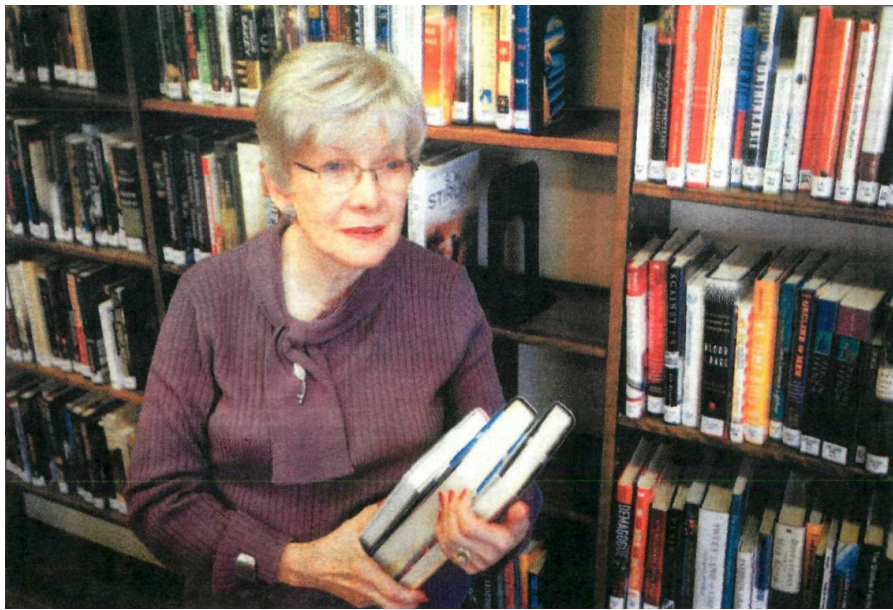




Estelle Cooperman



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Interviewer: Chad Comello

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Transcriber: Eric Skoglund, Paul Sidlowski

INTRODUCTION

Estelle Cooperman has lived in Morton Grove since 1967. Born and raised in Albany Park, she has fond memories of visiting Chicago museums and being outside in the evenings as a kid. In high school she acquired an interest in bookkeeping, which she pursued as a career as she and her husband, an appliance salesman, moved to Morton Grove in the 1960s. She served on the Morton Grove Public Library's Board of Trustees for 36 years, during which she started the library's first Friends of the Library group and in 2000 was named Trustee of the Year by the North Suburban Library System. After retiring from the board, the library's boardroom was named the Estelle Cooperman Room in honor of her years of service.

In this interview, Estelle talks about acquiring a love of libraries at an early age, her enthusiasm for serving on the Board of Trustees, and the relationships she has cherished over her years of service at the library.

This transcript has been edited for content and clarity.

EC: Estelle Cooperman

Q: Question asked by interviewer, Chad Comello

EC: We had bought a new car—after we were here for a while—on a Friday, and on Saturday morning—we didn't have this part of the building, it wasn't built yet—I go in the library, come back, and the car's not working. It's dead. I'd just bought it the day before. I come in and I tell the person at the reader's service that I needed to use the phone to call the police because I needed help. I said to her it would be worse if I wasn't stuck in my favorite place. So that is just to give you background of why I feel as I do about libraries.

Q: Well, let's start at the beginning so to speak and work our way up. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?

EC: Chicago, which was wonderful. We could go downtown on weekends, public transportation no problems, none whatsoever.

Q: And when did you grow up there?

EC: You mean, what years?

Q: Yes.

EC: Oh, that I'd rather not say.

Q: OK, that's fine.

EC: [laughter] But yes, I went to grade school and high school in Chicago.

Q: Where in Chicago?

EC: It's called Albany Park.

Q: So what do you remember about growing up in Chicago? Some favorite memories?

EC: I went to all the museums by public transportation. Everything was public transportation. My daughter came home from school and said they need help, we were going to the Museum of Science and Industry, will you volunteer? Well, I really felt that parents, if possible—now most parents are working, but I was not—would at least help the school in any way they could. I said I would be glad to, but what is the museum of Science and Industry? When I grew up it was called the Rosenwald Museum because he paid for it. So that was the beauty. I

went to every museum: Lincoln Park, everywhere, and in Chicago you could do that. And the beauty of it too, you could be out at night when you were young. Nine o'clock, when the streetlights went on, you went back home and nobody worried about you. It was such a different life.

Being able to go to Chicago, the Chicago Theater always had stars on stage. I saw Sammy Davis, Jr., with his uncle and his father. When he finished his performance—we were married at the time—my husband said he should have sung in his own voice. He mimicked people and sounded just like them, and when he sang in his own voice it was wonderful. We learned that was all he had to do, but in those days he couldn't do it any other way.

