



Karyle Butcher Oral History Interview, May 8, 2014

Title

“Cultivating Innovation as University Librarian”

Date

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Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Butcher discusses her upbringing, her early interest in librarianship, and her decision to make the switch from public libraries to academic libraries, beginning with her first position at Oregon State University. She provides her recollections of the environment within the library when she initially arrived and describes the evolution in promotion and tenure requirements that came about over the course of her career. Throughout the session, she also notes her own development as an administrator and provides thoughts on her philosophies of communication and leadership.

Several noteworthy events in the history of the OSU Libraries are recounted over the length of the interview. Among them, Butcher recalls the response necessitated by a large mold outbreak in a collections storage facility, the fund raising and remodeling that transformed the Kerr Library into the Valley Library, the curation of the Valley Library's Northwest Art Collection, and the development of the library courtyard quotation project. She also reflects on the OSU Libraries' contribution to the university's land grant mission, with particular focus paid to the creation and growth of the Oregon Explorer digital library.

From there, Butcher discusses the radical changes in library technologies that she observed at OSU and details the back story behind the establishment of two endowed chairs within the OSU Libraries. The physical and administrative arrival of the University Archives and the OSU Press into the library are also recalled, as is the creation of the Library Advisory Council and Butcher's interactions with professional organizations. The interview concludes with Butcher's thoughts on her own civic engagement outside of the library world.

Interviewee

Karyle Butcher

Interviewer

Janice Dilg

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/butcher/>

Transcript

Janice Dilg: So, today is May 8th, 2014, and my name is Janice Dilg. I'm the oral historian with the Oregon State University Oral History Project, and I'm here today with Karyle Butcher, longtime University Librarian, and we are in the Wilson Room. And we're going to talk about your history here at OSU, specifically in relation to the library. [Laughs] So, welcome.

Karyle Butcher: Thank you.

JD: I know there's a lot of biographical information on you elsewhere, but I thought it's always nice to start with just a little bit of your history—where you grew up, kind of your education, and perhaps how you got interested in being a librarian.

KB: Sure. I grew up in Tacoma, Washington. Moved to California, Fresno, California; went to high school in Fresno. Came from a working-class family, and nobody went to college, and the word to me was I would not be allowed to go to college, and so I immediately said, "Well, that's what I'm going to do." And my father said, "Then you need to decide what you're going to do." I said, "I'm going to be a teacher." I went to Fresno State College, University, and in my junior year it was real clear to me that I couldn't possibly be a teacher. I didn't have the patience for it. A friend of mine, a good high school friend, who was just thinking about going to library school, and she said, "Become a librarian. It's, like, really cool." And I said, "Okay, that's what I'm going to do."

So I went to Berkeley, finished my last year at Berkeley, stayed in Berkeley. Moved to southern California and went to library school, and got my first job as a reference librarian at Los Angeles Public Library. And I was a public librarian—can't remember how long I was in L.A. Moved to Santa Barbara, and I was an assistant librarian in the public library at Santa Barbara, and had an epiphany, which turned out to be incorrect, which was I didn't want to be an administrator. I was kind of tired of that, so I had an opportunity to think about moving to the Northwest.

As I said, I grew up here, and saw this position for a beginning reference librarian at Oregon State University Library, and it was a business librarian. I knew nothing about business, but why let that bother you? And I applied, and I got this job, and I was an entry-level librarian. And I had an amazing experience, which was, when I was in Santa Barbara, as an assistant librarian, I could walk into a room, and I could sit down, and I could say, "I think we should do X," and people would go, "Oh, okay, okay."

When I was in OSU, and I was a beginning-level librarian—even though I was still the same person—I would have an idea, and they would just blow me off. And that's when I realized—and I'm talking about this because it's kind of key to who I am as an administrator—that's when I realized that all authority is positional, and that it wasn't about me being really smart and really clever. It was, I had a position in Santa Barbara, and when I came here, I had no position, and I was totally ignored. You know, my ideas were just discounted. And so it's something that I just have always had in my mind when I did move up the ladder, and I did become head of the university library. I always knew that my ideas weren't any better than anybody else's, but I had the position, so I can make them happen, and they couldn't, you know?

So I was here as a beginning reference librarian, and this is probably pretty inappropriate, but I'm going to say it. It was kind of, it was an old era. Men ran the university, and the library, and it was an 8-to-5 climate. Everybody came in at eight, and everybody took a break at 9:45, and then everybody had lunch at 12, and everybody took a break at 3:45, and then everybody left at 5. And that was just foreign to me, that there was no flexibility, and it was compounded because I'm a vegetarian—I was from California. So there was just—I'm sure they wondered who this person was. So it was a little difficult.

Then we got a new University Librarian, Mel George, and he was really determined that the culture had to change. And he, for whatever reason, saw me as somebody who could be a change agent with him, and so I was promoted under his direction and moved up to Associate University Librarian, just as we started the building program. And then he left the university, and I was made interim librarian, and then went through the building program, and was—I think I was given full professorship at that time, and also made University Librarian. There was an internal search, and so in '97, I think it was—I don't remember the date, frankly—I've been University Librarian. [0:05:00] And I was in that position until I retired in September of 2010.

JD: So, just to back up a bit, in addition to the revelation that you had about who listened to you and who didn't, what were the other elements, I guess, of moving from being a public librarian to an academic librarian? Did that happen often?

KB: No, no. Hardly ever. And it happened with me because the position I applied for was academic. The interesting part for me—and I think I was fortunate to get into a Land Grant institution, so a lot of the values of a public library, which is, you are there for the people, you are there for people to help; that's really what you're there for. The academic librarian, it's a different position in a lot of libraries, because you're basically there to help the faculty and the students, and there's not the kind of a person you get in a public library: the poor person who comes in, has no other access except the library, and they need help.

Now, students come in and they have a paper to write, they need that sort of intellectual help, and faculty need resources. But there's not the do-good part there. But by being part of a Land Grant institution, we're—and we will probably talk about it, but some of our programs in the library, where we go out and work with the community, and out in the state, and the Oregon Explorer—a lot of that stemmed from, really, my interest as a public librarian, and that we're here to serve everybody, and my incredibly strong belief that libraries are key to everybody's existence. So it's a different—and it's an unusual transition and different, but turned out to be really pretty interesting for me.

JD: Mm-hm. So when you say that libraries are, in your opinion, key to people's existence, was that a philosophy that developed over your years as a librarian, or did you grow up kind of haunting your own local public library, reading books?

KB: Well, I did haunt my library. It came from working in the public—my first job was Los Angeles Public Library, and it was real clear to me that we knew how to find stuff, and people wanted stuff. I mean, that's a crude way of putting it, but we had information; people came in and wanted it. They didn't have a skill set to get it, and our job was to be an enabler of information, so that people were able to get the information they wanted. And information is power. I mean, I'm a '60s person, and information is power, and the more you can provide people with information so they make good decisions about buying a car, or a job, is key. And so that's what we do.

JD: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. And so you talked about beginning as a business reference librarian, and then you moved into Access Services in the library. Talk a little about how those positions varied, and sort of both what you brought to those positions, and what you learned from those positions that you took forward with you.

KB: Well, the business librarian was business, economics and law. And so what I learned real quickly was about those disciplines, because at that time, we would do lectures—the business, the College of Business, there'd be a professor of marketing, say, "Would you come over and talk to our students about marketing." And so that was good for both developing relationships with the college, which stood me in great stead later, but also, you know, it was a service to the students.

