

**Oral History Interview
with
Larry Romans**

Interview Conducted by
Tanya Finchum
January 25, 2009

Government Information Living Indexes
Oral History Project

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Interview History

Interviewer: Tanya Finchum
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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Project Detail

The oral histories collected as a result of this project will preserve the voices and experiences of government information workers who have invested a good portion of their careers to providing and insuring access to government information.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on February 15, 2007.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Larry Romans is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on January 25, 2009.

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About Larry Romans...

Larry Romans is the Head of Government Information and Media Services at Vanderbilt University, a position he has held since August 1983. He earned a bachelor's in political science from Stetson University in 1967, was a NDEA Fellow at Vanderbilt 1967-1972, earned a master's in political science from Tulane University in 1982, and earned a master's in library science from Vanderbilt University in 1983.

Romans is a lifetime, and very active, member of American Library Association (ALA) Government Documents Roundtable (GODORT). In 1995 he received the CIS/GODORT/ALA "Documents to the People" Award. This award is presented to the individual, library, institution, or other non-commercial group that has most effectively encouraged the use of government documents in support of library service. Under his leadership, GODORT's Education Committee began the Handout Exchange in 1989, a program of sharing and distributing user guides and training handouts from depository libraries. Handouts were obtained from depositories throughout the country, reproduced and provided to attendees at GODORT programs at American Library Association Annual Conferences. Romans' commitment and many hours of work made this program such a success. Another notable achievement is the Frequently Used Sites Related to U.S. Federal Government Information created by Romans which is an Internet site of comprehensive government information.

Romans received the 2008 James Bennett Childs Award in recognition of his lifetime and significant contributions to the field of government documents librarianship. He has served as GODORT Chair, Program Committee Chair, GITCO Chair, Education Committee Chair, and Federal Documents Task Force Coordinator, as well has served on the Budget, Legislation, Nominating, and Publications Committees. He is a defender of the public's right to government information and a mentor to many other librarians.

Through Romans' efforts GODORT and other round tables of ALA have representation on the ALA Council. He has served over 16 years on ALA Council and has been chair of ALA's Committee on Legislation. Additionally he was elected to serve on the ALA Executive Board for 2007-2009.

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Larry Romans

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Tanya Finchum
January 25, 2009
Denver, Colorado



- Finchum** *Today is January 25, 2009. My name is Tanya Finchum. I'm the Coordinator for a project called Government Information Living Indexes, and I'm here today in Denver, Colorado with Larry Romans who has been a long-time member of GODORT and some have referred to him as "Mr. GODORT." So thank you for joining me today. I should back up and say that your title is Head of Government Information and...*
- Romans** and Media Services, Political Science and Communication Studies bibliographer at Vanderbilt University.
- Finchum** *Lots of hats.*
- Romans** That's right.
- Finchum** *Thank you for joining me today. Let's have you start by telling us a little bit about your childhood, where you were born, and then we'll work forward.*
- Romans** I was born in Bangor, Maine. My family moved down to Florida when I was about five, and I grew up in West Palm Beach, Florida. The first library that I used was the West Palm Beach public library, and my first taste of libraries was working on summer reading programs to see how many books I could read and get a certificate, and that was always very exciting to me. Then in high school, I was on the debate team and so we used the library a lot then. I'm sure I used a lot of government documents, but I didn't think of government documents as something separate from other types of the library materials back then.
- Finchum** *Did you ever think about being a librarian in high school?*
- Romans** No. From about fifth grade I had decided I wanted to be a political

science professor and so that was my orientation for, I don't know, 10 or 15 years, I guess.

Finchum

And so in college you majored in political science?

Romans

Yes. Technically in economics, but actually it was political science.

Finchum

So how did you get the government documents bug?

Romans

I had a college work study grant and they asked me where I wanted to work. Since I liked libraries I said I wanted to work in the library. So I went and saw the head librarian, who had been the government documents librarian for a number of years until she became the head librarian. Her name was Charlotte Smith. The minute I said political science she said, "Oh, well you'll have to work in Government Documents." It was still her love in the library, so it was, I think, a compliment for her to want me to work in that area.

