

RUTH BRITTON
Interviewed in the School of Social Work,
University of Southern California
by John Milner
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ABSTRACT:

Long the social work librarian at the University of Southern California, recently-retired Mrs. Britton was interviewed by John Milner, Professor Emeritus, School of Social Work. Their employment in the School of Social Work overlapped. Mrs. Britton, with an undergraduate degree in social work and a graduate degree in library science, was with the School's library from the time it was started. She describes here its course. She also was a founder of the California Social Welfare Archives, the mission of which is to gather, preserve, and make accessible historical materials—including oral history interviews—that disclose the development of health and welfare in California. How that organization developed is described by Mrs. Britton.

(1/26/01) MILNER: Ruth, it's delightful to have you here to record something of your history with our School and your life's work as a librarian. I've been trying a long time to get an appointment with you, and you've been such a busy lady all these years. I'm happy that you have time to do this today. What year did you come to USC as a librarian?

BRITTON: John, I came first to USC as a librarian in the late 1950s. I was here for about a year-and-a half. My son was born in 1960, and I came back to work in 1971. When I worked here early on, I worked for Hazel Rea, who was Assistant Librarian, and I was one of the reference librarians. Down the years, I used to come in during the summer and say "hello." When I came in in 1970, Dr. Lewis Stieg, the University Librarian, said, "Aren't you ready to come back to work?" I hadn't really thought about it, but we agreed that if I came back, I wouldn't have to come back full time. They were aware at that time that I did have an undergraduate degree in social work from the

University of Oklahoma as well as my library degree from the University of Illinois. Plans were in the works to separate the social work from the main library to establish, as originally planned, a library that would serve the School of Social Work and the School of Library Science. Those plans fell on bad days, because the Dean of the School of Library Science wanted to build her own building and have a separate library. In September of 1971, working half time, I moved the social work reserve book collection, with a few journals, into the newly occupied building that the School of Social Work would be using. It had been the School of Law, and there was a space that had been the Law Library. I came equipped with somewhat less than 1,000 books and about 150 journal subscriptions – maybe 100. I don't remember exactly. I was greeted with open arms by faculty and students of the School, and it soon became apparent that that library was there to stay and to grow. It was a unique experience and a wonderful one for a returning librarian. The faculty was wonderful. They mostly occupied offices in an area that surrounded the library so that interaction between faculty, librarian, and students, was really busy. The need for more books was pretty obvious.

MILNER: That was a pretty scant collection at the time you took over.

BRITTON: It was. Original plans were that it would be a contemporary book collection and that older materials would be housed in Doheny Library. It soon became apparent that wasn't what the School wanted. Collections were transferred out of Doheny, somewhat reluctantly, and with the generosity of faculty and alumni and a really limited book budget, the collection began to grow. In early years, it grew at about the rate of 1,000 volumes a year. Looking at an annual report – in the early days, I didn't do annual

reports but looking at an annual report for 1977, the collection was estimated at 10,000 volumes, growing from approximately 900 in September, 1971.

MILNER: That's a pretty rapid growth.

BRITTON: As a matter of fact, the capacity of the room, the way it was constructed, was to house about 10,000 volumes, and it was getting pretty full. Those early days were special ones. The students were so happy to have the School in its new building and the library right there, and a librarian to talk to them about what they wanted and needed. Circulation was impressive. In 1976-77, with our 10,000-volume book collection, our circulation totaled 22,000 times. This did include use of two-hour and limited circulation reserves.

MILNER: That's an active library.

BRITTON: It was an active library, and it was pretty full. We had a balcony that was accessible by a strange old circular staircase. The doctoral students had desks on the balcony. However, a lot of them sat, during quiet times, in the main library, back by the journal stacks, reading the journals.

MILNER: Now is that called the Arlien Johnson Library?

BRITTON: I think it was not called the Arlien Johnson Library until we moved into the Montgomery Ross Fisher Building, was it?

MILNER: Yes, I think her name was on the door. Maybe at the time she retired.