And when I was promoted to Access Services, the main difference was I was supervising people who hired me. And that was a complicated situation, and also, that was the turning point of the library. When I came here, the circulation desk said, "We close at 10,"—the library closed at 10, the desk would close at a quarter to 10 and say, "We're closing at quarter to 10; do not ask to check out a book." And so it was a more—and again, that was a cultural thing. It's not these people were bad, but it was a cultural thing in all of libraries, and in the university. It was just a different culture. It was not about service; it was about the people who worked there.

And so when Mel George came in, one of the first things he did was take that sign down, and then he put me in charge, and partly because of my public-library experience. [0:09:58] He knew that, and his wife is a public librarian. So he knew that that would start to change that culture. So where do you want to go from there?

JD: Well, I'd actually be interested in you exploring a bit more of that change. I think when we talked earlier, in our pre-interview discussion, you talked about it going from sort of more of a clerical position—

KB: Right.

JD: —for the library staff, to tenure track. How did that evolve, and your role in that?

KB: Well, it's a little complicated. When we had a new provost—when I came to the library, you were promoted and tenured within the library. The library had a committee, and it was fairly, in my opinion, modest requirements. And then a decision was made, and it was sent over to the university president, who typically signed off on it. It wasn't very rigorous. We got a new provost, and he said, "If the library's going to be considered faculty, then the library must meet the demand, must meet the standards, of the rest of the faculty, which means you will do research, you will do teaching, and your dossier will be reviewed by the Promotion and Tenure Committee for all of the university." It will no longer be an in-house—and that's a decision the library can make. You can either say, "We don't want to be faculty; we want to be professional faculty, non-tenure track," or you can make that decision.

Again, Mel George, who was the University Librarian at the time, was adamant that we would become faculty, and it really wasn't a discussion point, but it did cause some tension among the librarians, because there was a sense about, "Well, I don't do research." And because the library degree is a master's degree, that's our terminal degree, as opposed to a Ph.D., and a Ph.D., as you know, is you do research. You don't do that, particularly, for a master's. So there wasn't a sense about what we do is real research. And the standard at OSU, because it typically, then, was science—there's a whole rhetoric about science, and how science research is, and that was not what happened in libraries. So the transition was, "Yes, we're going to become faculty, and yes, we will do research, and yes, we will do teaching."

And so my job was—I was Associate University Librarian, at that time, for public services, so the reference librarians reported to me. My job was to help define what constituted library research. It wasn't simply a matter of doing something, and saying, "This is what we did, and now you can do it." But it was really, really looking at what are some of the problems facing libraries, and how can you—how can you address those problems in research, and write it up? And really encouraging the librarians to publish, with the idea that if we learn something and publish it, it saves a whole bunch of people time, because they don't have to reinvent what you did. And we had a negative example of a person who was very, very good, who did a lot of work within the library, never published it, and left the library; was not tenured, of course, because he didn't publish—left the library, and all of the work he did just died. And so it was a good lesson for the librarians to actually watch that happen.

By the time I became University Librarian, the librarians—we were hiring people, with that expectation. I would always do that first interview, and say, "We do research and publishing here, and we will support you, provide you travel grants. We will do everything we can to make you successful, but the expectation is you will do publishing, and you will do conferences." And so we hired people, and so the culture switched over to, pretty soon, when people came in, they understood that's what they did. And we did a lot more travel support, so people did go to conferences. And then as the library became a leader in technology, the opportunities for publishing were just wide open, so.

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And so I know that you published regularly, and there's a long list of your publications. But just perhaps generally talk about what your research interests were, and how you explored that, in that realm.

KB: Well, I started out—it sort of switched, but I started out with the very essence of, not really electronics. [0:15:00] When information came out on compact disc, and everybody had these machines with compact discs, I talked about—my original research was how we made that decision to go that route, and the various decision points on purchasing information, and how we made it available to students. And so there's a whole bunch of issues around compact discs, and it used to be that research in the library was mediated. You had to go to a room, and somebody helped you. And my goal was to make it un-mediated, and this was a way to. So my research was also about the use of un-mediated research.

As I moved up in the organization, my interest and passion is organizational design. What are the elements that you need to have in an organization that works? The university went through a big Total Quality Management program, and we tried that in the library, and so I spent some time lecturing and presenting and writing on that. And then, just, really my interest is in how do you make it work, whatever it is?

JD: And so clearly, you're engaged with other professionals when you go to these conferences, or in the literature that you're reading, publications of other—

KB: Mm-hm, sure.

JD: —librarians? But then there's also, you're at a university, and there's faculty and students. How did they fit into the mix, in either the response of the library, or in kind of activating the library and its staff to change, and make changes?

KB: I'm not clear I get where you're headed.

JD: Just, there's certainly the professional input that you would help generate new ideas as well as receive new ideas. But I'm also asking, where did you see, or what was your experience with kind of questions and queries that students and faculty would come in? How did that help shape changes in the library?

KB: Well, you know, I'd like to say it shaped a lot.

JD: [Laughs] Or maybe it didn't.

KB: It didn't directly, in that, sadly and interestingly, people know what they know, and if they haven't—the students just knew what they saw here, and that's what they expected to see. So you would get things like, "Well, how come we can't have coffee in the room?" Comfort issues. Faculty, a little differently. If they came—as the university started to expand its horizons, because everything that happened in the library was being—was echoed in the whole university. It wasn't as though the library was moving in this direction, and the university was already there.

But there were new presidents, there was a new—there was a consultant we had once, that said the university is like an enclosed triangle. And we had a President, Paul Risser, and the consultant said, "Paul Risser is out here trying to break that triangle, to open up the university, so the university, OSU, starts to look beyond the state for its support, who it serves—that we can't do this, we need to do this." So while that was going on, that was going on in the library, also. So out of that, new faculty were hired, and those faculty came in with expectations. They'd been at Harvard or Columbia or Berkeley, and they came in with an expectation that the library—typically, they were collection expectations, not so much modernization or technology, but, "We expect to see this in our library."

That provided me with huge—it was one thing if I go to the provost and say, "Give us more money." It's one thing if I've got faculty knocking on my door, knocking on the provost's door and saying, "The library's not supported in the way that we expect a library to be." So that allowed sort of an opening in the library, and an awareness on the part of the rest of the campus that we were open to change.

And I did spend a lot of time working the campus. I'd talk to people and go to meetings, and say, "What is it you need from the library?" Really saying, "We're here to do what you need to do, but you need to articulate what you want." And also, the truth is, we have a limited budget, so we can't do everything. So it was a give-and-take kind of thing that allowed the library, again, to start to see itself as a player on campus. And then during the same period, the university went from a fundraising model, which was each universe, each college, had its own fundraiser, and everybody competed, to the current situation with the Foundation. We were fortunate. [0:20:00] We would get money.

And we were able to go—I could take that money. I discovered early in my life, happily, that if I went to a meeting with the faculty, say, the Dean of the College of Engineering, and I said, "We could buy this database. We have \$20,000, but we can't afford it. Are you interested?" "Yeah, yeah, we need it." I said, "Well, we need some of your money." So if you could come to a dean with money, and use that as leverage money, we were able to then build a collection through that, and similarly with the University of Oregon. We would start to say, "Okay look, we can buy this if you buy this." And so it's about leveraging the money you have, and helping people start to see the library as key to their research, that we weren't over here just hanging out. We were about them. Does that help?

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Yeah.

KB: Okay.

JD: That's great. And was that collaborative approach—I guess I'll put that term on it, and if that's incorrect, you can change that—was that being adopted kind of university-wide? Because you were here. You know, Measure 5 was wreaking its havoc in the education community. Everyone was trying to figure out how to make fewer dollars do good things.

