

Interviewee: Dr. Fran Miksa

Interviewed by: Shawne Miksa

Part 1

SM: It is November 24, 2012. We are in Columbia, Mississippi, and this is an interview of Dr. Fran Miksa. And just to let you know that this interview is your intellectual property, so you can do with it as you like.

FM: Thank you.

SM: This is also an interview for The Pioneers of Information Science.

FM: I'm not convinced that I'm a pioneer of information science, no matter what Robert Williams might have indicated to you. I've had a bit to do with it, but I have never been an information scientist in any rigorous sense of the word. I have done no mathematical algorithms; I have done a little bit of history related to it, but only very little. On the other hand, I have been very interested in the relationship of information study or information science and the library field. And so, if anything, I guess, I am a person who is important in some way, I suppose, to library and information science.

SM: Okay. Can you just state where and when you were born?

FM: I was born in 1938 in Aurora, Illinois, which was then a little factory town southwest of Chicago, in northern Illinois, and I was one of ten children of my parents, Francis Miksa, my father, and Frances Miksa, my mother.

SM: Both had the same name.

FM: Both had the same name, except for the difference in spelling for gender.

SM: And you were born on September 24th.

FM: September 24th, 1938.

SM: And you had how many siblings?

FM: I had nine siblings. Seven sisters and two brothers.

SM: Do you want to talk at all about your mother and father's background or education?

FM: Just a word. My father was an immigrant to this country at four years of age in the year 1905 from Poland, from Krakow, Poland, or near it. And my mother's parents were from Poland, a different part of Poland, near Poznan, I think it's pronounced now, but they came over in the 1870's and '80's. My father was born in 1901, my mother in 1905; they had minimal education. My mother had eight grades of education. I am not certain how many grades of education my father had. I think it was at least six, maybe eight, but I'm not sure.

SM: What did he do?

FM: He tried several different things. He tried to be a photographer at one time in the 1920's, but he ended up being an electrical worker for the Bell Telephone system in Aurora, Illinois, and he, in fact--they always told me--got the last job before the Depression really deepened right around 1930. Aurora, Illinois, is where I grew up--where I was born--and where I grew up. And he worked there all his life and retired from that company.

SM: What else did he do?

FM: He was a checkers and chess player. He was a checkers champion in Aurora sometime before I was born. He studied a lot, and he learned mathematics on his own, and began answering questions that were submitted to, I think, *Popular Mechanics* or *Mechanics Illustrated*, or something, way back in the 1930's, and as time passed he progressed past the fundamentals of calculus and such, on his own, had no teachers that I know of, and he ended up specializing in problems related to the area now called combinatorics in mathematics, which is a

part of number theory. But he was in that field before it was called that. In the 1940s it was still called mathematical recreations. He ended up doing some publishing in it, partly because he worked with some notable trained mathematicians with whom he could co-author some items, and so he published with them, and partly because he simply got a duplicating machine and published his own stuff privately and sent it out to his friends and to others. His collected works are in what used to be called the John Crerar Library in Chicago because that's where he placed them. That library has since become part of the University of Chicago libraries. , He is listed in the National Union Catalog. But you have to be careful. My father's name and my name are exactly the same. Except for years' difference. Thus, all of the mathematical works under the name Francis L. Miksa are my father's, they are not mine.

SM: Didn't you also place some in the UT [University of Texas] Library?

FM: My mother consented to placing his mathematical papers in the archive of the American Mathematical Association, which is held at the University of Texas at Austin. So his personal papers, his correspondence, his mathematical working papers and everything are at the University of Texas, in that archive. The guide to his collection can be accessed online at the University of Texas Libraries under Francis L. Miksa.

SM: You graduated high school in 1956 and then went on to college.

FM: Yes. I graduated from East High School in Aurora, Illinois, and went on from there to a small college, a very religious, called Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. It was about 22 miles from Aurora, and in fact it was close enough, and the highways were not busy enough, so that at least once or twice I rode my bicycle from Wheaton to Aurora to visit with my parents and with my family.

SM: What did you study?

FM: I majored in more than one thing at college but ended up majoring in English. I got my degree in English literature. I started off with an interest in archaeology, especially archaeology that had to do with the bible called simply biblical archaeology. I went to Wheaton but not as the result of some sort of self-directed, planned effort, but actually almost by accident. When I was in high school I was told by some teachers that I ought to go to college—my grades were pretty good. And some people at my church told me the same. But college was not something that anyone in our family had ever done. And so to go to college, I had to do write letters and everything on my own, but I have no specific memories of it being central and overly important in my mind. . My parents had virtually no notion of what the application process was all about. The director of youth programs at the church to which I belonged actually took me in his car and dropped me off at Wheaton on the day I was supposed to be there. I had applied to other colleges, small colleges, in the Illinois area, but not at any universities. I went to college because others thought it would be a good thing to do and because I went through the process of applying (half-heartedly) but in reality I had no notion of what I was doing, going to college. I had no idea except that you got to read a lot of books and you did studies and things. I had no idea what I was in for.

