Interview with Susan Latendresse

Interviewed by Associate Dean Ann M. Pflaum
University of Minnesota

Interviewed on June 4, 1999

Susan Latendresse - SL
Ann Pflaum - AP

AP: Today is June 4, 1999. This is Ann Pflaum and I'm interviewing Sue Latendresse about the 1960s at the University of Minnesota.

Sue, could you give me a quick background as to where you worked at the university and the different jobs you've had and, then, we'll go back to the 1960s?

SL: I started here in 1968. I'd just barely turned nineteen. I was married to a second-year medical student. We quickly discovered that we couldn't afford both of our tuitions, so I quit college and came to work full-time. I had one year of college finished in my hometown. I came to the university and took a typing test in what is now Carol Carrier's office on the ground floor of Morrill Hall. I couldn't type worth a darn, so they decided that I would be a good record clerk. I worked for three years in the Records office and then left the university for a few years when my husband graduated from Medical School. We moved out of state. Then, I came back again in 1974, I believe.

AP: So, you were here from 1968 to 1971?

SL: Yes, and came back in 1974 almost to the exact job in Admissions and Records. I worked in Admissions another ten years.

AP: We'll say 1974 to 1984?

SL: Yes, I believe it was 1984 or 1985. Then, I went to the Academic Counseling office in Intercollegiate Athletics. I served both men's and women's. I managed all the scholarships for all twenty men's and women's sports. I worked for Elayne Donahue; she was my supervisor. I left there in 1989 and went to the School of Public Health to the Division of Environmental and Occupational Health.

AP: Faye Thompson?

SL: She's in Environmental Health and Safety.

AP: Oh, okay.

SL: That's the unit that serves the university. This was the academic unit. I was the division head secretary for nine years. In the last year that I was there, Ian stepped down as division head.

AP: That was Greaves?

SL: G-r-e-a-v-e-s. I was on soft money for the first time in my whole life and our grant ran out. We knew it was going to run out and I had to look for another job so that's how I got here.

AP: The year you came over here was?

SL: I started here in February 1998, a year and a half ago.

AP: What were the years that you were in Occupational Health? About ten years, too?

SL: Yes, 1989 to 1998. I've been in the recruiting end of it and the records keeping. I worked at the front desk in the Admissions office for many years, actually processing applications, evaluating transcripts, answering questions about transferring within the system, and helping to interpret grades and interpret international transfers. I floated in every department. I worked in every single one, whether it's freshman or transferring from outside, transferring within, international students.

AP: Which of the jobs you've had... Were any of them ones you just loved?

SL: Yes, the very first one I ever had: hand-printing transcripts. When I think about it now, it was a perfect fit.

AP: When you say hand-printing transcripts...?

SL: I brought you a sample of what transcripts really are. They're called linens because they are; it's linen fabric sized with starch. Then, it's printed on top. This is a very old transcript. That's the only reason why I have it. It's not used any more. When I started there, they were blank grids and on the top, we would hand print. We all had to take an engineering graphics course. You can see from my form here that we had to develop a stylized upper case printing.
AP: Engineering graphics?

SL: In the Institute of Technology.

AP: Does that mean that in the early days...?

SL: [unclear], so when I worked there, we had to print all the course titles.

AP: You're telling me hand print rather than type?

SL: With a Repeatagraph pen. There isn't a typewriter that this would fit into.

AP: So, this is printed as well?

SL: Right. So you understand, this one is from the 1940s but when I worked there in the 1960s, this part was not printed anymore. They were just [unclear] grids.

AP: Wouldn't it be more efficient to have all of those...? I don't understand why the 1960s was an advance over the 1940s.

SL: In the 1940s, they were so structured. They had to take these classes.

AP: Oh, I see. So what you're telling me is that the work of a record clerk in the 1960s was more, in a certain sense, labor intensive than it would have been before because the end of distribution requirements meant that you could have no mass transfers. You had to individualize every student's transfer?

