

Oral History Project
Cedar Rapids Public Library

Lan Nowotny was interviewed at the CRPL on January 30, 1996.

Laura Derr: (LD) Lan why don't you say your name and tell a couple words of what you do here now.

Lan Nowotny: (LN) This is Lan Nowotny. I am speaking to Laura Derr here at the CRPL regarding the history of the library. And I am a 25 year employee, I will be here 25 years in April. And I currently work at the Information Desk, I have been here for the last three years. And I formally drove the Bookmobile, I started at the library in 1971.

LD : Okay Lan, I would like to begin with just a little background information about you. Although I have some information in writing, I would like to get it on the tape as well. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

LN : Okay, I was born in Belle Plaine. I lived near the city of Clutier and that is about 18 miles north of Belle Plaine. I grew up on a farm about three miles south of Clutier. And I lived on a farm for practically 15 years, before we moved to another farm down the road and we lived there about three years, before we moved to town. My dad quit farming.

LD : What was your birth date?

LN : My birth date, 3-11-43.

LD : And Clutier is spelled C-L-U-T-I-E-R, for our transcribers. I am sorry, go ahead.

LN : Very small town, population of about 206.

LD : Didn't you say that you started school in a one room school house?

LN : Yes, I did. We had a one room country schoolhouse about a mile and a half away from our farm and I spent six years there. The grade I started was kindergarten. And I went from kindergarten to fifth grade there.

LD : So you really had the rural experience then?

LN : Right, right.

LD : And when did you move to Linn County?

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- LN : I moved to Linn County in October of 1965. When I married my wife, Dorothy. We settled down on Third Avenue in an apartment across from Hawkeye Seed and we lived there about thirteen years before we bought our current residence on Westwood Drive NW.
- LD : And you have a son?
- LN : We have one son, he turned 23 last November.
- LD : Okay, and his name is?
- LN : Rhett.
- LD : Rhett, right. Tell me about when you began to work at the library, you mentioned earlier that you have been on staff for 25 years. What did you do originally when you came to the library?
- LN : Well, I was hired as a Bookmobile driver. When I first heard about the job I had been working driving a wrecker for a firm in Marion. And I was getting rather sick of that and so, I had my name in the Iowa Employment, which is now called Workforce I guess, they've changed the name several times since I had my name in there. But anyhow, they had called me and asked if I was interested in this job at the public library, driving the Bookmobile. And at that time it didn't sound very inviting to me. I didn't think I really had the qualifications, working with books and that sort of thing. I declined and my wife talked to me about it afterwards and she said, "Why don't you give it a try?" She said, "You might like it better than what you're doing now." So I called them back and told them I would be willing to give it a shot.
- LD : So that was in '71? And at that time, just describe what your typical work day was like, driving the Bookmobile.
- LN : Originally I was scheduled to work three evenings a week and every third week it was four nights a week. And a typical day, when I came in, in the morning, we had to clean out the Bookmobile.
- LD : Physically clean them out?
- LN : Physically clean the Bookmobile out. Which meant sweeping the floor, getting the soap bucket out and filling it up with soapy water and that kind of thing, and mopping the floor down. And taking the boxes of books off from the night before, we had about six boxes that it would hold for the return books that the patrons returned. We had to take those off and take them downstairs to be sorted and by the same token, we had to put new books on to replenish the shelves. Then after we got the Bookmobiles cleaned up and

ready to go we had to make the deliveries to the branches on the West and East side. And there were always books that needed to be replenished out there. And, of course, people would return books to the main library that are from the branches and so they had to be returned to the branches and so that was part of our delivery. And course there were reserve items that people would reserve from the downtown and so those had to be taken to the branches and that was included in the deliveries, and so we had to make those runs also. Besides those runs we had to make errand runs for the library, anything that would pop up that the library needed, we'd have to go out and make an errand run for that. And so there were many facets in a work day and probably no two days were alike.

LD : Did you get to pick the books that you took out in the Bookmobile? Or were they already presorted?

LN : They were preselected by the supervisor.

LD : Okay. How did they decide what went in the Bookmobile?

LN : Well, I guess the supervisor just went by instinct. What was popular at the time, the popular children's author and that sort of thing. It was mostly geared toward the children, although a lot of adults visited the Bookmobile also. And course they would have their favorite authors too, and so the popular authors got placed on the Bookmobile shelves. And so the adult patrons were accommodated in that manner too.

LD : Did, you say you went out in the evenings rather than during the day.

LN : Yes, we did. We didn't go out until after twelve o'clock. I think our earliest stop was at one and most of them started at two in the afternoon and they would go on until eight-thirty at night. What we'd do, we had female staff working on the Bookmobile with us and they would take a library car out and they'd meet us on the Bookmobile at the stop and then, when it was time for a supper break, we'd take the library car, that they brought out, and take it to our supper break. And then, at night when we closed up, they'd drive that car back to the library and we'd fold up the Bookmobile and take that back and then the take library car to another Bookmobile stop where there was another Bookmobile and pack that one up and bring that one in. And the female, who was on that one, would drive the car in.

LD : So you did a lot of, you shifted from one Bookmobile to another along the way?

LN : Exactly, right.

