

# Distinguished Service Award Acceptance Speech: Dr. Marilyn Russell



Thank you, Jon, for that lovely introduction. I am honored and humbled to be the recipient of the 2022 ARLIS/NA Distinguished Service Award. I am truly overwhelmed by this prestigious recognition that comes from all of you, my colleagues in the art library world. Miigwech, thank you.

A special thanks to Richard Saladino and Jane Devine Mejia for putting together the letters of support for my nominations. Thanks to the ARLIS/NA members who wrote these letters, to the ARLIS/NA Distinguished Service Award subcommittee, and to the Executive Board for this honor.

My careers span a period of 45 years. In reflecting upon my life of being an artist, teacher, art librarian, and library director, I would like to share a quote with you. Sandra Day O'Connor stated: "We don't accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads that form one to another that create something." The tapestry of my life began many years ago. I was born in Bemidji, Minnesota to my Ojibwe mother, Waab-Anangikwe, or in English "Morningstar" and to an English-American father, Daniel Eaton. I am an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and the Pillager Band at Leech Lake Indian reservation. My Ojibwe name is: a 'aw giizhig

zage gaa ikwe or in English "Queen of the Sky." Both my mother and my grandmother grew up on the Indian reservation near Cass Lake, Minnesota. My father grew up in Kansas.

My family moved from northern Minnesota to Kansas City when I was two years old. This is where I lived most of my life. I have always loved to read. As a young girl, my mother would give me a quarter so I could take the streetcar downtown to the public library. I would browse for books in the children's library. After checking out a few books, having spent 20 cents for my streetcar fare, I had 5 cents leftover to get a drink at the nearby Woolworth's dime store before heading back home.

My other love was drawing and painting. As a young girl, my mother had taught me to draw. Then as a teenager, I took art classes in junior high and high school. My Ojibwe mother wanted me to go to Haskell Indian Nations school in Lawrence, Kansas after my high school graduation. At that time, Haskell was a vocational-technical school. But instead, I chose to go to the University of Kansas having received a scholarship. I received a BFA degree from KU in 1957.

My career as an artist began at Hallmark Cards in 1957. At this time, I was married. Eventually, we lived in Kansas City, Kansas. Upon becoming a mother, I gave up working and became a stay-at-home mom of three sons. In the early 1970's, my interest in art was renewed and I began a career as an art teacher in the Kansas City area. In 1975, the first of many art exhibitions of my paintings was displayed at the Johnson County Community College where I was an art instructor in the graphic design department. This teaching ended in 1985 when I accepted the position as Coordinator of the Fine Arts Library in Kansas City, Kansas. This was the same library I went to as a young girl and checked out books. It is where I developed my love of literature. It was pure fate that led me to my first art library job at the Kansas City, Kansas Public Library. I was recommended for the vacant position by a friend, applied, and hired on the spot.

Just a highlight from my years at KCKPL. I joined ARLIS/NA in 1986. The ARLIS Central Plains chapter meeting was held in the fall of 1987 at the newly built suburban library which housed

the art collection. This is when I met Susan Craig, a long-time colleague and friend. In fact, she encouraged me to go to library school. I realized that if I wanted to pursue a career in libraries, an MLS degree was required. So, my studies began at Emporia State University taking weekend courses offered in Kansas City. My MLS degree was completed in 1990.

In 1991, I began my second library job, as the Fine Arts and Humanities librarian at the University of Minnesota – Duluth. My main responsibilities at UMD were collection development for the Fine Arts and Humanities Departments, Coordinator of Bibliographic Instruction, reference desk duty, staff meetings plus participating in state and national organizations such as ARLIS/NA and the College Art Association, and others.

During my tenure at UMD, I was privileged to serve as a member of the American Indian Advisory Committee. In addition, my art and education background enabled me to teach in the Art department and the American Indian studies department. Part of my art teaching was leading workshops in the Creative Visions program in Mexico. These classes were held at the Art Institute in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico in mid-February. A nice time to leave the cold and snow in Duluth. In 1999, UMD gave me the honor of being selected to teach in the Study In England program at the University of Birmingham in the U.K. This experience instilled in me a love of England and I've returned most every summer since. Upon my return from England, the library staff moved our collections in to an amazing new building that opened in 2000.