KB: Well, this university is amazingly good at getting money, in terms of people working deals. You know that there's a lot of entrepreneurs on campus. And the library hadn't really been seen as entrepreneurial. And so we were picking up on that, but there's—I think state funding, when I left, was at 25 percent or so of our budget, so there's a lot of grant work. There's work with the Foundation and fundraising. There's a lot of cross-departmental—not just within the library, but throughout campus. You know, basically, how do we take the money we have, and turn it into more money? And that's fun!

JD: Well, in looking through some of the *Messengers*, the library newsletter—is that the correct term?

KB: Yes.

JD: Mel George talked in one of his columns that you were great at asking the provocative questions in meetings.

KB: [Laughs]

JD: Such as, "What are we really trying to accomplish here?" "Does anybody care if this activity continues?" Or, "Is that what students and researchers really want or need?" It sounds like perhaps those were types of approaches that you just brought with you. But how did that sort of continue to resonate, I guess, as you moved into ever-increasing, kind of more responsibility, more powerful positions within the library, until you were University Librarian?

KB: Mm-hm. Well, if you have limited funds, you do have to figure out what your market niche is, and you have to figure out where you add value to the campus. What is it we do that nobody else does? So you start to wean away some things. And within the library, if you look at, "Are the work that the librarian's doing—does it take a master's degree to do that?" And if it doesn't, then they shouldn't do it. And so again, part of this earlier culture was a librarian's doing work that was not intellectual, and was not necessarily—didn't require their skill set, but was comfortable. And so they would be checking things in the card catalog, and things.

And so partly it was a combination of saying, "Why are you doing that, and not somebody else?" So there was a whole organizational shift, and it was accompanying this movement towards more publication on the part of the library, more of: the role of the librarian is to go out and meet the faculty, and meet the students. That means you can't be housed in this building. You can't be sitting in your office all the time—that a lot of your work is, we won't see you because you're going to be out lecturing to the History 101 class about library resources.

And even with the web and Google, the role of the librarian is to help them understand what a vetted resource is, and that requires contact with the students, contact with the faculty, and even educating the faculty that just because they might find the library resource, and they might find one of our databases through Google [0:25:01], and think, "Well, I don't need to use the library. I can get it all online." But the truth is, they're using our resources, just, they're coming at it through a different—so a lot of education to keep people aware of the role of the library—and I just lost the train of my thought on that question, so where were we headed with that one?

JD: Talking about just kind of your approach to changes in decision-making, kind of asking the provocative question or the tough question, to get people to really think through.

KB: Well, yeah, it really is that—and I think because I was a business librarian, even though I don't have a business background, you do pick up the jargon. And the concept of value-added is important to me. What do we do that nobody else does? And that's where we're going to put our money and our people. And if somebody else can do it, then we shouldn't do it. Or if within the library, it can be done by a library assistant, then you don't want a professional faculty person doing it.

And you know, I'm notorious for being a blunt speaker, and so [laughs] I'm sure that that affected some of the questions, too. It's a mixed blessing for people. On one hand, people have a huge comfort level in doing things that they've done a lot, and when I first came here and was promoted, there was a real reticence in going out and talking to the faculty, sort of like, well, even though we were faculty, it was like, "Well, they're real faculty, and we're not." But the campus faculty may or may not see the librarians as faculty in the same way they view themselves, but they value librarians. And that's all I care about. And they value that we have a skill set that they don't have, and we can make their life easier. And that's good.

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And when you mention "skill set," as I prepared for this interview, I realized there was probably a much wider skill set that a librarian needed than I would have assigned, in my ignorance.

KB: You and everybody else. [Laughs]

JD: In my ignorance as an outsider. [Laughs]

KB: Right, right, right, right, right, right, right.

JD: And you know, some of them were probably one of events, and one that was just intriguing, was discovering the mold in the collection, the offsite collection, that required you to develop a plan and execute a plan to de-spore?

KB: Mm-hm.

JD: Talk a little about that process, and just kind of how you confront something like that, or did confront it.

KB: With a mask, with a mask. Well, when we were in the old building, in the Kerr Library, we had offsite storage out at Adair, and turned out there was a flood in the basement, and there are no—that was moved out there before I came. There was no alarm system or anything. But I would go out there and just kind of check to see what was going on. And there was water—I came in, and there was water down in the basement. And so we looked at the collection, and sure enough, there was mold spores on the books. And we called various consultants, and actually brought in some.

The Head of Special Collections at the time, Cliff Mead, did a lot of the background work in finding out who would be the most likely people to treat this. They came, and it was a combination of some books, just literally taking them out in the sun, and drying them off, and then getting crews of people to come in and wipe them all down. So it was more of a logistical process. It wasn't intellectual. It was just a matter of staging these things, and making sure that the people we hired were there when they needed people from the library to come out and help, and then making sure that that was working, making sure that we were educating the campus about what we were doing, because "there's mold out there, what's happening?" So we had to deal with that. And then there were parts of the collection that just got lost. There were just—you can't—if you can't contain that, you can't have those books next to anything else. But it was more of a logistical issue.

JD: Mm-hm. But it was a large part of the collection.

KB: Eighty-five-thousand volumes.

JD: So, logistical or not—?

KB: It was a big job.

JD: Well, and important, too. Maintaining the collection.

KB: Yeah, yeah. But we had—yes, yeah.

JD: And I guess another aspect of at least your particular work here as University Librarian involved the extensive, multiyear construction project of Valley Library. [0:30:01]

KB: Mm-hm. Indeed it did.

JD: [Laughs] Talk a little about what the decision process was that involved you, as being so integrally involved in that, and how, to some extent, it unfolded.

KB: Well, it was a—we had a groundbreaking, with Gladys Valley driving a tractor across the ground. And that day, for a variety of reasons, the current University Librarian made the decision that he was going to step down. I had been involved in conversations with him about the construction, but not too much about furniture, and all of the little details that go into the library. So I was asked to step in as the Interim University Librarian, and the first decision I had to make was, when you go down each one of these hallways, there's wood paneling halfway up. And there are—I mean, I'll get into some

detail—two major decisions. One of them was the wood paneling. The engineer said, "We don't know if we have enough money to do that, and we could just have plaster, I guess it is, or we could have the wood paneling." And I said, "We have to have the wood paneling, because the building will be too harsh otherwise." And that was just a gut thing. I don't know anything about architecture. But I just couldn't imagine having these long hallways that they had no wood in them.

So we did that, and then, later on I got wonderful advice from somebody from University of Arizona. This person said, "Get rid of all your furniture, because if you have any furniture in that library when it opens, you'll never get new furniture." So we started getting rid of everything. [Laughs] We started getting rid of everything we could, you know? And so those are kind of anchor decisions, but one of the librarians, Shirley Scott, who was Head of Reference at the time—I asked her if she'd be the project manager. And so she did the day-to-day meeting with the architecture.

The complicated part—we stayed in this building the entire time, so there was a lot of noise, and we had earplugs and masks. And some people were very sensitive, and we said, "If you need to go home, you can go home." And there was a lot of staging, so that if you were going to build second floor, then the entire collection had to be moved to fifth floor, and that meant not just moving it—and we hired movers to do all the moving—but it was also the signage, faculty coming in and going to the second floor, and wanting to know what happened to their books, and we said, "Well, they're on the fifth floor."

