

Roberta Depp

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02:02

David:

Alright, let's start our interview. Firstly, thank you very much, Roberta, for joining me today. I really appreciate you being here, and . . .

Roberta:

Thank you.

David:

. . . I'd love to have you start just by having you introduce yourself. Just share your name, and maybe just a little bit about yourself.

02:15

Well, I'm Roberta Depp. I'm retired director of the Mamie Doud Eisenhower Public Library. And in the past I've been director at other county or, or town, or city libraries. So I came here with some prior experience and was excited about the possibilities. Hang on.

There is a pause as Roberta takes care of a cell phone call.

2:47

03:02

03:08

Can you just share a little bit about like, maybe when you first heard about Broomfield, or what drew you to the place, that sort of thing?

03:17

I was working in Berthoud, Colorado, which had a, a small library that had just been built. And the library board had hired me to establish the library program and hire staff. So it was a small library. But I had recently moved back to Colorado from New England. And it was a fun project to do. And I was very happy. And one day, I got a phone call from Hugh Brown, who was assistant city manager, and he said, we have this job opening, would you like to, have you applied? Have you seen it? I said, oh I saw it advertised. He goes, well, why haven't you applied? And I said, well, I'm pretty happy right now. He said, well let me come talk to you. So essentially, I was recruited.

David:
He sought you out.

Roberta:
He sought me out, yeah. And so

04:19
it was,

04:22
it went, the city was doing an experiment in recruitment process at the time. So it was quite an interesting process. And I had to compete against three other candidates. And we gave talks and different presentations. We had topics that we had to discuss. It was very different. But I got to meet a lot of Broomfield people during that process. The staff and the library board and a citizens group and town officials and employees and I, I liked what I saw. And so I thought it was, would be an interesting challenge. And so I came here.

05:10
David:
So tell me, you had been living, I presume, near Berthoud.

Roberta:
In Berthoud.

David:
But then you came here after that?

05:18
Roberta:
Yeah, I commuted for a year. But then as they kept building more and more development along 287, the commute was getting longer and longer because of the traffic. And with a lot of night meetings, it was getting to be a challenge. So I decided to move to Broomfield. And my husband was working south of Denver at that time, so it worked out well for both of us.

05:44
David:
Do you know much about your predecessor in that position?

05:52
Roberta:
I, I met her. In fact we had a recognition for her at the library, where the library board had paid for a photograph to be done of her and put in the library in recognition of her service. She had started out at the library as a library clerk and went back to, to classes in Library Science and got her degree, and

she was the second librarian only for Mamie Doud, as when her predecessor retired, she took over the position. So I ended up being the third director.

David:

Very good, so good.

06:38

And what year was that

06:40

again?

Roberta:

2016 when I came.

06:44

David:

Very good. So tell me just a little bit more, I know you're involved in the community here in Broomfield. What are some of the things that you are currently doing in Broomfield and kind of what, what does that look like?

07:01

Roberta:

Right now I'm on the board of the Friends of Broomfield History. I'm the secretary. I was the treasurer before. And I joined the group because in my job as director of the library, two museums, the Veterans Museum and the Depot Museum, kind of came under our, under our arm to take care of with renovations to both buildings. That was an exciting project, and hiring a museum administrator and helping establish the first Friends of the Depot Museum, initially it was called. (Inaudible) citizenship supporters. So having been involved in all of that, and actually helping to physically clean out the basement of the Depot Museum, which had to be done for the reconstruction. Structurally, the building needed to be brought up to better standards. It was, it's built into, the basement is built into the side of the hill. And the hill was potentially pushing in the wall. So a lot of support work had to, to go in, to be done in the building before we could open it to the public. So we had to clean out the basement. And that materials, or items that have been collected over the years were numerous, to say the least. And there were piles all the way up to the ceiling. And there were boxes and there were bags and furniture and just everything you could imagine. We cleaned out what we thought was a closet. And we discovered it was a restroom. And there was all kinds of strange things. But it was, it was great. But anyways, because of that investment, and I've always had an interest in local history wherever I've lived, I decided to get involved in the Friends of the Depot Museum, which, when I joined was, had just changed its name and scope to the Friends of Broomfield History.

09:20

David:

Wow. Fantastic. So during your time as the library director, and then as you, as you moved on towards your role now with Friends of Broomfield History, what are some changes that you've seen in town?

09:36,

Oh, wow. A lot. I feel, I feel like one of the early homesteaders who were amazed at the change in their town as, as it grew. And the folks that we've heard from, and their stories in the 1920's and, and in the 50's when Broomfield Heights came in. When I first came to Broomfield, I believe the population was about 47,000 - somewhere in that number. It was a very comfortable size. And I was impressed by the community spirit. how many people participated in different community organizations. I'd never worked in local government where there were so many advisory and community boards that were volunteers. So that was quite impressive. And the story of the folks who had settled here in, after World War II, and had built the town, they were still on council, they were still on a lot of the boards and commissions. So I had the, the privilege of getting to meet some of them and know them. But, but now, with all the steady growth, I'm not opposed to growth, it's just amazing how fast it has occurred. And we're still hoping for a downtown.

