the chairman of the Southern Regional Group, the last year it was the Southern Regional Group in 1979-80. So, before that I had been chair elect, and served on just about every committee. As we added committees, bylaws several times. In fact when MLA addressed their structure moving from the regional groups to the chapter configuration I think I was chair of the bylaws committee when we had to bring our bylaws into compliance with MLA’s. I served on the legislative committee, I don’t really remember now what that was all about; strategic planning, nominating, membership, I was a reporter for Southern Expressions; and involved with the 2 local meetings in ‘72 and ‘82. I represented the Chapter on MLA’s Chapter Council in the early ‘80s. I think actually, Ted Srygley, who was then at the University of Florida Health Sciences Library, he was the first chapter council rep from Southern Chapter, and I was the second one. He only served one year, he served officially, but he couldn’t go to MLA when he was supposed to represent the chapter. So I actually ended up doing that for 4 years. That was a very good experience for me. That was at the time when we went from the regional group structure to the chapter structure that was about the time we lost Louisiana …This
happened before, in the early ‘70s, we still were a larger group including the South Central Group, when we were the regional group. In the early ‘70’s, and at the meeting here in 1972, the business meeting, the Texas librarians introduced a motion to pull out, to have the TALON group pull out of the Southern Regional Group. So they did, but we kept Arkansas and Louisiana with us for maybe the next 7 or 8 years. Actually I think we made the Louisiana librarians honorary members, I don’t know Arkansas dropped, kind of eased away over time. But Louisiana, several of those folks stayed involved in Southern Chapter.


AR: Bill Postell was one. We had about 9 people from Louisiana that were still members of Southern Chapter when I went to MLA to represent the Chapter at Chapter Council. One of the big topics of discussion was how is Louisiana leaving Southern Chapter going to affect you guys if they go with the South Central Chapter. And at the time we only had 9 members, but they were considered honorary members because their official affiliation was with South Central but we still kept in touch with these folks. Bill Postell actually served as chair of the Chapter even though he was officially a member of South Central. So that was interesting. He came in as chair right after I did maybe, or 2 years after I did.

LK: How has the Southern Chapter impacted your professional development throughout your career, both of you?

AR: Really that, to me, I have felt that that’s been my professional association of choice. I mean I enjoy going to MLA and I felt like I learned a lot and networked a lot, but the Southern Chapter, the opportunity I had early on representing the library helped. I got to
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know people well, you don’t hesitate to pick up the phone if you are having a problem within your institution and say how have you handled this, have you ever faced this situation in your library. It’s just been a great source of support and assistance really throughout.

KR:  It’s true for vendors too, I think that Southern Chapter is small enough that you can actually meet people on a social level and get to know them a lot better and form friendships; whereas the national meetings, MLA, there are just too many people. You can see a few and get together with them and go out to dinner, but you are really just seeing a few. I think Southern Chapter you can get to know everybody. And it makes it a lot easier when you are vendor to go visit somebody if you’ve hoisted a few beers with them and that type of stuff. They can get more out of you and you can get more out of them. It’s more of a working relationship; you are really dealing with a friend. I know there wasn’t a director in Southern Chapter who didn’t feel free to pick up the phone and say Ken we’ve got a problem here or we need some money we are doing a meeting here can you sponsor us, or something like that and it always got done. It wasn’t just a director calling it was a friend of mine calling, and I felt we had to do it for them. And I think the Majors always felt that too.

AR:  I think also the professional development through MLA CE has been important over the years. I feel like that has been a good source of education within the Chapter environment. The poster sessions and contributed papers I’ve always felt were quite valuable. You always see something you might want to try, a great forum for sharing ideas.
LK: What are the names of some of your mentors or people who have really influenced you over the years?

AR: Positive or negative? (laughing) Well you know, there have been so many, and I was pondering this in advance but I really hate to call names because I…I think…

KR: There were some librarians that were mentors for almost everybody that came within their purview. Miriam Libbey was one of them at Emory University; she just took anyone under her wings. Including vendors, by the way.