BRITTON: Well, she was gone before the library came, but there was no doubt, from day one, that it would be the Arlien Johnson Social Work Library. She did come down to see it.

MILNER: Yes, yes, she came down from Oregon.

BRITTON: She did come down from Oregon. It was my very great pleasure when my son was in school at Reed, to visit Arlien and her sister there.

MILNER: I remember that.

BRITTON: Yes, they were happy times. The faculty had generally taught together for a long time. There was a closeness that was special. I could almost go around the corridor and name every office, the way it was occupied. In addition to teaching together, I think the faculty socialized together. It was a special world for faculty and for the students. At that time, the School took about 90 masters students a year. The doctoral program was somewhat bigger then. As I remember, we took 10 to 15.

MILNER: I think that's right.

BRITTON: And again, those were very interactive days. The space was compact, and you interacted whether you really wanted to or not. (Laughter) The library was staffed by a half-time librarian (me), and I usually had four to five student assistants who did the desk work and the busy work. It worked very well.

One very special part of being a social work librarian was the fact that there was a national network of librarians who served separate social work libraries. It was a small group. There weren't that many: about ten or twelve universities that did maintain separate social work libraries. Those librarians met every year at the Council on Social Work Education and talked about what their problems were and how they were solving them. It was an interactive activity, and a special one.

MILNER: What were the most common problems that came out, mostly?

BRITTON: One early and continuing problem that we really couldn't solve is how did we meet the reading needs, the required reading needs of students? In the early days, the

students wanted multiple copies of books they could take home. They wanted photocopying available at low or no cost. They couldn't really understand why we couldn't have 10 or 12 copies of a book that a hundred students had to read. This was a national problem. It diminished somewhat with the arrival on the scene with copy shops like Kinko's and mass photo copying on the part of the students, which actually is a violation of copyright law. The library had no part of that. It was a real problem, building a collection here to meet the needs of the students. One of the things that came up in every library that I knew was the need for current and probably expendable information that you could get at little or no cost, use for a year or two, and then lose. The solution to this was a pamphlet file. We did create a pamphlet file. It grew and grew and grew. There was no security system. Our mortality rate was pretty high, and we were kept busy replacing things that took a walk. But one thing about the Social Work students was that even down at the end, when they were through with them, they brought them back. It also took a lot of time, and time for a librarian who worked only half time, was a real problem.

Maurie Hamovich was the Dean when I came.

MILNER: When you took over the library?

BRITTON: Yes, Maurie was the Dean, and the faculty was very active in expressing their opinions of what the library needed. I can't remember exactly when the position of Social Work Librarian went from half time to full time. It went to full time without pay for a while before it ...

MILNER: Sounds like USC.

BRITTON: (Laughing) It got contracted for full-time work, but that was partly my problem, because as my children got bigger, they got more independent. The problem that was pretty prevalent in those days was meeting the needs of evening students. As time went by, more and more students wanted to work during the day, take evening classes, and have the library available to them. Early on, we went home at 5:00 p.m., about the time they were arriving. We discovered that didn't meet their needs and ended up with a student on duty, keeping the library open until after the break in their classes. I think it was 8:00 p.m. That was a kind of a solution to that problem, but I think all libraries were encountering that. Evening education was growing, growing, growing. The cost of graduate school and the maturity of the students made it necessary that they work.

One of the real pleasures of those early days was working with the doctoral students. They were a core group and occasionally you got one that didn't fit in too well. But they interacted together very well. They developed close relationships with the faculty and the librarian. There was a real challenge and a pleasure to see how you could meet their needs as they pursued their studies and did their research. They were all special people. Some of them are still around on the faculty and in positions of teaching all over the United States and internationally, I guess. There's David Freeman in Canada and there's Juan Cabrillo. He's in Puerto Rico, teaching.

MILNER: Oh, is that right? I didn't know.

BRITTON: Not very long ago, when Sam Taylor retired, we were trying to track down a doctoral student who was in Canada, and what we discovered – oh gosh, am I going to forget his name – we discovered he was teaching there. I sent him an e-mail and

suggested that he write Sam a letter, and I was surprised to learn that he came to Sam's retirement party.

