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The Law Library and the Librarian

by Thomas Basham

Carla Stone Witzel, the University of Baltimore law librarian, has a tidy office, containing a desk, a black filing cabinet, and a partially-filled bookcase. The only thing that looks out of place is a pile of brown, cardboard boxes stacked against one wall. In the boxes are old, leather-bound national reporters that are being sold back to the West Publishing Company.

Ms. Witzel's domain is visible through the glass walls of her office, and it is as tidy out there as it is in here. "Out there" is the law library itself, which is open to U. of B. law students a total of 106 hours each week during the school year. "In here", Carla Witzel is talking about how she became a librarian.

"I went to library school at Berkeley. I had gone to undergraduate school there, and at that time there weren't too many jobs around for anyone. There were signs all over Berkeley, 'Scholarships! Go To Library School.' I applied and I got accepted, really without thinking about it. But it turned out very well. I met extremely interesting people, not what you would think librarian types would be."

Carla Witzel could be describing herself. She is a 28-year-old California native who came east with her husband Tom to escape the tight west coast job market and "to see what the rest of the world was like."

"We like to sail, so it was either one coast or the other. New England was too cold for me and the South was too hot for him, so we focused in on Washington and Baltimore. I interviewed and he interviewed and we got jobs out here."

"We moved to Baltimore in September, 1971. We spent our first couple



photo by Tom Basham

of months here camping in Patapsco Park, because we couldn't find a home for us and our dog." The Witzels now live in a Bolton Hill apartment. Three years ago they purchased a 17-foot Thistle class sailboat.

"We try to sail every weekend if we can. I think we're pretty adventurous because it's an open boat and we camp-out in it. We've gotten caught in the rain a couple of times."

Carla's first job in Maryland was as a cataloguer, and later head cataloguer, for the library at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Then, in November, 1974, she was hired to assume the duties of law librarian here.

She is tactfully evasive in describing the situation she inherited ("Now I could get into libel and slander," she says with a laugh.). However, when the pre-Witzel

library is described as "pretty much of a mess", her response is, "I would concur."

"Emily Greenberg, associate law librarian, was here first and she really got the ball rolling. Much of it was just straightening things out. A lot of the basics were here, but they were very disorganized. Everyone pitched in and carted books around; I think the poor students have suffered because it seems like we've moved the whole collection. I think we've moved each book at least three or four times. We've made a number of important changes like making the reserve area smaller and getting the treatises out in the open stacks."

"We've been given a heck of a lot of financial support from the University." Carla says the annual library budget is more than \$200,000, which covers ac-

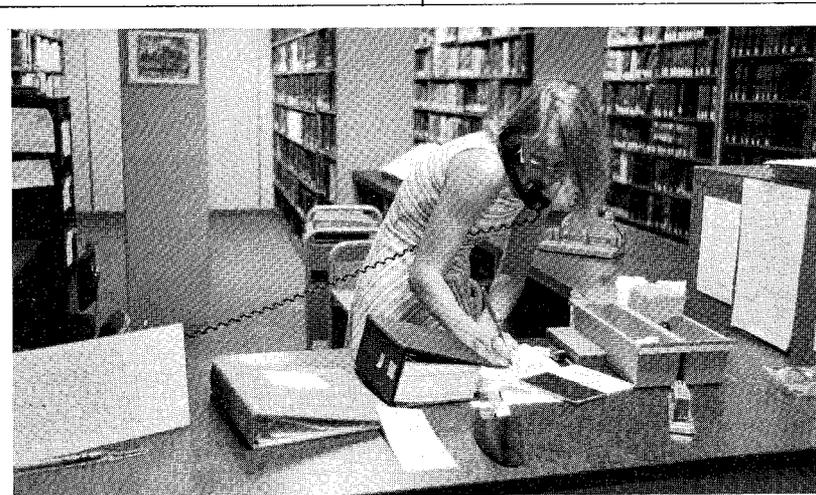


photo by Tom Basham

quisition of books and salary for four professional librarians and a fluctuating roster of from five to ten student assistants.