SM: You graduated in 1960.

FM: Yes, I graduated right on schedule—that is, in the stated four years of a B.A. program. I had a reasonably good education, though in some respects it was very narrow. No one ever advised me to take a broad array of courses in different fields. So, I loaded up on English literature courses and a smattering of courses in others fields that seemed of interest to me—many of them being history of some area, like the history of philosophy, the history of political science, and so on. I did not take many science, mathematics, or social science courses in any

strict sense. I did not participate too much in specific college extra-curricular activities because I had to work (15-20 hours a week) to stay in college. I did, however, participate in a religious youth club endeavor (establishing such clubs in relationship to the student bodies of local suburban high schools), serving as a counselor in one such club for almost all of my four years. In the fourth year of that endeavor, I also met the woman I would marry just after college, Barbara Vincent, who bore my four children over the next decade.

SM: And then what did you do?

FM: I had... Actually, I began a graduate program in English studies at the University of Illinois, in Champaign-Urbana, but I dropped out after a couple of months. I just felt unsure about it, I guess. I had also gotten married just before going to graduate school. With my mind not totally convinced that I wanted to study more English literature, I decided against continuing in that program, and I--my wife and I--moved back to the Chicago area where she resumed working at the hospital where she had been a nurse, and I resumed working at an organization in Wheaton that I had worked part time at, and we stayed there during the next year, 1960-61. I investigated joining the Army because the draft was active again. And I declared my intention to join up and have a choice about my future in the military. In fact, I was in Chicago for my induction physical exam on the day that the World Series was won in 1960; I remember that. But I was really not quite sure what I really wanted to do and so although I was accepted I changed my mind and decided not to pursue enlistment.

College had given me a lot of ideas; it was a very striking place for me. I learned a lot, I think. I learned a lot about myself. We joined a local church in Bellwood, Illinois--it was a Baptist church--and the minister there thought that I might be interested in the ministry, and so we went to the Founder's Day celebration for a theological seminary in Minnesota. The pastor and I drove

up there. And it sort of gave me an impetus to go into the ministry, something I had thought much about while at Wheaton College . At any rate, I ended up accepting an admission slot at the Bethel Theological seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and in August my wife and I moved to Minnesota. By that time we had already had our first child, so we went with the child and all of our earthly possessions in a little U-Haul trailer.

SM: In Minnesota, you weren't at library school there, were you?

FM: Well, I did after a while, also go to library school in Minnesota. But I spent four years at Bethel theological seminary first, graduating from Bethel in 1965. The normal course for a graduate of a theological seminary was of course to become a minister. But, I was not very sure of myself with respect to ministry, and I also had two other options that I could pursue. One was to pursue graduate studies in ancient Near Eastern literature, languages and literature, which I found to be just fascinating. And the second one was to respond to an invitation of the college and the seminary--they were linked --Bethel College and Theological Seminary--and become a librarian for them. In the end, that became the option I chose, because we couldn't afford anything else. I had been accepted for graduate work in the ancient studies field, I mentioned, at several places, but without funding. We could not move, and it'd be difficult to move to move to still another state to go to school--one of them was Harvard, for example, and another was Pennsylvania. It just didn't work.

So, I became a librarian, actually a cataloging librarian, I suppose the way you'd say... an assistant to the cataloger, at Bethel College and Seminary. They agreed to send me to library school, so I began taking classes after I graduated, at the University of Minnesota Library School, which was still open in those days. It was open until sometime later, in the 'seventies. And I did the equivalent of about a year of classes, and during that year I began doing pastoral

work at a small church south of the Twin Cities, and because of the experience decided I really ought to engage in ministry because I had trained for it, and I resigned my position at Bethel College library and applied for a full-time job as a minister in the denomination that that seminary belonged to, which was called the Baptist General Conference. And it didn't work out. I virtually had to get another job while I was waiting, and finally to proceed to get a ministry job, I switched denominations to the American Baptist Convention, and by March of the following year, in '67, I had taken a position at a church about fifty miles south of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. But it was not a good match, didn't work out, and by the fall I realized that this was a mistake for me. At least that church was.