Q: So it sounds like you enjoyed the cultural opportunities.

EC: Yes, very much. And the library was a huge part of our lives. We were financially not in the upper class of anything. We had everything we needed, but we didn't have extra money. We always had a dictionary and set of encyclopedias in the house.

Q: This was growing up?

EC: Growing up, definitely.

Q: Did you have any siblings?

EC: An older sister who was an avid reader, and I'm assuming, because the library was not that close, she must have taken me the first time. And once I got in there something happened.

Q: Do you remember which library you grew up near?

EC: Oh sure, the Albany Park library. It was in a three-story front building and the librarians were marvelous. Whatever your interests they could take you there. There was a place called the JPI in Albany Park where I went as a kid, and I joined the Girl Scouts and they had a handbook. Well, I wasn't going to ask my mother to purchase a handbook, but the library let me take the book out and nobody else requested it, so they allowed me to keep renewing it. So when I came and lived in Skokie, I volunteered for the Girl Scouts and that was my way of paying back whatever I could do. I thought I'd be a Scout Leader and the lady I spoke to said, 'I don't need a leader.' I said, 'What do you need?' She said a troop organizer. I said, 'What does a troop organizer do?' Guess what she does? She organizes troops. So that is what I ended up doing. I guess I've always said if I could pay back...

And if you want to know how I got on the library board, I brought my son and two of his friends to an open house before this addition and one of their

teachers moonlighted here. He was a teacher at Edison, the grade school. I was just waiting upstairs for the kids; he took them downstairs and showed them how to read the microfiche. Oh, the kids were having a ball. I talked to this woman and we just chatted. Afterwards she asked someone who I was, and she called me when a position became available on the board. And that's how it all started. I asked her 'Why me?' and she said, 'For your enthusiasm.' Thank God I have not lost it. So basically that's now I got here.

Q: So you've loved libraries for a long time, going back as a kid. In school were there any topics you liked more than others, or did you like learning about everything?

EC: In high school I got into bookkeeping. I didn't realize I had a natural ability for it. My first year I had a man teacher and he did not care for females. I could have been the only one in the class, I don't remember, but in my second year I got the top grade. Bookkeeping comes natural to me. It's logic, little to do with just math. Because we had adding machines in those days, and you know what it is now— it's logic, and that's my gift.

Q: So did you get any work in that area?

EC: That's what I did: I became a bookkeeper. I answered an ad for a gentleman, and in Park Ridge was his first office. He hired me, which was interesting. He hired me in December and then January came and he said, 'I won't be seeing you much anymore,' and I thought, 'Whoops, there goes my job.' He was a tax accounting professor at UIC, and he just kept pushing me. He said one day, 'Here, write up this corporate tax return.' I'm a bookkeeper; what do I know? But I was able to figure out the best way to do it and that's how it went.

Q: So there wasn't a lot of support otherwise for female bookkeepers in that time?

EC: No way. Maybe there could have been, but I wasn't in that group. But he was very smart. He told you to do something and left it to you to do. I have no idea what he saw in me.

Q: You talked about was public transportation, but what other things Chicago or just in general when you were growing up are different from how they are now?

EC: The best... if you were in the neighborhood and you dared to do something that was wrong, any adult who knew you and or your family had the right to say, 'What are you doing? Why are you doing that? I'm going to tell your parents,' and that was the way it was. Everybody looked after everybody. The best thing about growing up in those years in Chicago was the way people cared about one

another, really and truly. And that was the beauty of it. And the fact that we could go anywhere. I started bowling in grade school. Loved it, and continued for a long, long time. I liked doing something I could be responsible for—just me, that didn't depend a whole team. Because everything we got in line for height-wise, I was always pushed down to the shortest, so I figured maybe that's a disadvantage, but not to me.

Q: Interesting—so you wanted to find something that you didn't have to depend on others to choose you for or that you could do yourself.

EC: Right. I enjoyed it, and I'm totally non-competitive. I don't appreciate that. It's uncomfortable. So that was...and I feel bad every time hear about something bad in a neighborhood here. I'm devastated. Because I lived there all my life until I got married, and when I see and hear about what is going on, my heart breaks, because it shouldn't be... And what is going on now, I can't even talk about it. It's so horrific I can't imagine what people have been going through. Neighborhoods change, I know that, and even here now in Morton Grove it's totally changed.

Q: You've been in Morton Grove a long time.

EC: Next month it'll be 50 years. So that would have been 1967.

