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Linda Crismond, Vice President, Professional Media Service Corp.

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Against the Grain

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Interview — Linda Crismond

by **Katina Strauch** (College of Charleston)

I met Linda Crismond the first time over the phone when I called her. I met her the second time over the phone when she called me. I really met her in person the third time I talked to her, at the Charleston Conference in 1991. She is quite a woman. A librarian to be proud of. — KS

ATG: Tell us about yourself. You were the first woman to be Executive Director of ALA. We know also that as the County Librarian of LA County Public Library your library achieved the highest circulation/usage of any public library in the United States.

LC: I am Vice President of public relations for Professional Media Service Corp. It is a good stage in my career. Most of my professional life has been in public and academic libraries. Leaving ALA aside for a moment, one of my proudest accomplishments was LA County Public's achieving the highest circulation/usage of any public library in the U.S. When I left LA County (1989), the circulation was over 13 million, the materials budget was over 8 million, and reference questions answered were over 12 million. It is one of the five largest public libraries in the United States and the largest in terms of activity. I am particularly proud of the introduction of marketing at LA County as a way of insuring that programs were what the clientele wanted.

LA County former staff are in leadership positions all across the country.

ATG: Where did you go to college and where were you trained in librarianship? What do you do in your spare time?

LC: As an undergraduate, I was a modern history major and went through my early undergraduate years of college

wondering what to do. I knew I was not going to be a teacher of history. Finally, I focused on librarianship. My inspiration came from two individuals in my hometown of Carlsbad, California: the public librarian and the high school librarian. Over my career, I have had many mentors. The two most influential are the former University of Southern California Librarian, **Roy Kidman**, and the Assistant City Librarian at the San Francisco Public Library, **Harold Martelle**. I try to play the same role to younger colleagues who come forward in our profession. I was pleased when **Susan Curzon** won the *Library Journal* Librarian of the Year Award because she acknowledged me as her mentor. I think it is important throughout your career to keep in contact with your colleagues and friends at all the places where you have been. You mustn't forget from where you came.

I graduated from the Library School at UC Berkeley in 1965 and went immediately to the San Francisco Public Library as a reference librarian. I moved to head of automation and designed the first automated serials control system in a public library in the United States. Most of my remaining time at the library was spent as, first, Head of Serials, and later as Head of Acquisitions. I left the San Francisco Public Library to move to

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southern California where I became Assistant University Librarian at the University of Southern California. It was there that I introduced OCLC to

the Catalog Department, installed their first automated catalog system (CLSI), did my first comprehensive financial forecast, and went to a lot of football games.

In San Francisco, I also had an in-

come sideline of commercial "fisherperson" and was captain of the boat. We fished for salmon north of San Francisco at Bodega Bay. My fondness for fishing continues to this day. But, I also loved to sail which I learned when I

were rejecting Vietnam and societal values. You remember it all.

ATG: Where are you from originally? You live in several different places during the year, don't you?

LC: I am a native Californian. I was born in beautiful downtown Burbank and raised on an avocado ranch in Carlsbad in northern San Diego County, two blocks from the beach. I didn't wear shoes too long in childhood and still don't wear them much. In order to get the money to go to college, I did everything from being an account clerk, a travel agent, and fashion model to a short order cook. I have one son named **Dougal** (23) who is searching for himself in LA. He is the producer of late night clubs called "Raves" where young high school kids go to dance til dawn. He's a nice looking 6' 2" kid. I am a widow. Although I have been single a long time, I share much in life with my long-time friend, **Tony Leisner**.

Nowadays, I spend the summer in Illinois and the winter in Florida in the Greek fishing community of Tarpon Springs which has great Greek food and is a port for commercial shrimp boats into the Gulf.

ATG: Can you tell us something about your family?

LC: I'm a fourth generation Californian. My great grandfather was the publisher of the Pasadena *Star-News* (1890-1910) and also wrote one of the first

histories of Pasadena. My uncle on my father's side is a past president of the Tournament of Roses.

