



Library podcast

Anne Cisney and Eric Cisney

[00:00:00] Eric Cisney: I started in the library building that was built, I think, it was opened in 1959 and was torn down in 2001. Your grandmother, my mother, worked in the Carnegie Library, which preceded that. And now you're working in the new library that opened up in what, '04, I think.

[00:00:20] Anne Cisney: Yeah. And I'm currently the president of the Library's Union, and that's also a legacy thing because you were previously the president of the Library's Union.

[00:00:21] EC: Right.

[00:00:28] AC: Can you tell me something about how the union came to be?

[00:00:32] EC: Maybe '69, something like that, '70, we had heard rumors that they were thinking about taking away our vacation. Paying us a little more but we wouldn't get so much vacation. And nobody wanted that. With the union an employee never has to be alone in facing anything. They have help. It's not about pay so much as about a whole bunch of other stuff.

[00:00:54] AC: Feeling heard, feeling valued.

[00:00:56] EC: Yeah.

[00:00:57] AC: Feeling supported.

[00:00:58] EC: Right, right.

[00:00:59] AC: Knowing that your professional expertise and your dedication, that those things are respected and valued and that as the library looks toward the future and considers what program of service we may have and what the citizens of Seattle want, that they will look to the staff who work every day with those patrons and care so deeply about that work. And incorporate our expertise and our passion into that plan. Without a union it would be very easy for the library not to do that.

[00:01:26] EC: As most other professions and so forth, it's more about adversarial relationship, I think, between company or whatever and the employees. It doesn't have to be, but I think it is a lot of the time anyway. And in our case, in Seattle Public Library, they're trying to make it not that way.

[00:01:42] AC: And we're a better library system for it, I think.

[00:01:44] EC: Right.

[00:01:45] AC: In the world of Google, some people say the library isn't as needed. I feel it's needed even more than ever, and what we need to do is really make people understand that in the library they have a partner in whatever quest they're following. Even with Google they think everything's on the Internet.

[00:02:02] EC: Right.

[00:02:03] AC: But it isn't. And even when it is, you can get 30,000 hits for a very simple question, and trying to figure out how to navigate that --

[00:02:11] EC: Right.

[00:02:12] AC: Requires a guide.

[00:02:14] EC: Yeah.

[00:02:15] AC: And there's nothing more rewarding to me than when a class of junior high school kids comes in, and they're bored and they really don't want to do any research, but they're doing a History Day project. And they come in and they're thinking, "Well, civil rights in the 1940s, that's really boring. This is so old, I don't know." And you take them down to the Reader's Guide and you show them that "This is the Google that people would have used in the 1940s. You're Googling in this book." And then you find a magazine reference and you walk them over to the shelf, and you say, "Look at this article where we are debating the value of African-Americans in the United States. Your great-grandmother might have received this magazine article from the turn of the century. This might have been the only information she had about an entire class of people within the United States. What do you think, looking at this now, she must have thought?" And their jaws drop. And suddenly they have this perspective on history because they're holding an artifact from a time period that is not on Google, and even if there were a picture of it on Google it doesn't have the same effect.

[00:03:16] EC: Right, yeah.

[00:03:18] AC: And the public library exists for that.

[00:03:19] EC: Yeah.

[00:03:20] [MUSIC]