Q: So what was Morton Grove like in 1967?

EC: Well, someone had told my husband about some homes in a place called Skokie Towers. I think it was Pratt, east of Central or something like that. And they were constructing, so we couldn't get in, but we got out of the car, and it looked like these gigantic houses. And I said, 'Forget it, how am I going to clean that?' I never thought about money, couldn't afford it. Because I did all my own housework. And then somebody told him about Marmora, and I said, 'What's on Marmora?' You know? And it actually is one block west of Menard and one block east of Austin. Menard cuts in. Niles West is across the street. I had no idea what a great location it was. I only knew we could get back to Chicago easily. But I found Morton Grove to be... this library, I cannot begin to tell you, because I've been to so many meetings with people, and you identify yourself, and people would come up to me and say, 'Love your Children's Room. Love your Children's Room.' There is such warmth, and it still prevails here, although most of those original employees are no longer here, and a lot of them could walk to work. So this was truly, in my opinion, a small neighborhood library.

Q: Right. And the house you moved in, originally, are you still in that house?

EC: Yes. I'm the only one left on my street.

Q: And you said you were married at that time?

EC: Yes.

Q: So, how and where did you meet your husband?

EC: In Chicago.

Q: And what did he do?

EC: He finally became an appliance salesman.

Q: Did he work in Chicago, or did he work in Morton Grove?

EC: In Chicago. Abt was not around yet. I've always had every appliance made, because they carried small appliances then. I just feel that I have been very blessed. In later years, once I got on the library board, there were so many things that I realized were the main reason I felt we should be getting more public support. I found out when I went to a Friends meeting at Niles, and the Friends bought them a piano. I came back here and I told Joan Stewart, 'Couldn't we maybe put something together?' Maybe we could get a piano. So I started a group called the Friends of the Morton Grove Library, and we asked a lady from

up north—I don't remember her name—she came and spoke. We advertised. We had a very good group of people. We didn't have the Baxter Room yet, but we had a full house, and this woman is talking, and I look around, and people are half asleep. And I said, 'Whoops! These people don't want to raise money.' So I stood up, I turned to the group, and said, 'Would you be happier if, instead of fundraisers, you physically helped the library?' Our dues were two dollars a year, and that was to cover postage and things like that. What I found here was that library users are mostly very willing to give whatever they can, because they know the value of the library. We didn't get much support from the village, really, because our budget was tied to their budget. Later years, we are on their budget, but we are identified, so we know exactly the portion that is due to the library. Which is only fair, and that's the way it should be.

But Morton Grove has had some wonderful, wonderful mayors. We used to go before the village board every year—we didn't have to, but we did—to present our budget. It was not mandatory. I remember there was a group called Central Serials, which we housed in the lower level of this building. We got rent from them, to have them be part of our building, which makes sense. And then they had access to every magazine ever written to way, way back, which was a wonderful service. They were going to discontinue that physical part of it, because of computers they could have access easily. I was giving my talk, and the mayor goes, 'Mrs. Cooperman, I understand you've recently lost some funding.' He handed it to me on a silver platter, so I explained what happened.

But because he was such a decent person that knew the value, and Mayor Scanlon as well, was very, very good to the library. Unfortunately, many people in the village were not even library users, which is fine, because there are many people who do use it and welcome it. I have talked to Pam, your director, and she said that she feels the staff is exceptional. And that's what I've always heard, although it's quite changed.

Q: How have things changed in the library over the years that you were a trustee?

EC: The service for getting information has always been the best. If they don't have it at their fingertips, they take your phone number and call you back. That has not changed. Some people came to me and said they were having trouble, and I said, 'Call the library, they'll get you the answer.' 'What would the library have to do with what I need?' But they have the resources, and that's the point. And that's wonderful. I feel that that's very crucial.

Q: So how long were you a trustee?

EC: 36 years. Why? When I was initially going to go off the board, Joan Stewart, your first really educated certified librarian, told me in December that she was going to retire, so I figured I stick around. Paul Feil, who was reference librarian, he was actually hired as her assistant and I thought that—I knew him quite well, as did

everybody—he'd make a great director, and he did. Unfortunately, during his time he became ill and passed away, which was a horrendous blow to this community. He had worked with Sharron McCoy, who was also a reference person, and I desperately wanted her, because she had all the qualifications. Paul was smart enough to share with her. If you have a job and someone you work with, you have them be in on what's going on and share things so that if you're not there they can take over, and she was the next director. So we've done very well. I don't know if you got to know Kevin?

Q: I did.

