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Jerrie Lee Parpart Interview 2015

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Jerrie Lee Parpart, Hamersly Library, Western Oregon University



Johnathon Browe: We are here with Jerrie Lee Parpart on November 2, 2015 in the Hamersly Library Archive conference room. I am Johnathon Browe and am here with Tyler Arvin, Jacob Artman and Kimberly Burt, and we are asking questions to Jerrie Lee Parpart about her job here at Western.

JB: When did you start working at Western?

Jerrie Lee Parpart: I started working in here August of 1990 and I started as a Circulation Services Coordinator.

JB: What were the circumstances that led you [to] come to work here?

JLP: Good question. When I went to school here in the late 70s early 80s my degree was in Art Education. I had a lot of Chemistry and Sign Language. At that time I thought perhaps I wanted to teach and decided after going through student teaching I really didn't want to teach lower level students. I like teaching college students and was not quite sure what I wanted to do and sort of walked in to a job at Willamette University as their Circulation Manager and Stacks Manager. From there, with the experiences I gained, I was able to walk in to a job here, which was very nice. Still had to interview and those sorts of things. But one of the things we did at Willamette was move the library across campus so I had the experiences of organizing how to move a large collection. There were three libraries there that combined into one. And that was something that was, here they knew was going to happen, but that did not happen until 2000, which was ten years later. That was part of what brought me here. But in terms of my position once I got in to

the library here, I started as the Circulation Coordinator, which meant I coordinated the reserves, the stacks management, and then the checkout desk, and took care of those sorts of things. There were a lot of things I was trained to do and helped with other projects such as retroactive conversion, which meant we took the card catalog and put it in to the machine so we put it in computer format. And we also flipped the collection, because we started out in the Dewey Decimal System during the time I was working here because they cataloged everything in to Library of Congress [System], which we use now. They were not in order so we flipped the collection to A to Z order, which also gave me more experiences of moving things. I also supervised the convicts [Laughter] that we hired to do that. That was very interesting as well. Let's see, what else brought me to work here, you're wanting to know into Western or in to the position I am now? I am kind of answering both those questions, huh?

JB: Yeah, like what brought you to Western? Like how [did] that lead up to --

JLP: Why Western?

JB: Yes.

JLP: Because I had gone to school here, I am loyal to the University in that sense. I knew the history. My mother went to school here as well. She went back to school a bit later so she would bring me to her classes, her evening classes. I felt very comfortable with the campus and it is a nice place. So, I kind of got on a tangent there [Laughter].

Tyler Arvin: All right, question number two. What is the basis for your job here at Western?

JLP: The basis, I wasn't quite sure what you meant by basis.

TA: If you just had to sum up what you do here, what it would be?

JLP: Okay, okay.

TA: Like basically what you do here, is what I think.

JLP: Well, what I was starting to get into with the first question was that over the years I've had a lot of hats. So, when we moved into this building in 2000, I became the Exhibits Coordinator. And at that time I was also the building's manager and the signage manager and stacks manager. And so they kind of piled lots of things on people who had been here a little longer because we don't have the learning curve, and we have the experience to, to juggle a lot of things.

TA: Yes.

JLP: So the basis of what I do right now is exhibits and Archives. So with the exhibits, the purpose with the exhibits is to teach between the lines, is what I like to think. So it's a way of taking the things taught in the classroom and augmenting those. So maybe it's a subject of our exhibits, different from the Cannon Gallery, they are a Fine Art exhibit. Our exhibits deal with entire disciplines on the campus. So we might have something on history, we might have something on mathematics, we might have something on science, we might have health. There is art that we have in there as well, but its more than just there. The exhibit that's there right now is Hiroshima, so it historical, but it also brings a social aspect to it. So I try to bring, set that across

disciplines. That also might be interesting, also something you might not be able to take a whole class on. Hiroshima, you might not take a whole class on, the whole breadth. The mathematics one for instance took a look at the different ways math touched our lives that you might not think about. From the design of tables and chairs, all of that deals with mathematics, when it comes to looking at how to make things down to the itty-bitty structures. That's what I think of the exhibits teaching between the lines.

TA: Yes.

JLP: Then with Archives, our purpose with the Archives is to document the history of the University. We also have some history of the local surrounding area because we are 150 years old and we began at the same time as the city. We have that kind of local in common as well. So, does that--

TA: That's totally great!

JLP: Okay.

TA: There is another part to this I want to ask you. Typically like, day-to-day, what does your workday look like?

JLP: There is no typical [Laughter].

TA: [Laughter.] There is no typical! That's what I kind of was getting from what you were saying.

JLP: There really is no typical.

TA: It's kind of like an adventure every day.