And after a lot of consideration, I changed my mind still one more time in order to go to library school. But instead of going to Illinois, I decided to go to the University of Chicago, where I had always had some interest. I tried to get into the University of Chicago Library School for the fall of '67; it didn't work because I was two weeks late in getting my application in, so I began there in January of 1968. We moved to Chicago on the South Side. Interestingly, while I was going to the University of Chicago Library School for my Master's degree, I became the interim minister at a local church on the South Side of Chicago. And since '68 was rather a dynamic year for racial relations, I was ministering at a church with 250 parishioners, but had half black--African-American--and half white. And it was quite a time to be there, a time of riots and things, in parts of the city of Chicago, a time of great learning and such. I also began the job in that church and began at the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago having already been asked to become the librarian at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Oakbrook, Illinois, after I got done with Chicago classwork and everything. So I was really only in Chicago taking full-time classes from January to the middle of August or something like that, or around August, or July.

Two or three quarters. They gave me a lot of credit for work I had done in theological seminary and in Minnesota library school.

SM: And by then you had three kids and one on the way.

FM: Well, this is true. I did have two more children, and my wife was expecting a fourth. But we moved out to the seminary in 1968, in August, and I was the librarian there for two years. And all that time I was still working on my Master's degree, because Chicago required a thesis, a Master's thesis, and so I did the research on a person that seemed very researchable, Charles Cutter, of cataloging fame. But it was not... I had not intended to go farther than just to do a Master's thesis. It was on his published works, which I found out were all over the map. They were everywhere. A bibliography I did later, and a book on him, suggests that he was just proficient as a writer, just all the time writing.¹

SM: You have a lot in common with him.

FM: Well, I don't know about that. At any rate, I got my Master's degree in...

SM: In 1970?

FM: 1970, in March. And I was sure I was never going to go to school again. I had no intention to. But by a series of events I ended up being offered a Title IIB fellowship at Chicago to work on a doctoral degree, and so I resigned my position as Librarian at Northern Baptist, and I went back to school in the fall of '70, and I spent two more years in classwork at the University of Chicago, and began writing my dissertation, which I really wrote most of while I was at Chicago. I wrote seven of nine chapters, I think that's the way it went.

SM: But you had met Seymour Lubetzky at some point?

¹ *Charles Ammi Cutter: Library Systematizer*. Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1977. 344p. (Edited vol. with critical introduction and bibliography)

FM: Yes, I... the reason my doctoral dissertation is on Charles Cutter... It's a full biography, it's available online if you want to go to my website at Texas, it's available in PDF format chapter by chapter.² The reason I pursued it is because we had occasion at the University of Chicago to hear Seymour Lubetzky; he had been teaching at the University of Illinois for... I think a visiting instructor for a short course or a semester or something, and he came up to Chicago in 1969, I've forgotten the date. It was summer-ish; it was very hot, in fact, so I think it was the summer of '69. And he gave a lecture on aspects of cataloging. He was there because [Ruth Strout Carnovsky] had invited him; they were close friends. And when the lecture was over, she asked if there was anybody who would be--well, maybe it was beforehand-- but she asked if anybody would be available to take him to the airport to fly back to Champaign-Urbana. And I volunteered, and we left after the lecture, at some point. We had plenty of time because we got caught in a traffic jam going out to O'Hare airport, and we talked and talked and talked and talked.

And I told Lubetzky that I had done a Master's thesis on... Well actually, this was '69--this was actually before I had gotten my Master's degree. I told him that I was working on and interested in Charles Cutter, and he encouraged me to write on Charles Cutter because nobody had ever done it in a very rigorous manner. In fact he said the pioneers of cataloging had never had much attention paid to them for doctoral work. I'd forgotten that this was before I had even gotten my Master's degree. So, I think that's what influenced me to first do a Master's thesis on Cutter-- and that's about a hundred pages long--and it's on his published writings.

And then in 1971 I was OK'd for writing a full biography of Cutter for my doctoral work, in which I investigated all the archives I could lay my hands on, to get hold of letters that he had

