

Mary Margaret Wagner: The other day, Carolyn, we're at the reception here at Peter White Public Library celebrating its national medal of honor that they received in Washington, DC, we were reminiscing and I think that's a good place for us start. Remember we were saying, "Oh, this is where the checkout desk was," and I pointed up where the mezzanine used to be here at the library, where the mysteries were. What were the things you were remembering?

Carol Watt: I was remembering my first day at work. The director Mrs. Kell was giving me a tour of the library and she brought me throughout the library and then walked me into the children's room and left. And I thought to myself, "I don't want to work here." [laughs] So I walked out to the circulation desk and that's where it all started.

Mary Margaret: And your career was made!

Carol: Yes.

Mary Margaret: We never liked the smell of wet woolly mittens.

Carol: Oh, yeah, that was terrible.

Mary Margaret: That was the children's room.

Carol: I had used the library since I was a child. I remember the children's room. Of course then I didn't mind being at the children's room. But I would return my books every two weeks and I would ask at the circulation desk, "Are there any openings? I've put in my application -- are there any openings?" And I did that for months. And finally, they gave in [laughs] and I've worked at the library. I had worked at the library for 35 years and saw lots of changes. When I started working at the library, wives were never allowed to have cards in their own names.

Mary Margaret: Who will believe it? In 2011?

Carol: A wife would come in and say my name is Jane Smith and she'd fill out the card and I'd have to ask her, "Well what's your husband's name?" "Well it's George but what does that matter?" "Well, we have to go by the husband's name." Finally I remember one patron said, "I am not doing that and I'd like to speak with the director." It was changed!

Mary Margaret: I'll be darned.

Carol: We could have things in our own name!

Mary Margaret: We could be people!

Carol: Yeah. [laughs]

Mary Margaret: You know the library was sort of restrictive, then, too. There were so many "off" places that we couldn't go.

Carol: Locked cases.

Mary Margaret: The locked cases. They were glass, so you could look in and lust for the books in them but you had to just about have a congressional order to get them out. Probably parents' permission or something. And now the library is so open and expanded and wonderful and now we have everything.

Carol: Everything. This library has everything.

Mary Margaret: This library is our community center and everything open. Nothing is "no touch."

Carol: Right. It's so much different from when I started, now. It's a wonderful place to come. Even though I've been retired for four years, I'm here at least twice a week.

Mary Margaret: I remember loving the public library when I was a kid. I grew up in Calumet, a small town, and the public library was the school library. It was housed in the high school, and I remember the smell. I would walk in and the smell was just intoxicating to me. It was a book smell. It was wonderful. I still do smell books.

Carol: Kindle is an abomination

Mary Margaret: [laughs] You're so subtle!

Carol: Well, working at the library changed my life and he gave me a sense of worth. I worked, they kept on raising the bar. Eventually I was in charge of scheduling, and it lead to training interviewing, hiring.

Mary Margaret: Yeah, And now the position that you held requires a bachelor's degree.

Carol: Yes,

Mary Margaret: It is yes professional position, and you didn't even have a high school diploma? I mean that you went back after high school age.

Carol: Yes.

Mary Margaret: You have a high school diploma.

Carol: That shows you that if you're willing to work hard enough and learn. They gave me the chance to do that.

Mary Margaret: And you did wonderfully.

Truly, Carol, of all the things up our public library gave us – it gave you independence and a sense of self, I think. That's what I think

Carol: Oh definitely.

Mary Margaret: That's what I've seen in you. And it gave me you, my dear friend. You are just the best thing in my life you are absolutely wonderful. You're nuttier than a fruitcake, you really, really are, and you drive me to distraction, and the other night when I tried to strangle you, I was only kidding. Really. Honest.

Carol: I sometimes wonder. [both laugh] But every time we talk on the phone, even if it is three or four times, we always end up laughing.

Mary Margaret: We always end up laughing. That's wonderful, Carol. You're the best.

Carol: You are, too.