MILNER: Oh, is that right?

BRITTON: Sam was the chair of his dissertation. They were really all kinds of backgrounds: Cal State, Los Angeles is the home of a number of those early doctoral graduates, and a number of them went into clinical practice.

MILNER: Some of them were from San Diego State.

BRITTON: San Diego State, yes. It was great – Hawaii.

MILNER: Yes, Hawaii. Now, after Maurie Hamovich retired as Dean, what happened to the library in the next...

BRITTON: Well, Bob Roberts was an enthusiastic library supporter. He'd been a good friend from the day that I came.

MILNER: He was the next Dean?

BRITTON: Yes, he had been Chair of the Doctoral Program and was a really vocal supporter of the library. I'm sure he'd remember. It was actually easy to walk into his office and say, "Bob, this is what the library needs. How are we going to get it?" His door was always open.

MILNER: He valued the library.

BRITTON: Yes, he valued the library, and Maurie and Bob are both – were personal friends. The sadness of recent years is to lose some of these people who were special: Elizabeth McBroom, Carl Schafer, Maurie Hamovich, Lola Selby.

MILNER: All faculty members who are gone now.

BRITTON: And the only person still remaining on the faculty who was on the faculty when I came is Barbara Solomon, who is, I think, not going to be at the School for long.

MILNER: Lola Selby...

BRITTON: Lola Selby, yes, and Genevieve Carter.

MILNER: Genevieve Carter is gone.

BRITTON: Malcolm Stinson was still there my first year. I think he was there only a year, and then he retired.

MILNER: Josephine DePaola is gone.

BRITTON: Josephine DePaola – and a lot of the retired faculty were so closely aligned with the School, that it was hard to identify...

MILNER: Yes, that's right.

BRITTON: ...so, it's a sadness that comes with 30 years of library service. The library did exist for 28 to 30 years; times really changed during that time.

MILNER: Who was the new Dean after Bob Roberts?

BRITTON: Rino Patti.

MILNER: Rino Patti, and what happened after his...

BRITTON: He was one of our doctoral graduates and also was a good friend to the library. The fourth Dean in my tour of duty is Marilyn Flynn, who is currently in office. The library, down through these years, has changed beyond anybody's imagination.

MILNER: Yes. Tell about that change.

BRITTON: We had books, journals, pamphlets, card catalogues, printed indexes. We ordered books by typing our orders on slips of paper, and they went through a rather elaborate process of that kind. Photocopy machines did exist; computers, not yet,

although they were beginning to enter the scene. The first use in our library that was made of computers was to track the circulation of books. That was an arduous task. Actually, Social Work, with a good array of students, was one of the lucky libraries that quickly bar-coded all of our books. The bar code is a way of life now, but it didn't come along until, really, the 1980s. Each book had to be bar coded and linked in an online catalogue, so that when it circulated, all you had to do with your trusty wand was to run it over the bar code of the library card, then run it over the bar code of the book, and you were in business. No more hand stamping, hand signing, discharging with a card and card filing. It was a period of ups and downs, but I think we were all glad to have that chore under control. Early on, people who devised computers began to say, "What about those card catalogues? Can't we put it all on computer?" Patrons didn't like it, librarians weren't too happy with it, but the computer era had begun. All the new books that came into the library were part of an online catalogue. Mostly, we still filed our catalogue cards, maintained a shelf list, which was a card record of all the books by call number, and let the computer second this operation.

I think that there are a lot of patrons out there who have never really accepted the demise of a card catalogue as a way to find a book. When I eliminated our card catalogue, the first thing you did when you faced the problem of no more card catalogue is to stop filing in it. That meant that you could either look in the card catalogue for older material or go to the online record for newer material. It brought on something called a recon. But, what we did at USC, rather late in the day, was to send our shelf list off to one of the Asian countries - and I don't remember which one - where they manually fed the information in our shelf list, online. Then once it was done, it was incorporated into

our card catalogue, and the card catalogue was in a sense, obsolete. It was sad to see it go. Some of us old timers, generally, still maintained our shelf list. I did until the day that the Social Work Library moved back into the Central Library Collection. That's the way it was.

