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Evelyn Fazio-Vice President & Director of Sharpe Reference

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ATG Interviews Evelyn Fazio

Vice President & Director of Sharpe Reference

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <strauchk@earthlink.net>

ATG: We know that *M.E. Sharpe* has been in business since 1958, but when and why did *Sharpe* begin its reference line? How does it relate to the rest of *M.E. Sharpe's* list?

EF: *Sharpe Reference* was established in 1995, when I joined *M.E. Sharpe* to create a new line of reference books. Our first list was published in the fall of 1996. Because *M.E. Sharpe's* list mostly consists of social science, it made the most sense to me to capitalize on our strengths and publish in those areas. I also felt that we could expand our current market by moving down into the high school and public library markets, where we had little, if any, presence. We began with the *Encyclopedia of the Republican Party* and the *Encyclopedia of the Democratic Party*, the *Encyclopedia of World Terrorism, Lives and Works in the Arts*, and the *Illustrated Book of World Rankings*.

ATG: How long have you been involved in *Sharpe's* reference program? Did you have experience in reference publishing prior to joining *M.E. Sharpe*?

EF: I have been involved in the *Sharpe Reference* program from its inception. It was a wonderful opportunity to create something using my own vision to fill a market niche. I felt that we could capitalize on *M.E. Sharpe's* sterling reputation in the academic market, while also establishing a presence in two large markets that seemed underserved: high school and public libraries. My prior experience in reference extends back to the beginning of my career in publishing at *Prentice Hall*, and at *Marshall Cavendish* as Editorial Director immediately before joining *M.E. Sharpe*.

ATG: How did you implement your vision? What strategy or business plan did you use?

EF: The plan was to get the best material to the market as quickly as possible. I used a variety of packagers as sources for the first two years to avoid hiring a staff and adding to overhead expenses.

ATG: In examining some of your titles it looks like you have succeeded. Some of your titles seem appropriate for academic libraries and others more geared to public libraries. Are we on target with that observation?

EF: Yes, you are on target. I intended the line to be appropriate for researchers in high school, college and public libraries. Many of the sets sell well in all three venues, such as the *Encyclopedia of Civil Rights in America*, while others have penetrated the high school and public libraries more than academic libraries, such as *Lives and Works in the Arts*. And some, like the *Encyclopedia of Interest Groups and Lobbyists*, have had stronger sales

in academic libraries than in high school or public libraries.

ATG: What subject areas do you consider to be your strengths? Are there plans to expand into other areas?

EF: Political science and history, as well as the arts—humanities, are our strengths, and they fit with the existing journal and book lines that were the foundation of the company. We do plan to expand, and I have been undertaking market research in schools, as well as at library meetings. We are considering other subject areas that are related, as well as other educational levels.

ATG: How do you decide what to publish? Do you have specific criteria that authors must meet?

EF: What we publish must have a curriculum tie-in at the high school level, as well as in areas that are studied at the college level. Some subjects are of such a compelling nature, like *Terrorism*, that they need to be published. There is also a correlation to modern world history with a subject like *Terrorism* that high school and public librarians feel comfortable with the purchase. As far as the authors/editors go, I try to locate experts in a field who can then draw on their colleagues to create the best sets with the best contributors. They have to be well organized and well networked to be the editors of a set, and the contributors must be scholars with credentials that give them, and the sets credibility. It's very important that students know that what they are reading was written by some of the leading scholars in a field. An example of this is the contributors to *Encyclopedia of Third Parties in America*.

ATG: A number of reference publishers, including *M.E. Sharpe*, repackage previously published information. Your *Encyclopedia of Civil War Biography* is an example that comes to mind. It culls biographical sketches from the first fifteen volumes of the massive *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*. What criteria do you use in deciding to do this? How do you determine the amount of "value added" that justifies this type of repackaging?

EF: We felt it was such an interesting body of work that it should be made available to today's students. Much of the material was written by contemporaries of the individuals covered, making the work virtually a primary source. I found the eyewitness accounts of events like Grant's funeral, written in the style of the day, to be fascinating. The Civil War is one of the most compelling periods in American history, and is a very popu-

lar subject of research. The fact that *Professor McPherson* was the editor made it very exciting. His commentary provided the "value added" that you mentioned.

ATG: It seems to us that some of the "value added" was also in the selection of the specific biographies, negotiating permissions to reprint, etc. How did you tackle those issues?

EF: It's all part of the regular process of creating or editing reference works. I try to find the simplest approach, so that I can avoid dealing with too many pieces. It's easiest to find a single source that owns a copyright rather than put together a set with dozens of sources that each require separate negotiation. We aren't *Scribner's* or *Gale*, who have large staffs who can tackle these huge sets with big budgets and lengthy schedules.

ATG: What responsibility do publishers have in making clear what libraries are getting when they purchase these repackaged products?

EF: We feel it's important to make note of the origins of this kind of material. In the Civil War set, we make clear where the work first appeared, because we are well aware that librarians need to make informed decisions about what they add to their collections.

ATG: Is this repackaging obvious from your promotional material? How far should a publisher go in clarifying the extent of the repackaging?

EF: It's in the publisher's note in the book. Our materials are hand sold by sales representatives, who are fully informed about the original source of the information.

ATG: In the rush to electronic publishing how is *Sharpe* reference positioning it? Do you have plans to release any of your print products in electronic formats?

EF: We are not rushing into anything, but are carefully considering the possibilities and discussing what to do next with several providers. In a small house like ours, we hesitate to take the lead in somewhat uncharted territory because the financial impact can be so great if one guesses wrong. We are watching this development very carefully, and are cautiously optimistic about the future of reference publishing in an electronic era. I suspect that reference material in the future will be accessed on-line via subscriptions, much in the way that periodicals seem to be headed. It's a rapidly changing world for us, and nobody has all the answers. I've done a considerable amount of research on this, and there are few clear answers yet.