SL: Yes.

AP: How long would it have taken you to do a single transcript?

SL: You know where [McKinley] Mac Boston's office is on the first floor?

AP: Yes.

SL: That was the Records.

AP: I remember. I remember all the cages.

SL: I was on the other side of those cages. All of that beautiful oak paneling and the information desk in the front... We were divided by colleges and, then, every clerk within each unit was given a particular group of letters of the alphabet. I took care of IT's *A*s and *B*s. That was my book. You can see how there's a hole in the side here. They were canvas covered, almost like a ring binder, real heavy, padded, with leather corners, and it had two spindles in it that twisted on and off. You slipped these transcripts in your book and everyday your book was on your desk and that's what you worked on. That's the only transcripts you worked on.

AP: You worked on them all day long?

SL: I was also a degree clearance clerk. I calculated for the first half of the alphabet, *A* thru *H* in IT, the balance sheet. They were all done in the Record's office. The college offices didn't do balance sheets.

AP: When you say "balance sheets," what do you mean?

SL: What a student, who was a senior who applied for the degree, needed to complete his degree. Had he finished his language requirements? Had he finished Freshman English?

AP: Couldn't you see that from the transcripts?

SL: Not really because they would have transfer credits.

AP: I see.

SL: Maybe they had petitioned to substitute something they took at Carleton for a requirement.

AP: Let's say I came in and I'm entering your program in IT, how would you create a new transcript?

SL: We would get the file from the Admissions office, which was on the ground floor, and they would have been assigned an ID number. I would get all the new admits sometime in the summer and we would take the brand new transcripts and print in ink the name, the ID number... Look at the information on here. It's pretty scary: parent or guardian, where the parent lived, birth, place of birth, whether they are a resident on a non-resident and that was determined by the residency. This is their high school record. Look at this...how many units of English and what languages they took, what math in their junior and senior year, their rank. There's their high school rank. Those are particular tests. We had their ACT [American College Testing Program] scores.

AP: The ACT would send it in?

SL: That's all in their application. That would be part of the criteria for their admission. All of that information would be on here. Now, none of that. Once they came to register... Remember the little registers? They had carbon paper in them. We got the control class entry permits for each [unclear].

AP: Right.

SL: I'm on the other end of that line with a wrought iron window that swung out and those beautiful oak counters.

AP: How long did people wait?

SL: Long.

AP: I've seen pictures of people lined up.

SL: Yes. It could be an all morning event. There was no air-conditioning in there. If you came to register and it was hot, it was hot!

AP: Did you not get a date to register? I'm trying to remember.

SL: Yes, we did. It was a rotated alphabetical order. Then, once your date passed, you could come any day, so if you didn't make it to the first day... By the end of registration, it piled up and piled up. We're at the other end of this counter, no calculator, no adding machine.

AP: This is what year?

SL: It was 1968 through 1971. My particular unit was IT, General College, and Business School, so I registered three colleges. That means I had to know, in my head, three tuition rates, resident and non-resident. We memorized what was one credit in IT and what was two credits. If they had six credits or more, you added a student services fee. The IT [unclear], I remember, was eighty-five cents a quarter. They got charged extra for that.

AP: You said three tuition rates but then you said resident and non-resident.

SL: So, that's really six, but three colleges.

AP: I see what you mean: two for each college so that's six. Now I understand.

SL: That's all in your head. You were writing fee statements that almost looked like this. They folded up in an accordion and you'd put carbon paper in them.

AP: I remember the carbon paper.

SL: We wore the plastic sleeves over our cuffs so you didn't ruin your clothes. Do you remember those? They had elastic at the wrist.

AP: I don't think I remember them. Is there a picture of anybody?

SL: I don't know.

AP: Or the other thing that might be fun would be to do a photograph of some of the old documents that could be found.

SL: Yes.

AP: That's a wonderful...

SL: On Fridays, we had the actual mechanical Repeatagraph pen.