The way it was set up was there was a faculty wife, Dorothy Allen, who was the official head of the department and who did all of the correspondence with GPO and so forth. There was a graduate student named Paul who actually supervised the students and answered the reference questions. I really found that I loved government documents and I think I was the graduate student's most promising assistant. When Paul graduated in June, I became the de facto public services head. Mrs. Allen was in charge of administering the department; I was in charge of processing and reference questions. We had 20 college work study students that summer. I was 17 at the time and I was preparing work for 20 people. So I had to learn a whole lot about it and so that's how it started.

Then I went to graduate school at Vanderbilt University and had a checkered career there. I had an NDEA fellowship, which was really good - it paid for everything, but I also fell in love. The year that I should have been studying for my last written Ph.D. exam, I didn't do so good a job. I screwed it up and had to go to graduate school at Tulane. When I did that, I started working in the Government Information department there as a library assistant and probably partly, unfortunately, because I was a male, I had much more autonomy in the kinds of things that I did in the department. So I really became pretty expert in a lot of different aspects of the department and I endured what I think lots of library assistants have had to endure. That is, there would be librarians from other departments who would come up into our area and, rather than ask me how to find something, they would spend all this time, you know, looking for themselves. Then finally they'd come and ask me, and I could go to the stacks and just pull the very thing that they

wanted. So after awhile, they finally realized that I actually had some abilities.

During that time, I was teaching part-time at Tulane. I was the only graduate student in political science that they let teach classes at the time and while I had started graduate school at 19, I was getting older and older. After I had passed my exams at Tulane, my advisor sat me down and talked with me because, you know, I was almost 35 at that point. I worked with his wife, who was the president of the library staff association when I was vice-president. He said, “You know, my wife says you’re really good at this and I think you’re really good at political science, but face it. You’re going to be 40 before you get this dissertation finished, and then you’re going to have a hard time getting a job in a metropolitan area where you want to be and have to fight for tenure and all of this stuff. You ought to think about going to library school.” At the same time my partner had to move back to Nashville for a job, and so I had the option between teaching full-time at Tulane for a year or two or going to library school in Nashville.

At Tulane I would have had to make additional preparations for new classes. They wanted me to teach Latin American studies in addition to the basic American and Comparative Politics classes, and I knew I wouldn’t get anything more done on my dissertation during that entire period. So I thought, “Well, I really like working in libraries.” I went back to Nashville with my partner and I went to Peabody Library School, and at the time Peabody was kind of living on its reputation. They had had Frances Cheney who had the number one reference book [*Fundamental Reference Sources*]. When you took a reference course, hers was the book that everybody used back in the 60’s and 70’s. Like William Katz was when I was going to library school. So the department was well-known.

After having been in a fairly rigorous political science department at Vanderbilt and at Tulane, the first class I had in library school was so “rinky-dink.” I came home that first day just so depressed, thinking, “Maybe I’m gonna quit this.” The teacher talked down to us as if we were children. So my partner said, “You already know what you need to know to be a librarian. You just need to get the union card, which is the MLS,” and so I stuck it through. We had some good classes and some that weren’t so great.

It turned out that I knew some people who were working at Vanderbilt Library at the time and they thought I would be really good. Some changes were going to take place in personnel, because one of their most important bibliographers was getting ready to retire. Basically they created a position for me, and I moved over to Vanderbilt actually a

week before I graduated and started as the history and political science bibliographer. That was what I wanted to do. I wanted to be either a political science bibliographer or a government documents librarian.

Linda Williamson was the government documents librarian, and she was great, but at the time she had been there about 14 years and I was thinking, “How in the world could somebody stay 14 years in the same job?” So I worked part-time in her area to keep my hand in, and about three years later she got a job at Oxford University in England and I moved over to Government Information. All of the people that I knew thought I was crazy—“What in the world are you thinking of? Who would ever want to go into Government Information?” I continued to be the political science bibliographer and I was the government documents librarian. That was exactly what I wanted to do, and so I’ve now been doing it for 25 years. In our Government Documents department, there have only been two librarians in the last 43 years. That’s, I think, pretty unusual.