² *Charles Ammi Cutter: Nineteenth-Century Systematizer of Libraries*. University of Chicago, June 1974. 893p available at <https://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~miksa/dissertation.html>

written, and find out much more about him in terms of what he had written, and finished that eventually in 1974. But I am getting ahead of myself. I went to my first library school job in 1972, in August, at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, as a choice among several options that I had. But, I was not done with my dissertation; I was ABD, as they say. I finished a first draft by the following February of 1973, and then spent six months, or more, reinvestigating some ideas. I had sent the first four chapters, which were the mainly biographical part at that point, to the grandson of Charles Cutter, who was a Supreme Court justice in the state of Massachusetts. And he read them very carefully and sent me back--I have it in my papers somewhere--a 13-page critique of my biographical work on his grandfather. It was numbered on the sides, I believe; it was like a legal brief. And he questioned my use of the phrase 'Boston Brahmin' for Charles Cutter. 'Boston Brahmin' was a very upper-class person in Boston, and he said I had just interpreted that wrong, about his grandfather. So I went back and worked on it; I had to read many more things in the next six months. I rewrote those four chapters because he was right, and I was just in error. I finished a second draft by January of 1974. And it was that draft that I used as a basis for defense of the dissertation, because my advisor, Howard Winger, said, "Well, you have done enough work on this for us to be able to judge it." They were going to have ALA Midwinter in Chicago, so they said, "If you come for Midwinter, we'll have your examination, and then you can type the final copy afterwards." Which is what happened. I went there, I was passed, and I spent the spring teaching and typing. Typing, typing, typing. I couldn't afford, on the salaries they paid then, to have it typed by anybody, so I typed it myself, and it was accepted, and I was graduated in June of 1974, with my Ph.D.

SM: Do you want to take a break?

FM: Yes.

Part 2

SM: Now we're at 1972 where you had just gone to Louisiana State University.

FM: Okay. I think you said previously you wanted some information particularly about my sense of my career.

SM: Yes.

FM: And... before I talk about being at LSU, I wanted to make mention of some things in my background that were very important to me in my maturing, intellectual maturing. I have always had a very strong historical orientation. I've had that from the time I was a young teenager in high school. When I was... I was actually a student assistant, to the high school librarian. We had periods where we could study in the library, and I would read. I never did my homework in the library much, but I sure did read a lot of encyclopedia articles about ancient history, which was fascinating to me. I went to college, and I found my interest in history continued there. I tried to take other coursework in other areas; I had to take a beginning philosophy course, I found it very difficult, but I found that when I took history of things, like the history of philosophy or the history of political science, and such, that just really got my interest going. So I've had this historical interest for many years.

In college, a couple of courses were really important to me, because they suggested to me that one could think about things in a deep rather than simply mundane manner. One of them was a course on the nature of biography, taught by an English professor, Clyde Kilby. I thought writing a biography was just setting down the details of a person's life. Then I learned that all writing of biography is a form of history; it's a person's history. But it's interpretive. It all

depends on how you put your words together and what you see and think about this person, and such.

Probably the most stimulating course I ever took in college was the history of political philosophy, which was a two-semester course, and which was done by a kind of a master teacher—S. Richie Kamm. He just got us talking about all sorts of things. I actually read my first book by Karl Popper in that course-- *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, and we read that in that college course.

When I went to theological seminary, I was most enchanted by the... entranced by the courses that had to do with the history of Christianity, the history of this, the history of that, the history of Christian missions, for example. I was very, very much taken by ancient history as a background to biblical studies, so that's why I wanted to go on to study in the area of ancient Near Eastern languages and literature. By this I mean pre-classical history, things written in cuneiform and in hieroglyphics.

When I got to library school, both at Minnesota and Chicago, every chance I had, I turned topics that were related to particular courses into historical topics. This is besides the history courses that I took at Chicago, on historiography, and other content-driven history courses at the University of Chicago. I just had a difficult time seeing anything without this historical view of it. It always has roots, it always has a background, nothing ever happens in isolation. So I brought that with me to my academic work, both in library school as I got my degrees, and my work as a professional teacher and researcher.

I began teaching at Louisiana State University in 1972 for the fall semester. I had to teach cataloging and classification because, of course, having studied Cutter, they thought I could teach cataloging and classification. That's one of the great jokes, I guess, I have ever

heard, because having written a biography of Cutter didn't mean that I was either interested in, or capable of teaching, cataloging, although I'd been a TA at Chicago in cataloging classes. Oh, I could teach it. But it wasn't my first interest.

My first interest in research was really American library history. And Cutter was just part of that. And it was especially the history of the American library before 1900, from, say, the 1850s to 1900, and, really, the 1870s to 1900, a thirty year period. And I just... I became an expert in it, in some respects. I had, I think, the most entries of any one writer in the *Dictionary of American Library Biography* (I had seven entries). I just spent time working on these matters. When Michael Harris was writing his materials--his groundbreaking revisionist history approaches to American library history-- and Dee Garrison, I ended up writing some critical evaluations of their approaches and such that I published in a volume of writings on the public library that Jane Robbins Carter put together.³ So that article, buried as it was, actually was a critical review of these new trends in American library history. And this went on, from 1972 to the late '70s.

