



A Profile of Rebecca 'Becky' Lenzini

Your intrepid editors finally caught up with Becky Lenzini in the bar, during the 20th Annual Charleston Conference in November 2000. Over a bottle of red wine, we elicited from Becky the fascinating story of her long involvement and undoubted contributions to the information and serials industry.

Becky's parents were from Virginia and she herself was born in Radford, Virginia, but the family moved to Illinois when she was two. Her father was a chemical engineer and her mother a secretary, who advised her younger daughter to 'do typing at college'. Fortunately, even at an early age, Becky was ambitious and gained a place at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to study French and English, along with an Education Certificate, which qualified her as a teacher. Although she was not originally considering a career in librarianship, Becky earned money as a student working in the serial claims department of the University Library. A little known fact about the University is that the Library was built underground – so that it would not throw shadows on the experimental corn crops which surround it. In this underground bunker Becky worked industriously, sending out claims forms with two-cent stamps and signed with the name of a long dead supervisor! Despite such an inauspicious start Becky went on to gain an MLS in Library Studies in 1977.

At this time, the University Librarian at Illinois was Hugh Atkinson – one of the most influential library directors in the USA – who was particularly interested in the emerging library automation technologies. In 1977 – armed with a

reel of tape, which was purportedly the new IBM library system from Ohio State – he asked for volunteers to work on this new project. Becky volunteered and soon became involved in, or, as she describes it, "cheerleader for", library automation across the whole state of Illinois. By 1978 she was overseeing the photocopying of catalogue cards for the Illinois Union Catalogue of Serials and working alongside Michael Gorman (of AACR2 fame). By this time she had been promoted to Head of Copy Cataloguing, mainly she claims, because she knew nothing about cataloguing. Then she was hired by Dick Rowe at Faxon.

Faxon had never before appointed a librarian in a management role. Becky entered the company as Product Manager for their new Lynx automated library services and by the tender age of 31 had risen to the post of Vice President for Academic Information Services for the entire USA. "Dick gave me lots of opportunities" she says modestly, "I loved the job.... it was terrific". Colleagues at Faxon during the 80s included Gerald Lowell, who went on to become Librarian at UC Berkley, Buzzy Basch and Dan Tonkery – names familiar to many UKSG members. Libraries were really suffering from the escalation in serial subscription prices and library budget cuts and Becky remembers doing 'dog & pony shows' around the country with Jerry Curtis (now with Springer, then Head of Publisher Services for Faxon), advising on strategies for coping with the crisis.

1988 proved to be another turning point in her career. Becky left Faxon and moved the Colorado

Alliance of Research Libraries (CARL). She and Ward Shaw formed a for-profit affiliated corporation called CARL Systems Inc., of which Becky was the President and Ward the CEO. At CARL, Ward Shaw was working on the technical development of the library systems. Interestingly, although Ward was essentially a 'techie', he was particularly interested in information content, and arising out of this interest the original CARL UnCover concept was born. The basic idea of UnCover was to provide a quick and easy method of sharing the contents page information of all serials subscribed to within the Colorado libraries alliance. Information was derived from individual library check-in records and then tiny MARC records were created and linked to all libraries. Requests for articles from libraries were satisfied by a runner system.

CARL UnCover was the first electronic contents page service in the world and interest in it grew very rapidly. Becky joined Ward on the project and they put together a demonstration. Very shortly, libraries from all over the US were signing up to subscribe to the service. One of the best partnerships, brokered in 1993 by John Cox and Dan Tonkery, was with Blackwells. UnCover needed a partner with international scope and Blackwells was able to provide this. Chris Beckett was the Blackwell Project Manager and soon deals were in place around Europe and in Australia. In 1994 UnCover won the Small Business Award in Denver. In 1995 Becky and Ward sold UnCover to Knight Ridder. 18 months later Knight Ridder pulled the plug!

Becky "officially retired" in 1999 but she still maintained her interest in library collection development issues. Her long-standing friendship with Katina Strauch was the catalyst for her next innovation. Becky originally met Katina when she was still at Faxon. Marcia Tuttle had phoned Becky to mention discreetly that one of Becky's representatives had over-stepped the mark somewhat in a presentation to one of the

early Charleston Conferences organised by Katina. Becky immediately picked up the phone and called Katina, whom she had never met before, to apologise. By the end of the phone conversation they had agreed to be roommates at the forthcoming NASIG conference! And the rest is history.... including the infamous 'stage incident' for which Becky will be forever remembered. At one particular Charleston Conference, Becky was on the stage "doing her filler for Katina". During the course of her lively presentation, in a moment of enhanced animation, Becky suddenly overstepped the edge of the stage – plunging to the floor six feet below. Fortunately nothing but her pride was injured.

So, in 1998 she was once again on the phone to Katina who asked her, "what are all the things you want to do that you are not doing?" Enter Becky Lenzini into the world of publishing as President, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of the Charleston Advisor, publishing critical reviews of web products for information professionals.

One might think that such a busy professional life might have overshadowed other aspects of her life – but this is certainly not the case. Becky has two daughters – her eldest, Sarah, studied English and Art History at St Louis University and is now following in Mum's footsteps by seeking a career in publishing. She has just started her first job is as Assistant Editor for Facts & Comparisons, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Kluwer. Anne is 16 – a junior in high school – and an enthusiastic gymnast. Four years ago Becky began yet another business venture – she opened what is now a very successful gymnastic academy. Last year Becky, Anne and group of friends flew off to the Sydney Olympics – the gymnastic events being the highlight of the trip. Becky's other interests are camping and skiing in Colorado, as well as keeping in touch with all her friends in the world wide information profession – of which there are many.

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