EC: OK, I don't have to say anything else. When Kevin met Ben Shapiro, who followed Sharron, he was really nervous because Kevin was all up here. Although don't say anything about Apple to him. The word that begins with an M, which I once said. The look on his face... I said, 'Kevin, I'm sorry!' When he met Ben, that was the start of more of the technology. Sharron always said, for a library of this size, she felt—and it wasn't because she was here, I know that—that Morton Grove did a fine job. I think they still do. We have so many awards and that's something, I don't know, that they had taken down some of our awards that were up there.

I retired in '09, but prior to that I was voted Trustee of the Year of the North Suburban Library System. And I must tell you that I didn't do anything. It was just

in my nature to make something easier and better. And also if I do something, you don't have to pay me. That's what my Friends group did, instead of having staff. We have a big book sale, our very first. We priced all the books. Now you have one set price, but I wanted to make money. I knew that if you had an old cookbook and you put it out for 50 cents, you could get \$5 for it because people cherish them. I didn't know. I don't love to cook, but I know people who do, so we had the book sale. We made money, but we rented tables from St. Martha's, we had staff working the sale. I worked the sale, but I don't get paid so I was free. I was talking to the director and I says, 'You know, it's a shame, we made all this money, but how much do we have left?' Not that much. I said we should have an ongoing book sale, not a big one, but something. That's how it all started.

I remember Sharron, if she was leaving the building, the books were stored in the garage and I would price them and put them on a shelf, and then whoever could would put them out once they got picked over. Even as director on her own time would stock this. Everybody got into it little by little. In my last few years, I know twice I made \$5,000, because I knew the value. I may not know I've got a treasure. A man, when it was in the front here one time, he goes, 'Oh my God.' What could I say? I didn't know what the book was worth, but he got a find and that was good.

Now, the new Friends took over when I retired, but they weren't—I'll be honest—willing to devote the time that I did. Once my husband retired he would help me physically because you have to pick the books up. I was still pricing

them. Then, on the budget, you didn't require as much money, because if \$5,000 could come from the book sale, that's a lot of money. There's nobody that's going to be willing to do what I did. I don't blame them, they just don't want to.

Q: We have the ongoing book sale still—

EC: Which is fine.

Q: —and the larger music sales as well.

EC: Yes, when they pulled the records, who knew they were going to come back?

Q: Yes, the vinyl records were big.

EC: Yes, but that's with everything. I just can't believe the turnover, how it is. I just put a turntable out for the garbage collection. I put it out early Monday afternoon, and when I went to bring the physical garbage out, that was gone. So this is what the world has come to. You got to realize the staff is trained and schooled in whatever degrees you have, and if someone could just give you a hand... Even when my children were in school I was always the room mother to give the teacher a hand. My main claim to fame there is one of my daughter's fellow students said, 'Your mother makes the best ice I've ever tasted.'

Q: Best ice?

EC: Ice. [laughter] I brought some because it was warm, and she never forgot that. But you have to help. I know that people work today, and I did go back to work professionally. This man I told you I worked for one year gave me a wonderful plaque with my name on it—it says ‘Auditor’—because by this time I had perfected my skills without a formal education. So that was it. There’s warmth here. Did you see the library before the renovation at all?

Q: Not in person, but I’ve seen pictures. It’s very different.

EC: I truly think they did a magnificent job, because they made it modern without going overboard. We were looking to move for years and don’t have enough room here. Sharron and I drove all through Morton Grove. There wasn’t one piece of property. The only one was when Abt moved out, but the way it was situated it wasn’t going to be good.

Q: So here we are.

EC: Well, this addition was fine, used the same architect that did the rest of the building. But the second floor cannot have any more structure on it, otherwise we would have gone up. That was the one mistake we made. So what can you do?

Q: Looking back, any other things or memories or events that stick out, either at the library or about Morton Grove in general?

EC: Well, when it snows here they come very quickly and clean the streets, et cetera. If you need help of any kind... I had frozen pipes once, and they came out from the village immediately. I think the service is excellent. I know its dollars and I know about taxes because I have to pay them, and I do feel that in the past, for the most part, the village in my experience has been very good about that. Recently, unfortunately, if it's in your house, is it considered a burglary? Although I was home at the time, one of those guys gets you out of the house and someone sneaks in. They told me that if I see anyone that I don't recognize, call 911 immediately. The last time it happened, I stepped out and saw a license plate in a vehicle that the guy came in. I immediately reported it, and I know they send someone out because I saw police cars, but I don't know what the end result was. The policeman told me it's all over. There is no neighborhood that can avoid this, so you just have to be smart. Where do you live?

Q: Evanston.