AR: I mentioned earlier that I had the opportunity since Buz Sawyer didn’t particularly like to go to group meetings, when the Regional Advisory Committee – when the Southeastern Regional Medical Library program under the auspices of NLM was at Emory, I used to go to those RAC meetings and Miriam Libbey was there, Mark Hodges was there, as the then assistant director of the region. Sarah Brown from Alabama, Mildred Langner was at Miami. [KR asks something] No the Louisiana folks weren’t involved in this. I guess Ted Srygley was there. But this was my early environment when I’d been working for a couple of years and here I was with all these people that had been working for a while. I just felt very inspired by the whole group. I just couldn’t believe I got to start off as a young professional at this level.

KR: Miriam Libbey especially, she was in Atlanta so I probably saw her more than other directors. And she always would invite me into the office and we would sit and chat. She was a Southern Belle. She was the most gracious person in the entire world. Very small of stature, but the epitome of what a Southern Belle was, and as sharp as a tack, her mind was just...she just was incredibly intelligent. And I remember when someone told me
that whenever they needed someone from MLA to testify before Congress to get funds or whatever they would always bring Mrs. Libbey up there because there wasn’t a Senator in the U.S. Congress that could not refuse her money. She would sit there and charm them all and they would give her whatever she was requesting at the time. She was the great ace-in-the-hole that MLA had for Washington.

AR: I also enjoyed interacting with associate directors like Suzy Burrows and Carol Burns who then became a director. We started out at similar times and she and I helped develop some of the programs for the workshops that the RML offered. Always these high energy people that I thought gosh, how can they get so much done? They were inspiring to me, I guess.

LK: Right. Great. I wish I had known some of these people because I keep hearing their names.

KR: A lot of these people have become almost legendary in medical librarianship. I guess part of it is the personalities of the people and part of it is their tremendous intelligence and their ability to get things done. They were working in an environment where there weren’t computers; there weren’t all the interactive things we have now so it was much more of hands-on type of operation.

LK: How has the medical library profession changed during your career? Or even the publishing profession?

KR: Well, it’s all changed. It’s a lot more digital for one thing. There wasn’t such a thing as an online journal there was no such thing as an electronic book. I’m trying to think what the first big things were that came along.
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AR: Personal computer was the first thing I remember then I guess the online automated library system.

KR: What was that machine where you typed in to it and paper would came out with all the….?

AR: The TWX machine. We had a TWX machine early on.

KR: In most libraries that’s what they had. You would type into it like a big typewriter. And it would send the request to the National Library of Medicine.

AR: We used it for interlibrary loan.

KR: You would get this print out, it would just start printing out stuff.

AR: That was kind of pre-MEDLINE. When MEDLINE came long we had computer terminals, not laptops or anything to search with. I remember someone a few years later brought their child in the library who saw a typewriter and said – oh, mommy look, a computer without a terminal. (Laughter) I think the whole automation; MEDLINE in the early ‘70s made a big impact on how we could serve our users more efficiently or better.

KR: MEDLINE. When I started at Majors there wasn’t such a thing as MEDLINE.

The big thing is technology. The funny thing is that we kept being told as vendors that the book is going out. We heard this from the time there was a personal computer, in 10 years they aren’t going to be using books, they aren’t going to be using journals. Why are you still in the business? And when I left Majors in 2003 we were selling more books than we had ever sold before. It really had not made an impact. The reason was textbooks were still being used. Students still preferred having Harrisons’ Textbook of
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Medicine under their arm, rather than having it on a computer trying to find it. And that may change in the future but I think that is going to be a slow change.