So there was a lot of logistical things that Shirley—Shirley really handled all of that. I mean, we would meet and talk about it, but that was—my major job was money. You know, making, really holding to the vision of what this library was going to be, and not getting—not getting so worried that—what we were doing is we were raising money and spending it, so it was a piggyback thing. We didn't have the full amount of money. And so every major decision was a gamble, and we were fortunate to have the gift from the Valley Foundation. That was twenty million. And then Tony Van Vliet, who was in the legislature, really, like last minute, "Well, we're going to get that money, you know," so that was \$20 million.

Then we had \$7 million we had to raise, because the building was \$47 million, and that was all private funds. And it was also tricky. We didn't have the foundation, and there was a sense from campus that the library was taking all the money; every money that the president could direct to the library, he did. And so it was true, in some ways. And that had a legacy that lingered on afterwards, in terms of how some of the deans saw the library. So my job was to get the money and make the decisions about, "Yes, we can afford to do this. No, we can't afford to do that." Shirley's job was to do the logistical coordinating.

And then we were all just moved around constantly. I mean, I would be in my office, and a work person would come through the window! "Pardon me, everybody," and walk through. And then getting the permitting process and everything in line, so we could have this big grand opening. And it's a terrific library. The beauty of this library is it's very simple. There are standing pillars, can't be moved, but everything else could be opened up, and there is very little rococo decoration. If you go down any corridor, it's all clean. It's got a real clean look. And I noticed just coming in today, the floors, the terrazzo, all the tile and everything—it's good stuff. [0:35:02]

And we had a guy—the day before we were going to open, there was—I don't remember his name now, the person who was doing the flooring. It turned out he wasn't a flooring man. He was an artist. And so he couldn't hurry his work. I was like, "We don't want an artist! We want a floor guy!" So he did all of the—because if you go on the main floors, you'll see that it was a poured process, where everything gets mixed around. And so he wanted to have the perfect thing.

So, back to your question. My job was balancing money, and then at the very end, saying to the Vice President for Finance, "We don't have any furniture. We're going to have to buy new furniture," and his trusting that we would get that money. And he would run the money, and I would run the money. I spent just hours going over the budget. And I said, "I think we can do this." And by the time we got the furniture, the money had come, and we were able to pay for it. It was a very nerve-wracking process.

JD: Well, and meanwhile, I'm assuming you're doing your—

KB: Other jobs.

JD: —other jobs? [Laughs]

KB: I was, I was. I was. It was interesting, when I think back on it, because I think most of us, just, we do what we do, and we don't think about, "Well, I can't do that." And you just think, "Well, I guess I'm going to have to step it up a little more." And now I think back, and I think, "Gosh, I was working a lot." But just, everybody was, and it was so important to get—you know, it was so important to stay on time, because if you stay on time, you stay on budget. And if you start to drag it out, then you're going to go over, and we had no leeway.

And so I was doing my job as Associate University Librarian, and as I remarked to you earlier, that was probably one of the best things for me, and for the library, because I truly learned in a way I hadn't—I hadn't really internalized that running any business, any organization, isn't just delegating, but it's really having confidence that you can truly work as a team. And team decisions—we did teams when we did TQM, and they're a little bit, mm, maybe not so honest. But this was a really honest effort. I needed the department heads to help me. They knew I needed them. Every single one of them just stepped up, and did so much more than they would have thought they were capable of doing. And it was a hard time, but it was a joyful time.

And then I remembered that later, that my job was not to do the work; my job was to help people understand what needed to be done, and then encourage them to do it. And so that was real pivotal for me, not just that we had the physical building, but what kind of person did I want to be as an administrator?

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And there were some, perhaps, more fun or pleasant tasks associated with the library. Which one, we were talking as we walked into the building, about the art.

KB: Oh, yeah.

JD: Talk a little about that process.

KB: That was wonderful. We made the decision—and this was Mel's decision, actually. I think it was his kind of parting shot, but it was great. Oregon has a "one percent for art" law. In a public building, one percent goes to art. Typically, what people do is external design, statues. U of O did a lot of external work on the library, and you can see it on campus. Mel was really interested in our using that money to promote Northwest artists. So we said our one percent for art will be—or our one percent will go to art, and it was living Northwest artists.

So we formed a committee of art people from Portland, and a couple of people who had been involved in the building, and we worked with the Oregon Arts Commission. They were the umbrella. And they did a call for artists, and so basically, sculpture, paintings, drawings, photography, some fabric art. Everything came in, and then it was the most fun I've ever had. That was in a—well, not the most fun, but it was a lot of fun. But we had this big storage building out by the airport, and we would go out there, and somebody would bring out a piece of art, and talk to us about it, and say, "This is from such-and-such, and this is why," and then we'd all talk about it.

And there was—David Hardesty, he was the head of the Art Department at the time—was on the committee, and there was a person, one of our architects from SRG [0:40:02], the firm, Tom Fautier, was also an art person besides being an architect. And then there were a couple of old-fashioned people. And I think Gordon Gilkey was on it for part of the time, too. So they were talking about—some of the old-fashioned—there was one piece of art that had a nude person in it, and this old-fashioned person I won't name said, "We can't have that kind of stuff at the library," and Gilkey was able to say—and they were able to talk about art. They were able to say that there's representational art and that there's abstract art, and we want both, because the people who were more traditional only wanted representational art. And Gordon and David and Tom were much more towards abstract art. And I'm modestly knowledgeable, but certainly not the way they were.

But it was a lovely process. And we went through it, and we spent, I think it was like \$299,000 worth of art. And the artists were thrilled, and it's really the best collection of Northwest American art—Northwest art outside of Portland. I mean, it's a wonderful collection. I think it doesn't get seen a lot. We used to try to get the *Oregonian* to come down and write on it, but they never would. But it's a lovely collection. And some of the art is really—it's a very significant collection. The artists have grown in stature, and so it's pretty, pretty amazing.

Occasionally when I was here, there would be—this art committee was sort of in abeyance at the time, but if somebody wanted to give us art, we would bring them in. And so John Gray, who was a major developer, and donor to the library,

gave us two art pieces, and one of them we put outside. It was a metal sculpture. And then one of them is downstairs when you come in. The one we had outside was taken, and probably it was from people who were taking metal and melting it down. And I was heartbroken, and I looked and looked and looked, and did everything I could to find it. And then I called John, and said, "John, I'm just, I'm really embarrassed that this piece you gave us"—he had it outside, we put it outside. I said, "It's been taken," and he said, "Karyle, it's art. It belonged outside. You did what you had to do." It was like, "Oh!" So, it was a wonderful experience, both viewing the art, but also working with all these artists. I mean, it was great, and made my life enriched.

JD: [Laughs] Well, people that come into the library—

KB: I hope so.

JD: —constantly.

KB: Yeah, the idea was that a lot of our students come from areas where there's no art, and they're exposed to it by just walking down the hall. And there are tours. I mean, people come in, and the Art Department will bring people in, but it's a joy to watch the students just be dumbfounded by something. And so in addition to the collections and the electronic stuff, there's this aesthetic side that we've given them that I think is pretty unusual and pretty neat, in my opinion.

JD: And sort of a concurrent project, as I understand, was the quote project.

KB: Yes. The idea was to gather quotes from significant people, or people who—either quotes from the people, or significant people who had favorite quotes. And it was actually under the—one of the major people who helped, headed this up was the president's wife, Les Risser, Paul Risser's wife. And the idea was to take the stones out in front of the library, and we had these quotes, and they were submitted, and, again, we had a committee of people, and we had hundred and hundreds and hundreds of them. Some of them were pretty, like, "Mm, I don't think so," but we were able to winnow them down. And there was the Head of Reference at the time—Mike Kinsch was the library rep, and then Les was the administrative rep. And so the quotes were chosen, and then they were sandblasted into the pavers in front of the library. And periodically they get refreshed, and again, you see people out there reading a quote, and some of them are pretty nice.