Finchum *It is. In your library program, did you have a government documents class?*

Romans I did take a government documents class as a throw-away class. The person who taught that was this wonderful woman named Cosette Kies, but she had no on-the-job government documents experience. She was teaching it from an academic background rather than a practical background. I knew a lot more about the day-to-day aspects than she did, so she kind of relied on me to keep her honest about this stuff. It was a learning experience for me, too, but it didn’t contribute much to my documents career.

Finchum *Once you moved over into the government documents side of the library, how did you learn that big collection? Was it a repository?*

Romans Well Tulane and Stetson both were depositories, too.

Finchum *Selective or regional?*

Romans All three of them are selectives. I can’t remember what percentage Stetson got, but at the time I think Tulane was getting in the 60 percent and that’s what Vanderbilt does now. So I really already had a whole lot of experience at that point. When I started in the Vanderbilt department, we didn’t even have an electric typewriter; we only had manual typewriters. Of course, no computers, and this was pretty late. This was about 1984, 1985 something like that. So my first thing was just to get an electronic typewriter to type up cards. People find that hard to believe. We shared a personal computer, some of the bibliographers,

right about 1984, 1985. It was one of those word processing programs where if you made a mistake you had to call up that individual line and make the change and save it back into the document and then call up the next line and make any changes. So, it was really primitive back then.

Now in our department, we must have five or six computers for a four-person department and maybe four or five public terminals back in our area and all kinds of media equipment. Although I've been in the same government information job for almost 25 years, the job I'm doing now is so amazingly different from the job that I did back then. The thing for me is that I really love doing this job. A lot of my colleagues have gone on to be head of Reference or head of the Business department or something like that, and that's not really what I want to do. I figure I'll be retiring as a government information librarian.

- Finchum** *You found your niche early in.*
- Romans** I did, yes.
- Finchum** *Do you have grad students that work under you or undergraduates?*
- Romans** Both. In our department there is one other professional librarian, Frank Lester, and there are two superb support staff, Teri Bante and Brian Boling, and then we have about eight graduate student assistants who mainly work the evenings and weekends. They just have a few hours during the regular work week where we can interact with them. Then in addition, we have usually three or four undergraduates and they help me work on web pages and they check slips and catalogs and so forth.
- Finchum** *Do you have any shining stars that are "you in the making?"*
- Romans** Oh well, I am not sure I've got any now, but of our student assistants, I think four of them have gone on and either already have their MLS or are working toward it.
- Finchum** *That's good.*
- Romans** These are people who had no notion that they would go into the library. My biggest success story is Kevin Reynolds, who is now the Assistant University Librarian for Public Services at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. He has had a lot of positions in GODORT, a lot of them dealing with legislation. He's now the Tennessee Chapter Councilor on the ALA Council, So I feel that he's somebody that I've really had a chance to mentor who has been very successful.
- Finchum** *Do you know what might have gotten him interested in it? Anything in*

particular?

- Romans** Well, I'd like to say it was my charm, but I think he found that he really liked library work and he found government documents particularly interesting and a position opened up at Sewanee. He didn't have an MLS at the time but it was in government documents and he applied and he got the job. Since then he's gotten his MLS and he moved to a public library and back to Sewanee, and so now he's in charge of Public Services. I think we did do a good job about indoctrinating him about government information because I think that's still his real love.
- Finchum** *How do you train someone that comes in that's really interested in learning the collection?*
- Romans** Well I think for all of the students we do some fairly extensive training because they need to be able to answer basic questions at night and on the weekend. When we see somebody is really interested in it, then we give them more training and also we started letting him answer questions. We gave Kevin the first stab at answering the questions and he did very well and it just had a snowball effect.
- Finchum** *It's hard for new ones coming in to learn the collection. They've got the old versus the new? So do you have any secrets to learning the ropes?*
- Romans** One of the things that really helps in our department is that we really focus a lot on web pages. We have our own government information web page and a really good political science one. We get a broken link report every month and the students start by checking those things and that's how they get comfortable with it. We have maybe 6,000 websites linked from our page so users get a pretty broad view. Then with reference questions we let them take the lead on what they want to do. The younger the person is, the more apt they're going to start with the electronic sources than with the paper sources. Depending on how they do it, we try to familiarize them with the other kinds of sources, you know, and I think that's basically how it goes. We have a student manual, online tutorials, and lots of sample questions.
- Finchum** *Have you taught government documents classes?*
- Romans** No, I haven't. The woman who used to work with me in our department until recently, Amy Stewart-Mailhiot, has been teaching classes at the University of Washington. It's been a really interesting experience to me to watch her prepare for her classes, and it really is a fascinating process. She teaches a distance course, but she has to actually go there a couple of times a semester and she keeps me up to date with everything she's doing.

