

# LAURA E. CAMPBELL

## ORAL HISTORY

COMPUTERWORLD HONORS PROGRAM  
INTERNATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Transcript of a Video History Interview with  
Laura E. Campbell,  
Associate Librarian for Strategic Initiatives,  
Library of Congress

Recipient of the 2007 EMC Information Leadership Award

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Interviewer: Don Tennant (DT)  
Editor-in-Chief,  
Computerworld Inc.

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Today is Wednesday, May 9, 2007 and we're interviewing Laura Campbell, Associate Librarian for Strategic Initiatives for the Library of Congress.. The interview is taking place at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

This interview is made possible by the Chairman's Committee of Computerworld Honors, and the interviewer is Don Tennant, Editor-in-Chief of Computerworld.

The honors program was established in 1988-89 to seek out, honor, and preserve the history of the global information technology revolution by Roger Kennedy of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, Patrick McGovern of International Data Group, and the Chairmen of forty of the world's leading information technology companies.

This oral history is being recorded for distribution to more than 350 national archives, museums, universities and research institutions in more than fifty countries on six continents around the world, and for the program's archives on-line.

Without objection, the complete video, audio and transcripts of this interview will become part of these international scholarly research collections and made available in complete or edited form to the general public on the worldwide web.

This discussion, however, is private and should any participant wish to withhold from the public record all or part of the recordings of these sessions, this request will be honored for a period not to exceed twenty-five years.

All present here are honor-bound to respect such a request, and by remaining here, they accept the personal and professional and legal responsibility to abide by this agreement. With no objections being heard, we will proceed.

Don Tennant:           Let's begin with your beginning. Tell us when and where you were born.

Laura Campbell:        I was born in Camden, Maine, a town on the coast, which is a beautiful little sailing community. I was born in an old Victorian house that's still there on Main Street.

DT:    What's your earliest memory?

LC:    I remember spending time at my grandparent's farm.

DT:    How old were you?

LC:    I was probably three years old. I remember my grandfather. He died shortly thereafter but I still have a shadowy vision of him.

DT: Was he anything like your Dad?

LC: I don't know that he was. I think he was a gentle man who was a farmer. He had a big dairy farm with a large clientele on the coast.

My father was an adventuresome person. He was a pilot during the War under General MacArthur in the South Pacific. He flew 110 missions in Black Widow Night Fighter planes. We used to ask him about it, yet he didn't really talk about the war. We know that he was shot down once and rescued at sea. He was very lucky. I am sure those were difficult memories.

He would tell us lots of stories about the living conditions and sing entertaining songs. After the war, my Dad was keen to have a family, and he was very excited to have sons. He thought he would have two boys. He had two girls. He tried not to show any disappointment about that so he treated us just like boys.

We grew up with the understanding that we would do everything that the boys did. That included hunting, and fishing, horseback riding, playing golf, and learning to shoot. You name it; we were out there trying it. So we didn't think we were any different. We could do what the boys could do and that's what he wanted.

DT: Did you feel like you missed out on anything, or would you have had it any other way?

LC: No, oh no.

DT: Tell us about the sail maker you knew, and the time you spent sailing with your Dad.

LC: I have wonderful memories of summers in Maine. I could almost smell the pine trees and the seaweed before we would get there. Dad had built a little cottage in the town of Rockport, where his best friend, a gentleman named Henry Bondell lived. Henry was a great character, a lovely guy. Like his father before him, he was a very famous sail maker. They designed and constructed hand made sails that were gorgeous. In the summers Dad, Henry and I would go out on these grand, I mean very large sailing vessels, and try out these hand made sails. That was always a very magical part of the summer, the opportunity to be with these two fun-loving men, and to hear Henry tell his old Maine stories. They were just great outings and made for the best memories.

DT: Being in an Air Force family, you moved around a lot. Did you find it difficult to adjust to new environments?

LC: I don't think moving a lot was an adjustment until high school. I do remember thinking that going to Germany was something I didn't want to do after my freshman year, because I had made friends. I think I did do some fussing about that move but it didn't last long, because I got there, and in the end I had a fabulous opportunity to see a lot of Europe.

My parents were fairly liberal, and I got to do a good bit of traveling with friends and with them. It was a special time, another adventure. Dad just treated it as such, and mother was a good sport. We all just adjusted as a family. These years in Germany were an important window into another culture, still struggling with the aftermath of World War II.