- LD : What were some of the stops? Do you remember where you would stop?
- LN : Yeah, we had a stop at Rolling Green and we had a stop at Lincoln Way Village and....
- LD : And these are shopping centers?
- LN : No, they're housing developments.
- LD : Just housing areas?
- LN : Yeah, just housing areas, right.
- LD : Okay.
- LN : And we had a stop at the housing development out north of CR and Marion. What is that area out there? The Linn-Mar area, I forgot what that was called now.
- LD : Oh the Skogman development area...? Bowman Woods?
- LN : Bowman Woods, yes, that's it. We had a stop out there. We even had a stop out at Robins.
- LD : So you went beyond the city limits?
- LN : Yes, we had a contract with Robins. We would go out there every third Thursday and start it out, and that switched too. Sometimes it would switch to every third Friday and, you know, it just depended on what the people wanted, I guess. And so we'd take the Bookmobile way out there.
- LD : They could check books out then even though they were outside of the city, because of this contract?
- LN : Right, because of this contract, right.
- LD : Okay, because I know that's changed over the years.
- LN : It's changed considerably.
- LD : So, initially there was one Bookmobile and another was added. How many did you end up with, total?
- LN : We ended up with three, actually. And, we had the two larger ones, those were the ones that would go out to various stops. And then there was the

smaller one that was the first Bookmobile that the city had and we'd take that out to the schools, for a short time. The schools were involved because of the fact that they didn't have their own libraries. And in the morning we had two female workers that would man the Bookmobile at various schools. We would take it out and leave it there all morning and they would take a car out. And the male Bookmobile driver would drive the car back in and get ready for the day by doing the chores on the Bookmobile, cleaning up and so forth and making the deliveries.

LD : So you did not get involved, at all in check out or any of the staff work involved in checking out books and bringing them back in. You primarily drove?

LN : No.

LD : I am not listening very well, am I?

LN : Well, maybe I am not being too clear. But when we would drive the Bookmobile out and set it up then we'd actually change hats and sit behind the desk and check out books.

LD : Oh, okay. Well then what did the staff librarian do?

LN : The Bookmobiles, at that time, were pretty busy places and so we had two people plus a library Page, who would re-shelve the books and work at the back desk. We had a desk up front and a desk in the back, and the library Page would sit at the back desk and take return books and she would also be in charge of fines and that sort of thing. And at a lot of the stops there were two adult staff members because of the fact that they were so busy.

LD : They were so busy. They were so used.

LN : Oh, yeah. There were times in the summer when, especially during the summer reading program, when people were lined up from one door to the other, we just couldn't accommodate everyone inside.

LD : Typically, on a busy day do you have any idea how many people would go through a Bookmobile at different stops?

LN : I don't know how many people. But we kept circulation figures, of course, and it seems to me that we would have 1,000 to 1,200 books circulating in an afternoon.

LD : In an afternoon? Wow! So, obviously, that was a program that was important to people. Well, I'd like for you to describe what a Bookmobile

looked like. Because I know, that I remember them and there are still some around in various places, but there is going to come a time when nobody knows what a Bookmobile looks like. It was not just a typical van.

LN : No it wasn't, it was about the size of a city bus and you had an entrance in the back and one in the front. And you would step up into the Bookmobile and there would be shelves running along both sides and they were packed full of books. You had the juvenile books on one side and adult on the other side. So it would be easy to distinguish what side your area was on. And, like I said, there was a desk at the back and a desk at the front and the adult members would sit at the front and they would check out the books and collect fines. And answer any questions some people may have and make reserves for them and whatever. And we would make out library cards and the duties were very varied, there were a lot of things to do.

LD : Do you have any idea how many books you could carry on a Bookmobile at any given time?

LN : Someone asked that of the other driver once when we were going out to a stop. We had to stop at a filling station and put air into one of the tires. And he asked how many books we carried and I can't remember what figure the driver threw out, I never really knew myself, how many books were on that thing.

LD : It had to be thousands.

LN : Well, yeah. It was maybe 3,000 to 4,000, I don't know.

LD : If you could check out 1,000 to 1,200 in one afternoon...

LN : Yeah, course a lot of those books, that were being checked out, were being returned too. And then they were reshelfed, so that they could be checked out again.

LD : Right, that's true. How tall is a Bookmobile, off the ground? Is it taller than a bus? I know that it's wider than a lot of vehicles were, as I remember.

LN : Yeah, I don't know, it's probably about the same height as a city bus. I know that there had to be a certain clearance so we could get it into the garage doors, in the alley way. And that was a trick too, in itself, getting those back into that garage. You had to come in.

LD : This is the main library?

LN : Right the main library. The old library, downtown.

LD : On Third Street. Oh. I'm sorry. On Third Avenue and Fifth Street.

LN : Right. We had to enter the alley on Fifth Street and head down the alley and back the Bookmobile into the space, behind the garage. There was an area there that we backed in, and then we had to head the Bookmobile out toward Fifth Street again and then head back into, we had four doors down there, I guess it was. And we had to back into one of those big, overhead doors down there. And it was really a trick, in itself, to try to get it back in. And one thing I was cautioned, when I first started, by the Assistant Director, that was Thelma Grover at the time, "Always make sure that the overhead door is always open to the top. If you hit that door it's going to break and then we're in trouble." And she said that it had happened several times and we didn't want it to happen to you. Needless to say it did happen to me.

LD : Well I am sure you were worried about so many other things that you didn't always look at the door.

LN : Right. And the embarrassing thing about it was it not only happened once, but it happened two or three times.

LD : So this was a real serious issue that everybody dealt with?

LN : Yes, it was. But I was fortunate, that I wasn't the only one that it happened to.

LD : When you were out in the Bookmobile, you said lots of young people, but adults as well, used the Bookmobile. How did the public, how many people could you bring in at one time? How did you handle the numbers that you were dealing with? Did people just stand outside and wait until a certain number had moved or...?

LN : Basically that is what we had to do, especially during the summer reading program. That was the busiest, during the summer reading program and that is when we drew our biggest crowds. In the winter time we wouldn't make people stand outdoors, you know. But in the summertime time you couldn't afford it because you would be packed in there like sardines and so people had to stand in line outside and take turns coming in. And we had air conditioning in both units, the newest had the best air conditioning in it. But even when we had those peak periods, the air conditioning couldn't keep up with it. And on the number two Bookmobile, the air conditioning wasn't that great and course they would have fans on in there because it got pretty tight in there.