AP: What is a Repeatagraph pen?

SL: It's a name brand that you filled from a bottle. It's got very fine tips that screwed on the point. We would have to go on Friday mornings in the women's room and wash our pens and blow out the ink on the end of the point.

AP: Because it would get jammed?

SL: Yes. You'd have to clean your pen every week and then you could have even printing.

AP: Did it look like the tip that's a triangle with a point?

SL: No. It looked more like this actually, like a rolling writer.

AP: Did the others like it as much as you did? Was there a sense of pride in the job?

SL: I'll tell you, it was an interesting group of people when I started in 1968. There were a whole group of people that, now I realize, were my age now or a little older. During World War II, there were a lot of women that worked in the armaments plant in Arden Hills making bullets and whatever else they did. After the war was over, because they were actually federal employees, they couldn't just be laid off. They were given the option of working in any other government position. They could transfer and keep their seniority. A lot of women, I think, did leave because their husbands...

AP: Sure, sure.

SL: But there were a whole group of women who had worked at the armaments plant who were now in our Records office and Admissions office. I remember Gen Cole was the woman in the information booth.

AP: J-e-n?

SL: G-e-n, Genevieve C-o-l-e. She had several fingers that she had lost in a bullet-stamping machine. She was the most delightful lady.

AP: How was she able...? She couldn't have done...

SL: She had several fingers on one hand but not very many on the other. She had a thumb and one opposing finger. She answered all the telephones for two floors! She had an intercom that she would press and say, "Ethel, line two." [laughter] All of the senior clerks had to be trained in the information booth because we would substitute for her coffee breaks and lunch hours and her vacations. She gave away all of the bulletins.

AP: And answered all of the questions, I suppose.

SL: Answered all of the questions, directed students to the correct place. She was just delightful. She had this little oak—I don't know if you remember that—information booth right where the entrance...

AP: Oh, sure, I remember it.

SL: Then, Dr. Don Beatty's office was on the right. He was the registrar. He had a Ph.D. in history. Miss McCarthy had the office on the left. Judy Chambers, who is now in the registrar's office, [unclear], was her secretary. When I came in for my job interview, Judy had the little office that's Room 150 now.

AP: Right.

SL: That was before there was an elevator there. I remember Miss McCarthy asking me on my job interview—remember, I had <u>just</u> turned nineteen two weeks ago—"I see you're married to a medical student. I certainly hope you're taking birth control. I don't like my girls to get pregnant on me right away when I hire them."

[laughter]

SL: Can you imagine?

AP: Oh, my gracious.

SL: I think I stuttered an answer—of course, I was taking birth control. [laughter]

AP: What if you'd been Catholic?

SL: Who knows? I don't know what she would have said. She was very possessive of her girls.

AP: The term "girls"?

SL: Yes! definitely. We were her girls, most definitely. I don't remember any men, now that I think of it, that weren't administrators.

AP: Let's move forward to the demonstration.

SL: Okay. Waves...

AP: There are several demonstrations. Which one do you remember the best? There were some in 1968, and some in 1969, and some in 1970 and 1972, a whole bunch of them.

SL: I'd have to say January 1969 was the one that meant the most to me. It was the first.

AP: That was the one where African-American students...?

SL: First, they came and sat in the president's office. Malcolm Moos was the president.

AP: Was he there? At one of the demonstrations, he was out of town. Was he there this particular time?

SL: I don't know that because he was two floors up. We all knew that they had been up there and there were quite a few police officers in the building at the time. They were starting to get a little concerned.

AP: Do you remember what time of day it was?

SL: It was the afternoon.

AP: Do you remember the day of the week?

