

I interviewed Nora Gay, a librarian at the Art Institute of Atlanta on Feb 14, 2008.

Nora's interest in libraries began when she was in the 5th grade. She had a mean teacher who would make her sit in the back of the class (because only good students sat in the front) and send her to work in the library as additional punishment. This extra punishment did not really work as Nora liked going to the library and she liked the librarian who allowed her to do extra stuff that would keep her from returning to the mean teacher on a more regular basis.

In 6th grade Nora changed schools, through coincidence the librarian from the old school also changed schools (to the same one Nora was now attending;) and was now Nora's 6th grade teacher. She remembered Nora from the other library/school and encouraged her to work in the library during 6th grade as well.

Throughout her life Nora has always enjoyed libraries and reading. She found going to a library a 'nice escape from other things'. She checked out tons of books and would take them home for reading. What she enjoyed most about the library was the order of the library materials. When she worked in the library she was responsible for putting the books back in their order. She found the orderly needs of the library to be very satisfying ('when things are in order') in terms of a job well done if only for a few minutes.

Nora did not work in the library during high school, but she did work in a library again during her college years.

Nora's educational circuit started with an interest in nursing. She received an Associate degree in Nursing from a junior college and after working in the nursing field found out that she didn't really like nursing after all. Nora then decided to go back to school at Georgia State and worked toward a degree in biology, but she found the math part of biological science to be daunting and as an alternative switched to English with a minor in Philosophy. Nora expressed that her experiences working on her English degree were the most fun she has ever had.

While attending GA State, she worked as a nurse until she got tired of it; fortunately a position at the GA State library's reference room opened up and she took the job. Nora was once again working with the order of the library and after she finished her degree she continued to work there but was moved into acquisitions, which she actually hated. In this area she was responsible for checking to see if the library already owned a book and this was in the days before computers. As a result, she spent a good deal of time standing in front of the card catalogue. She admits that she did not last too long in this position.

Around this same time period, Nora married and followed her husband (who was a teacher) to various schools across the country. Many of these schools promised to have library work for her as well but fell through once they had arrived.

She decided to get the MLIS because she did not want to work as a nurse anymore. She had actually made this decision after she had finished her English degree, but was not able to pursue it due to the moving nature of her husband's career. The time they spent in Oklahoma was the first time she had been near enough to a school with a library program to start her studies. She was accepted at both North Texas University and Texas Woman's University, but she went with Texas Woman's (she doesn't remember exactly why though). Nora stated that she really enjoyed her studies there, 'it was a sweet place'.

There was no particular focus (track) of her master's program; it was a general basic of librarianship. Nora did however become interested in the aspects of being a Reference Librarian (she liked finding the stuff,) but noted that now it is not her thing. The MLIS program's had some digital aspects, but the internet was not the same back then (1994-95). Nora did receive training on some of the digital searching programs that libraries were using at that time, but she says they were difficult to use. Having had no prior digital experience (couldn't even figure out how to turn on a computer) Nora was surprised when asked to use a word processor for all her

papers (she ended up getting a friend 'Gunter' to "word process" them for her throughout her entire grad school tenure).

While her husband was teaching at a school in Oklahoma, Nora attended the Masters of Library and Information Science program at Texas Woman's University. However, her husband's job went away before she had completed the degree and they moved to Tuskegee, Alabama for his next job. Fortunately, Nora was able to continue working on her masters at Tuskegee University and finished their MLIS program in December 1995.

While attending Tuskegee, Nora was also able to work in their library, she noted that this was the only school/library that actually came through on their promise of a job for both her and her husband. It was at this library where she was able to work again in acquisitions, but now she actually got to order the books and send stuff out to the bindery. This time around she liked the work very much.

Soon after completing her degree, they moved back to Atlanta and Nora was able to get a library job in 1996. She mentioned that she knew many people who were looking for library jobs and not finding any at that time, but she also added that these people were not willing to move for the job (Atlanta had great opportunities.) Nora thinks that the market for library jobs has changed and that there are many opportunities for today's graduates.