DT: You spent time in Alaska as part those moves?

LC: We spent time in Alaska and that was wonderful. My father was a great sportsman. He hunted bear and caught king salmon. So I got to tag along on some of these trips. My sister was born there. She's five years younger than I am. Some day I would like to go back and spend time in Alaska.

DT: What values and ethics did your parents most strongly instill in you?

LC: I think kindness is something my mother brought to our family. She has a great big heart, and she has always been very generous in spirit and deed. She imbued in me honesty and certainly directness, which has been an asset in my professional life, and sometimes not an asset. But she taught me about directness, and honesty, and hard work, lots of hard work pays off.

DT: And I know your parents were avid readers.

LC: Yes.

DT: So obviously you picked up on that, inherited that passion.

LC: Yes and it was a time when there wasn't a lot of television. The early days of television as you know, were not all that spectacular. In some ways I think about this digital revolution that we're in, that it is much like the early days of black and white television.

So we read, and we listened to the radio. Our parents read to us, and we told stories, and we debated. There was a lot of debate in our house. There was a dictionary always available, or encyclopedia, because somebody had to be right, and somebody had to be wrong. It was all about learning and different ideas.

DT: As a child, did you have any role models?

LC: I think my father in particular was my major mentor and role model growing up.

DT: Why?

LC: He was exciting, with a fantastic sense of humor. He had a marvelous way with people. He loved people. We always had people in and out of our house. He was generous. He took in any stray that needed a place to be for a holiday, or a place to stay. He was very wise. He could see things, and often he would say things to me that would make me think for days. He was a good conversationalist, a great listener, and he promoted being all that you could be. He was the kind of person who didn't care what you decided to do, just be the best you could be at it.

DT: Were there any signs of your interest in business management, technology or the sciences?

LC: No, I was really interested in being Dale Evans.

In all seriousness as a youngster I was interested in the outdoors, whether it was building a frog farm, or it was riding a tricycle that I thought was a horse. I am happy to say today I don't have to pretend. I'm not wearing a holster with a gun anymore. I have a real 1400-pound horse, my preferred mode of transportation. But in those days I had a good time. I had a lot of western heroes, and I think a lot of us in those days did. There were great moral lessons that we learned from the westerners.

DT: So you wanted to be a cowboy when you grew up?

LC: Absolutely, still do. I spend a lot of time riding. It's great therapy actually, because when you are out there cross-country riding you need to really pay attention. It's a wonderful rest for me, forces me to clear the mind for a time.

DT: Are there any grammar school or high school teachers that were mentors, or anyone in that part of your life that shaped the direction of what you are today?

LC: I had teachers in Germany that I remember especially well. We were fortunate where we were in Wiesbaden to have attracted some remarkable educators. It was the embassy school as well. The embassy was in Bonn, but students traveled to Wiesbaden to go to school. It was a great, solid education with lots of exciting experiences and pretty remarkable professors, many that had come from university settings.

DT: You received a BA in Political Science from Penn State, an MA in Public management from the University of Maine, and an MS in Accounting from Georgetown University. Of all your degrees, which one do you think has proven to be the most valuable to you in your career?

LC: I would say the Public Management degree, and the degree from Georgetown. I was interested in both organizational change and finance, and I ended up working as a consultant with what was then one of the big eight accounting firms. Now it's Ernst & Young, but at that time it was Arthur Young. So both those degrees were very practical for me in the consulting world. I was able to combine both the organizational emphasis with the financial training. I also had a great interest in systems, and was an early adopter of technology, and had an opportunity to build some interesting systems working at Arthur Young.

DT: What was your first paid job? Was it when you were in Maine?

LC: I worked for the State of Maine. I was living at the time in Bangor. My husband's family owned a large timberland business and we moved to Bangor when I was in my twenties, and I remember thinking, oh my goodness gracious, what am I going to do here for work?

I was very fortunate to be able to talk my way into a job at the University with an in-state consultancy operation. It was a small operation that served state and local government in Maine and the New England States. There I had a remarkable boss who taught me a lot of lessons about what it is like to work in a team environment. I was fortunate to learn about organizational development and particularly public sector organizations. This opportunity combined with practical consulting experience was where I received formal training in organizational and strategy development in a team environment -- wonderful preparation to work as a junior management consultant when I moved to Washington.