- Finchum** *And ask you for advice on things?*
- Romans** Yes, sometimes.
- Finchum** *Let's switch gears and talk about your involvement with GODORT.*
- Romans** I forget what year it was that I first started going to GODORT meetings; it was in the 80's. I swear the first GODORT meeting that I went to was the Education Committee. At least it was the first meeting I went to at that conference. I don't remember others and it just so happened that half of the committee had resigned, including the chair. So they asked the people in attendance if they wanted to be on the committee and so I said, "Sure." They also needed a chair, and I think I put my hand up volunteering about 10 seconds before Atifa Rowan did, and so I became the chair of the Education Committee.
- One of the things that we started doing when I was chair was the GODORT Handout Exchange, and at the time it literally was handouts. I would contact different people across the country to see what kind of handouts they had, you know, "finding aids," things for classes, "How do you use the CIS index?" or those kinds of things. People would send us 200 physical copies of these and we'd set up tables on Saturday morning for the GODORT Update and people would come and pick up all of the handouts. Well that was pretty unwieldy. We were wheeling in dollies full of these handouts and so we switched to 5-1/4 inch diskettes. Then we changed to the smaller diskettes, and then we moved to a gopher site because Grace York from the University of Michigan volunteered to do that. Then we moved to a website, and I guess for 15 or so years it's been done through the web so we're no longer carting the paper versions around.
- When I stop doing all the stuff that I'm doing now I'd like to focus a little more on the Handout Exchange again. I think that it can be really helpful to a lot of different people but because nobody has really taken responsibility for it right now that it's just kind of sailing. I'd like to get it really more cutting edge than it has been.
- Finchum** *In the earlier days of that, you had to make phone calls or write letters. You didn't do e-mails, I guess.*
- Romans** Right. It was a much longer process to get those handouts. People had to agree not only to run off hundreds of copies and the expense of that, but to take the trouble to ship them to us. It depended on just a lot of cooperation from a lot of people.
- Finchum** *Kind of the precursor to Browse Topics?*

- Romans** Exactly, yes. Even better than Browse Topics. (Laughs)
- Finchum** *From an OSU person,—well, we'll talk about that later.* (Laughter)
That kind of led up to you being the recipient of the Documents to the People Award in 1995, right?
- Romans** Right ...
- Finchum** *Part of it?*
- Romans** Yes. I think that probably had more to do with my getting that award than anything, although right about that time I also started the FDTF Frequently Used Sites site and so I think that was part of it, too.
- Finchum** *If someone was to come up to you today and ask if it's a good idea to get into government information, what would you tell them?*
- Romans** Well I think that it's just a wonderful area to be in. The thing these days, of course, is that at more and more places there isn't a separate government information department. I would really encourage people to specialize in government information but I'm not sure what the job situation is going to be in the future for actually being a government documents librarian.
- Finchum** *And how about involvement with GODORT itself?*
- Romans** Oh, I think one of the things that's so useful about that involvement is because most government documents librarians are not going to end up being library directors. Participating in GODORT is a way to, I think, rise higher in the profession, to get to know all kinds of other people who are doing the same kinds of things. I think GODORT is such a great source of learning about how other people do things, also learning some management skills as you get on committees and chair committees and get involved with task forces. I just think it's a wonderful thing to do and I was able to go on and get involved in big ALA above and beyond GODORT.
- Finchum** *You were one of the first GODORT members to be able to do that, right?*
- Romans** Yes.
- Finchum** *What's your secret there?*
- Romans** I think a lot of it is luck, actually. I think in my particular case I am not very hierarchically-oriented and I think I'm a pretty friendly person. When I first started working in GODORT I felt there was kind of a

leadership clique and there was a group of people who seemed to just keep sharing the different positions, you know, trading them off among themselves. As I got more involved and took on more responsibility within GODORT, I opened up the round table some. In the appointments that I could make, I got new people involved and people who had been around awhile but just couldn't seem to get connected to any particular GODORT group. I think any chair of GODORT brings in new people, but I think I did a particularly good job of doing so. There are a number of people who have gone on to get really involved in GODORT and to hold pretty high offices in GODORT who are people who started because I appointed them to a committee the first time. Of everything that happened in that year that I was chair that was probably the thing that I did that was best.

