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Ursula Springer, President, Springer Publishing Company

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Interview with Ursula Springer

President, Springer Publishing http://www.springerpub.com

by Katina Strauch (Editor, Against the Grain)

This is the story of how a strong woman took over a small publishing company and made it an institution. — KS

ATG: How did you get started in publishing?

US: A very sad event led me into publishing. My husband, Bernhard Springer, who had founded the company in 1950, died of a brain tumor in 1970. I was a professor at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York where I had taught for twelve years. Since I had no experience in publishing or in business, other publishers thought I would sell the company and they offered ridiculously low prices. Well, I did not sell it.

ATG: Tell us more. Were you related to the Springers of Springer Verlag? Did you come over to the U.S. during World War II?

US: I was born in Berlin, grew up in Germany, studied languages and literature at Universities in Munich, Bologna (Italy), Berlin, came to the US in 1950 as a student, did graduate work at the University of Minnesota (Social Foundations of Education). I moved to New York and finally got my Ph.D. from Columbia University Teachers College in comparative education. With a grant from the Ford Foundation I did research on school reforms in European countries, inventing some of the research methods for the project. I also founded a quarterly journal, West European Education (M.E. Sharpe published it).

ATG: Was there any relation to Axel Springer or Jerry Springer?

US: No, not at all. My husband descended from Julius Springer who founded Springer-Verlag in Berlin in 1842. Publishing literature, the house grew to prominence, and when in Germany in the late 19th century, modern science and medicine evolved and began to produce research, Springer-Verlag turned to publishing scientific and medical books and journals, as the leading scholarly publisher in Germany and probably Europe. During the Nazi years the Springer family, being partly Jewish, could not continue this publishing work. Bernhard Springer therefore emigrated to the US in 1938 and became an American citizen. He never wanted to resettle in Germany, but established his own American business in New York, Springer Publishing Company, Inc., in 1950.

ATG: What type of books were the first publishing products of the young company?

US: Medical books, neurology, but also nursing, a field where the training level (in the United States) was raised to collegiate study for a growing number of nurses. Bernhard was a pioneer in the field, very sup-portive of often inexperienced nurse authors, and thus he was quite popular. He was very successful with several titles. Laboratory Tests for Nurses in six editions sold about 270,000 copies and Modell's Drugs in Current Use (now edited by Dathie) is in its 49th annual edition.

Another field that evolved in the 1950's to growing popularity was psychology, especially psychotherapy. My husband published significant titles of well-known authors in the 1950's and 60's, and through the years we continue to cultivate psychology and psychotherapy (even if "therapy" is no longer quite as popular as ten years ago). Among our authors are Al Rabin, Albert Ellis, Richard Lazarus, and many more.

ATG: Tell us more about your list.

US: As a small to midsize publisher, we would be foolish trying to cover all facets of a field. You must develop "niches" and cultivate them. So, in nursing we had to leave the lucrative mass production of basic texts to the oncoming big textbook publishers. We moved "up" to the growing areas of specialized nursing, geriatric nursing, teaching of nursing, management, leadership, and particularly research in nursing. Sixteen years ago we established the Annual Review of Nursing Research, (Currently, the "mother lode" will spawn several "children") Our general success in nursing publishing is shown by many awards we have received from the American Journal of Nursing. AJN chooses 40 "best books" of the year annually, of which we garner 10 to 20 percent. That is a lot, as our nursing list (about 20 per year) numbers barely 1% of all nursing publications annually.

Our other very important "niche" is gerontology/geriatrics. My husband also started this field in the 1960's, when the term gerontology was still little known. I pursued strengthening our program in this field by various means: attending all conventions, reading journals, meeting authors, giving parties, starting journals, courting "very important people"—you name it, we did it. Now we have a list of 150 active titles on aging, and an Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics, this year it will have its 20th volume. The main work in this field has been our Encyclopedia of Aging (1986, 2nd edition 1995, 3rd edition in progress), a great success in regular sales, many to libraries, and sales to the book club. It was translated into Japanese and French, and has brought much other subsidiary income. A sequel to this success story will be another similar one, the Encyclopedia of Long-Term Care (or Geriatric Care), just contracted and in planning.

ATG: What other fields do you include in your publishing program?

US: In addition to nursing, psychology, and gerontology/geriatrics, we publish titles continued on page 36

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From the Reference Desk

Column Editor: Tom Gilson (College of Charleston) <gilson@cofc.edu>

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imost a quarter century has passed since the war in Vietnam ended and at last we have a multi-volume encyclopaedia which puts the war and its legacy in perspective. The *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social and Military History* (1998, 0874369835; $275), published by ABC-CLIO, attempts an objective look at our country's most controversial and divisive war.

The *Encyclopedia* contains over 900 entries covering specific battles and operations, military tactics and weapons systems, as well as domestic issues. The first draft and the *Encyclopedia of the Viet-

Significant personalities (from all sides), are covered as is the role of art, music and the media in shaping perceptions of the war. Additionally, editor Spencer Tucker opens with a brief introductory essay outlining the history of Vietnam and includes a number of articles which discuss prior European involvement, and the perspective from the Vietnamese side. In short, this *Encyclopedia* lives up to its subtitle, and offers a thorough treatment of the many political, social and military complexities that inform the Vietnam experience.

While notable for its quality content, the *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War* also contains a number of other features adding to its value. There is a series of 22 helpful maps, reprinted in both volumes one and two, as well as bibliographies included with each entry and *see also* references guiding the reader to related articles. However, it is the third volume which supplies the most significant feature. It contains over 230 related primary sources including speeches, telegrams, memorandums, letters and official documents. This material is arranged chronologically from 1920 through 1995 and demonstrates the changes in official thinking and policies, both in the United States and Vietnam, over that period.

Editor Spencer Tucker and his over 125 contributors are to be commended for doing an admirable job. Given the quality of this set and the importance of its subject both academic and large public libraries will find it a necessary addition. Those libraries where interest is high should also consider Stanley Kutler's *The Whole Vietnam War* (1996, Prentice-Hall, 0132769328; $125) and the *Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War* by Harry G. Summers published by Houghton Mifflin (1996, 0395722233; $39.95).

Subject specific atlases are useful reference books which are sometimes overlooked and under appreciated. Often, maps are just part of the story. Usually, these references include tables, charts and narrative text which truly enhance their value. Macmillan Library Reference's *Growing up in America* continued on page 38

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