DT: You mentioned you were an early adopter of technology at Arthur Young. What attracted you to technology?

LC: I've always been interested in the future, the unknown, treading that uncertain path. I'm excited about "what's next."

I remember the days when we used to lug around as consultants those 55-pound early portable computers. No wonder my lower back kills me today. We had briefcases and pocket books, and those great big old computers. We would get on a plane Sunday night all loaded down. This is before the days of luggage with wheels, but I loved it, and what the technology enabled us to do. It just seems like the dark ages now when you think about it, but it was very exciting, and that's where I could see the future going. Organizations were trying to change and make efficiencies, and I wanted to be a part of that.

DT: How did you make the original connection with the Library of Congress?

LC: Dr. Jim Billington was appointed Librarian of Congress in 1987. He is a brilliant scholar, a Russian historian, and the first thing he wanted to do was a management review of the Library. I worked with him and his leadership team on that management review, and spent a lot of time looking at the Library's finances and how they were going to manage those finances into the future.

Through that experience I met a number of interesting people who were working at the Library and people Dr. Billington had brought with him into the organization. For about five years I worked on different projects. They were usually trouble spots that needed some sort of clean up, so I would be assigned to go in there and fix something, analyze something and make recommendations about change.

In 1992, three colleagues at the Library and I were asked to go to Prague, Czechoslovakia, right after it had been freed from Communist rule. We were to look at the National Library and the condition of the library. As you can imagine, the communists were not particularly interested in access, wide access to knowledge and information, and there was some concern about the disrepair of the beautiful National Library Clementine. The Rockefeller Foundation funded our trip so we went over to assess the condition of the library and make some recommendations.

I'll never forget being in the top floor of this gorgeous building, seeing pigeons freely flying around over these rare, illuminated manuscripts. There were broken windows. It took your breath away. It just hit me in the most obvious way, how could you possibly have kept people from access to this incredible body of material? Isn't access to information and knowledge a basic responsibility?

We had the opportunity to go to President Vaclav Havel's castle on this trip and meet his staff and see the rare castle treasures. The castle librarians took us into what appeared to be a large cedar closet and from these cabinets and drawers, they pulled out manuscripts with stones, jewels the size of the Hope Diamond on the covers of them, beautiful Medieval things. That was quite an experience, meeting Havel's staff, being in the presence of such a courageous leader, seeing the cultural artifacts that tell such an incredible story.

So I came back from that trip thinking, maybe it's time to take a job at the Library of Congress. There was something that really gave me pause for thought after that trip. I had fallen in love with the Library and its mission, and it was time for me to try to make a public contribution.

DT: So you approached Dr. Billington?

LC: There was a senior level job open and my colleagues who I had been working with at the Library of Congress encouraged me to take the job. They said, "Laura you are one of us. You have to join us. You have to do this." The Library wanted somebody to run the entire fee for service activities. That's what they call it in government. Essentially it's the business operations, those things that make money. So that's where I started when I joined the Library in 1992, and it wasn't very long before I was doing something quite different.

DT: The next year, interestingly enough, you met David Packard. Tell us about that.

LC: Shortly after I took the job here at the Library, Dr. Billington, said to me, "Laura, you're a consultant. We need a business plan and a strategy for how we're going to make the unique treasures of the Library of Congress available to the taxpayers, citizens who have paid to acquire store, organize and preserve this material. We've got these fabulous one-of-a-kind items, and everybody should see them."

So he gave me two weeks to come up with a business plan, and I'll never forget thinking, okay, well, he's obviously in a hurry about this. Now keep in mind that this is a genius, a scholar, who is not actively using a computer himself, but wanted these materials digitized because he was going to make them broadly available. This was before widespread distribution of CD ROMS, and well before public access to the Internet. He could see the future.

I took those two weeks and I talked to the staff that had been digitizing a sample set of items. Then I worked up the courage to go in and tell Dr. Billington that I saw a number of issues with moving forward. I wanted to know who he thought the market was for this material. Then I asked him if he had any thoughts about the distribution channel, and a few other questions.