EC: OK, right next door. Well, I was home two days and got a total of seven calls. The caller ID I did not recognize and they never left a message. I'll tell you a good one. My husband was sitting there and we get a call. A man tells me that my husband won a million dollars, and I said, 'No, don't bother.' 'What?' I said, 'No, we don't want it.' He's says, 'Why not?' I threw him totally. They wanted the address so they would come and deliver it. The thing was they had my phone number and if you have a phone number it's very easy to get an address. And I said, 'Frankly, I don't like money.' The guy probably had a heart attack. [laughter] That's the bad thing that's going on. But I know that's everywhere. But I think the services in Morton Grove are excellent.

Q: So what has kept you busy since retiring?

EC: Well, I was still working up until 2015 when the place went out of business, so that was unfortunate. I use the library and I've gotten over to the Civic Center for certain things, which is nice. Unfortunately, when I was thinking about coming here, there's just one other person, Art Goldstein, who retired from the board, is a friend of mine. He got on the board because I had asked him, and he did a marvelous job. I'll be very honest: I do not think the board he was on appreciated him. A very intelligent man. But they were going to do their own thing. I hope the new board that will come in now will do much better. It upset me that people

didn't run for the board, because when I was on the board we would try and recruit. I got Art, I got Dr. Walter Zinn, people that are interested in libraries. Some people that have joined the library board, they don't even have a library card, so they never step foot in here. It's important, very important. I learned a lot about the school, especially Niles West, which is right across the street, so that's easy. At one time we had once a month a public officials' meeting where everybody from each entity surrounding here—the schools, the library, the village—we all came and talked about what we're doing and how we can help each other. I think Park View was having some renovations, and one of the other schools said we'll take the classes that you'd normally have, we'll have them—that's what it's all about. That's what you need.

I was very proud when we had a meeting with people in the village, a lady—I think she was the principle of the Muslim school—said when 9/11 happened within seconds the police were at their mosque guarding them, which says a lot. That's as it should be. You can't condemn a whole group of people for what some people do. So that's unfortunate. I think here, this village, they have to try and get more people. I know ethnically, I remember when I was a little kid my aunt lived here, my cousin lived here, you know what I mean, in the same neighborhood. And we didn't have cars—well, there were cars but nobody drove, and that's what you need. You don't just stay with your own group. You have to fan out. A lot of people have, but in my opinion not enough. And it makes me feel

badly, like the library board, I had no idea that this was happening. I don't want to do it anymore. [laughter]

Q: It doesn't mean you want to come back?

EC: I'll tell you the truth: yes and no. I figure I've earned my leave, truly. I'm not saying that I didn't enjoy it, because I did. I'll be very honest, I have an attendance record that you wouldn't believe. I think I missed maybe five meetings in 36 years.

Q: That's pretty good.

EC: You take a calendar for the year and you mark off the day of the meeting, so if someone asks you, 'Can we do something next Thursday?' you say, 'No, I have a meeting.' That's all. Vacations, yes, and other things, *that* you have to miss. I just never understood people. It's a responsibility. I once told someone at the meeting that this isn't a private club that if someone can't come you don't meet; as long as you have a quorum you have to meet. I like the fact that I felt the administration here respected—as far as I knew when I was member of the board—the employees, which I think is very important. 'Cause you have to be happy, or when we come in you're not going to make us happy, right? But certainly the world is upside down, and you can have difference of opinion.

It was interesting, we had a meeting here and, I forgot about this... Was it in the Baxter Room? Probably it was in here; of course it looks so different. The two opposing factions for the village were answering questions. I thought they're going to kill each other. Well, I was carrying water. We had this sink, but I was downstairs or, I don't remember where, and they were all chatting like they were best friends, from the two parties. And I felt so good, because they disagreed, but after all we still lived here. But now I think the one thing I loved, which I didn't know when I got on the board, was there shouldn't be politics. I believe my first time that I ran they asked if I had a political affiliation and I said no. I didn't even know what they were talking about. What does it have to do with the library? Of course they ask that anymore, because there's nothing here.

Q: So would you not consider yourself a political person?

EC: I'm open-minded, very open-minded. I can always see where a person is coming from, always. That's been a gift. We don't have to agree necessarily, but like on the library board, let's all go in the same direction, which would be forward. Certainly things came up on the board that I thought, 'Oh my God, they've got to be kidding!' We did something and it turned out that it wasn't the best. You think it sounds good and that's important. Some people want to have the fact that they were trustee on their resume. There are reasons why people run for office. Definitely. Which may not be the best reasons. [laughter] Truly.

