

Interview with Richard Harbaick 3/12/96
Northern Michigan University Book Store

INT: My first question is Where are you from? Are you from Marquette?

RH: Originally, Manistique, born in Wisconsin but originally Manistique.

INT: Did you relocate from Manistique for the Job?

RH: Yes for the job.

INT: okay,

RH: I was living in Wisconsin before I moved up here.

INT: Why did you move up here

RH: for the job, I was managing Montgomery Ward. I graduated from Northern, went to Montgomery Ward, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan. Really got tired of moving and I was going to get transferred back to Illinois. I don't know how many? want for, but I called up one of my buddies up here to interview this job. Eventually took the job, that was in 1966.

INT: when you started.

RH: yes

INT: did it take some persuasion to take the job at the bookstore?

RH: Well we had to do some talking, I had some pretty good size stores, in fact I had two stores, this was a small store compared to what I had. This store was about the size of some of my departments. So I really was not interested at first. I came up here three or four times and looked at it and my wife was from Gladstone. My wife also graduated from Northern. We thought here is an opportunity to get back in our home area. It wasn't really the job I wanted to get back up here, but we would come back and we could stop moving around so much. WE wouldn't have to be transferred. But once we got up here and got started we liked it, we enjoyed it.

INT: enjoyed the area

RH: we got up here stayed here, I left Northern in 1993. Stayed here for quite awhile.

INT: couple years hey, and then you became the bookstore manager in 1966, you took management position right away.

RH: Right

INT: why did you choose the Northern Bookstore, they came to you

RH: Well I was invited, to come up here. I think 5 years before

INT: then you relocated back to your original area

RH: At first I had a buddy had me come up here and sort of look at the bookstore and come up with a plan, sort of a little a consultant. I was suppose to do a consulting program for them and then consider managing the bookstore for them. I did a five year projection presented that to the Vice President. Then eventually accepted the job as manager.

INT: and what did your job as manager consist of?

RH: well at that time general manager of the bookstore, it was small and there really wasn't a assistant manager.

INT: where was the bookstore's location?

RH: When I began the bookstore would be located, you know where the bookstore entrance is now, that is approximately the entrance to the old bookstore. when I came only the store looked much smaller.

INT: Did it look basically the same when you left.

RH: You mean when I retired.

INT: yes

RH: No,

Int: can you tell me about those changes? like, were they limited

RH: They expanded five different times. If I remember when I started the bookstore was about 4,000 sq. ft when I began and when I left it was 20,000 sq. ft. WE put in new merchandising programs and expanded programs we already been here in tact when I came. Really expanded to meet the customer demand. Went very heavily into used books. took a lot of space.

INT: all those changes to meet the demands were you responsible for all of that?

RH: yes

INT: Was there anything you wanted to accomplish and you were unable to.

RH: nothing major, you know when you renovate and expand you always want more money so you can do more things. Your never satisfied that appetite. So you find the happy medium you are happy with.

INT: what do you think are the bookstore's best qualities?

RH: well, we took a customer survey, maybe I think 5 years before I left. There was a new survey put out by the Management department, University of Texas, one of the Texas schools, this was made primarily for college's. So we completed a survey. The things we found out that on the survey that really surprised me, customers I am talking about are the administration and the students and faculty. That the staff is friendly and helpful, they liked the merchandise selection, they would of liked more store hours if possible, they told us they don't like to stand in line, but every college book store you do. Anyway from the information we got we could shorten the lines, we did extend some hours, we could work around that, it was an excellent survey and we got some good feedback.

INT: Would you say the bookstore had some bad qualities?

RH: yes, abut lets not talk about that.

INT: okay, that's fair.

RH: No there is always room for improvement, the students said we had good customer service, abut there is always room to improve customer service, you can always improve on that. I think there are some things in our merchandise selection that we would of liked to of carried, would abe nice to carry, abut as you get into these there just wasn't the demand for it. Price makes a big difference. The students just don't have the income to support some of the lines we got into. We wanted to get more into the computer software and hardware. We couldn't get into that because of the space restrictions. Took a lot of space.

INT: what were the supplies and selections like. Were they limited or ah

RH: for example in the softwood line, there were some pricey merchandise item that some student would of liked to have. But there weren't that many students that were going to buy it, ? a department alike that. Things get requested more and more ?. And I think that trend is still demand ?. When I came there was a very limited sources purchasing used books. When I was in school we just traded books around a lot. So after a number years the used books brokerage firm begin to grow. It gave us a source to buy used books. Our used book market grew from about 3 percent of sales to 44 percent of sales. That was high for a college bookstore, that was high for a college store, every college store at that time had about 22 percent of there sales in used books and we were ranging in 44 percent. But that was one way we could help students cover textbook costs.