And I remember getting a 55-minute lecture about this being our ‘moral imperative’. I sat there fairly outclassed in this conversation, and I realized then that we were going to do this! It didn’t matter that we didn’t have a distribution channel, or that we didn’t have the money for it, we were going to raise the money. So from that day forward I had a new job, and that was the beginning of building a digital library. It was a thrilling time.

DT: How did meeting David Packard fit into that?

LC: In 1993, after we had our business plan and strategy put together, Dr. Billington and I went to Palo Alto to meet with the late Dave Packard at his foundation. We presented our idea, and Mr. Packard was very interested in the possibilities. He appreciated the historical significance of these unique items. He had served in government himself so he understood the bureaucracy as well as what we had to offer, and clearly what some of our challenges would be.

We made an hour and a half presentation, and keep in mind in those days we hauled out boxes of desktop computers and all this stuff to do a presentation. We had lots of wonderful examples of the things we wanted to make available, as well as a business presentation to go with it. David Packard said, “Well, I only have one question.” And I thought, just one question? I hope I can answer it. And he said, “Are you going to do this with union labor?” I’ll never forget that. I thought, here we are in the presence of one of the world’s biggest business icons, he gets right to the point!

So with that Mr. Packard wrote us our first check for five million dollars to build what we called then the “American Memory Program,” an online historical archive. He encouraged us to make this a national program. He understood intuitively the power of the material at the Library – the Civil War diaries and photographs, the presidents’ papers, the story of the common man at any time in our history – a real treasure trove of the American story. He completely understood that this could be the beginning of something very important. Keep in mind we still didn’t have public access to the Internet at this point.

About two months later, John Kluge of Metromedia gave us a five million dollar personal check. So now we have ten million dollars. I’ll never forget that check, I’d never seen so many zeros on a check. I think we photo copied it. Mr. Kluge is very generous and said, “This is a good cause.”

A few weeks later we received \$3 million from the Kellogg Foundation to test some of the digitized material, these primary sources of history in the classroom. These materials were seemingly exciting for not just researchers, but young people. In just three months we had raised thirteen million dollars. So we were feeling pretty good.

Newt Gingrich, who was then Speaker of the House and also a history professor, came to us and said, "If you can raise this kind of money (\$13 million in just a few months) I think that the Congress can give you money to help digitize this material." So he encouraged us to develop a figure - what was it going to cost for us to do this work? We said it would cost 60-million dollars, and we would deliver five million items by the turn of the century. This was in 1994 that we made this promise, and he committed 15 million dollars and we were to raise the other two-thirds. We ended up raising 48 million dollars well before the five-year period was up, and we digitized the five million items before the target date of 2000.

It seems remarkable to me now when I talk about this. At the time it was somewhat daunting. We weren't in a production environment. And we didn't have staff to do this. We still didn't have that distribution facility. We weren't certain who was going to use the material, but we were building that field of dreams and we knew they would come somehow.

In time we hired 110 people, the most talented, enthusiastic young people who were just getting involved in digitizing and beginning to work on the Web. We hired them on five-year contracts, which was very unusual for the government. In other words, when the job was done potentially their tenure was done. So we had a workforce motivated in a different way, interestingly. When I look back on it there were lots of elements of change that were very important, and I don't think we fully appreciated that at the time. But, we hired these great young people and we were off and running with digitizing all kinds of material. Most of this talented staff is with us today. They wanted to make a difference and they continue to make a difference.

We had many early challenges including getting Library curators to let us even touch their materials. But when they saw the power of their prized collections online – thinking changed. One of our biggest challenges early on was displaying maps, because we didn't have the compression technology to make them available, and you know how popular maps are. So within a couple years we had some new innovative tools to allow us to put maps online, and now we routinely add maps and other challenging formats.

DT: Can you talk about how things changed in 1994 when you did finally get that distribution channel?

LC: Thanks to Bob Kahn, Vint Cerf, Tim Berners-Lee and hundreds of other really talented scientists we had access to the Internet, and soon thereafter the World Wide Web. That's what we needed. We had our distribution channel. It was just remarkable the difference that made, and we started putting collections online as fast as we could. We hired a group of designers who would do the interfaces. These are all young people who at that time could have gone to work at AOL or other places, but they came here because they wanted to make a difference, and they believed that access to this content was really important.

