June 1994

Jane Burke, President, NOTIS Systems, Inc.

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Against the Grain

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Recommended Citation

Strauch, Katina (1994) "Jane Burke, President, NOTIS Systems, Inc.," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 6: Iss. 3, Article 14.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1547>

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An Interview with Jane Burke

President, NOTIS Systems, Inc.

I had never met Jane Burke. I just heard about her from people that I respected. People like Becky Lenzini, People like Corrie Marsh. People like Clifford Lynch. So, it was with awe and a little trepidation that I began to interview her. And, you know what, y'all? I liked her, really and truly. She is, first and foremost, a librarian. Second and foremost, direct and to the point. And third and foremost, someone I think it is a real privilege to learn more about. A lot of what she said is provocative. A lot is controversial. Here it is. Read it. — KS

ATG: How did it all begin? for you? for NOTIS?

JB: I am a professional librarian. I got my library degree from Rosary College and started my career as Head of Adult Services at the Cooke Memorial library in Libertyville, Illinois.

Eventually I ended up at Northwestern when the University Librarian, **John McGowan** recruited me to organize the marketing and support for the NOTIS software. A lot of other libraries were interested in the software and my job was to form an office to take care of this.

ATG: I believe you came to NOTIS from CLSI? How did you get there from Libertyville, Illinois?

JB: My library in Libertyville was one of the first libraries to buy an automated circulation system, CLSI. From that exposure, I went to work for CLSI as a trainer. I trained librarians how to use the system. Then I became a regional manager and managed the middle part of the country. I was at CLSI for nine years while the whole industry was getting off the ground.

ATG: What was it like to go to NOTIS in its infancy? How many people worked there? Where were the offices? Was it still part of the library?

JB: When I got to Northwestern, there were three people in a little office, next to the University Librarian. All three were

associated with marketing and support of the system. There was one programmer trying to do technical support, a librarian doing documentation and training, and a secretary.

ATG: Tell us more. What year was it? How did Northwestern happen to start what we know as NOTIS?

JB: In the late 1960s, Northwestern began to plan a large new research library facility. The plans for the building involved a site that was landfill on Lake Michigan. If the design didn't match the landfill site, the library would run the risk of physically sinking. The architects and builders wanted to design something to fit on the landfill and so the building plan was a very decentralized one.

Immediately, people realized that they would need automation to cope with the decentralized design of the building. That was how Northwestern Online Total Information System (NOTIS) was born. **Dr. James Aagaard** actually moved over from the computing facility to the library full time so that he could work on developing the system himself. He was assisted by **Velma Veneziano**, a systems analyst.

ATG: So, how did NOTIS grow so that it was used by other libraries? Was this part of the plan?

JB: Originally, the library had no notion except to develop a system for them-

selves. Throughout the seventies, they worked with it, added functions, and by the 80s there was a lot of interest by other libraries in what they had done.

ATG: This was academe. What was the reaction to the offering of NOTIS commercially to other libraries? How did y'all manage to talk academe into starting a commercial enterprise? Was there resistance by the administration of Northwestern when this began to happen?

JB: Northwestern is a private institution and, as such, it is a bit entrepreneurial. The administration was very encouraging. When we moved out of the Library and became a for-profit corporation, we got excellent support from the university president. They appointed a terrific Board of Directors to help us keep ourselves financially healthy and to prod us to keep growing and succeeding.

I went into a situation that was wonderful. The system had been developed by librarians for librarians, and we could serve the needs of others.

ATG: What do you remember about your first day working at NOTIS? It was 1984? You have been at NOTIS 10 years, right? What kind of growth curve was it?

JB: We were located in cramped quarters in Northwestern University Library. I remember that on the first day someone actually called in expressing an interest in the NOTIS software. It was exciting. The first year, I did lots of marketing and demo-ing. NOTIS was still located in the Library and reported to the University Librarian until 1987. During that time the staff grew to 40+. It was hard finding physical space.