And then on the side was where we did the donor parts of it. The front part represents the quotes, and then on the side of the library, the pavers are donors who gave a certain amount of money. So it's just a way of—the quote part is just an extension of libraries as a cultural institution, and representing—these were all Oregonians who did these quotes. So that was neat, too. [0:44:59]

JD: Mm-hm. Well, and I think as you've been talking about kind of these projects that bring a certain perhaps even unexpected enrichment to students when they come into—

KB: Sure.

JD: —the library, or anyone who comes into the library, or around the campus, and the types of collections that you have, and you also touched early on, one of the reasons that you wanted to come to OSU was because it was a Land Grant college.

KB: Mm-hm.

JD: Talk a little about what you saw as the role of a Land Grant college, and perhaps how that evolved in, or was integrated into your work, when you became University Librarian particularly.

KB: Well, you know, the Land Grant institutions were set up to help people out in the hinterland, and so every state has—every county has an extension office and experiment station. The experiments do the research and the extension serves people that come in. And so frankly, as a former public librarian, that ability to go out beyond the library and influence people's interest in libraries, and apply for money to do that, was pretty compelling.

Almost all of our—the Oregon Explorer project, some of our digital projects—were all with the idea of how can—well, and let me step back for a minute. At the same time, the public library presence in our state has been diminished because

—you referenced Measure 5, some of the taxing issues. And so this was a way to partner with some of the libraries. We did such things as we applied for money from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and we received a—I don't even remember the amount anymore—a hunk of money to help—small libraries could apply, then, for computers. And we would go out and set them up for them, and then we were able to hire a person for a year who could be their contact if they had—so it was a way of giving, putting, helping those libraries become connected, and also showing in the community that those libraries were with it. Students, people, could come into some small place, in Joseph or something, and there'd be computers, and they could get databases.

And so part of that's the Land Grant role, where you go out and you serve beyond your institution. And so we did that, and then as I said, the Oregon Explorer project is, continues to be, an expanded way of providing services, people throughout the—well, anybody now, but certainly throughout the state could access it. And we did some joint programs with some of the libraries, where they were able to—we could help them digitize their collection. The state would have money; library service and construction fund is a federal fund; that money go to the states. And we would apply to that and get a grant, and then we would work with a library, and help them digitize collections that were special to them, and also we could access, so they were special to us; we didn't have what they had.

JD: Sure.

KB: So that whole idea of: how do you leverage your money to work with people in the state to uncover the resources they have, which a lot of these libraries have, but they have no way of making it available? So they were enriched, we were enriched, and all of Oregon. All the Oregonians, then, had access to information they never had before. So it's really, that Land Grant concept is dear to my heart.

JD: Mm-hm. You've mentioned the Oregon Explorer project a couple of times, which I didn't know anything about until I was researching for our interview, and I found it fascinating. So if you would just expand a little on how that project came to be, and what it is.

KB: Again, it has to do with money, and the College of Forestry. There was a map; there was an atlas. I really don't remember the name of it, but it was created to map out rivers and water in Oregon, and it was out of date, and there was some conversation about what to do. College of Forestry applied for a Meyer Memorial Trust grant, and part of this was how do you start to make information on the Willamette, which was—you know, the Willamette's got some parts that are endangered, in terms of trash and spills. And so it was how to create interest in the Willamette, to engage citizens of the state.

So the College of Forestry was the grantee, the person that ran the grant, but again, we had some money, and so I talked to them [0:50:00], and I said, "You know, there's a library component to this, too, which is: how do you take all this information and make it available?" And there had been some flyovers of the Willamette, and there had been some—if the Willamette used to look like this, and there'd be a wavy part, and then, over the years it's been straightened out, and that's had some problems with flooding and fish and all kinds of things. And so how do you work to restore it?

So we worked with them, and at the time the dean of the college, Hal Salwasser, was appointed dean, and his wife had been involved in some natural resources sites in California, Janine Salwasser, so we hired her to lead up the Oregon Explorer project. It started out as really a mapping project of the Willamette, and then adding written information, commentaries from people, why it's important.

And then we realized that we had the germ of something here, and why stop—you know, why not have other Explorer projects? And we began to add on to those, and just continually build out the site. When I left, it didn't turn out to work, but I was very interested in working with the wine industry, and create a wine Explorer, but it became very complicated. So it's a project that is basically using geospatial data and photographs and text to engage people in a different way about learning about the state. I think it's not had the impact it could have, and part of that's the difficulty of getting the word out. I mean, the researchers can use it, and various people have had workshops on how to use it, but for you to come in and say, "You know, I didn't know that existed," and you're in Portland, and you're an enlightened person who pays attention to stuff. So that's an indicator it still hasn't made the impact that it could make. And how that will happen is not clear to me, but it's kind of an undiscovered research tool that has a lot of power to it.

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And I guess while we're kind of talking about grant-funded, or outside funding for projects, another interesting one that I discovered was the Oregon Reference Link. And I guess OSU's was called the Northwest Link. That seemed like another interesting project that kind of started, and then evolved and—

KB: Faded.

JD: [Laughs]

KB: Again, it was part of that Land Grant role. The state library, under the former librarian, Jim Shepke —Jim was really interested in how do you provide services to those libraries that just don't have the—you know, Oregon has a slew of public libraries with maybe a person working, maybe a volunteer working. So if a person is living in a community where they don't have a very good library, it's tough. So the purpose of Oregon Link—and it served its purpose, and then as more information has become online, it's less of a need. But the idea was to set up these centers in the state, and so you basically have a hub, and each part of the state had a group of libraries; then there was the hub library. And so we were the hub library for part of the coast and inland.

The theory was that if somebody went into Newport and they had a reference question that the Newport library couldn't answer, then they would refer it to us, and we would answer it. And if we couldn't, we would check with the other hubs and get back. And so we hired a librarian who would go out and work with those communities, and alert them to the service, and say, "You have an opportunity to do that." I think that it was sort of an inter—it was a step between what used to be and now, everything—not everything, but so much online. There was some proprietary feeling in the smaller libraries about, "Well, we want to deal with our patrons," and then I don't think it got the kind of usage we had anticipated. Partly the timeline—people come in; they want an answer. They don't want to write it up and send it. But it was a way of linking the libraries, and getting libraries to start to work together, which continues to happen, so that part was good.

JD: Right. I mean, that's happening, having been at Portland State University, and used the Orbis system, and then the Summit system.

KB: Exactly, exactly. And so it was sort of a precursor, and quite effective in that kind of modest way. [0:55:04]

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Well, I think another kind of topic that keeps cropping up as we talk is kind of the role of changing technologies, and the way that that both influenced the library, and that perhaps you then had the opportunity, as University Librarian, to influence. I have to say, it made me smile when I was reading your CV about one of your early efforts was getting the copy cards for doing photocopies in libraries, which I, of course, availed myself of as a grad student.

KB: Right, right, right.

JD: And realizing kind of how quickly that was a technology that came and went.

KB: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JD: So talk a little about both how technology drove your work, as well as you deciding that technology could really benefit, and you would solicit.