We were here in this new addition here, which isn't so new, and we all pitched in to move things and clean things. We were here cleaning the glass in the doors here. I asked the question, 'Do you do windows at home?' The two people turned to me and said, 'Don't be ridiculous.' They're cleaning because this was different. We pitched in and it was just wonderful.

We have very early programs for children here. Extremely important. I'll be honest, when I got married I told my husband we needed two things. 'What do you need?' I said I needed a dictionary and hopefully a set of encyclopedias. He thought, 'What am I doing?' Because that's what we had. My father read a newspaper and a dictionary was right next to him. I'll tell you, I asked many questions in the board room. Because I didn't know the answers.

Q: So learning has been a big part of your life.

EC: Absolutely. I'm not going to sit here, you tell me something and I'm going [nods] and I'm going to have no idea what you're telling me. It could be asking me to do God knows what. I don't know. But I believe in finding out. It's like someone got on the board and, I'll never forget it, she asked what her perks were. Perks? What the heck are perks? Well, she came from a different board and moved to Morton Grove. There's no perks here, trust me. [laughter] The only perk we ever got was when we had a new bag or something and so we'd carry it around and people would know where we were from. But I really feel that the staff, from

everybody I met so far, and I'm sorry that some of the prior staff is no longer around, but you get new people, you get new ideas, and I think it's wonderful. I'm one of the knitters from Colleen's group. That was a terrible blow for us, but I'm so happy to say we asked to continue. We're doing it because we want to but mostly for Colleen. 'Cause we all feel the same way.

Q: It was a sad loss.

EC: Yes, I would ask her a question and, I'll never forget, she looked at me and said, 'Oh, what you like is a 'cozy mystery'.' I had never heard the expression. She's right, that's what I like. Not Mr. Patterson. [laughter]

Q: Not cozy enough?

EC: I don't know how people read some of his stuff. It affects me; it doesn't affect them. I don't like blood and gore and bad treatment. I know it exists, but I don't have to take it in my heart. No.

Q: That's the nice thing about having options here, right?

EC: That's what so good. That's another thing, I remember when I was president of the board, a man wanted *Der Spiegel*, which is a German newspaper, and it's not

a very nice paper for certain people. I had to be polite to him. So what we did was we bought the newspaper for a year, discontinued it after a year. He never asked for it again, nobody else ever read it, and that was it. So even though you don't like something, you have to go along with it. There were actually two other instances in my time when somebody objected and we did the best we could. But because, like I say, Patterson makes me sick, so should I tell you not to have his books? And I didn't know he's written some children's books too. But that's why it's diverse. And we've had people walk out with objectionable books, because we don't pull it. Although it's harder to walk out today. But if I'm standing there and the buzzer goes off and someone at the desk says 'Go ahead,' that I don't like. No, have them come back and find out why it's ringing. That's the point of it. A couple of people that knew me have gone to the desk, had a problem, and told the person at the desk, 'Well, I know Estelle Cooperman.' And the desk says, 'So do I,' and that's it. [laughter]

Q: You're famous here because the boardroom is named after you.

EC: That was... I cannot begin to tell you. I was astounded. When I got the award for Trustee of the Year, it was a glass book, just beautifully engraved. When Sharron retired they bought her a big book, and my book is like this, so I assumed I would get a big book. Well, we had the meeting and they said at the board meeting, 'One more item,' and there was an easel over here—I don't pay any attention.

One of the board members gets up and unveils this thing. I just was floored. Everything I did, I just did because I cared. This is so important. I don't know what kind of life I would have had if I didn't have a library. It's crucial.

And that's why I object in schools when they cut certain things. My son was at Lincoln Junior High and they had cooking, drama, typing, and one more. They took the curriculum and split it in four different subjects, and I felt that was taking and rounding a person out; boy, girl, it didn't matter. In his time, computers weren't started yet, you know. There was nothing. But by the time he got to a computer, he could type, so it did do some good for him. And that's what's so wonderful. That's so important. But like they don't want to have gym anymore, or, oh my God. I can't even imagine, you know? But I do know it's harder because parents are working. And they're working, in my opinion, sometimes, because they just want everything yesterday. I don't feel that way, no.

I feel that this building, knock on wood, we do the best we can. And we've got Skokie next door. Unfortunately, when there was an election of board people here, some of the new people coming in suggested Morton Grove doesn't need any more money—just go over to Skokie. Well, when the director of Skokie heard this, she was not too pleased. I spoke with her, and I said, 'To be honest, the board, the present board, never said that.' Because we wouldn't do that. The cooperation... that's another beautiful thing today. I wanted something and it came from California.

Q: Yeah, through interlibrary loans.