In retrofitting Doheny – in restoring the facade of the library, they have these rather elegant-looking, built-in old card catalogue units which will remain in place. What they'll have in them, I really can't say, but in a sense, most libraries these days have only online records of their holdings. The files are backed up so that if we had massive shutdowns, we can always bring them back up when the power comes on again. I don't think we ever really thought ahead to the energy crisis that exists now. Card catalogues, online, circulation, online. What about all those indexes that people had to search for all the time? What about going back in time and cite abstracts? Some of the older copies, the paper was wearing out from sweating doctoral graduate student hands, and it took a lot of time. What about tracing the history of happenings in the New York Times? All those indexes. Eager entrepreneurs undertook to bring all of those things on line. Now, as the library operates, there are few, if any, indexes that still have to be searched by hand.

There's a real victim of online activity in the opinion of some of us. The thing that I notice that doesn't happen as often is serendipitous finding. As you scan the printed page, looking for the heading that you think you want, a column or two away is something that really meets your need, that you hadn't known that you had wanted. However, the ease of using online indexes has really taken over, and now, if you're doing a bibliography, you go to a computer.

MILNER: In our School, the Social Work Library has moved a number of times. Initially, it was a collection of books in the Central Library. The School was located in the attic of the Administration Building. The School moved to the old Law Building. You helped establish the library there as an independent library from the Central Library. Then the School moved again to a building that was built for a Library Science School, and that School was discontinued by the University, and the School of Social Work didn't. What happened that was different here?

BRITTON: From overcrowded facilities, with no room for students to sit and study, a lot of noise around in the halls, we went to a beautifully-designed library in the Montgomery Ross Fisher Building. Nobody but the School of Library Science would have put the library on the first floor and the School on the second two floors. But that's what Martha Boaz, the Dean of the Library School had done. The library was the size of the building; I can't remember the square footage, but it was a substantial increase.

MILNER: A beautiful library.

BRITTON: The seating capacity increased substantially. Everything was ready for our collection to grow and be used. When we moved in, we moved our book collection, we moved our journals, we managed to retrieve a few long runs of older journals out of Doheny, and we had a great reference area. We had a security system, which also involved a manual activity. In addition to bar-coding our books, we had to security strip them so they'd ring the bell if...

MILNER: Ripping them off!

BRITTON: It did diminish the rate of loss, which has always been a problem.

MILNER: Yes, I always heard that the greatest loss of the University libraries were in the School of Religion and the School of Social Work.

BRITTON: The Social Work students were acquisitive about the material that they needed, yes. They were impatient with short loan periods. They hated two-hour books, which is what happened when we had one copy of a book that 20 to 40 students had to read. Early on, they rang the bell a lot as they tried to get away. The security system was a great thing for us. For being enclosed in an area with a corridor all around, we had windows all around, and that was nice. It was light, it was cheerful, and soon became, in addition to the information center, the social center of the School. Students met in the library.

MILNER: It was the center of the School, really.

BRITTON: It was the center of the School. It had been, before, but it was even more so.

MILNER: Now you've already mentioned that after this wonderful ideal library, something else has happened. The books have been moved to the Central Library again, where they began.

BRITTON: The cost of operating our complicated library system with lots of service units and increasing, unbelievable cost of providing online facilities caused library administrations to look at how they might save money. One way that that could be done is to decrease the number of service units. For a long time, discussions of merging libraries occurred. It had never occurred to me that the Social Work Library would be early tabbed for this. We were a heavily used unit that operated at really low cost. We were not heavily staffed: I used a lot of students. I thought we were fine. The University, as indexes got to be online, spent a lot of money on computerizing its

libraries. Students could access these indexes from their computers at home. More and more students had computers. So, it was decided that the Social Work Library and the Education Library, both part of a heavy social science component, would be integrated into the Central Library. This decision was very unpopular with each of the School's decision. There was right and wrong, both ways. I think the use of the library has certainly diminished with the integration of collections. Unfortunately, as they integrated, they encountered other problems, and were forced to do a retrofit in Doheny Library. So, in addition to merging our collections, we put them into storage. The plan for storage worked very well, considering. But, when you asked for a book, it took you a day to get it. You can't go to the shelf and browse in an area and pick the books you want without asking for a lot and going through them at another site. It's the wave of the future. USC is not alone in this.