There's a special camaraderie among this group, which made the work a real joy even though we didn't have a road map, and we got plenty of bruises along the way. The team is really passionate.

DT: So that road took you to the National Digital Library Information and Infrastructure Preservation Program. Can you talk about that for a bit?

LC: We went from “American Memory” to adding material for teachers, because of the acceptance and enthusiasm across the country for access to these primary sources in the Social Studies, History programs, and Language Arts programs. We built a [complementary] site for educators called the “Learning Page” where we have lesson plans and activities, road-tested work that teachers can use in the classroom. We also built a site using the historical material for younger children. We call it “America’s Library.” We have lots of other special offerings on the Library’s site that have built up around online exhibitions, teaching materials and more original historical items. So we went from “American Memory” to what we now call the “National Digital Library,” the story of America essentially through our documentary record.

The Library has 134 million items. Two-thirds of that collection is in these special format areas, it’s 19 million photographs, 56 million manuscripts, 6 million maps – a football field of maps – the world’s largest recorded sound and movie collection, 1.5 million rare books. We have more to choose from than we’ll ever be able to digitize and place online. We carefully continue to choose the collections to digitize so that they map to the school program and support the state standards of learning. We did that in concert with experts who helped us build a framework for how we would match these digitized collections to the standards, so teachers can teach to those standards using these materials.

After we had good traction on digitizing, working with teachers, and a growing audience, we turned our attention to the amount of material that was being produced only in digital form, “born digital” content. In the late 1990s two important things happened. The first was when Dr. Billington commissioned a study by the National Academy of Sciences to look at whether the Library of Congress was ready for the 21st century. They delivered a report called, “LC21: A Digital Strategy for the Library of Congress.”

The second important thing was that I pulled together our senior managers, and we had a number of strategic planning sessions, looking at future scenarios for the Library in an increasingly digital environment. We talked about what the most important areas were for us to tackle and focus on. We all agreed addressing the born digital material, things that are only being produced in digital form, was important. What’s most important to collect? Who is going to do it? How are we going to do it? Who’s going to pay for it?

So simultaneously we have two things going on. We have some internal planning going on, but we also have this distinguished body of people writing a report with recommendations to Dr. Billington about what we should do. That report turned out to be constructively critical about the Library’s need to get outside of our immediate community, and to really think and listen broadly to the content creators, distributors, owners in all fields of creativity, because the Library’s mission is to collect in all fields broadly, a universal collection, a comprehensive collection. We understood that there was a synergy here between these two messages.

In the fall of 2000, we went to Congress and talked about the need to build a national strategy for born digital material. We didn't know what that strategy would be, but we knew we needed to do something serious about it. We needed to get outside the box we were in. We needed to get out there and talk and think and listen and work with others to really collaborate with the stakeholders to develop a national strategy for how we put a national collection for the future together – before it is lost forever.

DT: Describe the scope of the collection that's being digitized and the value of these and the born digital materials.

LC: Again, I'm not certain we really understood the magnitude of what we were undertaking at the time. With digitized material it was easier for us to explain what we were doing for education. We're having a big impact on young people who want to be able to use high quality educational material online. That message was easier to understand than one that says we need to save the born digital content -- and we weren't even certain of the scale at first. In 2000, when we were making this pitch about building a "born digital" collection for the nation, we knew a lot of material was being created in digital form. We had no idea how fast that growth would happen.

This year, it is estimated that 161 exabytes of digital content will be produced. It's estimated by the year 2010, 988 exabytes of digital content would be produced. Obviously you're not going to collect all of that, nor would you want to collect all of it. Some material is important and interesting, some is just interesting! Part of what librarians and archivists bring to this process is developing an approach for what you select, the collection development part and curating what is brought into the collection. What's important for Congress to have? What's important for researchers and students to have now, and what's important for your great, great grand children to have?

DT: Who makes these judgments?

LC: That's a good question, and that's the beauty about the National Digital Preservation Program that Congress so generously funded in 2000 at 100 million dollars to develop a strategy for a national digital preservation program. This program distributes the responsibility for selecting among a set of trusted partners, trusted agents if you will for the Library, to help share in the responsibility and the cost of collecting and preserving very fragile "at risk" content; content that's both interesting and important to have. It's content that may in some cases be vital and if we don't get it, no one's going to get it. It won't be there. It will, poof, be gone.