The growth curve was phenomenal. Between 1983 and 1987, the customer base rose from 8 to 80. It was wonderful! Large university libraries were experiencing the need for a system that could handle their size of transaction volumes. NOTIS filled the bill. It was a good situation.

ATG: Was that early, strong start a disadvantage? The system is relatively "old" now?

JB: We have withdrawn the classic NOTIS from marketing as of December 1993. We now have a brand new system called NOTIS **Horizon**. It is a totally new system, a new design, and a great deal of what we learned from the first system is in the second system. Still, the

"Z39.50 — one of the most important standards for libraries in the 1990s."

two are totally different packages. We are supporting classic NOTIS until the end of the decade at least, but we are not selling it anymore unless someone asks for it.

ATG: You have been President of NOTIS for 10 years. Seems like quite a feat. How has your job changed over ten years?

JB: Actually, I became President of NOTIS in September of 1987 when we moved out of the library and set up a separate free-standing for-profit company.

What does the President do today in a company with a staff of 150 and millions of dollars of revenue? Is it different than it used to be with only a handful of people and a handful of accounts? Of course. These days I do a lot more listening and overseeing. For a long time in the beginning, I was the Sales Manager as well as the President. Today, I still get involved in sales, but I spend a lot of time looking at the longer term plan and talking to the staff about how their work is important and what they want to achieve.

We no longer have a Board. When we became a subsidiary of Ameritech, there was no need to have a separate Board of Directors?

ATG: When were you acquired by Ameritech? How did you feel about it when it happened?

JB: We were acquired by Ameritech in October of 1991. When we existed as a standalone company, the Board prodded the President to look at the future.

We began to look at what technology would do down the road, and we worked on building a solid system. As NOTIS got bigger, the riskier environment needed the software system to grow, and the financing and strong development, was not appropriate for a University. So Northwestern actually went through the process of seeking bids for NOTIS. They decided to sell NOTIS to Ameritech.

ATG: How do you feel about this ownership? What is Ameritech like as an owner?

JB: It has been great. Education is one of the cornerstones of Ameritech strategy so Ameritech is very supportive of NOTIS. They have allowed us to retain money in development. Whereas nobody throws money over the transom to us; Ameritech has been good at allowing us to put all the money we earn back into our own products.

ATG: In September of 1993 [ATG v.5#4], we interviewed **Paul Sybrowsky** the President of **Dynix**. Both NOTIS and Dynix are owned by Ameritech. We're going to ask you the same questions we asked Paul then: What's your relationship with Dynix? Do you compete for clients and development funding?

JB: NOTIS and Dynix are not competitors. We work together for a relationship that benefits all kinds of libraries. It is cooperative management. Paul is General Manager of Ameritech Library Services so he represents both of our efforts to Ameritech.

Dynix and NOTIS have been working together on several projects, such as on Z39.50, one of the most important standards for libraries in the 1990s. NOTIS has learned a lot about customer service and implementation of systems from Dynix. Dynix has much in the area of support from NOTIS. We learn from each other.

The marketplace is divided by type of library and thinks of itself that way. Increasingly, you will see that Dynix and NOTIS focus on individual parts of the market.

ATG: NOTIS has just made a big announcement? Can you tell us about it?

JB: In May during the National Online Conference Dynix and NOTIS announced a change in our sales force

organization. Dynix will have sales groups focused on public, school, and special libraries. NOTIS will continue to focus only on academic libraries and will offer all Ameritech products to academic libraries.

ATG: Could we get back to Z39.50. Why do you feel that it is so important?

JB: Z39.50 is the protocol that makes

"Our greatest challenge as librarians in the future is in the area of public access."

it possible to achieve the library goal of being interoperable. It makes the patron at my library able to see what is in your library in a manner that s/he understands. Z39.50 makes it easier for the patron to use and understand different systems.

ATG: What are some other important areas from your side of the fence?