LD : Because you only had windows in the front, right?

LN : Yeah, that's all we had. But we could prop the doors open and have a fan in there. But even at that, with that sun beating down on the metal body, it got pretty warm in there.

LD : In the winter, did you change your schedule? Time of day or anything? Or go to different places?

LN : Not because of the weather, no. But it seems to me that schedules constantly changed. They were always trying to find the best location. And trying to take advantage of the best time allotment and all that, you know. And patronage at the various stops. They tried to take advantage of all this.

LD : How did they make those decisions, as to where the stops were? Did people actually request that a Bookmobile would stop? Or did it just come from looking at a map and deciding where you wanted to cover?

LN : Yeah, I didn't want to get involved in that process. But I guess there were some requests from patrons. Why don't you have a stop here, that sort of thing. But I think that they would look at an area of town that was growing. Like a shopping center or that sort of thing, where there was a lot of traffic or cross traffic. And they decided to try a Bookmobile stop and see how it would work out.

LD : And so your route would cover a certain quadrant or portion on any given day.

LN : Right, it was the same route for everyday and we would go to the Vernon Village and we had those same stops on the same day every week. So the people could get used to it, or adjusted to that same schedule, so that people would know we would be there. We would drive up and have people waiting in line with their armloads of books or bags of books beside them waiting for the Bookmobile to come up. It was very seldom that we were late, sometimes we would run into some kind of mechanical trouble or something like that, you know, where the Bookmobile was late. And we'd hear about it when we showed up and they'd say, "Where have you been."

LD : And that brings us to a natural segway here. How was the public? What were the attitudes of the people that you dealt with generally?

LN : Very good, basically. The public really appreciated the Bookmobile and we had some very good patrons. They treated us like family, actually. And they were always glad to see us and interested in our personal lives.

LD : So you got to know people that came regularly, sure.

- LN : Yeah. You got to know what kind of books they read and who their favorite authors were.
- LD : So there was a real social element in that process. It wasn't just a matter of getting books and giving back books, a lot of interaction.
- LN : Yes, there was. And people like to visit too, like I mentioned, socially. They would stand there and tell you their life history and tell you their troubles. You know, we were like their psychologists, listening to all the problems they had in their lives.
- LD : So you were performing more than one service!
- LN : Yes, actually, you were. It was quite interesting.
- LD : My favorite memory of the Bookmobile was the smell.
- LN : Oh, really!?
- LD : I don't know if that got stuck in your brain. But I love the smell of books and all of those books in such a close space.
- LN : Oh, yeah, yeah.
- LD : But I don't know if it was important to everybody else. It's not quite the same as the regular library, there's too much space in the library. Lan, why do you think the Bookmobile program was established in the first place? Do you know what motivated the library to purchase and begin to use the Bookmobiles?
- LN : Well, I think that in the beginning they had various, well I don't know if you could call them branches or not.
- LD : Stations, I have seen that word used.
- LN : Stations, yes, thank you. And they were placed in various places around the city and I guess at the time when the Bookmobile was initially thought about the price on them really wasn't out of line. And so they thought having the Bookmobile would make working conditions more mobile. As far as getting out there, getting to the stop, and accommodating patrons. Packing up and pulling out, you wouldn't have to worry about paying rent on a station and hauling books out there and hauling books back and this kind of thing. I imagine that's where the idea first evolved and I imagine when they saw the success of the first one they thought about another one and another one.

LD : It was a tremendous outreach program.

LN : Yes, it was.

LD : Would you tie it, as well, to what was happening in the main library, at that time, in terms of the space there. It was probably getting harder and harder to accommodate the public as that area got more crowded during those years. What are your memories of....?

LN : Do you mean in the Bookmobile Collection itself?

LD : No, I mean the main library. It was becoming more and more crowded during that time.

LN : But, see our collection was in the basement of the main library. And so we had a separate collection all together. And actually, we had separate collections for the branches and the Bookmobiles.

LD : I didn't realize that.

LN : The books were all marked. They had a special markings in the back. Whether they belonged to Bookmobile number one or number two. And the branches had their separate markings, whether it was Kenwood or Edgewood or what have you. And those books all had to be separated according to their original points. So a lot of that went on in the basement of the Main library. And we had the Bookmobile office down there in the basement. We were hurting for room down there, actually. I think the Bookmobile office moved from one room to another, to a larger one to accommodate for all of the books. But the upstairs operation, at the main library, was an entirely different thing. We were absolutely independent of each other, except that we used each others services for reserve books and that sort of thing.

LD : I didn't realize that, it was an independent, separate collection.

LN : It was, yeah.

LD : I suppose that makes sense because they would need to have copies of those same books in the main library and the branches.

LN : Right, right. A lot of people didn't realize the amount of work that went on behind the scenes. You know, they'd come in and see people sitting behind a desk and they thought that was what we did all day.

LD : Pretty easy work!

- LN : Yeah, pretty easy. But they didn't see all the hurrying and scurrying that went on behind the scenes.
- LD : Who worked with you, in those days, at the Bookmobile.
- LN : Okay, when I came in '71 there was another driver here, by the name of Robert Pfeiffer. And he had been here, at the time, I don't recall when he started. But he had quite a few years in when I started. In fact, well, let's go back a ways, they purchased the first Bookmobile in '51 I believe?
- LD : I can check that, hold on. Well, I have '52.
- LN : '52 was it? Okay. That was probably when he started, back in '52.
- LD : And the second one in '54 and the third one in '64. So you can see how that was a two decade program.
- LN : Right, so he had quite a few years by the time I started. And they also had a couple part-time drivers too, who would fill in on Saturdays. He and I would rotate Saturdays, he'd work one and I would work the other. And they'd have these part-time drivers come in for the other one and do the driving. They had other jobs, of course, full-time jobs, but they would come in on Saturdays and drive the Bookmobile. And sometimes in the evenings too. Like when he came in the morning and had the evening off, they'd come in and fill-in on his Bookmobile in the evening and I'd be on the other one. And vice-versa, when I would come in the morning and go home at five or five-thirty. And they'd come in and park their car in the library drive and take the library car out and drive out to the Bookmobile and relieve whoever was going to be off for that day and they would drive the car back in and go home.
- LD : These Bookmobiles were out, what six days a week?
- LN : Right.
- LD : Wow! Lots of wear and tear?
- LN : Lots of wear and tear. And speaking of..and some destruction. A lot of times we were pelted by snowballs and rocks, driving through a neighborhood or something. Sometimes they'd break the sign, we had a big lighted sign on the side.
- LD : So, rowdy kids are nothing new.
- LN : They've always been around.