I have a brother who is 18 months older than I who lives in Florida near Tarpon Springs. My mother lives in northern California. She recently made a decision to move into a retirement home and is now Vice President of the Own-

"Audiovisual materials are our only products, and libraries are our only customers."

ers' Association as well as social chairman. She is one of the few people who owns her own car there. She still works in an art store and does motivational selling for the employees. I am the first librarian in the family and the first to have a post graduate degree.

ATG: You have just completed editing an important book for Highsmith called *Against All Odds: Case Studies on Library Financial Management*. Can you tell us about it and about Highsmith, the publisher?

LC: The book was published in mid March, and Highsmith is reporting good early sales. It's a book covering issues on financial management including organizational structure, sources of funding, outsourcing of operations, and management strategies. It deals with allocation and creative reallocation of resources. The case studies were written by prominent leaders in public librarianship, like **David Warren, Charles Robinson, Susan Goldberg, Ken Dowlin**, and many others. I hope it will be of interest to library managers faced with inadequate resources and growing service needs.

Highsmith is a new press, though the company has for over 100 years sold supplies and products to the library market. The publisher is **Don Sager**, former Commissioner of the Chicago Public Library and Director of the Milwaukee Public Library. He is a well known author himself.

ATG: How did you hook up with

ALA? How does it feel to be known as the ex ED of ALA?

LC: I applied for ALA at a good time. My son was 18 years old, I had been at LA County for ten years. And I accomplished a good deal when I was at ALA especially in the areas of diversity in ALA staff, establishment of the first new magazine in 10 years (*BookLinks*) and in heightened public awareness of libraries and librarianship. I was the first woman Executive Director of ALA, and I am very proud of it.

Why did I leave? That's the \$64,000 question. The Executive Board did not share with me the reasons why they were unhappy with the progress we made at ALA during my tenure. Some of the difficulties included an adversarial relationship between the Board and staff, constantly shifting priorities, and a great deal of politics surrounding every decision. Anyway, I consider it an honor to have been the Executive Director of ALA.

ATG: Are the interests of ALA too diverse? Does this hamstring ALA from being able to take strong stands on anything but mainstream political issues?

LC: No. The diversity is what makes ALA exciting. The divisions' strengths should be enhanced, and spokespersons should come from all levels in our profession. Our common interest is support for libraries, librarians and librarianship:

for the institution, the people, and the profession. All divisions united, for example, for a White House Conference and now must also unite for the national information highway. Our profession has a broad range of interests. We can't all be experts about everything, and the divisions of ALA allow us to focus on the various segments of our profession.

I hope the ALA self study and the Perlov Report will be thoroughly reviewed and acted upon. It has been two years since I left, and I have seen no real change despite widespread discussions. ALA is too distracted by internal politics at the top. These are not the issues of the profession. ALA needs a united leadership at the national level. There must be mutual respect among elected leadership and appointed management as well as a continuity of priorities.

I just got back from PLA, the Public Library Association meeting. It was a great meeting. Attendees had time to spend in exhibits and to talk to companies. Even the President of PLA was wandering around through the exhibits. The President of ALA never steps into the exhibits, rarely sees the attendees, and is always in meetings.

ATG: So, tell us more about Professional Media Service Corp.?

LC: Professional Media Service Corp. sells non-print media to academic, public, and school libraries. It is a growing company. Founded in 1982, the company offers the largest audio and video database for online acquisitions. It has

"In outsourcing, the technical service librarians' responsibility changes from managing people and the process to managing contracts and the results."

the most comprehensive cataloging service for AV materials. Early in my career I was Head of Acquisitions for the San Francisco Public Library. Now, I'm seeing life from a different side of the tracks, and it, too, is a good side.

How did I get into this area? Well, I have known **Peter Jacobs**, the President

and Founder, my whole career. After ALA he asked me if I wanted to work for him. We had worked together on the ANSI Standards Committee for a standard order form in the 1960s. I love having the freedom to work outside of the main offices. In fact, I work from my home. It's the first time in my life that I have no staff (everyone I talk to is jealous), no committees, and no meetings!!!!