JB: My view of the market comes from the academic perspective. The issues of connectivity and interoperability are extremely important. Any standards or protocols we can use to help systems talk to each other more easily are very important. Our greatest challenge as librarians in the future is in the area of public access. People now have an expectation that their library can connect them to all kinds of information. NOTIS' **Win-Gopher** has the purpose of providing access to resources on the Internet. These are not just library resources. The program runs next to the public access programs.

When librarianship became a profession more than 1200 years ago, we were organizing information. We are still doing that. Then we were organizing information on paper. Today, the role of the librarian is to organize electronic access. Librarians have to step up to this organizing function. End users have increased their expectations. If we don't help them, they will go out and do it themselves.

ATG: Could you talk about **Horizon**, the new NOTIS system, in that context?

JB: It was to achieve this organizing function that **Horizon** was created. You can no longer have library systems where

you have a terminal talking to a single database such as on OPAC. Horizon is a client-server system and is designed to provide for lots and lots of connectivity.

ATG: How is the NOTIS Horizon system different from the classic NOTIS System?

JB: They are totally different systems. Horizon is a totally new design, all new programming. Horizon is based on different technologies and written in different computer languages. The client-server technology is the basis of the Horizon system. This means, as an example, that the public access part of Horizon connects just as seamlessly to another library catalog as it does to the local library server.

ATG: One concern for some libraries has been the expense of NOTIS. Would you comment on this vis a vis Horizon?

JB: We are making a concerted effort to make Horizon very affordable. This is an advantage of Horizon. The

"Today, the role of the librarian is to organize electronic access."

platform for the classic NOTIS system was an expensive one, and Horizon is going to solve that problem. People who have seen the costs for Horizon have been very pleased. We want to show that we have a good system that works for all sizes of libraries. We are working to show that through Horizon and its functionality and pricing.

ATG: How many accounts do you have and who are your customers?

JB: There are 180 installations of the NOTIS System. Today we have 27 Horizon customers. These are not installations but libraries that have committed themselves to Horizon. That is only through the end of April and we started marketing Horizon in January. The basic Horizon package and how it is priced is attractive to people so they are buying all the functions.

We are focused on the needs of academic libraries. We don't have a sense of trying to move into other types of libraries. We would like to work with libraries where we can do a good job.

ATG: How about foreign installations? How many of those do you have?

JB: We have 5 or 6 sites in South America and the University of Auckland in New Zealand. For years, we have turned down offers to market NOTIS internationally, but we are changing that. We believe that Horizon is quite suitable for the foreign market. Using the Internet, we can do a lot more support today. Frankly, we wanted to be a big enough organization to be able to implement foreign installations and not hurt our other customers in the process.

ATG: What are NOTIS' future plans? Can we even have long term goals anymore? What will the library of the future be like?

JB: Sure we can have long term goals. Our long term goal is to make the electronic library vision as much of a reality as we can. We must keep the needs of the information intermediary, the librarian, as well as the role of the goals of the researcher in front of us. If we do that, we will be able to pick our initiatives.

We actually have divided our company because we believe so strongly that researchers want access to many things beyond their own library catalogs. We have one group of people developing Horizon and enhancing our continuing system, and another group is designing new types of retrieval tools, like Win-Gopher and building an image system. We believe that what the end user wants in the way of information retrieval is moving very quickly from library citations to the information itself. Libraries provide information about information. Now, having found the citation, the user wants to retrieve the information itself.

I think the library of the future will be much more of a service organization and an instruction organization. It will focus a lot more on access than on processing.

Librarians can't expect to be information intermediaries in the old sense. I think the role for the librarian is as the organizer of systems and to be as inclusive as possible. The nature of end users is that, with automation today, they will walk up and use resources as best they can. The role of the librarian is to make the systems as good as they can to encourage better research.

ATG: Is there any hope of unifying the Internet?

JB: Yes, there is hope, but our profession needs to take it up. A number of organizations and librarians have embraced the paradigm shift and are trying to make it work. Others are just beginning to think about it.

Our profession must take responsibility for organizing access to the resources on the Internet. We need to use our library systems to find the technologies and make them all work together. Our organizational role is to make information accessible. We have to stop organizing packets of printed information. We need to classify electronic information and realize that much of that information will not be on our local automated system. We have done that for a long time. Interlibrary loan points the way to remote resources. But the profession needs to do more, faster.