11:04

David:

I'm sure that was a discussion when you first started, and it's still a discussion . . .

11:07

Roberta:

It's still, correct. Correct. But the, the mall had already been built when I came here, it was still brand new. And you know that, but then all of the huge apartment complexes that are building now, I think are changing, perhaps, the character the town, of the city, I had some concern that it'll be harder to maintain a sense of community with so many huge apartment complexes, where folks come and go so frequently, that it will be a challenge for the city leaders and, and residents who want to keep that sense of community alive.

11:58

David:

I think I'm curious too, just about the changes at the library itself. You know, libraries are community centers, they're also a place where people come to access resources, that sort of thing. What did you notice over time, you maybe, as the population grew, as different, serving different people, different needs? How, how did that change over time?

12:25

Roberta:

When I first came to the library here, I would call it a very traditional library. Extreme, very book-centered. I love books, so that's not a problem. But story hours and the kind, those traditional things. But the whole library community at that time was undergoing changes, across the nation, where

we were becoming more of a community center and offering more programs. So that was one of the things that I think I helped direct our staff, in putting together more programming for different ages. And changing to a more digital, to more digital resources as well, so that we could offer more to our patrons than what would just fit in the physical structure of the building.

David:
Yeah.

Roberta:
And a dramatic example of that is the reference collection. I used to work for a reference book publisher. So I had kind of a, you know, soft spot in my heart for reference books. And I think almost half of the second floor was a reference library. But gradually that got whittled down. In fact, we were a minor government depository for Federal documents even. But a lot of that got changed to digital format. And so now the reference collection is just a small ready reference. And those digital items are available online to the patrons so they have easier access. So reference services as they used to be thought of in a library, where you come into the reference desk and you ask the librarian, you know, what is, yeah, questions. You can look it up yourself now much easier. And, you know, obviously, everybody uses Google too, but there's more authenticated sources that are available to our patrons.

David:
Databases.

Roberta:
Databases and, and publications. So that's probably the big change. And then really expanding children's services so that they supported families in a, in a larger sense. We sent staff for training to learn a philosophy that's called Family Place Libraries. And it involves offering toys for children that teach, where they can learn different skills that support reading. There's different physical activities that little children do that help ready them for reading or prove their physical skills that you need in reading, whether it be concentration or sight or hand dexterity, surprising the link, but it's because of brain development. So part of this training is learning about brain development of, of early childhood. And, and also having resources for parents, such as seminars or work, or lectures or, or resource time with community specialists in different areas that would help families' child rearing and behavioral issues, child development, but whatever. So that's a huge program now at the library. And then we also stepped into the Makerspace, the arts, science and technology, the STEM world, and started bringing in real scientists working in their field to have programs for kids so that they would see that they could be a scientist too, maybe. And then developing the small Makerspace in the library. And then the last project I did before I retired was to establish the Makerspace at Garden Center, and archival space for the museum collection.

David:
Lovely. Thank you so much.

17:04

So I was thinking, you had mentioned your interest in local history, so I wanted to ask a follow up question about that. And I thought maybe the way to frame that would be to ask you about the name, Mamie Doud Eisenhower Library. Why is it named that and why is that important?

17:23

Roberta:

It has the, the name Mamie Eisenhower Public Library in recognition of President Eisenhower's wife, at his request. He was, they had, she grew up in, in Denver, and they had a lot of Colorado connections. And he was involved with a group of businessmen here in Broomfield. And they wanted to include a public library in the new town center that they were developing along Midway. And they were originally going to name it after Dwight Eisenhower, the president, and he said no, please name it after Mamie. So they did. And she, they were both invited here for the opening ceremony, which occurred a little bit after he had left the presidency. But they were gracious and came and she toured the library. And then she actually donated books and mementos from her collection, her family collection. Many had belonged to her father, and some were her books as a little girl. So that collection is housed in the library.

18:39

David:

What, what else about local history is intriguing to you? Maybe what are some of the projects that the Friends of Broomfield History is working on that really speak to you?

18:52

Actually, one of the reasons that I joined the group, was because I had kind of a future project in mind that I wanted to do when I was director. But I retired. So I thought it was a way to maybe keep that idea alive, and that was to, when the new town center is finally developed, to include in that some kind of recognition of Broomfield's history, whether it be signage maybe at different spots that highlight different time periods in Broomfield history, as I've always felt it's real important in my job as a library director, and as a citizen, to help maintain a sense of place and a sense of community. So that was one of my goals. But I've always liked local history, and when I lived in New New England, the town that I was in celebrated its, its 300th anniversary.