LD : What about, over the years, was there ever a Bookmobile accident that you were aware of?

LN : Well, there wasn't. While I was driving there was a minor scrape coming out of the alley once. Well, I was pulling out, I was trying to pull out of the alley and a pick-up was trying to pull in the alley at the same time and I was too big for him to come in and so he motioned me out and see a long vehicle like that has a long turning radius. And I don't think he realized the length of my turning radius. And so I started to pull out and he pulled in at the same time, we kind of touched bumpers, but that was it. But I guess that before I started working here, one of the part-time drivers did put one in the ditch, put one on its side.

LD : Because its kind of a bulky, high-center of gravity vehicle.

LN : Yes it is. I could see how it could roll over easy onto it's side. But I guess there was no damage to speak of, and he got it back up and running again.

LD : Since they were so popular with people, what caused the Bookmobiles to be retired?

LN : Well, it was a matter of finances, it's that plain and simple. They no longer had the funds to keep them rolling and course the price of vehicles nowadays, and '64 was the last one they bought. By the time they started to look at a new one, in the mid-'80's, the price had skyrocketed so high that they couldn't even consider.

LD : Give me an idea of what they originally cost versus what they were in the '80's.

LN : I don't know what they paid for the original that they had, I have no idea. But I know, when they were talking about a new one, anywhere from \$100,000 to \$150,000. So they thought they could better utilize the funds in the branches.

LD : They probably didn't get the best gas mileage either?

LN : No they did not. I think they got five to six miles per gallon.

LD : And, of course, across those two decades the price of gasoline went up pretty considerably.

LN : Right.

LD : Did you have break downs very often? In the Bookmobiles that you had?

LN : Well, toward the end there, of course we were down to one Bookmobile in the end, the one they had purchased in '64. And it seems like there was something going wrong with that all the time, something kept wearing out on it. It had hydraulic steps, to let patrons on, and eventually they wore out. And so we had to have someone devise manual steps that we could let down manually and raise back-up manually. So that was a big cost. I forget what firm did that, right now. I was thinking Iowa Steel, but that's not right.

LD : So, they just created something you could hang off?

LN : Yeah, it was kind of a lever affair, where they unhooked the hydraulics and everything. We would lower the steps manually and hook into place with a lever. There were a lot of little things that would crop up like that, that wore out. You had to devise some way to replace it. Toward the end there it just kept growing by leaps and bounds, it seemed like. And so they decided to do away with it completely.

LD : Do you know when they decided to retire that last one completely?

LN : I think it was in the middle eighties, like '84 or '85.

LD : Was it before the move to the new facility?

LN : It was before the move to the new facility, we moved here in '85. So, it must be '83 or '84, somewhere around there. I don't remember exactly.

LD : So that was about a 20 year period of time that the Bookmobile was a real important outreach program?! Now I also know that you were involved in the Edgewood branch, when did you start working there? Was that, that was before the Bookmobile program died.

LN : Well, that came into existence after I started driving the Bookmobile. And it wasn't long after I started driving that.

LD : Well, because it opened in '71.

LN : Yeah, so what they did was they would rotate the drivers to the Edgewood branch also. When we weren't driving the Bookmobile, we would go out and clerk at the branch. So we had many duties beside getting the Bookmobiles ready and getting out to a location and working on them, we'd also work at the branch.

LD : This came under other duties, as required. Where was that, that original branch was not in the...

- LN : It wasn't in the mall, no, it was on Edgewood Road across from that little strip mall on the corner of Edgewood Road and Johnson Avenue.
- LD : Yeah, I have 221, but I didn't know exactly where it was.
- LN : Yeah.
- LD : What kind of building was it in? Did you build the building?
- LN : No the building was there, it was one large building that was divided up into stores. And we shared it with the cleaners, the cleaners was on the end and then we were situated between the cleaners and a T.V. store. And it seemed like we had the smallest store, no maybe I should take that back, I think the cleaners was probably a little bit smaller. It seemed like our facility was pretty small, a lot of people called it a hole in the wall.
- LD : Probably a high traffic area though.
- LN : It was a very high traffic area.
- LD : Do you have any idea how large the collection was, that you had at Edgewood? (in terms of numbers) Or what your typical circulation was in and, out of there?
- LN : It depended too, on the time of year. When we had the Summer Reading Program that was when the circulation numbers would really soar. Oh, I imagine that we did as high as 1,500 in a day.
- LD : In a day?
- LN : In a day. There were other days that we were probably lucky to get four hundred. It just depended on what time of year it was and of course the weather conditions and all that.
- LD : Did you offer full services at that branch? You could get books through Inner Library Loan and things like that out there as well?
- LN : Yeah, right.
- LD : Okay.
- LN : They could get everything that you could get at the main library, it might take a day or two for it to come.

LD : Didn't have online service at that time.

LN : No we did not.

LD : So how did you do that? Did you just make telephone calls to find out if something was available at another library.

LN : Yeah, eventually we did get computers though, before the Bookmobile even went out, we had computers.

LD : Oh really?