An early pioneer emerging in library operations was Columbia, which has, or had what was probably the classic social work collection.

MILNER: It was the Russell Sage Foundation Library?

BRITTON: Yes, it was.

MILNER: It's the one I used as a student.

BRITTON: It was moved into an area with other social science collections. While it maintained a somewhat separate identity, a lot of the older materials remained behind in storage. It was a thing that was happening in more than one place: Ohio State Social Work Library was merged with several others. At UCLA, they took the Education Psychology Library and didn't actually merge it, but they sent it off in two directions, with Education going to the Central Library and Psychology going to the Bio-Med

Library. Libraries all over the country were looking at doing this, and the only thing that was doable, once a decision was made, was to make it as painless as possible.

MILNER: Mergers in libraries are like so many mergers in business.

BRITTON: Yes, mergers are a way of cutting manpower and operating costs, and that's what happened.

MILNER: Ruth, where did you take your library training?

BRITTON: I took my library school training at University of Illinois, at Champaign, Urbana. It was one of the top library schools in the country at that time, and still is. It was a two-year program, actually, what they call a six-year masters. I stayed around a little while after as what you'd call it a teaching assistant. In the school, I worked for the teacher who taught cataloging. Then I went back home and worked at Oklahoma City University, a private Methodist university.

MILNER: That was your home state?

BRITTON: That was my hometown. Yes, I went home and was there for a while. Then I came to Los Angeles in the late 1950s and came to USC. Dr. Stieg, who had been the head of the Library School when I was at Illinois, was the librarian at USC.

MILNER: I remember him well.

BRITTON: I met him in Kansas City at ALA (American Library Association). He said, "Why don't you come out and work for me?" I was having a few romance problems at home then, and I was ready to make a change. So that's what I did. I came out to Los Angeles and began to work at USC.

(4/29/01) MILNER: Ruth, we waited between interviews for quite a while. Let's pick up on some of the things we haven't covered. One thing is that I know you've been asked to

do many things besides the requirements of your regular job. One of them has to do with the California program, gaining the history of social work in our state. I know you've been very active in that program. Tell me about that.

BRITTON: It was a real delight when it began. At that time, it was a statewide operation. George Nickel was the coordinator, and we had basically Berkeley and USC as northern and southern collection points. Early meetings were in several parts of the State. George and I flew up to Berkeley to meet with Jim Leiby, Marjorie Gray, and the librarian at the Bancroft who was going to be handling our collections there. Once we went to San Diego, where we met at the home of Gene McFall, who was an active social worker there on our board. It was very much a statewide thing with lots of interest in San Francisco, lots of interest in San Jose. Going through the minutes of those early days, you really got a look at the movers and shakers in social welfare history in California from the '30s up through the '70s. George Nickel was a remarkable man, and he tended to draw into the Board of the Archives people who had been movers and shakers. Meetings were a delight. It was interesting to talk to the people. Collections came in slowly, but tended to be rather heavily focused. For example, Gene McFall in San Diego got together a group of early school social workers in that area, most of whom were living at that time in retirement. They put together a remarkable collection, reflecting the way a school of social work functioned in the '30s and the '40s; prime collection material, I think. Northern California ran into some problems. The Bancroft Library attracts a remarkable lot of collections. They, early on, came to the idea that they couldn't really take in and process the collections that might have been available. As

time went by, the northern California collecting diminished considerably, but southern California continued.

The Board also changed drastically. It was a very senior board. The natural attrition of old age and the appeal of retirement communities tended to take people away. But our collections have grown, and we do have some remarkable collections. Family Service of Los Angeles is one very large collection. Another agency, which we have in our collections, is All Nations Foundation. It was started by G. Bromley Oxnam.