David:

Wow.

Roberta:

And I also had lived on the western slope in Gunnison, Colorado, and was there when they celebrated their 100th anniversary. And I lived also in Eagle, Colorado, and helped found the Eagle County Historical Society, because the library, local library, was ending up being kind of depository of what little history had been collected to date. And as Vail ski area developed, and more and more county land, ranches, and farms were being turned into development, some of us wanted to capture that history before it was lost.

David:
Yeah.

Roberta:

And so we got stories from the remaining families, collected photographs, did a huge photography project of photos from the early days. And I grew up in Niagara Falls, New York, which has a long history back to the French settlement in North America. So one of my favorite classes was history and history of our area there. So it started young.

21:21

David:

It feels too, like (inaudible) history, this project, this interview we're doing now, is one of the kind of brainchild's of the group, and so I guess I'm curious, too, about what this sort of project, what, what the value is for gathering stories now.

21:43

Roberta:

Well, there's always a danger that you will lose history. And folks often think that when they're living now, it's not history. But it will be next year. And so I think it's really important, and Broomfield is changing right now, it's on the cusp of another change. It's becoming a little bit more urban, and there's a lot of businesses, corporate businesses, and it's not, for a long time, it's not been an agricultural based, based community. So it's in, it's moving into the new technological age where a lot of our businesses are, are our tech based. So, and that's drawing lots of new people from all over here. So before the history that was how we got to here is lost, I think it's really important to hear the voices of the people who helped create the community, who lived through the changes. And I think that was one of the reasons too that we did the project during the pandemic, about capturing what it was like to be in Broomfield during a major event that affected the whole nation. But what was it like here? (Inaudible) for people. And so we tell the story of the folks who lived it.

David:

Yeah, absolutely.

23:21

What else, can you just share a little bit, we haven't talked much about, kind of your family and maybe a little bit more about your background and if you want to talk about you know, (inaudible) now, that sort of thing, anything like that, love to, love to hear it.

23:45

Roberta:

Well actually, in terms of personal family, well I live with my husband. We, we don't have any children. We've raised 10 dogs - mostly Huskies. We're nuts. And, but my family background, I'm actually, on my father's side I'm a first generation American, because my father came to this country as a five year-old, with his family, from, from Germany. And my mother's family is Swedish, and English, and have been here for a few more generations. But I got intrigued with my husband's history, and the last few years

have been spent going through his genealogy, trying to put together their roots, as a project for his nephews and nieces. Their father died young and they didn't know much about his family. And much to my surprise, that project became quite involved and I found out that on his mother's side the roots go back to about 40 years after the Pilgrims landed, they came. And his family has members who served in the American Revolution, and the Civil War, obviously World War I and World War II. One who was a best buddy of Daniel Boone.

David:
Okay.

Roberta:
So it was like his, his family is like American history.

David:
That's right, you just trace the (inaudible).

Roberta:
That's right. And then on his father's side, it's more the classic European immigrant story. They came over in the 1800's and settled in Brooklyn and, and all of that. So it's been like learning American history all over again . . .

David:
That's so fun.

Roberta:
. . . which is really cool. Yeah. And we're originally from, from the East Coast. As I said, I grew up in Niagara Falls, New York but, but we've lived in several different states. And, and our family is kind of scattered all, all over.

26:11

David:
And do you feel like, what are some of the advantages maybe of Colorado, or disadvantages, that sort of thing, versus (inaudible).

26:28

Positives . . .

Roberta:
Yeah, right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Having grown up in western New York outside of Buffalo, immediately one of the best things about Colorado was the weather.

26:40

David:
Absolutely.

26:45

A, a, a day like today when it's super cold and there's a little bit of snow on the ground, is a little bit of a reminder. The wind's not blowing that hard from the Arctic, and there's only an inch of snow and not four feet on the ground. And, and then the other was kind of the, a little bit more of a laid back. attitude amongst people. When we first came to Colorado, we came for graduate school. And my husband went to Western State in Gunnison. And for a city girl from New York to land in the middle of the western slope cow country, was a little different. But I was so impressed by how friendly everyone was and how, how welcoming, and it was a college town so they were used to, to, you know, people from elsewhere coming down and a ski area up in Crested Butte, although it was small ski area. So it was, it was interesting to be in a totally different environment . . .

David:

Yeah.

Roberta:

. . . and meet and learn from different, different people. Yeah. And Colorado seems to just constantly be changing. One thing about the East, it's an expression that Connecticut, where we lived for a while, uses on, it was on the cover of a phone book.

28:19

Connecticut - where the past is present. And there's a lot about the East that just stays put. Colorado never stays put. It's always moving forward. That's exciting.

David:

That's interesting.

28:38

Did we miss anything?

Inaudible.

28:48

Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it.

Roberta:

Thank you.

End of interview.