LN : Yeah, right. They started to get those in and it was quite a big deal. Everyone had to take a crash course on the computers and all that you know. Of course, they were very simplistic compared to what they have evolved into today and all.

LD : So you used to check for availability of books? My information was that the computer system at the main library really didn't come online until the move. But ahh..

LN : Maybe it was closer to the move.

LD : I know that there was some experimenting going on.

LN : Yes there was some experimenting before the move, I know, because we got a lot of our basic training, on the computers, at the old library.

LD : Did they ever switch over to the card catalog, I mean from the card catalog to the computers during that time, or did it come later? I am talking before '85 and the move. Because my memory is that the new library was where the electronic card catalog...

LN : Yeah, my memory is kind of vague on that. I think they used the old card catalog up until the very time we moved out of there, but when we moved into the new library we had the new online system of computers.

LD : So it was mostly staff that used the computers, not the public?

LN : Right.

LD : In the branch.

LN : Right.

LD : Who worked with you at Edgewood?

LN : Well the supervisor, when I first started on the Bookmobile, was Virginia

Grant. And she was also the supervisor at the branch out there at Edgewood. Of course I would work with her and Bob Pfeiffer out there and there was another lady by the name of Linda Crosswell, who became Linda Hasley. She is no longer with us, she was a good friend of mine. Later on Roger Rayburn came in and he drove the Bookmobile after Robert Pfeiffer retired and so he was included in the rotation, working at the branches. And so, well let's see, Roger's wife, Joanne, she was part of the staff. And she worked in the rotation to, she worked on the Bookmobile and the branch. In fact, that's where Roger and Joanne got together on the Bookmobile. They were working together on the Bookmobile and ended up getting married!

LD : A romance on the Bookmobile. Those who worked at the branches and in the Bookmobiles, you were not professional librarians.

LN : No we were not.

LD : Your background was not, you didn't have any academic background. How did you become knowledgeable? They said do this and you did it?

LN : Just by working with it. That's the only way we could do it is by learning the various duties and working with them everyday. No two days were alike, you'd always confront something that you weren't accustomed to and you would have to ask somebody else, what do I do in this situation. After awhile it all comes together and so....

LD : I'd guess you'd like detective work. I think people who work in libraries, or who are librarians, enjoy a problem that they have to find an answer to.

LN : Well, you're probably right.

LD : When did Edgewood move to, now it is currently at Westdale.

LN : Westdale?! Yeah, its on the second floor there, next door to Younker's.

LD : Is that as late as the '90's? It has been rather recent. I could look it up here.

LN : I was afraid, that you were going to ask that.

LD : 1990, it moved to Westdale. And that was about the same time Kenwood moved into, they are in the Town & Country Shopping Center.

- LN : They are in Town & Country Shopping now, but that came quite a few years later. I think they've only been out at Town & Country only 2-3 years.
- LD : That could be. Those are the two major branches, are they not?
- LN : Right.
- LD : Do you remember any other branches while you worked here.
- LN : Not in my time.
- LD : How did people react to the move of the Edgewood?
- LN : We heard a lot of complaints.
- LD : Did you? I think there were a lot of complaints about the Kenwood one too.
- LN : Right, yeah. People didn't care for that at all. And some people swore that they wouldn't go to the new branch and I noticed that a lot of those people are coming to the main library now. They were true to their word, they didn't come out to the new branch.
- LD : But they didn't stop using the library.
- LN : They kept on using the facility, right.
- LD : I know people that committed to a particular space, did you have much of a concern that was expressed when the Bookmobiles closed down?
- LN : Oh definitely. People were really, some were in shock over it. They just couldn't understand why we would choose to stop Bookmobile service to a city this size. We just had to sit there and explain to them that we just didn't have the funds to provide a new Bookmobile and the old ones were wearing out.
- LD : This might be a good time to talk about funding, because that's kind of been a historical issue in relation to the library. And obviously it was a long and difficult process, getting the funds to move into the new facility, that you are in now. Over the years, what are your memories about the different bond issues that were attempted and failed. And the reactions of the staff to that. You know, everybody wanted state of the art but nobody wanted to pay for it. That sort of thing.
- LN : I forget how many attempts there were. I know there were quite a few but I don't know the exact number.

LD : Four or Five.

LN : Course the staff was always heavily involved in trying to get the election to go in our favor. And we would be out distributing the information on the bond issue.

LD : This is side two of an interview with Lan Nowotny on January 30, 1996. We were talking about the bond issues and the difficulty the library went through over the years in getting the funding and your involvement as staff in that process. How did people react, on the staff, each time, and think there were five different attempts to pass a bond issue, how did that effect morale around here?

LN : Well, of course there was a certain amount of disappointment each time a bond issue failed. But I think for the most part that the staff at the library has always bounced back, they have always had the ability to bounce back no matter what the situation. It seems like we could be dealt a severe blow sometimes and....

LD : And keep on going.

LN : Right and keep going. I don't know, we just kind of worked our way through it.

LD : Well, I'll tell ya, in reading through some of those annual reports, that were involved through the history. I was amazed at the staff as a people who always did what needed to be done. With the growth of the library you had to keep moving things from one place to another and I can imagine you mostly had to be camels more than anything else, just to pack stuff up and move it, and then move it again. It did take a lot of flexibility. I would like to shift to the working environment and we'll come back to the move, because I feel that it is important and you were involved in that. But you worked under two or three different directors, I believe, during you period here. Anything that you would like to share about any of them. For instance, was Dave Smith here during your tenure?

LN : That was before I was here.

LD : Alright and Marvin was before you. So it would have been Tom Carney.

LN : Yes, he was the director when I arrived and had been here a year when I came in '71. I don't know what year he arrived but....

LD : '70, it says.

