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Interview / Janet Flowers

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Against the Grain

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Lightning Visits — Janet Flowers

I remember when Marcia Tuttle told me about a fantastic acquisitions librarian at UNC-Chapel Hill who I had to meet. Marcia said that Janet couldn't come to many meetings and that she probably wouldn't come to the Charleston Conference. But some things have changed. Way back when, Janet showed up at the Conference (after the deaths of two family members for whom she was caring) and is now an active and avid supporter. I was recently in Chapel Hill at a fascinating UNC School of Information and Library Science workshop (see this issue, page 29) and had a few hours to leisure around with Janet. Here is what I learned about her.

ATG: You are Head of Acquisitions at the Davis Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, right?

JF: Yes. It's hard to believe that I've been at UNC for 22 years! When I got out of library school at UNC (1967), I briefly was a Reference Librarian at Wake Forest University. Then my husband took a job at Duke in nuclear medicine (1970) and there were two jobs in the area that I was interested in (that was back when it wasn't such a hassle to get a job as it is now) — one as a Reference Librarian at Durham County Public Library and the other as a Romance Languages Cataloger at UNC-CH. Though my career goal was to be a reference librarian, I took the job at UNC since it started April 1 and the Durham County Public Library job didn't start till July. I worked in cataloging for less than a year before I became assistant head of searching in the Acquisitions Department. Later I became head of searching and when Bill Schenck left, I became Head of Acquisitions in 1983. I remember that Bill used to make me defend everything I did, workflows, how searching was handled, everything. Once he judged that I was competent, we got along.

ATG: Are you a North Carolinian?

JF: No. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio but my mother was from near Winston-Salem and we moved there when I was a baby. I have a twin brother who I share a brain with. He lives in Winston-Salem and is a disgracefully skinny postman with a wonderful memory. I had a younger brother who died in 1987. I have an adopted son, Thomas, 6' 2", 17, who wants to be a fireman. When he was in the fourth grade, he announced that he wanted to get his Ph.D. and drive a truck. For my mother's day present this year, he went to church.

ATG: You know this question is

coming. What do you do for fun?

JF: I have fun all the time. Really. I like to read especially Southern fiction. My staff gives me every book on management that comes through the department. I just finished **Pelican Brief**, **A Time to Kill** and **The Firm**. I like both serious and light reading.

I go out to the movies frequently and rent a lot of videos. I love romantic comedy. Recently, I saw the movie **Dave** and it was hilarious. My husband and I love the Raleigh Little Theater.

I am very involved in church activities. I was the church librarian for 15 years and president of the N.C. Chapter of CSLA (Church and Synagogue Librarians Association). Now I'm a Deacon and have a care group of 14 families. Every spring my husband

and I organize a church retreat in Blowing Rock up in the mountains.

I feel I am living a balanced life as Joe Barker [U. of Calif., Berkeley] advised privately over e-mail one day. I spend six hours a week engaging in aerobic exercise for my cardiovascular well-being. I figure it's better than being at home on the computer.

ATG: Mike Markwith wants me to ask you about Tar Heel basketball. Are you a fan? Probably a stupid question.

JF: Of course! Dean Smith is the best coach there is!

ATG: How about Acquisitions and Davis Library? It's an amazing place for someone like me who remembers the days of long tables, waxy xerox machine paper, no computers, and manually typing subject headings on catalog cards.

JF: We finally have a full staff in Acquisitions — 19 people. We have three professional librarians including myself. **Helen Miller** is the order librarian and she has just finished 20 years at UNC. She supervises ordering and receiving and works with publishers and vendors. We placed 40,000 firm orders this year. We don't do much with Approval Plans (\$8000 was budgeted this year). Our total materials budget is \$3.2 million which includes books, serials, standing orders and binding.

Betty Meehan-Black is the head of bibliographic searching, approval plan coordinator, and gifts librarian. Both Helen and Betty tell me they have too much to do! Betty and Helen have direct supervisory responsibility so I have two very competent people to run daily operations. I mainly facilitate, coordinate and manage the budget. Now I normally see only exceptions. But I have plenty to keep me busy.

We have 4 LTAs, and 11 Library Assistants and a clerical person. They are all extremely well-educated. I believe in hiring bright people with lots of language skills.

We are trying different management strategies. Recently we set up a "TQM-

like" group to work on how to straighten out problems with sets which we receive. A set is arbitrarily defined as four or fewer volumes and it is something that I wish Marcia [Tuttle, Head of Serials] would do.

ATG: How about automation? You have recently bought DRA for your online public access catalog? But you are still using Innopac?

JF: Yes. We are currently using Innopac (which is wonderful) though we have purchased DRA for the online catalog for the Triangle group (UNC, Duke, NC State). We brought up Innopac in May of 1991. I had foot surgery that same year which added to the fun. After two years, we have a lot of documentation still to go though we have done a lot. We are getting ready to implement the vendor statistics module. It seems like many things that we expected to do in the first year will not get done till the third year. I don't think any of us would automate if we knew what we were getting into. I remember the manual days well. We used to use the "Dick Dougherty system" meaning that we used the original bibliographic order card and photocopied additional copies. I remember that I was typing order cards and Dick decided that we would photocopy the order cards as a short cut. I thought I was going to be out of a job! Instead, I was switched to claiming. It was 1965. Marcia Tuttle came in 1969, four years after I did. She was hired as the Interlibrary Loan Librarian. It all runs together without the annual reports to consult.

