This interview for the ALSC Oral History Project was conducted on April 4, 1995, at the Dallas Public Library, in the office of Jan Moltzan, former Executive Director of the Texas Center for the Book.

Barbara Immroth interviewing William C. Morris, who is Vice President and Director of Library Promotion and Advertising at HarperCollins Children’s Books. He was awarded the first Association for Library Service to Children’s Distinguished Service Award in 1992. Bill, you began at Harper in 1955. How did you become interested in children’s book publishing?

William C. Morris: Well, it was an indirect interest. After I’d been in the Army for two years in Virginia, I went to New York to try to get into book publishing. I got as far as a Doubleday bookstore, where one of my jobs was to sell children’s books to people. I knew nothing about them and didn’t care much about them at all.

And you had already graduated from college and gotten your master’s degree at Duke.

Dr. Barbara Immroth: Right. I remember being “sentenced,” if I didn’t dust properly, to the children’s book section. Since this was a Doubleday bookstore, we got commissions if we sold Doubleday books, so I’d sell those—for the commission.

When I left Doubleday and went to Harper as a temporary worker, I still wasn’t particularly interested in children’s books, but I was, for a while, in the children’s book department. In fact, I think I was the first male actually to work in the children’s book department under Ursula Nordstrom. It was a part-time job, and I sent back rejected manuscripts to authors.

But then I became the sales representative for Harper in the New York area and sold all the books that Harper published. And I began to get more and more interested in children’s books because of the great enthusiasm that women—important women in the children’s books field—showed.