ATG: Can we talk about document delivery?

JB: I think that document delivery is an example of the overall problem. I

"You can no longer have library systems where you have a terminal talking to a single database such as on OPAC."

don't believe that you will see us doing paper copies or faxes as document delivery for long. Soon, we will simply be accessing a server and downloading the information.

It is up to the library profession to lead the way and to make clear to publishers that we represent the needs of end users.

ATG: Does the printed book have any role in all of this?

JB: I don't think the role for the printed book will go away. But for certain kinds of information — too current and too changing — it may. At the same time, I am always lugging around at least one book.

ATG: I can't resist asking. What book are you lugging around now?

JB: I read junk — fantasy, historical fiction. Yesterday I finished the Viking something or other.

And We Weren't There

Female Publishing Professionals — The Men and the Pendulum by Nat Bodian (Publisher's Marketing Consultant)

I've always felt that the listings in the "People" column of *Publishers Weekly* were a good indicator of employment and promotional trends in the publishing industry. Thus, when my *PW* arrived recently, I opened to "People" and gave it a quick scan. One of the things that seemed apparent is that the names were mainly female. I counted: there were 32 female appointments and promotions out of a total of 41 entries. I went to the earlier issue of *PW* on my desk and did another count: again, female names dominated — 26 out of 41 entries.

I recalled that years back, female names and appointments were sharply in the minority. Things had changed in 1994. I went to my file of comparable *PW* issues in 1984, a decade earlier. In that year, here is how the percentages stacked up in two comparable "People" columns: in one, of 22 listings, 16 were male; in the other, of 34 listings, 20 were male.

Truly the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. The female publishing professional has come into her own! ♣

Jane Burke Interview

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ATG: *That's kind of refreshing. Tell us more about yourself. You are married to a librarian, right?*

JB: I am married to **J. Michael O'Brien**. He is the Director of the Suburban Library System in Chicago. He is more of a librarian than I am. Michael was brought up in a library. He actually grew up living in the library. I mean it. His mother was Director of the Scotia Public Library, and when Mike was born he went from the hospital to the library.

"... researchers want access to many things beyond their own library catalogs."

There are pictures of him giving story hours when he was eight years old.

ATG: *How about your family? Tell us about them.*

JB: I don't have librarianship roots like my husband does. I had a lovely Midwestern upbringing in a family that was willing to encourage me to do whatever I could do. My father worked for a division of General Motors that made locomotives and my mother's favorite thing to say is that "you are never going to learn any younger."

ATG: *You are a young person. Are you planning on leaving NOTIS at some point? What about your personal mentors — who have they been? And what do you consider some of your significant contributions?*

JB: I have been privileged to be involved with a number of very good libraries and very good customers. Our customers are not only very smart but very supportive. We have to listen. **John McGowan** mentored me and I owe a lot to him and his work. He made sure the support was there. Early in my career

Walt Winshall mentored me at CLSI.

If you listen, and you listen hard, and

"I don't believe that you will see us doing paper copies or faxes as document delivery for long."

you ask a lot of questions, and you are willing to spend most of your life on an airplane, you understand what to do. It's not very hard at all.

I used to threaten to do something else, but I have discovered that there are lots and lots of opportunities at NOTIS.

ATG: *What do you do personally, when you're not on an airplane, that is. What are your hobbies?*

JB: When I'm not on an airplane, I garden and read.

Jane Burke is an incredible woman to talk to. She gets right to the point! Let's look for her in Miami! — KS

Jane Burke was born in Naperville, Illinois. She got her degree in general history (American and European) from St. Dominic College in St. Charles, Illinois, a college which closed even before it was accredited. Her MLS is from Rosary College in Illinois and her MBA is from Northwestern. She says she is not a techie type, not technologically literate at all. Does she have a computer at home? An old one that doesn't work anymore, she opines.