One very interesting thing that we have quite a lot on is the licensing of social workers in California. You remember that Lola Selby was consistently a member of the State Board?

MILNER: That's right.

BRITTON: She saved all of her minutes and all of her papers.

MILNER: Is that right? I didn't know that.

BRITTON: Yes. So we do have a prime lot of material about how we licensed social workers in California.

MILNER: I remember Maurie Ostomel was very active.

BRITTON: Maurie Ostomel was very active in that. As you look back, we're very pleased with the collections that we had, and worry about some that we never really got around to getting. We're still on the track of El Centro, which was a very pioneer USC, etc., Hispanic community operation in the '70s. It was a pioneer in that sort of thing. Special Service for Groups was incredibly unique.

MILNER: I was on that board for a long time.

BRITTON: Were you?

MILNER: Yes.

BRITTON: What I'd like to do, at some point in time, is get together the people who remain, (and it gets to be fewer all the time,) and have a tape recorder going and let people talk about the way they remember SSG. George Nickiwaka is gone, Roy Morales is gone, Paul Chikahasi is gone. Those were the people I always thought of. I have spoken with Herb Hatanaka, the present head of that organization about doing it. But I'd like to get together talk sessions about Special Service for Groups and about El Centro. Incidentally, Andy Dieppa has offered to write a paper about his experience there.

MILNER: Very good.

BRITTON: But, I'm not quite sure where he is now.

MILNER: I have no idea.

BRITTON: I somehow have a feeling that he's no longer at the school in New Mexico.

MILNER: There's been a number of name changes for the archives over the years. I wonder what is today's official name.

BRITTON: It's now the California Social Welfare Archives. We did a lot of debating about social welfare and social work and you still see it come up wrong on a lot of things, but it's the California Social Welfare Archives. One very important part of our collections, John, is our oral histories. We have in the neighborhood of 200 now, and it's growing. We are constantly reminded that we got some just in time, or that we never got around to talking to some people who no longer are available. It's a very important part of our collections.

Another thing that's going down the road now is the California Social Welfare Hall of Distinction. It will be under the aegis of the California Social Welfare Archives,

but it will have a committee, statewide, that will look at setting up a way of remembering the people who have, in the past, made significant contributions to California social work. Lots of discussion about the criteria. One thing that's talked about quite a lot is whether we should include living people, or have only those who are dead. (Laughter) Another is how far we should go in recognizing people who made significant contributions, who are not social workers. The general idea, at this point, is to start way back when, and get the people who, the longer we ignore them, will be harder to retrieve. That is probably where this operation will begin. There's also a discussion of setting it up on a kiosk, or putting it on the web. Again, these are things that generate a certain difference of opinions. That makes the work slower.

MILNER: Do you continue to be active in this?

BRITTON: As far as I know, I have no plans to stop.

MILNER: Excellent. You've been a very important part of it.

BRITTON: I certainly have been a watcher for a long time.

MILNER: You certainly have. Where will the archives be housed?

BRITTON: They'll be part of the Regional History and Culture Center here at USC. As soon as space is available, the processed archives will be housed there. That may be very soon. It's important that we do that. Working with archives is a very specialized profession. We've had a couple of trained archivists working on our materials, and we've certainly become aware of the fact that they know what to do, and the rest of us don't. USC is quite interested in becoming – again there's a lot of competition to collect certainly Los Angeles history. The Urban Archives at Northridge is one particular area. USC has one. Loyola, very interestingly, is moving into that field. A lot of organizations

are setting up their own historical collections. But the important thing is not where they are housed, but how can people find out where they are and get to use them at the point of need. We would like to start exploring that.

The NASW California Chapter Archives are housed at Berkeley in the Bancroft Library, and they regularly go there. That's an important thing to know.

MILNER: California has had a number of national and regional conferences on social welfare over the years. Did you participate in some of the planning?