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| Finchum | <i>Nurture them on?</i> |
| Romans | Yes. |
| Finchum | <i>Well did you have a role model or someone in particular you modeled yourself after in the GODORT world or Government Information, either one?</i> |
| Romans | No, I don't really think I have a mentor other than Charlotte Smith back at Stetson who was so involved in government information. I've certainly had lots of people who have been helpful that I think have also been mentors to other people. One of those people is Andrea Sevetson, who was GODORT chair two or three years before I was. I'm not sure that Andrea and I ever agreed on much of anything, but she knows so much about the process of making GODORT work that whenever I felt out of my depth I would contact her and she almost always knew what needed to happen. So I think of all of the people who were helpful the year I was chair, that she probably was the person I relied on the most. |
| Finchum | <i>Who did you rely on when you had a difficult government information question at the library? If you couldn't answer it, who would you ...</i> |
| Romans | Luckily in the first years there was Linda Williamson, who was the Documents librarian, and also during that time Gretchen Dodge was her assistant. I helped hire Gretchen and I knew she was the one that Linda Williamson would want and she was not my first choice, but she ended up working with me for 18 years. She was just wonderful, and between the two of us we could answer just about anything. I think these days probably the person that I ask the most things of is Jim Church at Berkeley because I think I'm not as up on international documents as I am on federal documents and so if he doesn't know the answer, he knows someone who does - so I'd say he was probably one of them. |

Finchum *I was just curious because earlier you had mentioned Lois Mills so I thought maybe someone like that.*

Romans No, I never particularly asked her. One of the other people, of course, who has been really important to me has been Bernadine Abbott Hoduski. It's funny. I probably shouldn't say this, being recorded, but my first reaction to her was, "This woman talks too much." She would be at the GODORT Updates on Saturday morning and it just seemed like she talked and talked and talked, telling us what was going on in Washington. I wasn't really all that interested, but the longer I got involved in GODORT the more I realized what an amazing resource she was and how much she really did know. We ended up being on the same side of a number of issues and Fran Buckley was frequently with us on different kinds of things, and so they certainly were big influences over me. So of the people who had started significantly before me, they were probably the two biggest influences.

I guess where all of this came to a head was maybe a little over 10 years ago, but it seems like it might have been '98—maybe a year or two earlier. There was a big conflict over whether we would become part of the ASCLA division of ALA, and a lot of the people who had been the head honchos in GODORT for awhile were really favoring this. I think part of it was is they'd done just about everything they could do in GODORT and they needed something else to be able to do. They had lots of skills and there was no place to go. I found myself being about the only GODORT leader who was really opposed to this. I think Aimee Quinn was somebody else who didn't think a whole lot of it, but she wasn't very vocal about it. It became unfortunately very dividing. When it finally came for a vote, despite the fact that almost all of the main leaders were for this, it lost in a lopsided vote of like 83 percent to 17 percent.

One of the things that I did was ask Fran Buckley, who was Superintendent of Documents at the time, to chime in on our side to say that it was important for us to have the separate Government Documents organization that could deal with GPO and so forth. Of course, he was well thought of and I think some of the folks on the other side didn't think that was a fair tactic. But anyway we were pretty successful and unfortunately that meant that for about five years there were a lot of people who were not very happy with me. I think most of us have mended fences. I'm somebody who does not hold a grudge but not everybody is like that. It could be pretty uncomfortable for awhile and so the year that I was GODORT chair in 1999-2000, I had some trouble getting things done because there were still people who were pretty unhappy about that. The thing is they are very good people. We just didn't agree.