SL: No, I don't remember the day of the week. I think it was in the middle of the week. It was a fairly quiet time. The quarter would have already started. There were some students canceling, adding but the lines weren't as long. They came in. The way that it worked is there was a security button that the people in the transcripts department... They would see a staff person coming up to the door and they could press a button under the desk and the main door in that big u-shaped... The staff person would then come in that way. Then, you were supposed to wait and make sure the door closed behind you. Well, evidently, they were opportunistic and waited for a staff person to come in that door and they flooded the office. Now, it seems like there were a lot of them, but there really weren't. At that point, there were maybe eight to twelve students. This was a big office. There were almost ninety staff people on that floor. Our desks were cheek to jowl. It never would have passed inspection now.

AP: Right, we both know that space.

SL: Yes. They came to all of our areas of our windows and reached in front and closed our wrought iron windows.

AP: You're meaning the students?

SL: The student demonstrators.

AP: Did they look hostile or angry?

SL: In charge. [laughter] They definitely knew what they wanted to do. They knew what they wanted to achieve. We had a black woman in our department: Maxine Jones was her name, a very elegant woman, very dignified, the best printer on the floor. She was known for wonderful printing.

She was highly offended by these students taking over her counter. She just didn't think this was very appropriate. First, they closed our windows and, then, I remember that Rosemary Woods is the one that came and sat on my desk. I'm there and she sat on my transcript book!

AP: Does that mean they've come around behind the cages?

SL: Right, they had to close the windows.

AP: I'm not understanding. I was thinking of the windows meaning just the little front windows through which paper is passed.

SL: They opened up like gates on our side.

AP: So you could actually walk...?

SL: No, no, no. They walked in through that security door. Let me sketch...

AP: They went around behind you and closed the gates?

SL: Yes.

AP: I was imagining they were in front of the gates. She stood on your desk?

SL: She sat. She had to weigh 300 pounds. She was a huge lady. Here's all of our windows, and the bursar is here, and this is where the transcript door was, and the transcripts [unclear] there, and this is where the scholarship window was and, then, we had three here for IT, General [College] and Business [School], so three sets of wrought iron doors. CLA [College of Liberal Arts] had three sets and, I guess the third one was the professional college. The Medical School, Law, all their desks were here. There were even four desks together.

AP: And they were all back around...?

SL: Right. I sat right here. They had counters that went all around. So, when they came in here, they spread out to all of the service windows and closed our windows. Once you swung your doors open, you would put your paper clips...

AP: I understand.

SL: Then, Rosemary Woods came and sat on my desk.

AP: What did she say or what happened then?

SL: "We're shutting you down," and she reached over and pulled the phone right out of the wall.
AP: Then, what happened?

SL: Well, we were rather stunned. What's going on here?

AP: There are ninety people, approximately, [unclear]?

SL: All the way around.

AP: Mostly women?

SL: Yes. Each unit had a supervisor so there was one supervisor for here, one for here, one for here. Judy Madsen, M-a-d-s-e-n, who is still here in the Records office would be another interesting one for you to talk to.

AP: Okay, good idea.

SL: She was the CLA supervisor. I think everybody else is gone. We didn't quite know what was going on. Then, Don Beatty and Dean Arnold—his first name is Dean; he's not a dean—came back. Don Beatty is now dead. I don't know where Dean is now. I know he's retired. It had to be at least a half hour when we were wondering what was going on. They told us to start leaving in pairs, to take our purses, and go through the tunnel if we could because there were student demonstrators, evidently, at all the doors. It's afternoon.

AP: Their offices are out here so they wonder in behind the students. The doors were open. Do they whisper to the supervisors and word gets passed around?

SL: Yes, right. They're all doing a little confab, what are we going to do here? The other students who were waiting to cancel, add or whatever are...

AP: Wondering what's going on?

SL: Of course, we couldn't see them anymore.

AP: The doors were shut.

SL: We are scared. Here's people sitting right on your desk. Bert Herbert was my supervisor. Oh! she was just delightful. Bertha Herbert, H-e-r-b-e-r-t, was her name. She was one that was from the armaments plant. She was just like a little bird. She just chattered and fluttered. She was real thin and the cutest thing. She was just beside herself, really. "Get them out of here! You're shutting down my office. How can you do this?" She was chattering around and flittering like a little sparrow. So, we gradually left.