Around 1977 or '78, John Phillip Immroth passed away, and I was asked by Bohdan Wynar if I would be interested in rewriting Immroth's book on the Library of Congress classification. And I said I was, but I got all wrapped up in the history of the Library of Congress classification that I never did get very far on the book, and finally Bohdan and I came to a parting of the ways on the matter; it was quite obvious I wasn't getting the work done. I later published a book on the history of the Library of Congress classification.⁴

³ "The Interpretation of American Library History." *Public Librarianship, a Reader*. Ed. by J. Robbins-Carter, pp. 73-90. Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1982.

⁴ *The Development of Classification at the Library of Congress*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library & Information Science, 1984. 78p. (Its Occasional Papers).

But I was minimally interested in cataloging and classification as an everyday process, sort of on the outside edges looking at such things and much more interested in how it had developed, how its ideas had developed. Around 1977 and '78, I ended up writing, rewriting, the chapter I had written in my dissertation on the nature of subject headings in the dictionary catalog a small work about 120 pages long, and I sent it to ALA to see if they would be interested in publishing it. They were, they put it out for review, and it took a year for it to be reviewed. And a year later, around 1978, I got the answer back. It had been looked at, and the very critical reviews, that said it had to be rewritten,. What was not said very directly was that I had written it as a discovery thing, a report of my discovering of ideas about this subject in the dictionary catalog, especially with respect to Cutter. And so, in a very real sense, it was oriented to me. It wasn't so much a history of subject headings as it was a history of my discovery of subject headings. So it had to be redone.

I started rewriting it, and as... I was essentially going to write about Charles Cutter, and the idea of the dictionary catalog up until around 1900 or so, 1905, 1910, and I spent a lot of time on that, and read more works than I had, even for my dissertation, by a long shot. And then I realized that I had to have at least a chapter that brought it up to the present time.. And in the process of reading, I realized I could not just write a single chapter to bring it up to date, and I ended up writing six more chapters and reading another 200 works, I think, 200 items. And finally published it with ALA in 1983. And it was called *The Subject and the Dictionary Catalog*.⁵

Now that's a historical treatment of an idea, or a set of ideas related to the subject catalog. I don't know that I wrote it very well; I think it had some stylistic problems. It's very

⁵ *The Subject in the Dictionary Catalog from Cutter to the Present*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1983. xiv, 482p.

turgid in places. But on the other hand, it is something that nobody else had ever tried, to write the history of an idea in our field like that. A history of an idea in cataloging, in fact. Everybody had treated cataloging pretty much as a technique, and I was here trying to describe how this was related to original ideas that were going through society in the nineteenth century and such. It took me into the history of education, it took me into the history of classification. It was just a strange journey for me. I published that in 1983, or it was published in 1983, and in 1984 the work on the history of the Library of Congress was also published.

I'm not quite sure what time of the year, but by 1984 I had been asked to join the faculty of the University of Texas, Austin. And by that fall, we had moved over there. I failed to mention that in the process of being at LSU, I had become divorced from my first wife, and four years later, remarried to a local person from Louisiana, Mary [Spohrer], and we are still married now, many years later. And we moved to Texas together. She had been a librarian, but she became a lobbyist, and I guess I count myself very fortunate because I not only had a wonderful wife, but a very competent professional in the realm of lobbying, who taught me a lot about the nature of the political process and everything at the same time. So that actually then provides a dividing point, 1984, when we moved to Texas.

SM: And then from 1984 to about 1992?

FM: Yes. We talked about this earlier, that's a very cohesive unit for me, of time. I wrote, or I presented a paper at an ALA meeting in 1985 that applied some ideas that I had on the nature of information that I had gotten from I cannot think of the name of the man, authored a three-volume set on information...

SM: You want to stop?

Part 3:

SM: So a three-volume...

FM: The name of the author is Fritz Machlup. He had written a work in the '60s on the nature of information in society, and then he followed that up with a longer work in the late '70s and the beginning of the '80s before he died in 1983, on the nature of... he was rewriting it, and it had to do with information in society...and he talked about 'what is information?' and it had a lot of background on that, and I applied that to library history. What I wrote was a rather interesting article, and it got a lot of attention, and such.⁶ And it sort of became a theme for me, trying to apply ideas about information to other things as well.