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Donald Hagen
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ATG: Tell us about your international offices. How large are they and where are they located?

DH: Bernan has no international offices. The closest we come to international offices would be the resale agreements we have with our international distributors.

ATG: How has the electronic revolution affected Bernan?

DH: Since we were founded in 1952 and we are not a huge corporation, we, like many other companies, are working to retrofit an established company. This is a difficult process, though, on two levels. First, you have the cost associated with making these changes. We do not have large cash reserves that we can use to throw money at this week's new idea. We must make our choices wisely, so that a year from now we are not suffering from buyer's remorse. Secondly, in a company that is almost 50 years old, you have tradition and a certain ebb and flow to business. When you publish a book it is an event with a tangible item. Electronic publishing does not offer these same things. Material posted online can be updated whenever you like, there is no need for second or third editions. So while you set dates for posting material online, those dates are much more easily changed than a publishing date. Electronic publishing is in our future. How that will manifest itself is still under consideration.

We have an e-publishing group that is laying the groundwork for this transition, looking at hardware options, doing market surveys and evaluating which material is best suited for an online format.

The electronic revolution has had, is having and will continue to have an increasing influence on how and what we do at Bernan. From networking the office, to changing our order entry/accounting system, to deciding what material to publish online and how to package it, the electronic revolution has changed the way we do business. That is just the nature of the world we live in, though. Change is inevitable so we must continue to change and reinvent ourselves or we will be left behind.

ATG: Tell us about yourself. What are your hobbies? What do you like to do? What do you like to read? Family?

DH: I'm a family guy with three girls and a boy. My wife, **Joyce**, is busy constantly keeping the daily business of the family operating. My oldest girl will be in her second year at the **College of William and Mary**. Another girl is a rising senior in high school, and the third girl is moving up to the 8th grade. My son will be in second grade next September. The majority of my free time is occupied with crew, soccer, lacrosse, and Little League events. Reading—mostly newspapers and re-reading high school classics to help the kids with reports. Biking has become my outlet for stress relief and weight control.

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ATG: Given the uncertainty and high cost of electronic publishing, we understand your hesitance. Have you considering partnering with other small (or large) publishers? Is that a viable option? Why or why not?

EF: We are partnering with **netLibrary** on some of our academic works, but have not yet gone this route with an encyclopedia. I am considering options, but I am not ready to make any recommendations. As far as other publishers go, it becomes a question of who owns the copyright to a work, how it's going to be used and where, does it end up in a database that then competes with the original work, and similar issues. These things become a deterrent.

ATG: Where do you see *Sharpe Reference* in 5 years? 10 years?

EF: I would like to see this line continue to grow and expand, and become one of the best in the industry. I believe that if we stick to our mission and continue to grow carefully, and concentrate on high quality, we will continue to be successful. We have increased the number of titles published from 4 a year to 6 or 7. Our print runs are fairly stable—we'd rather reprint than keep excessive inventory, and the sales are growing on an average of about 20 percent a year so far. The backlist continues to sell, and we've reprinted several titles. I expect these trends to continue.

Here's Looking At
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One of the revelations of this book, as I've mentioned, is that sprawl did not happen by accident. I had thought that the *lack* of zoning was responsible for sprawl, but here the authors demonstrate that sprawl is actually the logical outcome of current zoning laws and planning practices, which specify nonoverlapping single-use areas for shopping and for housing, and which regulate the type of housing that can exist in a certain area, forcing uniform, economically segregated neighborhoods without options for multifamily dwellings, apartments, and single family homes in a single integrated area.

The authors show that the typical suburb with its cul-de-sac kids and soccer moms is not a healthy psychological environment. The kids are safe on their cul-de-sacs for their first few years, but then become virtual prisoners "of a thoroughly safe and unchallenging environment" which they cannot leave except by car, so they are completely dependent on adults. Moms, on the other hand, are stuck in their cars for hours, driving various children to all the places they now need to go since they have nothing available to them in their

own neighborhood: no walkable park, school, library, or shops. Teenagers are bored in these environments, and the elderly are stranded. Commuters are exhausted, pushing the limits of how far they can stand to drive daily. The authors point out that "now, largely be-

cause of suburban land-use patterns, the eight-hour day has once again become the ten-hour day. These two hours, once the most interesting, varied and socially productive hours of the day [when spent at home, or in communal activity as early in the twentieth century] have become some of the most stressful and unpleasant"—spent fighting traffic on overstuffed highways.

The book's most simple and yet stunning conclusion is that we've been designing our towns and cities for cars, not people. To make them work for people, they should look like traditional neighborhoods: mixed use, with shops and houses intermingled, apartments above stores, narrow treed streets, houses set close to the street with garages hidden at the back, and a sense of the presence of other

humans (which the mixed-use tends to encourage, but the single-use to discourage, since people all go off to work at the same time, abandoning one area, to fill an office park somewhere else, which, because of its isolation in a sea of asphalt, off a highway, is impracticable to leave except at the end of the workday.)

One of the authors' strengths is their ability to show how the "devil is in the details"—how small things like street width and the angle at which roads meet are important factors in establishing our psychological as well as physical environment. They point out that the arbitrarily curvy streets of the typical new subdivision "create an environment that is utterly disorienting" and that road engineers design roads with curves at intersections to allow cars to navigate them more quickly, but these same roads discourage walkers. It is difficult, after reading this book, to underestimate the power of such physical details. The authors believe (and do a good job of showing) that "community cannot form in the absence of communal space, without places for people

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