KB: Mm-hm. Well, this library is great. This library is such a fascinating place, because we're a small library, really, compared to U-Dub, and then there's this association of the big reference libraries, research libraries—Association of Research Libraries, and U-Dub's a member, and U of O's a member. We're not a member. But we're kind of like the Little Engine That Could. And the thing I like about the library—and I think, without being unduly modest, I was able to contribute—was, we're fast on our feet. And I had said to the librarians a long time ago that research is not all success. Eighty percent of what you do might turn out to be good, and twenty percent might just bomb.

But the culture in libraries is laboriously slow, and everything is in little baby steps, because you don't want to fail. And so I was bucking that culture by saying, "It's okay to fail. And we will create research money, and you can apply for it, and if it works, it works, and if it doesn't, it doesn't work." So there was already the sense about being agile, and thinking, and then hiring people, as I said earlier. I was able to hire a lot of people, and when I interviewed librarians, I said, "We're

about research," and it's not just about promotion and tenure. It's not for promotion and tenure. It's about how do we move the library forward, and the side product is you get promoted. [Laughs]

But my goal is how to get the library forward. And we will create—I was fortunate in working with donors who would create—so we could get a research fund, and the librarians could apply for it and do research. And then, when John Gray wanted to give money as we were completing the building project, and he wanted to give money to this library—partly because his daughter, Janet Webster, is the librarian out at the Marine Science Center; I'm sure that was not an insignificant reason for him—he said to me, he said, "I don't want to do"—and the library was going through financial—the university was going through financial troubles. And he said, "I am not interested in backfilling your positions. I'm not interested in providing money that the state took away from you. I'm interested in my money doing something that's new and different, so tell me what you can do for me."

And so the idea was we would create what was called the Gray Chair for Innovative Library Services—Betty, John and Betty Gray, Betty being his wife, John and Betty Gray. And it would be a three-year chair that would rotate, and my original thinking was we would hire out of the business sector. That proved not to be—didn't work very well. But the idea, as we framed it to John, was: this would be a three-year chair. There would be no supervising responsibilities; they had no responsibilities. It was not a tenured position, so they weren't doing research. Their job, their only job, was to move this library forward in fast ways. And so he was very excited about that.

And so we hired the first chair, Jeremy Frumkin, and his job was to—he was a really, really gifted, is a very, very gifted young man, and his interest is in digital libraries. And we hired him here to help us move the library forward, the digital part of our library forward. Well, not just buying online journals, which was just what was happening in the thing, but what could we do with collections? How could we use technology to advance the library? How could we use technology to create better services? So everything from some of the work that was done in Special Collections [1:00:01], scanning the Pauling Collection, to digitizing collections, to Jeremy going out to meetings with important people, and sharing with them what the library did. And so this library has a reputation as being cutting-edge when it comes to technology, and that was led by the Gray chairs. It was our ability to convince John Gray that this would be a way that his money would significantly transform the library. And it has. It has made a huge difference in terms of how we digitize, how we create information electronically.

When the OSU Press came into the library, how we could work with backlogs of press books, how we could have—if a book is published by the press, but the author wants to have a digital attachment, how we could do that. And more significantly, it raised the whole digital presence of not just the librarians, but the staff. People really saw that this way of presenting information was very powerful, and how you could mix every—you could take photos and text and how you could just do so much. And then concurrently in the world, there was Facebook and Twitter, and all of these ways of sharing information that our librarians would propose—you know, soon as they saw it, they were, like, on it. And I think the genesis was in this Gray money. It was a very powerful gift; bless his heart.

JD: And there is a second endowed chair, the McEdward Chair, that came along a little bit later, and just talk a little about what that's meant.

KB: Well, that's very interesting. McEdwards? Nobody knows too much about him. He was working with—he was a guy, and he had a neighbor, and he, McEdwards, was getting old and ill, and turned out he was wealthy, and his neighbor, whose name I've now forgotten, kind of helped him out. And then he said to the neighbor, "I want to do something significant with my money," and the neighbor contacted the Foundation. The guy had liked the library so they contacted us, and we talked a lot about what could we do. Again, my goal was always to do something was this whole added-value thing. I mean, I wasn't interested in just one more endowed chair. I was like, "Well, what can we do?"

And at the time, it was real clear that the other arm of the library was how we were interacting with students, and what kind of teaching we're doing, what kind of modules we were doing. When I first came here, the teaching aspect of the librarians was kind of an added-on thing. It was basically the faculty saying, "I'm going to be gone for Friday. Could you come over and teach a class?" And there was more to it, but there was a certain amount of that. And so the librarians, as we hired people who were more interested in that aspect of library instruction, as opposed to bibliographic teaching, they were really interested in helping the students know how to do good research.

So we talked to this person about the McEdwards thing so we could create this endowed chair, and that would put us in a leadership position, in terms of innovative teaching. And the thing was clearly, this library's about innovation, whether it's technology or teaching or whatever it is. So we put together a package, and we had a person in the library, Ann Marie Deitering, who was already a leader in that area, but this—just as the Gray chair freed up Jeremy to really focus on something, Ann Marie was part of the faculty, so she was doing promotion and tenure, but it freed her to really focus her energy on innovative teaching ideas, both how she would teach, but what she would bring back to the library. And also what she would bring back to the profession, whether she would go out and do conferences, and talk about what she was doing, but making connections and talking about ways—how do students learn? What are some effective ways—and if you're in a classroom, the classroom downstairs, and you're teaching, what are the best ways to address the various learning styles of students? And what kind of technology should we be having?

So she became the lead on that, and there was a cadre of librarians, then, who were primarily working on library instruction, and worked with her. [1:05:03] So it allowed us to create a position, allowed us to kind of leverage her salary, and move it up and keep her, and then there was some money, then, that would allow her to travel and do what she needed to do to be successful.

The Gray Chair—that was the first chair in the United States like that, and that was just devoted to going out and finding the new thing. Since that time a couple of libraries have worked to do that. And similarly, with the McEdwards Chair, that was the first chair to really, really focus on an innovative approach to teaching. So it speaks very well for the library.

JD: Mm-hm. And the library isn't kind of just a single entity. We are in the Valley Library right now, but there's the Cascade Campus Library—

KB: And Guin Library.

JD: —and the Guin Library. There's other departments. You touched briefly on the Pauling Collection as a part of the larger Special Collections, and University Archives. And there were some fairly significant changes in the library's relationship with University Archives and Special Collections during your tenure. Talk about bringing them into the library, and the value that that created.

KB: Well, we all have strengths as people and as administrators. And I feel blessed—some of the faculty would say it was a curse, but I feel blessed with—things make sense to me. I could just kind of picture it. And so when there was conversation about—Archives was under Finance or something—I don't know what they're under—and there was all this conversation about what to do with them, and where should they go? It just made eminent sense to me that they should come to the library. And there was some pushback from the faculty, because it's, "We don't have enough resources, anyway," and, "What do they have to do with us?" But as I say, it's just one of those things where intuitively, it was just clear to me this was the right thing to do.

So then I just spent the rest of my time convincing people that this was going to be okay. And it was a terrific thing! And it was terrific for the library, in terms of having Archives there with the amazing knowledge base. I mean, Larry Landis is very, very amazing, and the collections they have. We shed some of the stuff they had in terms of personnel records, and things like that. We didn't care about that. But also it was really great for them, because all of a sudden, they're part of a library that's looking at research, and looking at services, and looking at new ways to provide services, and new things to bring in. So something like the Multicultural Archives, which they would never have done over there. It couldn't have happened. They just didn't have the support for it. All of a sudden, they were able to do that.