In the meantime, in 1986, I was selected as a participant in the visiting distinguished scholar program at the Office of Research at OCLC, and I spent, in fact, twelve months there, from the end of July, 1986, to the beginning of August, or the end of July, 1987. I had as my research theme, to study classification comparatively, in more than one discipline. And they liked that topic. And I did in fact start studying classification in anthropology, as worked on in anthropology, and classification in psychology, that is, cognitive studies. And I ran across the fact that much had been done in classification, but in terms of set theory, and finally in classification in biological taxonomy. And then of course there was the history of classification in our own field, which I really didn't know that much about. I ended up writing a rather long work that I submitted to OCLC eventually—but we did not publish what was the beginning of the history of classification in the United States. And it really represented a lot of study on my part, in trying to understand the nature of classification.

⁶ "Machlup's Categories of Knowledge as a Framework for Viewing Library and Information Science History." *Journal of Library History* 20 (Spring 1985): 157-92.

Classification, to me, had always been kind of a difficult, blank... well, it's almost like a black box for me, for a long time. Just classification itself. I started reading some of the things that Ingetraut Dahlberg had been writing, but I had no handles on it. I just could not comprehend what it was really about and how it really affected us. And so there's a sense in which that whole period from '84 to the beginning of the '90s was the history of classification for me. I gave a paper in Japan, for example, and then I gave a paper in '91 at a conference in...

SM: Was it Finland?

FM: No, no. This was a paper in upstate New York, I can't think of the... SUNY at Albany, I believe, or something like that. I gave another paper on Dewey and the historical aspect of Dewey's work on his classification at that time. And I finally gave a paper in Finland in 1991 that had to do with library and information science. And that probably is the point at which I could say I was more interested in library and information science than just library history or anything to do with library history. I've really been "emigrating" in my thoughts.

SM: Going back to when you were at OCLC though; you said you also read the three editions of Ranganathan's...

FM: Well, one of the parts of my study of classification in our own field was to read a substantial number of the works of S.R. Ranganathan. I think we have underplayed some of the lesser-known works that he has written, including his account of his trip to America in 1949 and '50, and also, I think if one... Well, I took his three editions of the Prolegomena, put them side by side, and read them in comparison. If you look at the beginning, the first part of the first edition, for example, you will not... I'm sorry, the first part in the first edition gets carried on to the others, but it gets to be a smaller and smaller portion of the others. The second part of the

first edition was just entirely taken out, and it was replaced by many other things by the time he wrote a second edition in 1957. Those were in 1937, 1957 and 1967. And he really changed and enhanced the content over those years. It was in that study that I determined that... began to realize that Ranganathan's full thought was an accumulation that really flowered in the late 1940s. He wrote things earlier, but he rewrote his ideas and he then discovered documentation in the late '40s on his trips, and he rewrote everything again, and all of that then became grist for his ideas in the '50s, which were the ideas that so excited the people in the classification research group.

As a result of my study of Ranganathan, I started reading classification research group materials. I had actually started to read Classification Research Group (CRG) authors much earlier, actually, when first trying to understand classification, but they didn't make much sense to me at that earlier time. When I went back to them, they did. At any rate, all of this carried on with me all the way through the early '90s. I wrote one work that I gave in the first COLIS conference, Conceptions of Library and Information Science, that was at the University of Tampere, Finland in 1991, that was entitled "Library and Information Science: Two Paradigms," which has gotten a lot of attention, and it was my attempt to see if there in fact was something called library and information science that was a unique thing, a unique combination.⁷ I think I have concluded since that there is no such unique combination, but it really got me involved in trying to understand the nature of information science.

In 1991, I also gave a paper at the Study Conference on Classification and Research that was held in Toronto, I believe. I think that's when it was. And I gave a paper that essentially

⁷ "Library and Information Science: Two Paradigms." Conceptions of Library and Information Science: Historical, Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives. P. Vakkari and Blaise Cronin (eds.), pp. 229-52. London: Taylor Graham, 1992.

was attempting to chart how Ranganathan was approaching... well, it was on the history of classification, I think. I've written at least two or three papers on the history of classification, and if you look at them they're all slightly different, because they're going off in different directions trying to understand the history of that field, of that area of the field.

SM: So that's from 1984 to about '92, and now, 1993...

FM: In 1993 my life really changed, dramatically, when Brooke Sheldon, the Dean at the University of Texas, asked me to become involved in a project to write a proposal for the digital library initiative at NSF. And I did, I spent six months on that; it really threw a lot of things in my life out of kilter because it took so much energy to do so. Our proposal was drafted around the idea of NAFTA--which was the North American Free Trade Agreement--to create a digital library in support of that. We didn't win one of the awards, but I certainly met a new kind of person in the process of doing this. I had attended the 1994... the initial digital library conference--and the '95 one, I was involved in it, because it was held in Austin, I participated in the arrangements for that. And I just... I didn't continue that close interest in it, but all of that just put me in a different realm than in the kind of historical studies that I had been doing. I was now looking at a different kind of animal; the digital library was something different. And this was also at the same time that the idea of a browser was being invented.