- LN : '70? Okay, it was about a year before I got here.
- LD : What kind of management style did Mr. Carney have? Did you have much interaction with him? Or was it all just filtered down? (BREAK) We were talking about directors and different management styles and people that you worked under. I am curious about the hierarchy in a situation like a public library. Did you have much interaction with the people at the top..the directors and the professional librarians or did you work, primarily, from one person and that is who you got all your information about what was going on.
- LN : Well, actually our marching orders filtered down through the supervisors and we'd get all of our information and orders through the supervisors. It was a lot like a military command post, there was a chain of command and everything. That's what it reminded me of, that kind of a structure.
- LD : So how did it go up the chain? Supervisors and then who were ahead of the supervisors, typically?
- LN : Well then it was the Assistant Director and the Director.
- LD : So the Supervisor's covered different areas, like circulation...
- LN : Right.
- LD : Gotcha. Because Margaret Bradow would have been a supervisor then.
- LN : Right.
- LD : Gotcha. We did talk earlier, about the point at which the employees unionized. That would have been in the '80's after the move to the new library, or would that have been before then?
- LN : Actually, it was before then.
- LD : No, it was the mid-'70's.
- LN : Right. The library had their own union back then. The staff union basically, was what it was, within the library. It went on for a few years and it seemed like it was pretty powerless to do anything, to be able to negotiate anything reasonable. So it was decided to go to Communication Workers of America, I think that we had a choice AFSME and Communication Workers of America and we settled on the CWA. And so basically we still have a union steward here and when it comes to negotiations we have the union representing us and going into contract negotiations for us.

LD : Before that process occurred, what was a typical, typically how long did you work? Did you get overtime pay? I am just curious about what changed after the unions came in.

LN : Before the union came in, we'd work overtime but we didn't get paid time and a half. We'd just get paid...

LD : Regular pay.

LN : Regular pay, for that. So that was a welcome change, once the union came in we got time and a half for anything over 40 hours then. That was pretty nice. I know when I first started I was disappointed that you were required to put in over 40 hrs many weeks and only got straight time for it. And coming out of a factory, I wasn't accustomed to that.

LD : It's a little different. Did it improve the overall wages?

LN : It seems like, before the union came in, that we'd get quite significant raises compared to what we got after the union came in.

LD : That's interesting.

LN : Yeah, it seemed like, right before the union came in, that we would get annual raises maybe anywhere between 6-10%. Of course after the union came in it would drop down to 1 1/2-2%.

LD : It's hard to tell if that's the union or the times.

LN : That's it, yeah, you don't know.

LD : I know there are a number of different physical ailments that people who work in the kind of positions you are in are prone to. Such as the carpal tunnel, you could get back problems. Are those things, did the union improve the coverage of, insurance wise, of any of those?

LN : I don't know if it's the union, I think that OSA had more to do with that than anything. And the fact that people were coming down with disabilities all the time, due to repetitive motion.

LD : It became recognized.

LN : Yeah, it became recognized. And they decided they had to something about that.

- LD : Sure. Anything else that you would like to say about the working environment, before we move on the another topic?
- LN : Nothing really comes to mind right now, I guess.
- LD : Okay. Social times, does the library have traditional events for employees, or is it mostly kind of an informal thing?
- LN : Every year, before Christmas, we have an annual Christmas get together, supper, that the employees.... It could be at any of the big restaurants here in town and of course the employees have to pay for it out of their own pocket. The city doesn't.....
- LD : It's a social time, the city doesn't pay for it.
- LN : Right, the city doesn't pay for it.
- LD : You mean all those fines you collect all year long, you guys don't get a penny of it?
- LN : We don't see a penny of it, right. One thing that's nice also, is that it seems like all the various departments, every so often, puts on a thing for the rest of the staff, like one month it would be the Information Department and they would put on a feed for the staff in the staff room. It's kind of like a pot luck thing, you know everybody from that department brings something or contributes something. Then the whole staff benefits from it, they can come in and enjoy it. We take turns doing that, it's kind of nice to socialize like that.
- LD : Well, you have a, what I presume, a pretty nice staff room in the new facility. Did you have that nice a place, where people could gather before?
- LN : Actually, no. We just had one small room and it was probably just twice the size of this small room that we are speaking in now.
- LD : This is not a large room. Maybe 10 ft. X 10 ft.
- LN : That's basically all we had and people were allowed to smoke at that time. And so the non-smokers didn't want to go into that space. Because you'd go in and you'd have to cut the air with a knife. And I was so happy when they restricted smoking in the building, which they just did here not too long ago.
- LD : I didn't realize that. I thought it had been a smoke free facility from the beginning.

- LN : No, it wasn't. There was a segment of the staff room where they could smoke. The staff room, actually was divided into two parts. But without exhaust fans the smoke would, naturally, drift into the non-smoking part and it would make it kind of tough too. So, eventually they just banned smoking forever from the library.
- LD : I guess that really is a '90's consciousness. I know in some of the other public places, even in museums where they preserve things you know. What about, we did talk about the Bookmobile, but we didn't talk about the Friendsmobile. Which was a later edition that was used, primarily, to go to shut-ins and that sort of thing. Were you involved in the Friendsmobile at all? My notes say that it didn't come in until '78 and it was donated by the volunteers, The Friends of the Library.
- LN : The Friends of the Library, right. My only involvement in that was getting it ready to go out, sometimes. We had to load books on it, that type of thing. Usually it was the driver that did most of that. Sometimes, when a Bookmobile was down for repair we would be forced to take the Friendsmobile out on location and that was always a drag because you had to stand outside of it.
- LD : It was just a truck, wasn't it?
- LN : Yeah, it was like a catering truck, with the flaps that would open up on the side. And then you would have the books inside and you'd have a tape recorder and you'd tape record all of the transactions that took place during the day and then you would have to come back to the main library and take down all the transactions that you'd made for that day.
- LD : Because you didn't have a place to check out, so to speak?
- LN : No. But my involvement didn't go much beyond that in the Friendsmobile.
- LD : And then that, is that still in place?
- LN : No, that is defunct.
- LD : Probably, it would not have stood up to the wear and tear as well as the specially designed Bookmobiles.
- LN : Speaking of the doors in the side that opened like flaps, sometimes they would forget to close those and they would pull out of the garage and...
- LD : Oh no. Not another garage story.