ATG: How do you define "audiovisual?" What kinds of things do you handle at Professional Media? How about the Internet? Do you use it?

LC: Academic libraries are increasing their purchase of audio and video material to support classroom instruction and research. Audio books are in high demand in public libraries. The second fastest growing service in public libraries is informational videos. Academic libraries also buy music to support classroom work. Librarians in academic libraries are finding that students refuse to deal with print when an electronic resource is available. Students like the convenience, speed, ease of use, and added search capabilities of electronic publications. It is certain that library budgets for CD-ROMs and interactive and multimedia will dramatically increase.

The Internet is open to all; some will participate in discussions and others will not. The private sector has much to offer in making the Internet more accessible and in developing information sources and tools. The Internet is not free, despite what some academic librarians think. It's not free to me. Every time I check a message, I am paying a tele-

"Students refuse to deal with print when an electronic source is available."

phone charge so I want to use it as efficiently as possible.

ATG: How many employees are at Professional Media Service? And tell us about some of your special services like

cataloging? How do you feel about "outsourcing"?

LC: There are thirty-five employees at the headquarters of PMS in Gardena, California. The staff is diverse and representative of southern California. The technical services department has 4 professional catalogers. We are experts in the acquisition of audio and video materials. AV are our only products, and libraries are our only customers.

We are building other timely services. At ALA Midwinter, the hot topic was "outsourcing" and Professional Media can provide to libraries the contractual services of selection, acquisition, cataloging, and processing of AV materials. Our longest standing academic library customer is the Music Library at Stanford University, and we have supplied all of their sound recordings with cataloging and processing for the last decade.

Outsourcing is a major decision and it is coming [see Media Minder, this issue, page 52]. Of course, it's no different than in the early 1970s when OCLC went national, and we began to use cataloging from other libraries. Or, way before that, at the beginning of the century, the Library of Congress began to share its cataloging. In the last decade, commercial companies have entered the field providing cataloging with the supply of materials. Most of these companies use professional librarians to create a MARC record. The theory behind outsourcing is to receive a product at a lower or equal price and at an equal or higher quality.

Approval plans and standing orders are part of outsourcing. An external resource is used to assist in the acquisition and selection of materials. Professional librarians in technical services have the responsibility to manage functions and operations to acquire information and make it accessible. They may choose to perform the tasks within the library or to partner with a contractor who provides these services. In outsourcing, the technical services librarians' responsibility changes from managing people and the process to managing contracts and the results.

ATG: What do you read? What are your hobbies?

LC: I just returned from Tarpon Springs where I spent the winter. It was great. I took a salad out to the dock and sat with a fishing pole eating lunch every day and caught dinner. I would clean it and then cook dinner. There are all

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sorts of great varieties of Florida fish and my favorite one is snook. This summer we will spend several weeks cruising around Lake Michigan on our Island Packet sailboat.

I am reading Lawrence Sanders, *The Case of Lucy Bending*. I like mysteries. I read fiction and escapist stuff. I am reading the autobiography of Ben Franklin, who is most librarians' great hero. My hobby is creative embroidery and I am doing a collage of colorful fishes right now, some of which I caught in Florida. I like to cook low cal and am always looking for ways to cook without fat. I jog and exercise most days of the week. This enables us to splurge every now and then for a pizza or a great dinner out.

I also like to sit down and read *Against the Grain* cover to cover. Tony [Leisner] does too. Someone came up to me at PLA, a vendor, and said to me: "I know you, you write a column in ATG!" He said he thinks the magazine is great.

ATG: I can't resist asking you. Where do you buy all your wonderful jewelry?

LC: I buy jewelry wherever I travel and I love to shop when I travel. Recently, I went to Hong Kong and Thailand to celebrate a significant birthday with a 0 after it. ☺

Well, y'all, Linda says she will be in Miami and invites you to her booth # 1920. She says ALA is still the biggest group of librarians in one place and is not to be missed for companies like hers which serve the library market! Let's look for her. Bye for now. — KS