SM: Wow, yeah.

FM: Browsers didn't become big time until late '94. They had been invented around '93. The original browser, I can't remember its name, came out of the University of Illinois...

SM: Mosaic?

FM: Mosaic. And then we had Netscape, I think, or something. But they were all very slow; the equipment we had to work on it was very slow. Our own school was using computers but, again,

I remember trying to reduce some things I had written to a uniform set of fonts, but you had to load the fonts yourself. This was back in the early '90s. At any rate, I got involved in digital libraries, and then we went through a period of time in our school when we had to find a new Dean, and I ended up being the Chair of the Dean Search Committee. I had some time off after that. I ended up writing, or giving an address and writing a book about the Dewey decimal classification. I think I gave the address in '96, and I published the book in 1998.⁸ It's probably been the most cited work I've ever written.

SM: *DDC, the Universe of Knowledge, and the Post-Modern Library?*

FM: Yeah. I also tried some different things with my basic classes in organization of... well, it was a basic class in cataloging and information organization that we had at the school. I failed to make note of the fact that... by the way, in the previous period when I came back from OCLC, I took over the teaching of the introductory course; it was Introduction to Library and Information Studies. And I re-shaped the course, and I taught it for three years to every student who ever came into the school when we were exploding in terms of the number of students we had. And by '91, I was just kind of burned out. But any rate, my course on the organization of knowledge gave me the impetus to start writing a textbook on the organization of knowledge and the organization of information. I wasn't quite sure how those differed, in my head. But I wrote some introductory chapters, which I used in my teaching. I had students doing some little experiments and things. Finally by the... it took all the way to the end of the '90s, but I joined with the woman who is the editor of the *ASIS&T Bulletin*.

SM: Irene Travis...

FM: Irene Travis. Irene had moved to Austin by that time, and we created a new course on the introduction to our field, but it was just on the organization of information. And it just simply

⁸ *The DDC, the Universe of Knowledge, and the Post-Modern Library*. Albany, N.Y.: OCLC/Forest Press, 1998

changed the direction of my teaching, to make that course with her. And I taught that course with her for a while, and then taught it alone for a little bit, and then finally it was taken over by others, and it still exists, so far as I can tell. But, it was all a very interesting time for trying to figure out what is information, and such.

Starting in the mid-90s, I started investigating how organizing information has developed in several different streams of work, for example, in bibliography, and in indexing, and in cataloging, in information retrieval, finally by this last century, 1950s, and so on and so forth. Also, I was trying to wrap it in with those particular things... oh, documentation, and finally, museum studies and archives. And I finally ended up calling them traditions of information organization. It's there again, a historical view of information organization. The problem with treating so many of them like that is you can only do it very lightly. But I was trying to find some deeper themes that informed how they went about their work and how they were related to one another. And I think that pretty much... I ended up with quite a collection of pages on this, but I have not published that either. It still sits in my computer, and I'm not sure that I would even think the same way about some of the things right now because we keep changing our views, although I've been encouraged to publish it. It is a kind of a primer on what went before we had the present situation in information retrieval and such. I would like to be able to write that and get it out of my mind, you know, get it out in the public to give some thoughts on it.

I suppose that if I had to summarize one aspect of my intellectual contribution to our field, it is that I have discovered that there's a lot to be said for the historical understanding of the development of our tools and our ideas. The minute one begins to try to understand things like

that. For example, the idea of a subject, what does that even mean, when we say that a document has a subject, or when we say that there are subjects in the universe of knowledge, or something like that. What do those things mean? What are their...what I would say, what are their referents, what do they refer to? I think that we are poor, in that sense, in our field. We don't understand where we got our ideas from. But I also would say that the minute we start trying to discover where our ideas come from--where their roots come from-- where they started growing in the first place, that we go well beyond the boundaries of our field. Our field is essentially a service occupation. It has been a service occupation in terms of public libraries and academic libraries; it helps people get to informational objects. It helps them to try to cope with them; it helps them to think about things. At least that's the way it started. We have changed the way we talk about those informational objects, from being knowledge that people are trying to access, to being information, and such. But this involves such a wide range of change. One looks at the beginning of libraries in the United States; it is an extraordinary blend of politics, of eighteenth century ideas that matured in the nineteenth century, amongst those ideas there was much having to do with how people looked upon what education was for the individual. People get educated because they learn things in their own self. Education is not a public endeavor; it's a private endeavor; it's a personal endeavor. We go to public institutions, but we do something with what we hear, and it changes us from the inside. It's intensely personal. But we have never really given much recognition to those kinds of connections. We do, in terms of techniques and such. When the school librarian deals with children, they know there's more going on there than just giving them words, giving them pictures to identify things. They have to process something all themselves, and it is so personal that it affects, we say, the personalities of the people that are learning. Other aspects of our field, they are not simply our thing; they are ideas that come from