AP: When did you come back, the next morning?

SL: I walked down the mall, I remember. My husband belonged to a fraternity on Ontario [Street] and that's where I would always walk down to ride home with him at the end of the day. I remember walking down seeing all these students going to class and thinking, don't you know what's going on? Nobody knew what was happening. It was a perfectly normal day outside of Morrill Hall. There was snow on the ground. It was cold. I walked down to the fraternity and when I got there, all these buddies, whoever was in the house, said, "What are you doing here in the middle of the day? Are you not feeling well?" I said, "A bunch of black students took over Morrill Hall." I remember there was one fraternity brother from the South. Well, he was ready to recruit the whole fraternity house and go and beat them all up and get them out of there. He was just incensed! I said, "That's not going to solve any problems. No, you're not going to do that." Then, luckily, my husband came from class and settled this guy down. I went home that night and that next day, Bert called us all individually and we were not to come into work; the students were still there. I don't remember, Ann, how many days they were actually in our office. It was a couple days and a couple nights, I think.

The very first day—the students were negotiated with—after they left, the janitors came in because there had been a big mess made in the office. We were not to come until the custodial staff had scrubbed and waxed the floors and cleaned up. Because I was a senior clerk, I was called in on the very first wave of the cleanup. We were told to come in slacks. Remember, we all wore dresses and shoes and stockings in those days. We were told to come dressed casually and we were all given rubber gloves. We saw, at that point then, that our desks had all been flipped over and stacked and shoved to various corners. Quite a few, not mine, transcript books had been flushed down the toilet, some of them unsuccessfully so the toilets were jammed and the bathroom was flooded. That was another thing that the custodial staff had to clean up. The fee statements as well... The fee statements were the easiest to flush because they were the lightest paper.

AP: What would happen? Was this an era of duplicate records or none?

SL: We had to regenerate transcripts from registration copies that were in college offices. If you registered, one of those carbons on the inside would be turned into your college office.

AP: Oh, I see, so a whole lot of backlog work?

SL: Yes.

AP: Oooh!

SL: Now, what if you were a student who came back for a year and you hadn't been here for ten years? Who's to say if that college office really had a copy of their registration from ten years ago? That was a big problem. Luckily, my own personal book wasn't very damaged, but all the belongings in my drawer were gone and my radio was gone, picture frames, anything like that was gone. My sweater that I had in my drawer...any personal belongings were taken. We, eventually, were compensated somewhat, much later, for that.

AP: I've seen estimates and the number that comes to me is $11,000 worth of damage, which sounds little but that's a lot in those days.

SL: Yes. After everything was recreated as much as we could recreate it and back to normal, then, because of that, there was more security. We were given safes in the office and at the end of the day or even when you went to lunch, you were to put your transcript book in the safe. Before then, when I think about it, we just left it sitting open on our desks...so naive. It was such a simple time. There was never a thought that anything would happen—not to mention that but the privacy of it wasn't an issue.

AP: Right.

Let me ask you another quick question.

SL: As a result of this, we were all taken one-by-one in the sheriff's car or a police car downtown to an attorney's office to...

AP: Give statements?

SL: Yes. I believe Rosemary Woods is now an attorney in Los Angeles. I've seen a list of all the names of the students who were actually involved in it.

AP: Was John Wright, who is [unclear] involved?

SL: I can't remember that.

AP: I think he might have been.

SL: At the time, the names didn't mean anything.

AP: It's ironic that it was necessary to have gone to those lengths to get an Afro-American Studies Department.

SL: No kidding!

AP: It's extraordinary thing.

SL: It seems so normal to us now.

AP: Right, but at the time, it wasn't that normal.

SL: How long had they had the vote? Just a few years.

AP: Mac Boston's description of walking into a university class...

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[End of the Interview]

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