EC: Absolutely, and people don't know that. And that's the beauty of it. And, if you're in, we used to call it Reference. What do you call it now, Reader Services?

Q: Well, we're Adult Services.

EC: Adult Services, right. What you love best is if I need something and you've got to go find it, because that is the challenge. And Paul Feil, the director, he worked reference once a week. Sharron, once she became director, still worked reference once a week, because that is so fulfilling. And that's probably what it is with me. In bookkeeping, you get a product immediately. You don't have to wait. It either works or it doesn't. You get such pleasure. You know, I never knew, they told me once someone would come in and say, 'I can't think of the name of the book, but it had a blue cover.' [laughter]

Q: Right. [laughter]

EC: And I thought they were kidding! And then I thought about it. You know, I'll be honest, I don't know if you can relate to this. I think we were living still here maybe, or in Skokie, and I went to the library. The library was Central Park off of Devon in Chicago, big library, very nice. And I told the librarian I wanted the book

about the nursemaid that flew—that’s all I could remember. She said, ‘You mean *Mary Poppins*?’ [laughter] And then for my son, I think in Skokie I said, ‘There’s a book about a little Chinese boy.’ She said, ‘You mean *Little Pear*?’ If I could remember that from my childhood, you can imagine what a profound effect that book had on me. But the library people know this, which is so wonderful. That’s why Colleen was so... if you tell her a little bit about something, she just knew. Because you have to be curious. Well, I know I’m curious. And then when I got my first cat I realized that I’m a cat. I have the same curiosity. Cats are extremely curious. I don’t dislike dogs, but I’m strictly cats.

Q: Well, you’d fit in well in the library world then.

EC: Well, Joan Gross, at the time she was the head of the children’s department, she had seven cats. I met her recently at Trader Joe’s and she had three or four at this time. And on the board at one time, we had seven board members and we had maybe ten cats between us. [laughter] Just a coincidence.

Q: Right. [laughter]

EC: But you’re OK even if you’re not a cat person. I forgive you.

Q: Well, is there anything else you’d like to share?

EC: No, I just feel the library has done a wonderful job. I think they've kept up with technology beautifully. And I don't think our size, we're small, but it's warm here. I went to an accountant for my taxes when I stopped doing them myself—I just didn't want to bother—and he said, 'Say, do you still have that book sale?' I said, 'Yes!' He said, 'My wife reads all those big romance books, would you be interested?' I said, 'I sure would, but wait a minute, you live in Skokie!' He said, 'Yes, but your people in Morton Grove have helped me so much that I want to donate the books to you.'

Q: That's great.

EC: So that was very nice. When we were looking for this addition, we sent letters to million-dollar companies in Morton Grove. Believe it or not we had them. They were here. And most of the follow-up I did, because I had the time. I wasn't locked in to a nine-to-five, five days a week. And in the replies from the companies around here, the reason they gave us the donations was because, as I was told, 'Your librarians have helped our librarians so much.' And that's before... now that wouldn't happen because they all have their resources. But then, we were the only ones. And that's the beauty of it, the cooperation. That's what still prevails. I know I said goodbye to Carolyn Anthony when she left Skokie, and I can understand why she wanted to retire, but we had a beautiful

relationship with them. At one time there were four of us in the first consortium with the computers: Deerfield, Morton Grove, Skokie, and one more, I can't think of the name. But anyway, it was so... I guess I would be the perfect poster child to tell people, not just this library, but what's so wonderful about a library and the kindness. I can't explain it, because, now thank God, financially, you make a decent wage. A lot of our people who worked here later went to Skokie, because naturally they have a bigger budget. But I always said people don't work in libraries for the money. Right?

Q: Right. [laughter]

EC: [Laughter] Yes. But you got to get something back. And satisfaction is enormous. But as far as the history, we had a local history room here. And one of the board people—she's deceased now—worked on interviewing people and getting the stories. There's a wonderful video, and I know that we have it, I don't know if it's called *Remember Morton Grove* or something, but just fantastic. I never knew there was an airport on Dempster. You know, what? And the florist that has since closed, Mr. Lochner, I went to collect for Channel 11 when they had the auctions, and he told me stories. Wow. This was quite a town. The gambling that went on here. If you won money, you were escorted home, because they didn't want anyone to hold you up and get the police involved. Truly. Lincolnwood, do you know what Lincolnwood's name was? Tessville.

Q: Tessville?