many other sources. Information is actually spoken of in almost every field, in one way or another. Why, then, do we try to talk about information as if it's something that only we deal with? That seems to me to be somewhat pretentious. We do deal with information, but what is it really? I haven't found very many people that are really brave enough to deal with it. I think Robert Losee's work⁹, is as close as I've seen to a really first-rate discussion on the nature of information. But it is hard reading, to understand what he sees as the source of these things. And even he does not go far enough, in my view, in relating how we look at information to, say, how information would be applied to molecular structures, or how information would be applied to social situations. It is just a terribly complex matter. I once gave a lecture on this, both at the University of Texas and the University of North Texas, on the nature of information, and everything. It really got a lot of people troubled. I know at least here, at Texas, because it didn't stay within the box, I think.

Well, anyway. I have been concerned with things like this since the early '90s. I guess I have a career of unfinished documents of one kind or another. I would like to be able to finish them; I'm not sure that I can, but I will work at it. I retired in 2008; I had been part-time from 2005 to '08. In 2009, my wife and I moved from Texas over here to southern Mississippi to be near her family, and that has crimped my abilities to write a little bit because I'm not really near a major library. There is one at the University of Southern Mississippi, but it doesn't have the kind of collection that I would really need to continue some of the writing that I've done. I wouldn't mind having a sabbatical from southern Mississippi and maybe go back to Texas or, you know, to go someplace for half a year...

SM: On a sabbatical from your retirement?

⁹ Robert M. Losee, *The Science of Information*. Academic Press, 1990, and also his more recent *Information from Processes: About the Nature of Information Creation, Use, and Representation*. Springer, 2012.

FM: Yes, a sabbatical from my retirement. At any rate, that's pretty much the nature of my professional experience. I could give you a lot more details, but I don't think that this is the place for them. I mean, if we wanted to do a longer attempt at my life, you know, I could give you an hour, or two, or three, on each part of my life, each section of years, an hour on college and an hour on seminary, and such. But I don't know that'd serve any purpose greatly.

I will say that I'm a little sad for the field, because I think it needs to deepen. I think the field is essentially training people to do jobs. I'm not sure that the I-School movement, for example, is really trying to understand information so much as to figure out how to manipulate it. Data mining is a good example of that. It's very good to do data mining--no question about that--but it will not tell me what information is all about, I don't think; I may be very wrong. I also am sad to see--not every program in the I-School movement--but a large number of them, have really forgone, I think--or not a large number, but a significant number-- forgone the heritage from the library field. That's too bad, but that is bound to happen. And it could be that we'll have another split where library education and I-School education go their separate ways, but that would be sad for me.

SM: Yes, it would be. It would be sad.

FM: But that's just... here it is 2012, we don't know what the future's going to bring. I do think that what's gone on with the introduction of the social web is changing not only our fields, but changing the nature of Western society. I don't know that it's changing some of the other societies so much, but it is changing the nature of Western society. And I see the information movement chasing after the social web when, in fact, its forte, its strength, over many, many years--whether it was called the information field or not--was on access to substantive

information that had been created by writers and others, whether it was in written form or in graphic form. I'm not so sure...

I'm sure there's a use for studying and gaining some kind of access to social knowledge--the throughput of people talking to each other--but I'm not so sure it is nearly as significant as what we were doing before. And we certainly should not talk about it as if it's the same kind of thing. Giving access to the social communities is simply not the same as giving access to the heritage of human beings in substantive writings and expressions of knowledge. And I wish we would make a separation between them at that point, and understand that they are two different things. But that's my view. It may be very wrong. I would like to be... I'd like to have it demonstrated that I'm very wrong. But I haven't seen anything that indicates otherwise, that we're running, so to speak--our field is running after all the technologies and the wonderment of the millennial generation communicating to one another, and using their finger to move images across the screen, and all that kind of thing, when in fact that has very little to do with thinking about things deeply, and answering substantive questions about the nature of life. It has some overtones of cooperative learning, but cooperative learning in the end is not going to take the place of those insights that come from people that are so deeply involved in what they're studying that they see things in their minds, whether those people be scientists, or social scientists, or artists. The individual act of creation simply can't be replaced by cooperative acts of making documents, or making statements. I don't think so. But I may, again, be very wrong.

End of interview