- Finchum** *Almost 10 years later, it should be mended.*
- Romans** Yes, it's pretty much now I think.
- Finchum** *It still comes across as a very tight knit community though.*
- Romans** I think it is tight-knit It's an amazing group of people, and there are a lot of really warm people who are in GODORT. So it's always a pleasure to me when I get a chance to go to GODORT meetings, you know, to see all kinds of old familiar faces. It's also reassuring to see a lot of new faces, that new people really are picking up the ball. I know that there are a lot of people who feel that it's kind of hard to break into ALA in general and GODORT in particular, but if you compare the faces of the people on the GODORT Steering Committee now with five or six or seven years ago, it's amazing how many of those people weren't even involved in that earlier period of time and they have already risen to the top of the organization.
- Finchum** *Over the course of 25 years, do you have a few favorite memories?*
- Romans** I saw that question on your list. I certainly have some favorite personal memories. I guess probably the most gratifying one was getting the James Bennett Childs Award last year. It was actually an award that I really wanted to get, you know, but I think almost more important than getting the award was that Jim Church wrote the thing about me that went onto the GODORT web page. It was about the nicest thing that anybody could say. I mean, he talked about the different positions I'd held and about the Handout Exchange and the web pages and stuff, but talked about how I had mentored a lot of people and made it easier for them and that I was a nice guy. That means a whole lot more to me. He was somebody that I supported a lot when I was the chair. He was the International Documents Task Force person and he was having trouble getting things going and I helped smooth the way for him. That was nice.
- Finchum** *Did you have any inkling it was coming or that your name was put forth for it?*
- Romans** Yes, I did. (Laughs)
- Finchum** *I didn't know if that was against the rules.*
- Romans** Yes. Well I think it is against the rules, but I knew.
- Finchum** *Okay. Enough said. Nice guys finish first.*

Romans Well I'm not sure everybody would think that I'm a nice guy, but I think there are enough of them that do, so it felt good.

Finchum *What are some of the things you're doing at the bigger ALA?*

Romans Well, one of the things that I did a few years ago was be chair of the Committee on Legislation (COL) and being COL chair was one of the two things that I really wanted to do in ALA. It's kind of hard to be able to become COL chair because there are a lot of people who want to have that position. I really loved doing it, but as it turned out, I needed a liver transplant and the annual that I was chair, I was in the hospital getting a liver transplant. So I wasn't able to do as much in that job as I really wanted to.

But two years ago I was elected to the Executive Board of ALA. I thought I knew so much about the American Library Association, but when I got on the Executive Board it was amazing to realize how little I knew about ALA. It's a fascinating job. You are approving a budget of over \$50 million a year. You're dealing with all kinds of personnel issues. You make a great deal of difference on policy issues and so forth. It's just an amazing experience. The way I got to do that is that I was already on ALA Council and that was kind of a luck thing. The Tennessee Library Association was looking for somebody to run for ALA Council. I didn't even know what ALA Council was. I said, "Oh, sure," and I was pretty sure the other person was going to win, but I ended up winning. I learned a lot about the governance of ALA at that point, and I've actually been an ALA Councilor now for 16 years. I'm one of five people who have been on the Council all that time.

Finchum *Continuously?*

Romans Continuously, yes, and so as a result of that you really get to know the movers and shakers in ALA, and you can affect what happens. I think one of the best things that I was able to do for GODORT and other roundtables was until I started pushing it, roundtables didn't have a councilor. After a pretty long fight about it, we were finally able to get the top five roundtables to have councilors and at the time GODORT was one of the top five. Well, a couple of years ago we slipped down to six and I was able to push forward a change so that every roundtable that had more than one percent of the ALA members could have a councilor. That moved it from being five to being eleven roundtables which meant that GODORT should be able to have a roundtable representative on Council for quite a long time. I think GODORT plays such an important role in the policies that come out of ALA that we really do need to have somebody whose responsibility it is to represent GODORT there. I mean, I did it myself as the Tennessee Chapter councilor and councilor-

at-large, but it's still not quite the same thing as having somebody who is working for you—that's their job.