And then the combination with Special Collections was happening just as I was leaving, but again, it was a logical thing. Typically, you have Special Collections and Archives together. But because we already had a Special Collections department that was on a path, with a head, and Archives was on a path, politically, it would have been difficult to put them together until there was a change in—but it's been a powerful thing for them, and a powerful thing for the library.

And similarly with the OSU Press. And that was a bizarre thing, because presses are shutting down all over the United States. U of O's press is gone. Washington State's press is gone. Idaho's gone. Some Midwest ones are gone. And so the provost at the time, Becky Johnson—who's now out at Cascades—set up a task force, and asked me to, appointed me with the idea that, "What should we do with the press?" Now, in her heart of hearts, as she confessed to me later, she wanted

the press to be disappeared, but as I had the people who were on the committee, we, all of a sudden, got very excited about the press, and we thought, "Well, this is way cool." And they had a budget, and so the idea was they could either disappear, and they would all have to drift off to wherever they drifted off—and I suggested, "Why don't we bring them into the library?" Well, Becky was cranky about that, but she said, "Yeah, well, fine, whatever."

And so they came over, and again, it's one of those—and that had a lot of pushback here [1:10:02], because they just didn't have—financially, they were in a kind of tough situation, and so there was a fear that they would be a drain. And there was also, "What does the press have to do with us?" But in reality, it has a lot to do with the library. The advantage, again, for the press was they no longer had to have clerical support. They didn't have to do their own money, and they didn't have to do personnel stuff. All that was absorbed by the library, so the three people who came over were able to just focus on publishing. And Tom Booth, who's housed in Portland, is amazing. He's just wonderful! And so they were really able to go from publishing, like, six books a year, to twelve books, to sixteen, and move into the digital realm, and create a website, and start to help us bring in some money, and grow.

And so now we have a really good university press, where so many places, they don't. And again, though, it's one of those things where I just thought, "Well, this makes a lot of sense," and then you spend all your time trying to figure out how to make it make sense to other people. I just loved having the press here. I thought it was really fun, and I'm sure Faye's having a wonderful time with them.

JD: Yeah, well, and as a member of the historical community, we're glad that another press is—

KB: Oh, that's good.

JD: —still around and doing great things, too.

KB: They're good, they're good, yeah.

JD: They are; they are. You've talked a little about kind of your leadership style, and talked about a team-based approach. And it seems to me one specific piece of that is communication, both internally and externally. Again, looking at your résumé, you did a lot of presentations, just kind of around the state, in front of a lot of different types of groups. There's internal communications, like the *Messenger* newsletter, which we've talked about. Talk about that role in a healthy department, its role in the larger institution of the university.

KB: Communication?

JD: Mm-hm.

KB: Well first of all, I spent my early years as a kind of Marxist Maoist, [laughs] and so I did go to China prior, when Mao was still alive. And I accept that there's a lot of problems with China now, but at the time, we were young and we were idealistic, and what we saw in China, what we chose to see, and what was talked about, whether it was actualized or not—I think maybe it wasn't—was the belief that power laid with everybody, that it wasn't a hierarchical. Power doesn't come from the top and go down, but it's dispersed.

And so as I matured as an administrator, and developed confidence in my own style, it was real clear to me that I had a particular way that I saw the world, and I had a particular way of communicating. Other people saw the world differently, and they communicated differently. So if I were to be effective, I needed to have a lot of help from other people, so that my style could get translated to people who didn't share my way of—whether it was blunt, or I tend to make qualitative leaps, and so there are some people that like go one through ten, and I'm kind of 1-5-20 person. And they're both equal. And if you do Myer-Briggs, you get the, "I communicate this way."

All of these are equal styles, but as an administrator, you have to really, in your heart, embrace that. You have to embrace the fact that you only know what you know, and you are who you are, but that doesn't make you special, and that just means that, you know, I had positional power, but I wasn't necessarily smarter than anybody, or couldn't communicate better. So partly because of, as I said earlier, with the building project, where it became really clear to me that—it was like, "Open your heart and get help, because if you don't get help, you're going to die." I was able to do that, and I believe in not just transparent—that's, who cares?

But I really believe that you just tell everybody everything you know, unless it's personnel or confidential, or the president says you don't do it. So when we had budget issues, there was no secret. I just said, "Okay, here's what the story is." [1:15:00] Or if there was—and perhaps we talked about this earlier, but there was that Peter Senge book on communication, *The Fifth Discipline*, and most of it was interesting, but the piece that I really, really held onto was, Senge says there's two major ways of communicating. You communicate because you're trying to gather information, or you communicate because you're trying to give out information.

If you're giving it out, that's basically, "My mind's made up; here's what we're going to do. Tell me if there's a pitfall here." And if you're gathering, you're saying, "I'm not really clear." And I tried to practice that when I would talk to the librarians, and when I would talk either one-on-one or at meetings, and say, "I'm pretty much going to do this," like with the press. "I'm pretty much going to—I really believe this is the—" I mean, I was the leadership in the library. It was my job to make decisions. So, "I'm pretty much going to do this. Tell me where you see the pitfalls, and what I need to worry about." And so we would have that conversation. And then sometimes, it was, "I'm not sure if we should do this. I'm not sure I know how to do this. Let's talk about if this is a good idea or not." And these were typically with the management team. You know, "Tell me if this is going to work."

Then, when I would meet—I also discovered, earlier—we would have library meetings every month, and part of it would be, I would be sharing, "Here's the budget information. Here's personnel," just stopping rumors and letting everybody know. But I also realized that, as a university, as an administrator, and as a person who typically is a little bit standoffish, I needed to extend myself to the faculty and staff in a personal way so they did not feel intimidated. I mean, the nature of hierarchy is—even though I think I'm, "Oh, I'm just Karyle, and what do you care about me?"—when I walk into the room, the conversation would change.

And so a lot of what I tried to do was be personal. And so I went through a period where my sister was dying from cancer, and I talked to people. Not in detail about that, but just saying, "You need to remember that if you love people, you've got to talk to them now. Don't be waiting until, you know, whatever." And things to just let them know I was a person; I had my stuff, and that we could talk about things. And I'm not running therapy, and I'm certainly not taking people home with me, but I do believe there's a value in not trying to protect yourself the way a lot of administrators do, that I'm a fallible person, and I make mistakes, and when I make mistakes, I say, "I really made a mistake on that, and I apologize, and I'm sorry I did that."

And so people, I think, had a comfort level in complaining to me. They certainly had a comfort level in telling me I was making mistakes, you know? [Laughs] I mean, I'd get these emails, "I can't believe you said that!" But that was okay, because they weren't talking about me personally; they were talking about me as an administrator. And I think if you can separate those two things, and say, "As an administrator, this is my job, and my job is to hear good and bad and ugly, and to be able to talk about it." So this is a roundabout way of saying I think forthright communication—and I truly trust people. I really think people want to do the right thing, and sometimes we're not very clear about what that is. And so our job is to clarify that, and if you clarify it and they still do another path, then you deal with that path, but you don't assume that people are not wanting to do the right thing.

And the other hard thing in any organization is people tend to start to see themselves as their position. So they'll say, "Well, I'm a clerk," or, "I'm a librarian," or, "I'm a member of the faculty." And so particularly with the classified staff, saying, "Your ideas are important," and they say, "We don't have any ideas." I said—I think we mentioned this—"You raise children, you buy cars, you buy insurance, you buy a house. You do things that are a lot, lot harder than anything that will ever happen in the library. So let's talk about what you think about this." So it's a process, and you just have to never, never quit doing it, because people—people tend to just slip back if you're not right there.