Nora got her first computer (a Mac that came in handy for job searching) in 1995 and has used a 'learn as she goes along' approach since. She admits that she could use some more information and training in using computers; and has supplemented her graduate education, by attending workshops at SOLINET to learn digital technologies associated with Inter-Library Loan. Nora added in regards to software, that even within the library she has to constantly learn new software programs as they come down the wire and is getting ready for a new circulation software implementation as we speak. Nora finds that just as she gets used to one software program, there is a new one replacing it, but when using programs like OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), the changes are announced way ahead of time to give everyone time to adjust to the new technology.

Nora is not certified as a librarian in Georgia. She feels that certification is just a 'money' issue and used primarily as a background check to make sure you are not a felon or pedophile, (they look at your degree and give you a stamp.) However, if she did work somewhere that required certification; she says she wouldn't have a problem getting it. She added that not every state has a certificate requirement and after years of paying for nursing licenses she decided to opt out on the Georgia State Library Certificate.

I asked Nora about why she chose to work in an academic library. She said this reason was mainly because her early library experience was with academic libraries, but she also mentioned that even though she actually loves children's literature, the thought of being surrounded by them brought on panic attacks that made public libraries out of the question.

Nora has worked at the Art Institute of Atlanta (a 4 year For-Profit institution concentrating in the applied arts) since 1996 (12 years) and has moved from her earlier interest in reference to working with collection development and management of the library's growing DVD collection. She started working with the Inter-Library Loans and reference and noted that as reference librarian she was often mis-used by students wanting 'the librarian' to write their English papers for them. In addition, Nora was asked to handle the media (VHS/DVD) part of the library's collection.

Under Nora's care the media collection at the Art Institute has grown over the years with the help of faculty suggestions and research from outside sources such as the Library of Congress and "Video Librarian" magazine. Since 1996, the media formats have changed from VHS to DVD and she has been able to replace many VHS tape with their DVD equivalent. The students

are permitted access to the collection within the library's viewing areas only, but the faculty are the main users (both for lectures and personal entertainment) of the collection.

The main goal of the collection is to support the various visual aspects of the degree programs offered by the school: Animation, Film Making, Video Production, Photography, Culinary, Fashion, Literature, Art History, Graphic and Fine Arts. As such the nature of the collection includes many of the best films, be they blockbuster, classic, animated or documentary; and also sports many instructional and education topics as well.

Nora noted that this collection requires special budget compensation and has its own copyright issues due to the for-profit status of the school. She says that although it is ok for the movies to be viewed at home; there are problems with showing the entirety of a film before a class.

In terms of changes in media format, Nora is still trying to find DVD replacements for some of the more obscure VHS movies or educational works. We spoke of the upcoming BlueRay vs. HD discs issue and Nora says she will wait for the 'fallout' to see which media has come out ahead (similar to the beta/VHS thing) before collecting one or the other.

A typical day for Nora is divided with "X" amount of hours spent working the check-out desk (answering questions and stuff), some time is spent every day cataloguing the backlog of DVD's that need to be put out, time is also spent researching or reading reviews of films to add to the collection, and talking with faculty and staff about the collection needs.

When asked about bad days, Nora said the most stressful part of the day may occur when the copy machine breaks down and the students 'assume' it is her fault and expect that she should be able to fix it right away; even though it was their misuse that caused the malfunction.

I asked Nora what are some of the main differences between how her education said to do something and how those things were actually done as a library practice? She replied that Graduate school seemed to portray that there was a 'carved in stone' way of doing things; she found that this was not the case outside of school and that libraries were more flexible and creative in terms of improving efficiency for both workers and patrons.

Nora had two pieces of advice for students of library science: 1st: People may treat you like you are strange, but you just have to ignore that. Librarians are always getting dumped on (like being mousy or stereotyped), and granted there are some strange librarians out there, but she feels this makes the profession more interesting and helps them (librarians) to be more tolerant of others than most people are.

2nd: She recommends working in a library prior to completing the degree, so that you can have some prior experience and can work around the whole 'must have experience and a degree' issue when applying for jobs.

I asked if she had any interesting stories to share with MLIS students and she replied that "spelling is important". One time a student was trying to find information about democracy using the computerized catalogues. They had about 5 computers dedicated to this task for students to use. This student managed to lock up all 5 computers by spelling democracy as 'dimocracy'.

Lastly I referred back to the original intention of this interview and I asked Nora "What effect has your education had on the direction of your life?" She interpreted the question and gave this answer: "I actually have a job that I enjoy; I actually look forward to going to work each day." She says that this is important to her and that it has been her goal in life.