- LN : Of course, you know what would happen when they hit the framework of the garage door. It didn't do those doors much good.
- LD : I can see the issues that were involved in the coming and going. The amazing thing was, that in the driving part there wasn't ever any problem. It was just driving them in and out of the garage.
- LN : Exactly, that was a very tight place down there.
- LD : Oh, that alley is narrow anyway.
- LN : You know what made it bad was when people would park down there illegally. They would leave their vehicles and we didn't know where they were, they could be in a bar somewhere or shopping and or just out on the town. And we'd come in at night and that car was parked there and what were we to do, you know. So we would just call the police department and have them come along and get the car somehow and roll it ahead. But then there came a time when, because of lawsuits, they didn't even want to move the car or anything.
- LD : I would think they could just tow it, no?
- LN : Well they were very reluctant to do that. I remember one night I came in and there was a car parked in the way and I called the police. The lady police officer arrived with a policeman, and the door was open on the car, it was just a matter of pushing it out of the way you know. And the man was willing to help me with it and the lady didn't want to do it. She was afraid of getting sued and she didn't want to touch that car. So he and I ended up doing it.
- LD : So that was part of your job description too, moving cars.
- LN : Yes, moving cars.
- LD : I think they are a lot tougher these days. Because I know if you're illegally parked you may come back and your car is gone. Let's shift to the move to the new library, because I know that was an incredible time of change and probably stress, for everybody who was on the staff. What are your memories about, after the Hall Foundation supplied the grant and the community was able to match it and the library was actually built in '85. During the period right before that, how was the staff involved and how did it effect your work? In getting ready for that move?
- LN : Well, I remember there was a day when they closed the library down for a brainstorming session with the staff. The staff came in that day and we all sat around and brainstormed about what kind of planning we would like to see

go into the new building. They seemed to make a pretty big deal of that, that our input was important. And in many cases, it turned out, that many of our ideas...

LD : They didn't show up.

LN : Pan out, right. But, then there was a day or two when the staff came in, in all our old clothes and move furniture and....

LD : So you physically contributed to the move.

LN : Yeah, yeah. A lot of the furniture was auctioned off, you know. So it had to be gathered in one room for the auction. And the things that they needed at the new library had to be packed away and of course the books had to be packed in boxes and they had to be marked so we knew what books were in what boxes. And they needed to stay in order so that when we unpacked them, they could be unpacked in that order.

LD : Who moved the collection? Did you move it, the staff? Or was it a firm that was brought in??

LN : They brought in a moving firm and they loaded up the boxes. I remember they backed a trailer up to the steps on Third Avenue and they put ramps on the steps to the trailer and they would roll the boxes of books out to the trailer.

LD : How long were you closed, during that time?

LN : Memory fails me on that. It seems like we were shut down a very minimum amount of time, a couple days, or something like that.

LD : So it was pretty well orchestrated.

LN : Yes, pretty well orchestrated.

LD : At that time were you down here, or were you still out the Edgewood branch, primarily?

LN : Right.

LD : So you weren't involved as much as you might have been otherwise?

LN : Well, due to the fact that we were still running deliveries we were still down here. We were the drivers, even though the Bookmobiles were no longer in operation, we were still running the deliveries. There were still deliveries between the main library and the branches and we drivers were involved in

that. So we were involved in a lot of the moving.

LD : You got caught up in it.

LN : I remember making many trips to the liquor store, for boxes.

LD : Oh, I thought you were going to say, "To get me through it!"

LN : You thought I was going to say something else?! But it was to load the van up with boxes, for packing books and whatever else needed to be moved. And we got loads and loads of boxes from that liquor store.

LD : When did you become, then, stationed or worked specifically out of this library, this facility?

LN : Okay, I guess it was coming up on three years ago that I moved down here. And that was because one of the information people, that worked at the information desk, got her degree in Library Science and resigned. And I believe she moved up to Mason City, to be the Assistant Director there. Course, that left a vacancy down here and it was decided that I was to move down here. And that's how I ended up here.

LD : So you have replaced a professional librarian, in other words. Now I want to know, are you getting the same pay?

LN : I wish!

LD : What do you do in your job now?

LN : Well, there's quite a few duties involved, besides working on the desk, there is a lot of behind the scenes work involved. There's a government document program, this library is a deposit for government documents, we don't handle 100% of what the government mails out to Iowa City. I think our percentage rate is 15-16% somewhere in there, if it is that high.

LD : 15 or 50?

LN : 15, 16...

LD : Oh, so a fairly low percentage?!

LN : Fairly low, compared to what Iowa City has. But at any rate it seems like they roll in quite often. They are delivered in boxes, the boxes are 1 1/2 X 1 1/2 ft., something like that. And they are filled with various documents.