- Finchum** *Sixteen years. Is there a term limit?*
- Romans** No, there isn't a term limit, and people come up with that on a fairly regular basis. There really are very few of us who are crazy enough to be on it that long. My latest term as a councilor-at-large actually ends at the end of June but I'm still on the Council because I'm an Executive Board Member, so I'll be doing it at least one more year.
- Finchum** *So what do you foresee in the next 10 years then?*
- Romans** For me or for ...
- Finchum** *Both. First for you.*
- Romans** Well, I suspect 10 years from now I'm going to be retired. I'm 62. A couple of months after the transplant, even though I was not well enough to really go back to work part-time, I was in the office working half-time for, oh, over six months without being paid, which most people would think was absolutely bizarre. I really do love the job and I was going crazy being at home. So I'm not sure what's going to happen when I hit retirement age if I will go gladly or go kicking and screaming or try to work part-time or whatever.
- In terms of government information, boy I don't know. There are so many wonderful things that are happening right now and so many projects that people are developing that 10 years from now I'm hoping access to government documents will be so great that every reference librarian is a government documents librarian and every patron will be able to find stuff, you know, pretty easily.
- Finchum** *The reverse of that is over the 25 years what's been the biggest challenge?*
- Romans** Oh, I guess one of the biggest challenges, particularly near the beginning, was getting people to treat government documents like other material. Government documents were to librarians about the way the library was to patrons. It was, you know, a little confusing, a little strange. So if a patron thought the Library of Congress cataloging system was bizarre, librarians thought the SuDocs system was bizarre, and so, all too often we were sort of pushed off into some corner. Trying to convince people that these were sources that they ought to think of right at the beginning - particularly to get librarians to convey that notion to people - was really difficult. One of the best things that

happened was when Marcive and others started using the GPO tapes so that you could batch-load your records and get them into the catalog so that when people searched, the documents would come up as part of their search.

At Vanderbilt we were one of the first 10 libraries who subscribed to the Marcive tapes and unfortunately as the result we have more problems because they perfected them after we loaded the records. I had a mini-career there for three or four years telling people about our experience. I was one of the speakers at the very first depository library conference where they had lots of programs for all kinds of librarians, and I spoke at other places, and so that was interesting.

Of course, the electronic revolution has made our jobs completely different. People can get on Google and find government information. They no longer have to think of government documents as these strange things, you know. So even if they don't have us to help them along, they're still finding a lot of stuff. Now obviously I'm convinced that they would do even better and find even more wonderful stuff if they asked us to help them, but just the fact that it's not esoteric anymore is really a good thing.

Finchum *Still some challenge though.*

Romans Oh, yes. It's not nirvana yet, but I think that government information is getting more and more accessible.

Finchum *Anything I haven't asked that you want to make sure we cover?*

Romans Oh, I bet there'll be five or ten things after you stop.

Finchum *We can do round two later if we need to.*

Romans One of the things I guess I want to say also is that for me what has allowed me to do the kinds of things I've done in GODORT is all of the wonderful people. I think one of the things that really has made it easy for me to do the kinds of things that I've done in GODORT has been that I've had this great group of friends who have supported me and promoted me and so forth, and I want to list them.

Finchum *Okay.*

Romans There's Michelle McNelly, who I first met in the Education Committee about 20 years ago; Mary Mallory, Cathy Hartman, Betsy Richmond, and Kevin Reynolds, and all of us worked to support each other. You know, if one of us has an appointed or elected position, the rest of us

come and help support them and help them make it successful. At times I'm not always the most diplomatic person in the world. Sometimes I can be a bull in a china shop, and when I'm feeling that I haven't done a very good job about something, I have these people who support me. I hope each person who's in elected or appointed positions has something like that because it doesn't matter how well intentioned you are, how much experience you have, and how good you are at what you do, there are going to be people who don't like what you're doing and what direction you're taking the group. You really do need to have people who are going to pat you on the back and say, "That's okay. We'll try again tomorrow."

Finchum *Well I'm sure they'd say the same thing about you.*

Romans Yes, I think they would.

Finchum *If there's nothing else, we'll sign off.*

Romans Alright. Great.

Finchum *Thank you very much.*

Romans Well thank you for asking me.

----- *End of interview* -----