We have taken a collaborative approach, as agreed to during our planning process. No one thought there should be a centralized approach because no one institution could do all that needs to be done. Everyone realized that was absolutely out of the question. We have identified special subject experts and people who have specialized skills in various formats, geospatial material, social science data sets, web sites, digital television, foreign news broadcasts, blogs, podcasts, social networking sites, all kinds of material. We are relying on subject experts, people who have real knowledge of what's important to save and to curate.

We're doing this with the help of a lot of smart people including the Library's 450 "recommenders." The Library has many experts; we just can't do this monumental job all by ourselves.

DT: Last summer, in testimony before the House Committee on Administration you spoke of collaboration with other government agencies and noted that there is no duplication of effort. What's the secret to your success in that regard?

LC: What's really interesting is that everybody thinks if you're doing something in the digital world you're duplicating one another. GPO as you know is responsible for government documents. The National Archives is responsible for federal records, the output of the federal government, and they both have big digital challenges as well. The Library of Congress, we deal in all the other material. We deal with copyrighted material, with what is published as well as unpublished works. It's the human record of creativity in all formats: audio, visual, maps, graphical material, music, TV, oral histories, papers of famous people, books, pamphlets, newspapers, serials, and more. We have the Copyright Office of the United States, and that has been an enormous source of content for the national collection, along with donations of great historical and literary significance and materials from the Library's overseas offices. We are talking to each other to ensure collaboration, not duplication.

DT: What will the program look like 10 years from now?

LC: Ten years from now we'll have a lot more partners. We will have solved some of the problems around access to copyrighted or restricted materials. We'll be better at knowing what agreements we should be negotiating. We will be continuing to track and address standards because technology is not going to stand still. This is a dynamic, moving target. It's not like paper or the physical world where you could say, this is the best edition of a book and put it on a shelf. The preservation standard for physical material was static. Now, whether it's a digital book, pamphlet, journal, or newspaper -- they can be changed in any way and at any time.

So 10 years from now I think we'll have a mature network of very specialized expertise that will be sharing content in an interoperable way across a large network, and services that are provided for the network will help you locate the content. There will be such technical services as format registries that will help you keep track of old and obsolete formats so that you know when to migrate or emulate content and move it to new technical environments. And you'll know how to preserve and move content because somebody has bothered to save the software and the rules of the road for that old format. If I went back and took that old "portable" computer I used to lug around that weighed 55 pounds, what would I do with those old floppies? You can't work with that material today. There will be a growing distributed network with defined roles and responsibilities for stewardship, with certain services provided to the network by partners in the network.

DT: You've written about the importance of anticipating the needs of the 22nd century user, which is a mind-boggling concept. How do you approach that challenge?

LC: It's time for us to listen to the next generation. I think getting ready for the user of the future we've got to be thinking about all types of remote delivery. We have to be making certain that the next generation of researchers, leaders and/or national legislators are involved in helping shape the direction, our environment is going to change fast. If you can't get it online, and you can't get it fast, and it isn't easy, people aren't going to use it.

DT: What do you think society 200 years from now are going to think about us; our culture, and our technological expertise?

LC: I think they will know that there was a beginning with the Internet, yet I don't think it's going to matter. I think the world's going to be so dramatically different that this will be like us looking back at the invention of the printing press.

DT: How would you define leadership, is it learned or innate?

LC: I think leadership is innate, and empowered by the environment within which one works. It is the ability to conceptualize a vision or embrace a vision and then take responsibility for it. I think that a good leader starts first by listening so that they gain understanding from whomever they need to, and then communicating that understanding so that the people involved will be clear about the end result. I think it's a collaborative process where communication doesn't just happen by announcing a vision or developing strategy. I think there's a great deal of attention paid to communication during the execution of the strategy.

And I think that's particularly where vision breaks down, or communication breaks down is when you're executing a strategy. I think leadership is understanding that communication throughout all three steps: envisioning, strategy development, and execution. A good leader is paying attention to realigning the work and adjusting the strategy. I do think optimism is a crucial attribute of a talented leader, one who is a "dealer in hope," as Napoleon is reputed to have called it.

DT: What are the risks and rewards of leadership?