AR: When automation came along to our library, Nancy McKeehan and I had to convince Buz Sawyer that this was the way that we had to go. She and I had started going to some meetings to try to learn what we could about the whole process and different systems and that kind of thing. We finally convinced him he didn’t have any choice. And he said “O.K., but I’m going to take all of the card catalog home, take all those cards home, and you’re going to have to buy them back from me when this all fails.” (laughter) I think he was half joking but I think he wasn’t totally convinced that we could get rid of the card catalog. Of course we didn’t initially, it took a little time.

KR: Bill Majors was very, very against us computerizing Majors. One of the big reasons was just before I came with Majors, it must have been in the mid ‘70s, the largest medical book distributor in the country was called ABLE, I believe they were out in California. They were the first to computerize and within 3 years they had gone out of business. And their service had just plummeted, just constant problems.

AR: Richard Able?

KR: Yes I think it was Richard Able. Bill Majors saw that and said we are NEVER going to put computers in here. Well you come to a point where you have to. But he was absolutely against it. We remained a manual operation until the early 80’s when we just couldn’t do it any more, we just couldn’t handle it. We take computers so much for granted now, but we were able to function pretty well without computers…no email.

LK: Without email, that’s incredible.
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AR: I remember once there was a chapter meeting and one of the sessions that I heard from a group of librarians, when Tom Basler was at MCG in Augusta. His staff put on a presentation about how important email was to their operation. And we were sitting there thinking - email? And now I’m still on the computer at home half the time on email.

KR: There weren’t any cell phones. If I wanted to make a phone call I’d stop at a Holiday Inn somewhere and use their phone banks to make a call. And I remember once getting a voice mail message when I called in saying “Contact me right away, this is important! I got to know the answer to this. It is going to be a disaster if you don’t call me.” And the time on it was 5 hours previously so I called the person and she said what are you calling about? I said you left this message… She said, oh we took care of that a long time ago. (laughter)

I found out after that, that emergencies usually solve themselves eventually. You don’t have to answer right away. We didn’t have the technology and yet we didn’t feel technology deprived. Just wasn’t there and people…I think we handled it very well.

AR: I’ll have to share this one, talking about the personal computer. When I got my first Apple or Mac, I don’t remember now the time frame here; it was in the 80s I guess. And had a mouse there - it sat on my desk for probably 3 weeks before I thought, I really need to start figuring out how to use this. And I picked up the mouse like a remote, and I thought well this obviously doesn’t work. But once I got into it I never looked back. (laughter)

LK: We are about done. What advice would you each give to a new medical librarian?
AR: Be open to change and just think outside the box, too. There are boundaries or guidelines that we all sort of grew up with, not grew up with, but learned, that are so fluid now. I think the whole description of the library and what its main function is, is way different. Just be open to change.

KR: I think the future is going to be a lot different from the present, digitizing everything. The World Wide Web is going to change a lot of things, and just the way people use libraries is going to change. My advice would be just to get to know people, form a network. They’ll last for your entire professional career, the friends you make at meetings, the people you get to know. This is how when you have problems these people are going to help you and you are going to help them also. It’s very, very important to network, get to know people, learn as much as you can and don’t be afraid to ask questions of people. No medical librarian can work in a vacuum.

AR: Email is great, but face to face contact is better.

KR: Pick up the phone and talk to people. Email can only do so much, it’s an information thing, but you don’t get to know people through email. I’ve visited many hospital librarians and they worked in a vacuum. They maybe went to one meeting a year, took a few courses, but basically they felt they were working alone and their libraries were not efficiently run. They were really depriving their patrons of a lot not being able to call upon other librarians to help them.

LK: Are there any other comments you would like to make?

KR: When you watch this in 2085 (waving his arm) (laughing)
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LK: We’ll miss the good old days…

KR: We were using cars back then, we didn’t have the floating planes!

AR: I think the Southern Chapter has been wonderful for both of us. That’s how I met him!

LK: Thank you both so much for being interviewed, we really appreciate it.

KR: Thank you, this was great.

AR: We really enjoyed it.