BRITTON: I've been an active member for a long time on the Council on Social Work Education Librarians group. That's been a very meaningful experience. There aren't a lot of social work librarians, and when we get together, we have a lot in common. When they meet in California, for example, the librarian (myself) is usually involved in planning for the group. Another group that was very important to me was the Mental Health Librarians group, because a very large part of social work is mental health. That's a small group, probably 20 to 30 librarians, nationally. The meetings are a real experience. I think that in both of those fields, it's important to have national perspective on library collections and support. You always learn a better way to do something that's important to do.

MILNER: At the conferences for social work, like the National Conference or the Child Welfare League of America, the School used to maintain booths to attract new students. I wonder if the library had any part of that.

BRITTON: The library never got involved in that at all. When we had booths at CSWE (the California Social Work Educator), the materials that we had relating to the library were always on display. But the NASW, the Child Welfare League, the Public Welfare

Association, which has a new name which I can never remember, I was never active in them. The School, back in the old days, was always very active in the International Association of Social Workers. Lola Selby, I think, went to every meeting.

MILNER: She was very loyal.

BRITTON: She was very loyal, and that has dropped off.

MILNER: Helen Northen, too.

BRITTON: And Helen Northen. I'm not sure that we have any displays or even attendees. Our alumna, Sue Peck, is always trying to get USC people involved in that, because she's very active with it. However, the School is certainly looking internationally now, and now specifically, at the Pacific Rim countries. We have a lot of graduates over there, and we do get doctoral students regularly from China, Korea, and Japan.

MILNER: India.

BRITTON: India. Some of them go back home, and some of them don't.

MILNER: True. With all the changes in the world's relations and communications, I wonder what you predict the future of library science will be, particularly as it relates to universities.

BRITTON: That's a question a lot of people are asking now, and you get a lot of different answers. There are regularly books coming out on the future of the book. Is it going to be online? What's going to happen to those paper books? Some libraries, when a journal starts to be online, immediately cancel their paper subscriptions. I think that's very unwise. One thing that makes you know how unwise it is is the energy crisis that we're in now, because when the power goes down and the card catalogue is gone, there's

no way to know what your book collection is. We are very careful to always back it up so that we can retrieve it, but it's my impression that in the future, we might wish we had those card catalogues back.

Journals' full-text online are great: it makes them a lot more available and tends to capitalize on the ones you can read online. There's a feeling, "If it's not online, I don't know if I'm going to bother," which is a very dangerous academic point. My impression is there will be paper and online resources for a long time to come. One very angry man now is taking on the discarding of old material that's online and in fragile condition. I think he's picketed several libraries that were getting rid of old files such as journals going back. Probably, the end solution in California is a central place where they're stored and made available at point of need.

Very interestingly, not long ago, I was helping a friend – Jane Asler - with a library problem. She needed a copy of an Appleton Journal article from 1873. Now USC doesn't, apparently, have Appletons. I can remember hearing about it, but I can never remember seeing it. However, there is a service through the University of Michigan that makes it available full text, online, and there you are. Jane was soon reading about the first in-print article about the U.S. Secret Service.

MILNER: Very interesting.

BRITTON: It's expanding the world. But abandoning old ways is, I think, is not the way to go. One of my favorite online resources is the Library of Congress's American Memory Section. It's totally amazing.

MILNER: They published a magazine and then stopped it recently.

BRITTON: Well they probably have it online. But I seem to get e-mails when they put up a new file, and I always hurry to look.

MILNER: You don't think the day will come when we stop teaching children how to read?

BRITTON: They have to read online and off. (Laughter)

MILNER: It could be audio.

BRITTON: Yes, it could be audio, but I hope not.

MILNER: It's an interesting age of change.

BRITTON: It's an age of change and it's hard to know how it's going to go.

MILNER: Where were you raised when you were a child?