JLP: It is an adventure every day and I love that! I love that! What I am doing a lot of times, and I have to look at my notes here, because I said, "Okay what are the things that I might do?" And so, one of the kinds of thing I might do might be scheduling exhibits one day, because I work with the exhibits, I tend to schedule one to two years out. And especially if it's something like the Hiroshima [exhibit] that I might need to have (of course, that one came a little quicker) but if I need to write a grant to be able supplement it, to be able to pay for it, then I'd want to know in advance, because grant cycles run a little bit longer. But it might be that I am, it depends on the needs of the students. If a student comes to me and says, "I need this information out of the Archives," that's my number one priority. If I'm working down at the desk, and somebody asks me a question and I have to follow up on it, that's my number one priority; I make time for that in there. But it might be that, if we are at the beginning of a term, or just before the term, we are installing exhibits. If it is in the middle of the term, we might be, if it is an exhibit we are creating, so, we would be doing the research, looking for images, building structures, the structure to put something in so that it would be safe, that it wouldn't fall over. It might be that I'd be working with donors. It might be that somebody calls and says "Oh, hello. My grandmother went to school there and I have all this stuff from when she went to school when it was Oregon Normal School, do you want it?" Well of course we want it! That is always my answer, "Of course." So it could be that I would be traveling someplace to go and talk to a donor,

to be picking up things. Two summers ago we had a wonderful alum who went to school when it was OCE, and she had this beautiful scrap book, and she had records that were not the master records, but they were etched into aluminum, of a concert that she was one of the major singers at, but it also had the orchestra and some other things, so we actually have that from the late 1940s now. So there's all kinds of little gems that could come up with that. I'm also supervising students who are, they could be doing things like moving the exhibit furnishings. They could be doing some of the research, they could be doing some of the writing, they could be helping to install the exhibit, so you know, pounding hammers and nails, getting the drill out, you know, we are creating boxes and if we don't have what we need, we create it. It could be that they are working with a collection and they are doing an inventory of it. They might be re-housing it, putting it into different boxes for preservation, they might be actually doing preservation. We have a project that we are working on right now of digitizing the old newspapers. Well, some of those newspapers are a hundred years old and they are kind of crispy, so we have to actually use a cotton, it is like a cotton paper, and glue the pieces back together before we can scan it. There might be some other kinds of things. We are not doing restoration.

TA: Yes.

JLP: So we are not restoring it to its--we are doing preservation, enough so that we can preserve it for the next generation. It might be that they are scanning images, and it could be scanning for an exhibit, they could be scanning for preservation, they could be scanning for, to answer a reference question that came in through the Archives. Sometimes the questions that we get are from people that have never even been to Oregon, but they know the information here is what they need, so we just scan it and send it to them. I got an interesting question from a gentleman in Missouri, who is in the sheriff's department, and it happens to be the same county that Ira F.M. Butler, who was a county sheriff there, also was the county sheriff here. When he moved out here he was also one of the founding fathers of the institution. So he wanted more information about that. Is this person ever going to come to Oregon? He said probably not, but he still wanted to know what happened to the sheriff from a hundred years ago.

JLP: So then, of course, there is always email and correspondence, you know, I get phone calls, I get lots of email. I try to keep abreast of what is going on in Archives; I am fairly new to Archives. Am I going way over?

TA: You're fine.

JLP: So, I can't say that there is anything that is typical.

Jacob Artman: What was the most interesting event or experience that has happened when you were working at Western?

JLP: That one was a hard one for me because there are so many interesting things that have happened. I think that if I am looking at exhibits the most meaningful exhibit for me was when we had the monks come and build a sand mandala in the lobby. They did that over three or four days, and just that calming sound of the sand it was, well you know, cause they have these long tubes that have ridges in them and they kind of scrape them slightly to get just a few grains of sand to come out at a time. The ceremonies that went with that and, it was just a very peaceful

situation, so that was good. I think in terms of anything else on campus, I think listening to some of the speakers, President Clinton when he came to speak, President Fuentes, Helen Prejean, Sister Helen Prejean came to speak, and just those kinds of opportunities I think are most impressive to me.

Kimberly Burt: What are your plans and goals for Western, now or in the future?

JLP: I tend to look at things that are right in front of me, so I don't always have concrete goals, they're more goals of, what can I do to get the information that we have so that people know that it is there. So I guess for the Archives, one of the goals that I have is to inventory more of the collections, and get those inventories into a format that we can put online so that they are searchable, so that people know what we have. There is a lot of little wonderful gems that are in there, a lot of sweet little collections, but nobody knows we have them. Those that people do know they are being used by people all over the U.S., which is wonderful. So I guess that would be a primary goal for that. I think that with the exhibits, I'd like to see more programming that goes along with it, so I would like to have speakers come or some kind of an event that goes along. I think those have been the most successful exhibits. So I would like to get it to where I could do that once a year. Does that answer your question? Do you have any other things that are outside of your script?

KB: No, I think we are doing fine. Thank you very much.

JLP: Well thank you. This was a great opportunity.