



# Rosemary Saber

Interviewer:

All right. So this is Emily Reinl. I'm here with Rosemary who is going to tell us a story, so go ahead.

Rosemary Saber:

All right. My name is Rosemary Madeira Saber. I started working in the New Bedford Free Public Library downtown in 1965 as a participant in what at that time was called the Neighborhood Youth Corps, not to be confused with the Job Corps, which also started in New Bedford at about the same time. The Neighborhood Youth Corps was a program for high school students to get jobs in the community. I was 15-years-old and was hired as a page, I'll explain this a little bit further on. All of the Youth Corps, young people had a counselor who we checked in with monthly to be sure we were working well in our job assignment and as Mrs. Waters, who was my counselor, would ask, are you doing things personally to advance yourself?

She would always ask about plays seen, books read or special events that we may have attended. That was very important because it kept us thinking about our responsibility to the job, but also our responsibility to our development. I would later learn that Mrs. Waters was the mother of Herbert Waters, a decorated military man from New Bedford and who later became the principal of the Carney Academy. As a page, and I was one of several, our jobs were to fetch material from the library stacks, which were close to the public at that time, and to return that same material to its proper place.

It was a never ending process of working in the stacks, gathering requested material, returning same to its place and reading the shelves. This was the process of making sure all of the material was in its proper place. Because if an item was put in the wrong place, it literally could be lost forever. In the '60s and early '70s, New Bedford High School was still located at the top of William Street on County, what is now the Paul Rodrigues Administration Building.

Also on County Street a little bit south was the Swain School of Design. This was an outstanding art school. New Bedford Institute of Technology was located on Purchase Street a little further north from the downtown. All of these schools used the library, the reference department at the library for materials, and we have to remember that at that time there was no internet, so everyone depended on the print material basically at the library. The library had a room devoted to art, a room devoted to business and technology, as well as a reference department staffed by several very knowledgeable reference librarians.

Rooms were also devoted to children's services as well as pleasure reading and audiovisual material. And basically at that time, audiovisual meant records and maybe some microfiche and so on. The genealogy department was always there and always a very integral part of the library system. The main library on Pleasant Street was the repository for everything students needed to do their research. Because the stacks were closed, access to much of the material was obtained by way of call slips.

These would be filled out from information obtained in the card catalog, probably words that many young people are not even familiar with anymore. The card catalog was a series of draws of cards containing information on all of the items in the library. These call slips, which identified books, periodicals, pamphlets, what have you, would be presented to a librarian at the main desk. They would then assign the slips to the pages, the young women and men who would retrieve the items from the stacks.

This procedure went on regularly, particularly in the afternoons and in the evenings when students were out of school. Saturdays were nonstop retrieval of materials, return of materials to the stacks and subsequent shelf reading to make sure everything was in proper order. A dumbwaiter assisted the pages in moving vast amounts



of material up and down to the five levels of the library. It was a wonderful job I remember fondly and I went on for a career in libraries, but this was the way it was done 50 years ago. Thank you.

Interviewer:

You're welcome. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for telling the story. Can I ask, so was the public library at that time the same building that it's in now?

Rosemary Saber:

Yes, it is.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Rosemary Saber:

But at that time, the stacks were closed to the public and that was the reason for the pages. And the numbers, the use was tremendous in those days because it really was access to material, pleasure reading, research, genealogy, art, technology, all of that. And it was an old collection, so there was a lot of richness there to be had.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Great. Do you still work in the New Bedford Library system?

Rosemary Saber:

No, no. I'm retired. I'm a library user now. Very interested still in libraries. I went on to work in New Bedford. I continued through various levels. I went on to work in the Dartmouth system and became the director there, and then came back to New Bedford as director in New Bedford in 1985, '86, but now I'm retired.

Interviewer:

Wonderful. Any exciting things that you do in your retirement now besides visiting the library?

Rosemary Saber:

I serve on a board of the Association for the Relief of Aged Women.

Interviewer:

Oh yeah. Great.

Rosemary Saber:

Are you familiar with that group?

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm.

Rosemary Saber:

And we assist primarily single elderly women financially in need, and we help them in various ways. It's the last approach on several levels of service that are available. When something can't be obtained from another resource, that's where we kick in. So we can do all kinds of things, fix automobiles, hearing aids, cable TV, things



that are important that sometimes get neglected by other agencies and so on.

Interviewer:

Fantastic.

Rosemary Saber:

And that's a private foundation, so the board makes all the sessions. Actually a lot of our very early material, because ARAW, as it's known, goes back 150 years, 157, I think. A lot of our older documents are here at the Whaling Museum.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Great. Thank you. Any final things you want to add before we stop the recording?

Rosemary Saber:

Well, I think the role of libraries has changed a great deal with the internet and information being so readily available on so many different levels. But I think the thing that libraries really need to focus on is literacy, because that's sort of the common denominator. You can't even read the computer if you can't read. And I think we need to start with tremendous emphasis being placed on the very young, not even waiting until they get into school. But whatever programs can start sparking that interest in reading, I think that really needs to be the focus.

Because now in addition to that, with all of the banning of books, it seems like everything is in jeopardy. So without an informed population, we're going to be losing more and more. And if people don't realize the value of the written word, it can be taken away. So I think that's the thing that bothers me most about today. And then with COVID, a lot of people got out of the habit of using libraries because they were closed. And to me it's almost like a reintroduction of libraries back to the community and however you have to do it, you have to almost reeducate.

Interviewer:

Thank you.

Rosemary Saber:

You're very welcome.