BRITTON: I grew up in Oklahoma, born in Oklahoma City. I grew up there, went to the University of Oklahoma as an undergraduate, and that's where I got my Bachelor of Social Work Degree. Then I went on to the University of Illinois to library school. I was there – I got a Bachelor Degree in Library Science, and then I stayed on for an advanced degree, which was an MLS. I was there several years, went back to Oklahoma, worked at Oklahoma City University for a few years, and then came out to USC. I was here a year-and-a-half, got married, stayed home for ten years or so, and then came back about the time they were responding to urgent pleas on the part of the School of Social Work.

MILNER: Yes, we talked about that.

BRITTON: So, there you go.

MILNER: You were raising two children at the same time.

BRITTON: My children were both in grammar school, and when I came to work, I came to work half time. That meant that I got them off to school, came to work and then got home by the time they got home.

MILNER: They finished their education now.

BRITTON: Yes, they have.

MILNER: One is a father?

BRITTON: My son is an attorney and his wife teaches philosophy at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. They have two little girls, ages six and two.

MILNER: That makes you “grandma.”

BRITTON: Yes, that makes me “grandma” twice, and it’s a wonderful thing. My daughter has a cat and a rabbit. (Laughter)

MILNER: And what field is she in?

BRITTON: Well, she’s in outdoor recreation.

MILNER: I knew she was interested in that.

BRITTON: Yes, she’s very active at Rocky Mountain National Park.

MILNER: Did you have brothers and sisters?

BRITTON: I had no brothers and no sisters.

MILNER: You were the only child.

BRITTON: I had a vast array of cousins. Both of my parents came from large families. Both of them came to Oklahoma: my father from Arkansas and my mother from Kansas in the very early 20th Century. That’s where we lived, and my father died there. My mother, after he died, came to California and ended up dying here.

MILNER: This is the way families move; from the East and the South and end up in California. Now, some are moving back.

BRITTON: Both my children are Middle-Westerners now. I just, since I stopped working, started looking at where my family might have come from. My mother's family seems to be pretty easy to trace. My father's family seems to be a little bit harder. They came out of the South, and my father's father died when he was quite small. His family, I really don't know a lot about. I'm going to start – I think I traced one of them back to South Carolina. I have no recent immigrants in my family. They've all been here forever. However, my mother-in-law is of pure Norwegian stock. They all came over in the – probably early, just past the middle of the 19th Century.

MILNER: You say she's 104?

BRITTON: She's 103, headed for 104.

MILNER: And still living in Los Angeles.

BRITTON: Still living in Los Angeles. She's the oldest living ex-Los Angeles City employee.

MILNER: Isn't that interesting?

BRITTON: Yes, she has been for several years. Bill Britton regularly gets letters from them that he has to have notarized that she's still alive. (Laughter)

MILNER: Isn't that interesting?

BRITTON: It's kind of interesting. She's having a little bit of trouble with her health insurance. Los Angeles City, as you may have remembered, was heavily supported by Ross-Loos, which then turned into Cigna, which then, just recently, stopped doing senior patients.

MILNER: You have to pay for that.

BRITTON: Yes. So, she tried to go over to Secure Horizons, and it wouldn't take her. So now the City benefits department has taken over and is giving Bill a hand, trying to get her signed up for Blue Cross.

MILNER: Good, good.

BRITTON: They're very aware of her existence. She worked for the Los Angeles Police Department. She was a secretary there.

MILNER: Very interesting. Can you think of anything else you'd like to add to the interview?

BRITTON: I think we've pretty well covered things, don't you?

MILNER: I think we have.

BRITTON: It's been a very good 30 years for me. The School has been good for me and I think I've been good for the School.

MILNER: Yes, you are considered a real treasure of the School of Social Work by both students and faculty over the years. I know you'll be greatly missed now that you're leaving.

BRITTON: One very interesting thing that seems to be happening - maybe because I'm out and around more than I used to be - but every place I go, there seem to be Social Work Alum there.

MILNER: They all know you.

BRITTON: They say, "I know you; you're the librarian."

MILNER: Yes, everyone would know you.

BRITTON: Yes. It's been very interesting.

MILNER: Wonderful. I appreciate your responses

BRITTON: We can say we've done our duty.

MILNER: Right.