

This interview was conducted on August 23, 2010 by Kathryn Mendenhall [then Director of the Library's Partnerships and Outreach Programs] and Sybille Jagusch [Chief of the Children's Literature Center]. It was published in the Library of Congress. *Library Services Journal*. Autumn 2010.

“Serving those who Serve Children.”

Kathryn Mendenhall and Sybille Jagusch: A Conversation.

KM: How did the Children's Literature Center begin?

SJ: In the early 1950s, the Library asked Frances Clarke Sayers from the New York Public Library to write a proposal for a children's book reference center. Mrs. Sayers' *Report* became the blueprint for the Children's Book Section – as it was called then. It opened - by Congressional mandate - on March 3, 1963.

KM: Who was the first director of the Center?

SJ: Virginia Haviland, the first head of the Section was hired in a way unimaginable today. The Librarian, L. Quincy Mumford, picked up the phone and called her at her desk at the Boston Public Library. Of course, she said yes. Virginia was a *tour de force*. She put together a reference collection, began an annual children's book list, published numerous bibliographies, organized programs and exhibitions, and prodded the library administration to establish the section of children's book catalogers. She loved to travel and made the Center known all over the world.

KM: Was there any other staff?

SJ: There was a clerical assistant, and in 1964, Margaret Coughlan arrived from the Baltimore County Library. She was much admired for her a superb children's book knowledge.

KM: Where was the Center located in the early days and where is it now?

SJ: In the early days the Center was in a little shoebox of a place, down the hall from the Main Reading Room and next door to the north-east corner pavilion. People loved the little shoebox and the great reference services they received there. The place was always crowded. People didn't even mind sitting on the floor. That is when Virginia coined the Center's motto “Serving those who serve Children.”

In 2006, the Center moved to its present location in LJ-129 - the pavilion next to the former shoebox. The designer, Kevin Hornberger, did an outstanding job. Not only is the

space aesthetically pleasing, but it can handle all the different kinds of functions that take place here. We can have small and intimate book showings in the little book room, or group lectures in the “class room.” The large library table provides a welcoming setting for conducting reference interviews with students who come for help with their dissertations or other research. There is study space and a computer terminal. There is even space for two display cases. One holds the smallest children’s book in the world and other curious “biblio-things.”

KM: What did you do when you came?

SJ: I continued on Virginia’s course but added a few “flourishes.” First of all, I created a fund for the Center and began fundraising. Then we began an ambitious outreach program of symposia, lectures, and exhibitions. Every year we organized an international program. We invited the Who is Who in children’s books: Katherine Paterson, Susan Cooper, Eric Carle, Mitsumasa Anno, Lisbeth Zwerger, Leo Lionni, Arnold Lobel, Vera B. Williams, Rosemary Wells, and many, many others – including some of the country’s premier editors, critics, and collectors. We published most of the proceedings of these programs and had the funds to print special keepsakes.

KM: Has the Center’s role changed in recent years?

SJ: Just before the Center moved to the new location, it became part of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division. It has been a good fit. The Center became much more closely linked to the rare children’s book collection. We can now quickly fetch some books for a book presentation, for a quick exhibit or for research. My work has become more book than program oriented.

KM: What kinds of collections do you have in the Center?

SJ: The core collection of the reference books that VH assembled is still there. It has been updated and weeded, of course. It contains, for example, biographical dictionaries, histories of children’s books, lists of children’s books, or monographs about a particular author or illustrator like *The Art of Maurice Sendak* or books like the illustrated history of *Moveable Books*. There is the whole set of the *Horn Book* magazine, perhaps the most famous of all review magazines in this country. There is a small showcase collection of children’s books from the latest eye-catching info-picture book to some classics or other noteworthy books that can be shown to visitors.

KM: Could you talk about the Library’s children’s book collections?

SJ: LC holds the premier research book collection of children’s literature in this country. There are more than 500,000 volumes, all scattered throughout the collection. In the early days children’s books arrived in an unsystematic fashion but after the Copyright Law of 1870 children’s books have come in a steady stream just like all other books.

There are a number of special collections. For example, early children’s books are in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division; foreign language books are in divisions like Asian and others. There are also boxed and board games, sound recordings, maps, and original children’s book illustrations; books in braille, books with cds and other attachments, books that move and make a sound.

What makes this collection so unique is the fact that it is not selected. No one evaluates the content of a book. The collection holds everything from the beautiful to the bland, from the redundant to the controversial. It contains all the dreams and hopes, the goodwill and the prejudices of the nation. In addition, the children's book collection is supported by an unparalleled collection of reference books, serials, maps, manuscripts, and databases. It is a researcher's paradise.

KM: Who uses the Children's Literature Center?

SJ: The Center answers reference questions from students, teachers, librarians, parents, publishers, and others who study children's books in one way or another. However, more and more visitors come for special children's book presentations. Congressional families and constituents, teachers, professional visitors from abroad, student groups, book discussions clubs, professional groups, etc.

KM: Could you talk about some of your acquisitions and give examples of favorite items?

SJ: In recent years acquisitions – both gifts and purchases – have become much more meaningful for me. When I select an item now – or when someone offers us a gift - I try to think not only of its research or exhibition value but how I might show it to readers and visitors. People often ask how I go about finding these treasures. There are a number of ways. Dealers send their catalogs to us - either in print or online – which I read right away. Then I find out about the Library's holdings. I also attend book fairs, sometimes visit a dealer's shop or a potential donor's home.

TEN SPECIAL ITEMS

GIFTS

A Token for Children; Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of Several Children [1728]. Exceedingly rare (in this edition), the book had been in the donors' family for 260 years - eight generations.

An elegant British, silver and ivory hornbook, produced in the late 18th century.

Fedor Rojankovsky. *Daniel Boone. Les Aventures d'un Chasseur Américain parmi les Peaux-Rouges*. Paris: Domino Press, 1931. Limited, numbered, and signed edition. One of the most beautiful children's books of the 20th century.

James Marshall. *Fox be Nimble*. New York: Dial Books for young Readers, 1990. Book dummy and original art.

ACQUISITIONS

Josef Franz Kaiser. *Mechanischer Welt Globus zum Gebrauche des kleinen Geographen* [*Mechanical world globe for the young geographer*] Gratz: J.F. Kaiser, [ca.1840]
The hand-colored folding globe becomes three-dimensional when the strings are pulled.

Beatrice Appia. *Histoire de Jean Vallade*. Paris: D. Jacomet, 1928.
A limited edition of a picture book which tells the life of the young boy Jean from birth to young adulthood. With handwritten texts.

Fritz Rumpf and A. Erich Oswald. *Spielzeug der Völker* [*Toys of the world*] Berlin: W. Weise, 1922-1925. A hand-colored album of folk toys.

John Green Chandler. *Santa-Claus presents his Compliments to all the Little Folks and Big Folks and expects a Warm Reception from Everybody ...* Roxbury, Mass.: J.G. Chandler, [1858]. Earliest movable version of Clement Moore's *Night before Christmas* with a Santa Claus who will descend the chimney when the string is pulled.

Florence Upton. *The Golliwogg's Bicycle Club*. London: Longmans, 1896.
The Golliwogg and his doll friends travel around the world in this second book of the popular and stylish series – today considered controversial.

Tekiho Hishizawa. *Tango Gangu Shu* [*Toys for Boys' Day*]. Kyōto-shi: Unsōdō Taisho 14, [1925]. An album painted by a master of traditional Japanese toys for Boys Day.