LC: You know it's funny, I don't think about the risks and rewards. I guess I'm a fortunate person that I don't worry about the risks. I worry more about the opportunity to do something.

DT: So you're not risk averse?

LC: No.

DT: Can you talk a little bit about how that approach and your management style has worked here at the Library?

LC: I would say I've been very fortunate being able to create a start-up in government, to have hired many talented people. This was a risk perhaps, for them, given they didn't have permanent jobs. They were younger in their career than I was and they were challenged by the notion that they could be here at the beginning and make a difference in something that was brand new. There was no road map. We made it up. We made it up together, and they were enthusiastic about it. So I would say it's been a very happy experience. There have been some challenges, but I don't think any of us thought of it as a big risk, rather an honor.

The Library of Congress is the oldest federal cultural institution in America. We collect in 450 languages. There isn't any subject that Congress may not be in need of.

The mission of the Library is to collect, preserve and provide access to knowledge and information, to make content widely accessible, in the hopes that users turn information into knowledge and then wisdom. If we don't have the material that is being produced in digital form today, we won't have access to the human record of our time. There would be a big void. What was it like at the beginning of the Internet? How did it change business and advertising? What did it mean for education? What did we learn from the digital revolution, so we can make those important decisions about the future of education?

At the heart of the revolution that we're in, we are providing high quality educational information that makes people think critically makes sound decision-makers and allows them to be informed citizens.

DT: And in what ways are you working with other national libraries around the world to preserve this?

LC: We are working with others in lots of really new ways. One of our partnerships on the National Digital Preservation Program is something that we founded with the French National Library and the British Library. It's called the International Internet Preservation Coalition.

There were 12 of us originally, 12 national libraries, who got together and said, "We all have to preserve important websites now." Whether you're preserving materials about Katrina, or 9/11, or the presidential elections, or prescription drugs, or whatever the issue, event, subject, or social experience is, all countries are trying to tackle this preservation challenge. We thought instead of each of us doing it alone let's get together and build the tools that are necessary to harvest from the Web; to perform more advanced harvesting to make our job easier; to share in the development of the software that we need to use to do this job. Out of the 12 countries, we probably have a group of about 30 technologists collectively from these institutions who are working together. The tools we develop will allow us to share the material.

Consequently, we won't necessarily have to collect websites from some of these countries because they are doing it for us, and we will share that material.

DT: How would you define innovation, and where would you say it comes from?

LC: Innovation is the process of creative collaboration. Many a brilliant idea has faltered at the execution stage. Successful innovators really understand the value of well-conceived strategy for execution. They involve others in the development of that strategy. They look for diversity of ideas. They understand the strength in divergent ideas and values. Innovation is resident in the work that we're doing, I think because none of us alone had the skills to make this happen, but together we could do so much more.

DT: How do you encourage innovation?

LC: Let me tell you a story about an example of encouraging innovation. I had the great fortune to spend a little time with the late Dave Packard. He was a real role model for me, and just a wonderful, wonderful man. He and Bill Hewlett built Hewlett Packard and it has been one of the most innovative companies for many, many, many years. Why? Because they adopted the style of walk-around management. They listened to their engineers. They encouraged experimentation and testing. They gave people an opportunity to get their new product ideas into prototype. Maybe not all ideas came to fruition, but they fostered an atmosphere of innovation, creative collaboration. I think they were brilliant. They were brilliant leaders and great innovators.

Google, another wonderfully innovative company, has its employees spend at least one day a week on some creative experiment or innovation of their own thinking – great idea. The atmosphere that you provide for experimentation goes a long way toward innovation.

DT: What are your hopes for the future of the information revolution that's unfolding?

LC: My hopes are really pretty simple. When you think about how far we've come, but how far we still need to go, the technology today enables us to share information about cultures and people. And I hope that if we are able to do a good job, that we will have a body of content that helps people understand one another better than we do today.

DT: What are the greatest obstacles in the path ahead? Are they technical or social?

LC: The obstacles are social. I used to think that technical problems were the tough part, but it's the human element.

DT: How would you like your role in this revolution to be remembered?

LC: I fervently hope that the Library and its partners are remembered by some in the future as being a positive force in providing access to information, and for making sure it's there for future generations. My role is a very, very small part of it. I am just humbled to be here to make a contribution.