My life changed in 2002 when I interviewed and accepted the job as Director of Library Programs at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. My responsibilities were similar to those performed at UMD, except I now supervised a staff of four and oversaw the development of the book collection and the archives. Part of my job was to manage the move of the book collection into a new building completed in the fall of 2003. IAIA today has about ten new buildings on its 140-acre campus. It is the only fine arts college in the world dedicated to the study of contemporary Native American and Alaskan Native arts.

In addition to my library work, I taught a contemporary Native American art course. My library position enabled me to participate in the International Indigenous Librarians Forums and the Tribal College Librarians Institutes plus continue my work in ARLIS/NA. An exciting episode happened in 2006 at IAIA. The president of Haskell Indian Nations University, Karen Swisher, was visiting the campus and came by the library. She introduced herself and noted there was a position open as Library Director at Haskell. She encouraged me to apply. I was interviewed and accepted the position.

Due to family circumstances, I had decided to move to Lawrence, Kansas upon my retiring from IAIA. I had already purchased a home there. But, instead of retiring from IAIA, I began the job as Director of the Academic Support Center at Haskell Indian Nations University in January 2007. Haskell has a unique history as it evolved from being a boarding school for American Indian children in 1884 to a vocational-technical school to a junior college and in 1992 became a university. Haskell has an average enrollment of over 1,000 students from federally recognized tribes across the United States.

As Library Director at Haskell, I supervised six staff members and oversaw the development of the book collection, attended faculty and staff meetings, and received a grant to refurnish the library into a more modern facility by purchasing all new computers, new furniture and shelving, and having it installed. I participated in the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums and the American Indian Higher Education Consortiums and continued my work in ARLIS/NA. In addition, I taught a course in the humanities department during my tenure in the library and continued teaching until my retirement from Haskell in 2016. It has been my honor to serve Native American students and faculty in universities and libraries for 25 years.

My years in ARLIS/NA have meant a lot to me. In particular, I've appreciated the work that our organization has achieved through the Diversity and Inclusion Committee which enacts the core values of diversity and inclusion across all aspects of art librarianship. I've enjoyed all the educational workshops, visiting different cities for conferences, tours of museums and historic places, interesting speakers, plus spectacular convocations and parties. I've had the privilege of

having ARLIS mentors early in my career and also being a mentor to others. ARLIS offers wonderful art study trips in which I've participated – going to France, Brazil, Sweden, Finland, the U.K., Germany, and the Netherlands. Participation in the Central Plains and Mountain West chapters and ARLIS/NA committees and the Executive Board gave me the opportunity to be of service to our great organization. ARLIS/NA has been the foundation for my years as an art librarian and library director. Since retiring in 2016, I've been privileged to serve on the Board of Directors of the U.S. Friends of Gladstone's Library. This library is in Hawarden, Wales and is the only residential library in Europe.

I truly value all the people I've worked with and met in ARLIS/NA, the things I've learned, the places I've been, and the support I've received from so many of you through the years. ARLIS offers all of you many opportunities for service. Do not hesitate when you are asked to serve on a committee, to speak on a panel, to publish an article, to do a book review, or to be an officer in ARLIS/NA. Volunteer where you are needed. Your service will be greatly appreciated and you will be rewarded.

It is my belief that each of us can make a contribution, that each of us must focus on who we are, where we are, and where we are heading. We must cultivate what sustains us, whether it's our family, our job, our personal interests or the communities where we live. What matters to you? Where are you heading? What are you doing for diversity and inclusion?

We are all woven together, like a tapestry, by the threads of life, mutual respect, and memories of our times together. As Desmond Tutu said "Do your little bit of good wherever you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world." Thank you, ARLIS/NA for giving me the opportunity of doing a little bit of good. Miigwech, thank you.