- LD : Fascinating reading!
- LN : It is, and I think, there are three of us who work with that. We have to take out each document, there are shipping lists that are packed in that box and we have to make sure that each item is checked against that shipping list. We have to make sure we received it. We also have a main check off list and after we're at the bottom of that box, we have to go through all the sheets we checked off, compared to our master list and make sure they didn't forget anything.
- LD : Detail.
- LN : Right, if they forgot something, then we have to claim that. Course, we have to document all of these government documents that come in, assign them a call number and all that. In other words, we process those.
- LD : You do the processing. So they don't go up to Technical Services?
- LN : Well they do after we process them.
- LD : After you process them?
- LN : Yeah, we process them and then we send them up to Tech. And that way, due to our processing, they know where to send them from then on. And so we do that and one of my duties is filing microfiche. We get microfiche from the State of Iowa, regarding various legislation and all that. And also from the federal government, we get microfiche regarding legislation and what have you. Let's see, what else do I do?
- LD : Do you get involved with the telephone and answering questions as people call in? Or is that primarily.....?
- LN : Yeah, definitely. That's one of the jobs at the Information Desk. And sometimes questions are too involved for the information people, we have to hand them over to the librarian at the Reference Desk. And so our job, at the Information Desk, is to determine if we're going to help them or else if they should be transferred to the Reference librarian.
- LD : Do you remember any unusual questions that you've had? Because I am sure that you get quite a variety.
- LN : Yeah, we do get the gauntlet. My memory fails me now, at the most memorable question.
- LD : You guys used to give out telephone numbers, when people called you,

didn't you?

LN : Yeah, that was before I came in on the scene. They did that at the old library all the time. I think they did that for a year or two after they moved down here. I think one of the staff workers was telling me that. They stopped doing that because it involved too much staff time.

LD : That is really an incredible task.

LN : Yes it was. Yeah. Speaking of telephones, another one of the staff members duties is to check the telephone books in the various states and the cities in Iowa and make sure they are up to date. And put them out where they are supposed to be and have numbers. And that's quite a job too.

LD : And that's one of those things that we take for granted. They are going to be here.

LN : Yeah, and of course, we have filing to do. All of the Reference books in the back, like in the Business Section have to be updated all the time. So we keep getting new information that has to be filed into that. And a lot of the reference books have to be updated constantly and we have to keep filing into those materials. And so there is a lot of behind the scenes work that you don't even stop and think about.

LD : How have computers changed your job? In the last few years? I would guess that this new system is fairly comprehensive?

LN : Yeah, I think one of the biggest changes would be in the magazine directory. We have an online magazine directory now, and so instead of looking up something in Reader's Guide you can go right to the computer and in a lot of cases the full text is right there on the computer, what's in that magazine article. And, if a patron wants to, they just print it right off without even going to look in a magazine of any kind.

LD : So you don't have to go back and pull out a magazine and pull out a particular issue? A lot of that is summarized.

LN : Right online, yeah. And, like I just mentioned, some of the articles are summarized in just a brief summary, and other offer the full text. It would be nice if they all offered full texts, but...

LD : Of course, there will come a point when people will just look it up on the internet and won't have to come in at all.

LN : I think it's kind of coming to that too. You know, with all the internet hook

ups and all the people who can just go to the computer and find out the information. And, perhaps that's why some of the circulation figures, or stats, are kind of falling a little bit too.

LD : Really? Because I thought that this was the busiest library in the State of Iowa?

LN : Yeah, we did have that distinction. I don't know if that distinction still stands or not, but I know there's some concern that circulation...

LD : But it would make a difference.

LN : It would make a difference, sure.

LD : Because you don't, physically, have to come in and use the materials here.

LN : Exactly, there is so much information available on the WWW and the internet that people can just sit down at their computers. And they don't have much need for the library, I guess.

LD : Oh, I can't imagine a time when the actual facility won't be important. But, you're right, it is going to change dramatically in the future, as to how it will look and the kinds of services that you offer.

LN : Yeah, and I believe that we are going to keep changing here too, all the time. You know, to adjust to those conditions.

LD : You certainly have, over the years, I have been amazed at reading, just the different ways in which the staff has created new programs and really reached out to the community. And certainly, I think the Cedar Rapids Library is the first internet station in a library in Iowa. I am not sure on that.

LN : I am certain not about that.

LD : I know that it is in conjunction with MCI. That it is some kind of joint project and that again is a sign of the openness of the organization. Well, Lan I think we have kept you for an awfully long time. I wonder is there any other areas, that we have not touched on, that you specifically wanted to speak about in your experience, over the years, as a part of this library system?

LN : Well, actually, I think that you've done a great job of highlighting a lot of these various areas.

LD : Well, we had a good conversation, earlier, that helped. I would like to ask you one question, in closing. And that is, what do you think in your years

here, as a member of the staff, is there a particular contribution or a particular program that you think has been one of the most important services, that kind of stand out in your mind? That you are really proud of the fact that you have been a part of?

LN : Well, I think one of things, that comes to mind, is a service that they called Outreach and it was kind of a service that you had mixed feelings about. Because, it took alot of work, you know, getting these collections ready. The thing was, we'd get a collection together to take out to the various nursing homes or this kind of thing. Or senior citizen type homes and we'd take a collection out there and the people would come out. And we would haul boxes of books out there and line them up on tables and of course they would have a schedule for when we were coming. And it seemed like they really appreciated something like that. And they stopped doing that, oh maybe a year to a year and a half ago and they just depend entirely upon deposit collections now. Just pack the books up a box and the driver deliveries it and leaves it out there for three weeks, or something like that. And they get to pick what they want and when they are through reading it they send it back and a new shipment comes in. But before that stop, we used to be out there, personally, checking out the books. And, of course, we would have to come back to the main library and record it on the computer and all that. So there was alot of work involved in it, but it seemed like these people really appreciated it. The very last stop that we went to, I delivered the delivery, personally, along with the library Page and they had a big party for us. They had a cake and ice cream.

LD : Oh, you're kidding.

LN : Yeah, all that for us. So it seemed like they really appreciated us.

LD : Well, you're back to the social, importance, what you're doing. It was a place for people to come together and communicate and enjoy each other. And obviously, they were very grateful! Well, I thank you, very much, for the time you have given us and we will certainly make sure that you get a copy of the tape. And if you would like to see the transcript that'd be great too, because you could probably correct it for us! But thanks for the help, Lan.

LN : Well, you are quite welcome. It was a pleasure talking to you. I am glad I had this opportunity.