EC: That's what he told me, yes. Lincolnwood. Because when I lived in Skokie, Lincolnwood was about two blocks away. When I moved to Skokie, Skokie's library was in a storefront. Even the people in Skokie don't know this. I have to tell them. Thank God they were able to grow like that and make such good use of what they have. I remember my husband went to an eye doctor in Evanston, and it was right across from the library, the old Evanston Library, and we were killing time, so naturally I went to the library. I found all kinds of old books that they didn't weed. We have to, because we have no place to keep them. That was interesting. And I don't know now, I've been to the new library; it's almost too big. It doesn't feel like this, I can't explain it. And those pictures, I'm sure you've seen them, of Chicago that we had on the wall upstairs. I don't know where they put them. Those were in memory of Paul Feil. He just loved Chicago. Just adored Chicago. Sometimes I feel that I'm a Chicagoan although I've been here longer. But when you lived, in those years, in Chicago, you could go anywhere. Again, by public transportation. And when they made the streets one way, I can't imagine how two cars fit, because you've got parking on both sides, and just barely enough room—it's amazing. But when we lived there, we didn't have a car, so it didn't make any difference. That's it.

Q: Great.

EC: But, like I say, I'm just disappointed in the fact that people have not shown an interest.

Q: Yeah, it's tough. Like you said, you have to dedicate time without any pay.

EC: And people have asked me over the years, 'How much money did you make?' [laughter]. Really. And that's just so sad. I never even thought about money, you know. When she asked me to run.

Q: Well, you're a true believer.

EC: Yes, but a lot of my former board members were exceptional, and a lot... [checks watch] 'I hope this meeting will be over soon.' I mean, that's just awful. And we got a lot of that, too. What can I say. Listen, just like you have patrons you like better than others, that's just the way it goes. And I was the one all those years, I felt that board members should pay fines. And now it's mandatory. If you cease to be a patron, how can you know what goes on?

Q: Right.

EC: If I walk in and you roll out the red carpet because I'm a big shot, then how do I know what's happening here? I'll tell you a quick story, you've never heard it, but Barb Sclafani, who was a shelver, was pushing a wooden cart. Now, I don't know how much experience you've had with carts...

Q: I've had a lot.

EC: OK. Wooden ones are great. The metal ones, yeesh. And I say, 'Barb, you've got a wooden cart!' And she throws herself on the cart, like this, and says to me, the 'big shot,' 'And you can't have it.' And that's when I knew whatever I was doing was right, because I was one of them. I was, 'What do you need? Tell me, and I'll help.' You know? That's the whole point. You're the one that's educated in this. I don't care how much schooling I would have had, but I haven't had library science, and that's the difference. That's what I found, that the people here were just wonderful. You have met Michael Hurley, I'm sure.

Q: Yes.

EC: Well, Michael was exceptional. And Ronny, who does some knitting downstairs on Mondays, he and I were in the Fourth of July parade, and she asked him what kind of costume he'd like, he said Superman. I have a picture; I really should bring you those pictures. He said Superman, and she made him a Superman.

You'd swear that he was Reeves. Honestly, she's so talented. That's another thing here. And the food here is good, because people are always bringing food in, and that was very nice. But I feel very fortunate. Did you get to know Claude?

Q: Yeah, I actually interviewed him as well.

EC: Did you? Wonderful. He is just a super man. He is so gifted with his hands, what he could do. Saved the library a ton of money. And then I find out he's working at Niles.

Q: Yeah, he's still going.

EC: Oh, he's just a fantastic person. He got to know my husband quite a bit, too, because he was helping me with the book sale. And he's just down-to-earth, and I think that's what's good here. Very, very good. I do go to programs at Skokie and I've met some very, very nice people, but of course I don't know the staff as well as maybe I'd like to. But I think, just keep up the good work, and if there is any question you have about the history, I can still remember most of it. Well, like I say, the local history and all the other things. We've had some very dedicated people. This teacher I told you about who had the children, they made books which I remember donating. When we were down in the local history room, I

found my son's book and what he wrote in there. [laughter] It wasn't bad, but he spoke the truth, as a kid would.

Q: Yeah.

EC: Yes. And that's it, that's what's so good here. And I just hope it maintains. But I think we really have to have more people in here for programs, but then they have to want to be part of this. That's something we can't make easier, because either they want to devote or not. It's just like with the Friends group. I said to myself, these people, they fundraise for so many things, and now you're asking them to do it for something else, and they've just got it up to here. And so we would host parties and whatever event that we had. The thing is that you don't have to pay them, because they're volunteering. When it first started two of the board members said, 'Volunteers, forget it.' I said, 'Why? I've been volunteering my whole life.' They said you can't depend on them. But there are many that you can, so you have to look at it that way.

Q: Right. Well, thank you for participating.