ATG: Those were the days. I was a student worker in the Catalog Maintenance Department at UNC. Later I became the head filer. I remember I had to file two inches of cards a day and check the two inches of filing each that 4 other people were responsible for doing and go over problems with them. The Head of the Catalog Department was annoyed because I got to talk when everyone else was supposed to be absolutely quiet.

JF: Yes. In library school back then there was no such thing as MARC and OCLC or computers. I remember back in 1984 when my husband wanted to buy a computer and that was almost

revolutionary. Not long afterward, I chaired an OMS Task Force on the reorganization of reference and my husband taught me how to use the computer for the 300-page report that we prepared. Now I use our home computer 70% to my husband's 30%. INNOPAC, e-mail and Lotus are regular companions. Our bedroom is really a computer room. My husband was right. The computer can come in very handy.

ATG: What other changes would you comment on?

JF: There has been a trend toward downward delegation to paraprofessionals. We used to give all \$250 orders to professionals for searching but no more.

At UNC, librarians have quasi faculty status. I have been a member of the promotion committee forever. I think that there is a trend toward greater professional involvement and qualitative not just quantitative change. People's careers are so different. It shows how diverse librarianship is. I have ten times the number of meetings than I had ten years ago. The pace of change has been accelerated and unending. People have to learn to cope with it.

ATG: Will you talk about the bibliographers and what they do in relation to acquisitions at UNC?

JF: We work closely with the bibliographers. They are a parallel department with Acquisitions. The structure was set up in 1975; before that, we had a lot of faculty selection. It's a traditional structure. There are 7 bibliographers including a Chief Bibliographer. The bibliographers do identification and selection of materials. Their primary tool is CIP information for domestic and vendor selection slips for foreign titles. They rate materials as priority 1-4 with 1 being the most essential. There are boxes of selected titles that we are unable to buy because of lack of funds. Recently, there was a television spot on all the boxes of materials that we couldn't buy. If tuition increases, some of it will go to the library we hope.

ATG: I know that Chapel Hill is the southern part of heaven and all that

but what's it like to have been at UNC for over twenty years?

JF: I've done all sorts of special projects. Joe Hewitt [the new Director of Libraries, used to be Associate Director] is wonderful to work for. He gives people freedom to pursue their own professional agenda. I chaired the Committee on Long Range Planning in the library. I also had a stint as Acting AUL for Technical Services — January— May 1990. I remember the first administrative council that I attended, Dr. Govan [then Director of Libraries at UNC] announced a major budget crisis. We had to give the state back money in mid-year so we had to make major adjustments to the budget. It was a baptism into what tremendous damage a 1 or 2 % cut could do to such an enormous budget. I also subbed when Joe had heart surgery last year. Needless to say, I understand more about budget cycles now.

ATG: I know that you are big on staff development. Would you tell us more?

JF: I am proud of our staff development program. Instead of doing things better, we have to make sure that we are doing the better things. With the changes in workload and automation, staff can be very upset like when I thought I was going to lose my job because of photocopying. We have to figure out together how to get the work done and make improvements. Sometimes it seems like we don't have time to do it right, just to do it over.

ATG: How many reorganizations have you lived through?

JF: Let me see. Not that many. Just one actually after Dr. Govan came and the Technical Services AUL was added. When we merged the reference departments (humanities and business and social sciences) that was a major change. Still, we have the same basic organization that we had ten years ago. Unlike a place like Duke, we're very traditional. We consider ourselves the oldest state university. I would say that the university itself has changed a lot since I've been here. Nobody seemed to care about employee welfare and

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ATG: Can you look into your crystal ball and tell us what you think the future holds?

JF: I hope that libraries will survive another 15 years through the length of my mortgage. Seriously, recently I was reading an article in **The Bookseller** and there was discussion about how book publishing has increased. I think that it's analogous to the television and the radio. Both are still in existence; roles have just changed. We are moving more toward access than ownership and it does bother me that we are losing the archival aspect of libraries in doing this. It may be a good short-term solution but it has long-term negative connotations. The preservation function is a way to ensure the continuation of knowledge. I can't imagine a totally

electronic world. Acquisitions librarians need to maneuver for a place in it all.

ATG: UNC, Duke, and State have recently gotten a Title II-D grant for document delivery?

JF: Yes. We are going to try out this method for delivering information to our users. There are many logistical issues to be addressed first.

ATG: Okay, the canned question. If you could change one thing about libraries and librarianship, what would it be?

JF: I hate for us to keep saying this, but our image as librarians is poor. There isn't true respect out there for what we do. We need to recruit bright, creative people to be librarians in the future. We need new ways of looking at things. Some of the best ideas start with a bad question.

ATG: Maybe we should ask more of them?

We enjoyed the visit and the conversation. Thank you, Janet. ♣

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