Some of the surplus has contributed to a 30,000 volume increase in the library's collection over the last two years. According to Ms. Witzel, there are more than 70,000 volumes now available to students, including some 10,000 on microfilm.

"I spend a lot of time in collection development, as does the staff—deciding what we need to add to the collection and getting input from the faculty and students. Law students, at least law students here, make their wishes known. All I can say is I hope they keep doing that, because it helps us. That's our job, and the more communication we get, the better we are able to meet other people's needs."

Meeting people's needs is the library's goal. "This year we have a number of exciting events planned," Carla notes. "It's sort of our reward to ourselves, planning fun things."

One of the fun things is a law film festival. Three films, "**Anatomy of a Murder**," "**Twelve Angry Men**," and "**To Kill a Mockingbird**" have already been screened. Yet to come are such movies as "**Judgment at Nuremberg**" and two Frederick Wiseman documentaries, "**Law and Order**" and "**Juvenile Court**." Panel discussions led by faculty members and members of the legal community in Maryland will follow some of the films. The movies are shown free on Saturday nights in the Langsdale Library auditorium.

"I thought of it," she says, with a touch of surprise in her voice. "I was looking through some brochures. I like movies and these movies are amazingly inexpensive to rent."

"This year is going to be, I guess you could facetiously call it, 'The Year of Improved Service.' The first year was sort of a year of cleanup and getting the collection organized in some logical fashion. Year two was the year of tremendous growth. This year we're going to try to provide the faculty with more service, the students with more service, and in general meet the service goals of libraries."

Ms. Witzel contemplates copying and book delivery service for the faculty. A monthly list of library acquisitions will be compiled and published. The professional librarians now stay on duty until 10:00 p.m. to better serve evening students.

Keeping the students and faculty abreast of the developments in computerized research, the law library hosted a demonstration of Lexis, a computerized law search system, on September 23rd and 24th. Following that, on September 30th, representatives of the publisher came to the law library to explain the use of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and the Federal Register.

While directing the re-organization and expansion of the law school's library, Ms. Witzel attended school herself. Last spring she added a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Maryland School of Law to her Masters of Library Science. She graduated "Order of the Coif" and took the Maryland Bar Examination this past July.

Did she feel divided loyalties while attending Maryland? She laughs. "I think I had the best of all possible worlds. It was really interesting, because I got to know my teachers there as both a fellow faculty member and as a student. Of course working with law students gave me a far more philosophical attitude toward my own law school career, . . . which I lost when it came close to taking the bar. But after I saw people getting nervous here, it was hard for me to get into that. It seemed to me that they were wasting a lot of energy worrying and that they were doing a lot more suffering than they needed to do."

Her experience has also taught her something about how to do legal research. "The first key is being curious" she says. "Legal material is so well indexed, that it's really a joy to do research." She advises getting to know the material. "For example, when you have to use a tax service, sit down for ten minutes and read the 'How to Use This Service' section and sort of methodically go through it. When your research takes you to, say, A.L.R., or to anything, spend a few moments browsing through it and seeing how it's set up. I think that's the type of

stuff you will remember."

While the University of Baltimore law librarian is planning the future of the library, she is also thinking about her own future. Tax law interests her. "There's a lot of creative things that could be done with the tax system. It's an area that you can kind of get a handle on, and I like that." But she's not certain she will practice law. "If I don't practice now, I probably never will, so of course I'm considering the idea."

In any event, Carla has an ace in the hole should she turn away from the law and its libraries. She can type. "I do my own typing, because we don't have sufficient clerical help. Not that I mind it. I'm nimble on the fingers. I think I could get a pretty good typist job."

To fully appreciate the difference in the law library during the past few years, ask any fourth year law student or any member of last year's graduating class. They will be happy to extol the virtues of Carla and her staff. Oh, there is one other thing in Carla's office. It's an engraved plaque, titled "Special Service Award", presented to her by the Student Bar Association last spring for her accomplishments. As noted at the time of the presentation, the award was the students' expression of thanks to Carla for "turning chaos into order." Anyone wishing to interview her for that typing job is going to have to first get by a thousand law students.