INT: what do you think the improvements are of the supplies and the books now.

Rh: lets just talk about supplies, they are wider and merchandise is certain. You talk about the supplies in school supply dept. sizes, colors, papers, sizes and colors pens, different pens for different projects, art dept. supplies, the art department has quadrupled in size. Much better merchandise selection in brushes and paints and art accessories.

INT: Like a little mini mart you can buy anything now.

RH: that is what it was intended to be. To save you from running down town. The intent also all those years not to compete with down town stores. I worked in the Chamber of Commerce, we were here to support the academic program at northern and not to compete with the down town business. We took lines of merchandise out of the store because a merchant downtown said that is our line, that is our business, they would say oh well.

INT: did you have low prices.

RH: lets say fair prices

INT: fair prices, pretty much what it costs the maker.

RH: sometimes you can find the same price downtown, lets say pretty much the same price downtown, sometimes they can make a better purchase at a better price, sometimes we can make a better purchase at a better price. But we would have a little ?, it all works out.

INT: okay and my last question what did you leave the management position at Northern.

RH: at Northern, December 31, 1993, 5:01 p.m.

INT: exactly

RH: that was my last day of work.

INT: and did you enjoy your

RH: immensely, the longer you stay the better you like it. In fact I have been retired for a little over two years now and I still miss it.

INT: you do,

RH: I do, I come ? what I really miss, is the job, it was an interesting job, I miss the people, first of all the people at the bookstore, but the people at Northern, working with students is really something different, it is so nice to work with, work with young people and watch them grow, and having the students for employees, we have had students work for us for four years and watch them go out and two of the students I had working for me are now book store managers, another one is a manager of a retail store

in Minneapolis, another is an assistant manager in a book store downstate.

INT: so everyone went into management.

RH: well not everyone, some went on to get there Ph.d's. and something else. But it was fun to follow the students after they work here.

INT: I am sure it is.

RH: you are going to be talking to Don Potvin I understand.

INT: yes,

RH; well I called Don last night to get some information, he said he was going to be talking with you tomorrow. I said give me the date you started, you can get that from him. and there is a Mrs. Pallatier, have you contacted her?

INT: no

RH: The first manager of the bookstore was Dr. Mattson. The story I got, you can check this with Don, Don and I are friends.

INT: okay

RH: I think way back then, faculty had to get there own books. Own books for there students. Of course they didn't change books for a while, they got a book they stayed with it for awhile. Then the story I got, Dr. M? in the math department, decided there had to be a system, get all our books together for ? and sent all the ? at one time, so they got a system going. But if there was a store I really don't know. I came to school in 1948. And Mrs. Christianson was the bookstore was at the bottom of Longyear Hall which is no longer there. What year are you in.

INT: my third year

RH: you remember Longyear Hall then don't you

INT: I wasn't here, I transferred here

RH: Oh, anyway right next to Jamrich there was a hall named Longyear, that's been demolished, the first bookstore was down there. sometime in there when Don was in there, they moved over to I think Lee Hall or Carrie Hall. Don will give you that information, if you get Don in here he can give you a good history before him

INT:okay, great thank you very much. Yes I went to the archives and they have nothing, they got lost or burnt or something.

RH: but over the years or so, they expanded 16,000 feet but over the years the sales kept rising, so we were really selling more merchandise, we bring in more lines, and sell more and more merchandise, we needed more space, we kept growing and growing. so really I should of retired in June of 93 but I started the bookstore new expansion and so I stayed on until December 31, to finish the book store, and I handed the keys over to Mike Kushak, I brought Mike in as my assistant manager and I would say Mike is a first assistant manager, we always had manager, I think as the store grew we needed an assistant manager. So I wanted to say Mike is the first Assistant Manager, so from the management hierarchy was Manager and assistant manager.

INT: who is this Alice Christianson,

RH: Alice Christianson tried to follow her, Alice Christianson her husbands name was Russell, if you want to look in the phone book. Her number is 226-8458. I got this from Don. She could give you some early history of the bookstore.

INT: so she was before

RH: She was before Don.

Int; Okay

RH: So it would of been Dr. Mattson, as I understand it, Ella, then Don and then myself and Now Mike. Now you have all the managers of the book store.

INT; Okay great.

RH: Now I have to go out and skiing

INT: you are going out skiing again.

RH: yes.