JD: Mm-hm. And would it be fair to say that that approach in your thinking was, perhaps, a factor in your creation of the Library Advisory Council?

KB: Yeah. Yeah. It was partly driven by the Foundation expecting people to have a council. [1:19:59] But also, we were at a point where, in terms of funding and getting funding, that it was important to have an external group that saw the library—they weren't library supporters all the time; they weren't true, 100 percent library supporters. They were 80 percent library supporters. So they were able to help me look at things that maybe people in the library couldn't point out

to me. In addition, they were bringing money into the library, and they brought in a kind of energy, of like creating the Faculty Awards Grant, and the Student Awards Grant, that I might not have seen, but they want to do something.

You know, any external group is complicated, because—just because it is. But again, it's about somewhere having your own personal comfort level, that you believe on some level this is going to work out okay. And then if it does get a little off to the side, you can put—I felt pretty comfortable that I could bring it back if I needed to. But the outcome was a group of people who were huge library supporters, and really did set up these programs—the Lundeen Travel Grant that the faculty here can apply for and go places, the Student Awards. They did the guidelines, and they donate the money, and they present the awards. And they love it, because they meet with the students, and the students are getting honored, they get résumé, and they get money. I mean, what more would you want in your life, if you're a student? [Laughs]

JD: It's always helpful.

KB: Mm-hm.

JD: And in addition to all of your responsibilities as a librarian, you were very involved in many professional organizations. I mean, there's a long list: the American Library Association, College and Research Libraries. Talk a little about what the role of professional organizations is. What do you get out of it, and how does that kind of help change, perhaps, your approach, or changed your approach at OSU, and what you learned there, or provided to them?

KB: Well, you get friends and colleagues, which is great. Typically, when you go to, especially after about a few years of this, when you go to, like, American Library Association, and you go to the meetings, you think, "Oh, I've heard all this. It's not so interesting." But what you do is you have a network of people you connect up with, and it's basically, "What are you doing? How are you doing it? How are you getting money? What kind of program?" And someone will have a really good idea, and you go, "I'm going to try that when I get back."

And it was important for me to elevate OSU Libraries. I wanted us to be a player. I wanted people to know who we were. I wanted the librarians to be involved in poster sessions, and presentations. You have to model that behavior. They need to see that that's important, that I'm doing it, and how it works for me. But also, that is where you learn about—mostly through your colleagues, not typically through attending a workshop, although occasionally you do.

But a lot of it's meeting with your colleagues, and finding out everything from, "I have a personnel issue, and I'm not clear how to do it. What are your experiences?" to, "What kind of programs are you running?" Or, "What kind of fundraising are you doing?" or, "Do you have a fundraiser or do you not?" and, "Who do you report to?" and, "What do you think about this?" So it's just a genesis of ideas, and friendship—both friendship and then collegiality and ideas. And it's a way of getting the library out there. And so they hear about things from me, and then people here go out and talk, and it starts to pepper the world out there that OSU Library is where it's happening. And the point of that is it makes recruitment so much more powerful when you—we get people wanting to come here, as opposed to just—when we do job apps in Corvallis, the OSU Library's seen as a happening place. And partly, it's through that sort of work.

JD: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. And I would say perhaps a bit of a parallel track is you also were very involved in the local community in Corvallis, from being on the Planning Commission to part of Benton County Cultural Trust, as well as many others. [1:25:00] I think that's an interesting intersection. Certainly there's lots of myth or stories about town-gown relationships. But I think also Corvallis is a bit of a smaller town, and how did you see the importance of being involved in Corvallis, just personally, as well as perhaps professionally?

KB: Well, two things—or maybe several things. One of them is the library is a job, and I love the library, and I loved my job, and I really learned a lot, and thoroughly had a good time. But it's not who I am. It's a job. And there's much joy and pleasure and sorrow in hard work, but it's not—there's a whole other part of me, and I love giving back to my community. Corvallis is a place where if you want to do something to make change, you could do it.

And I believe in change. I'm not a person who'll sit around and think, "Well, that's a real drag." It's like, "Well, let's make this happen." And so I applied for the Planning Commission because there was some development in my neighborhood, and I got curious about, "Well, how are these decisions made?" And found I really liked it, and started to develop a network of people in the city. And of course, you sell the library when you're out there. You talk about the library, and

you talk about libraries—not just our library, but why the public library is important. And then Planning Commission is over, and somebody mentions budget—and I'm still on the Budget Commission. I'm on my third term, or something.

But I want to be involved in my community. I want to live—I want to have my feet in my community. I want to feel like I know the mayor, and I know the city manager, and I know who these people are. And I think I mentioned that I'm working on a friend who's running for county commissioner right now. And it's very important. I mean, I'm a political person, first of all, but it's important for me to be a part of my community. I didn't plan it this way, but it turned out that when I left the university, I had a whole other life. My life didn't end when I left the library.

I just sort of segued into—I'm on the culture—we just started an Arts and Culture Commission, and there were several of us who had been working on this for two or three years, trying to get some interest. And finally we got the mayor at the time to appoint this commission, and the City Council approved it, and I was the first chair of that, and I'm still on that commission. I'm really interested in how you can demonstrate to the city the economic value of the arts, and how the city needs to start funding the arts the way they fund everything else. And so that's kind of a hobby horse of mine.

But it's all part and parcel of engagement—engagement with the library, and when I worked here, engagement with the university community, and engagement with my town, and making change happen—and really enjoying that whole process, and meeting people I would never meet before, and probably would never have at my house, but you find a way to make it work. So it's just important to me.

JD: Mm-hm. Well, are there other topics or comments that you've been hoping I would ask you about but I haven't, that you would like to address now? Because I'm going to give you the chance to offer just kind of your final thoughts here?

KB: I think you've asked good questions, and we've talked about them, and I'm comfortable. You know, it was important for me to talk about the change in the library, the change from the paper to technology, and how that's benefited students, and also made it complicated in terms of who really owns this stuff. And it was important to talk about my personal leadership role, and why I am who I am, and why my style might not be like anybody else's style, but it worked.

And I will say, in the self-serving thing, that when I introduced, when I was here, the idea that we would have staff in-service days, and we would close the library, and we would just—everybody, no matter what you did—a student, everybody—we would meet. And the first time we had it, the library administrative team arranged the program, and it was pretty awful. And so then we just moved it out to everybody else, and we had these really terrific programs. So every year, we'd have this, and in September when we had my last one—this is self-serving, but I had a standing ovation when I stood up to do the final [1:30:00], "Okay, it's been great working with you." Everybody just stood up and applauded. And it was really gratifying, because it really felt like—that I had made a change in this library.

And I came at a time when it was the right time to make the change. Mel George had set the stage for change. The university administration has changed dramatically; we got a lot of support from John Byrne, and Risser—Paul Risser—and Ed Ray, of course. And so I feel fortunate that the timing was—for the kind of person I am, if the university and the library had stayed the way it was when I first came here, I'd have been gone, because I just could not work in an atmosphere where it was so regimented.

But I feel fortunate that partly through people coming in and making changes, partly through my own ability to make changes, and partly through hiring people who demanded we have changes, that it all came together into what is a wonderful library. And I feel really good when I come here, which I don't do too often. But when I hear things about the library, that it's on this trajectory, and it's different from what I was doing, but it's still on a trajectory that people know that OSU Libraries is really, really important, and a fine place to be. And so that's what I wanted to get across, and I hope I did.

JD: Well, thanks very much—

KB: Sure.

JD: —for taking time to meet with me, Karyle.

KB: [Laughs] Yes, okay. [1:31:24]

