Celebrating Doris M. Goldstein

Doris Mueller Goldstein was born in New Jersey, and moved to the small town of Beaver Crossing, Nebraska at the age of nine. As the youngest daughter of three born to German parents who immigrated to the U.S. as young adults, Doris always had an international outlook. Her parents, Henry and Sophie, met and fell in love onboard ship while traveling from Germany to the U.S. In order to keep up with her many German aunts, uncles, and cousins, Doris applied herself to learning the language, which would serve her well in future pursuits.

Inspired by talks by President Kennedy and Sargent Shriver, she joined the Peace Corps and spent two years in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia teaching at Haile Selassie I University and then at the Tefari Mekonnen School (a middle and high school). Today, Doris still loves Ethiopian food, and although her Amharic is “a bit rusty,” maintains a strong interest in the country and its people.

Doris’ career in librarianship also has its roots in Beaver Crossing. As an eighth-grader, Doris volunteered to run the community library—“a large room with a pot-bellied stove”—and later, her high school library. She enjoyed organizing the books, telling people about them, and signing them out to readers. After her return from Ethiopia, she worked at the Library of Congress, taught German at Bowie State University, and then went back to school to earn her M.L.S. from the University of Maryland at College Park.

Sargent Shriver again played a role in Doris’ career when she came to Georgetown. Doris was recruited to serve as the founding director of the KIE bioethics library by André Hellegers, M.D., the first director of the Kennedy Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction and Bioethics (now KIE), and LeRoy Walters, Ph.D., first director of the Institute’s early Center for Bioethics. The directors clearly recognized strong talents in Doris—they actually hired her prior to her graduation! Ambassador Shriver and his wife Eunice Kennedy Shriver provided initial funding that established the KIE as the first academic bioethics institute in the world in 1971, and the library in 1973.

Doris became a pioneer in the field, establishing library procedures, acquisition methods, and reference practices for this new type of special library collection. Issues were unfolding daily in the headlines as ethicists and scholars from different fields focused on developments in medicine and science with KIE scholars leading the way. The new collection had to cover some bold topics for the time: cloning, chimeras, organ transplantation, death and dying, and more. To do so, Doris gathered articles and books from an array of fields including medicine, science, theology, psychiatry, psychology, law, and sociology. Because the topics were ever-changing, congressional testimony and unpublished, cutting-edge materials were included in the growing collection, as well as court decisions, bills, laws, books, book chapters, journal articles, newspaper articles, reports, and audiovisuals all formed part of the holdings. One video in the collection documents a discussion about neonatal bioethics that was held on the stage of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts the night before it opened to the public as a performance space on September 8, 1971.
We all enjoy the story of the library’s early beginnings, including its being carried around in a shoebox, since it now numbers over 34,000 volumes, 330,000 plus articles and loose documents and some 700 video titles. Devising a system to organize these materials required a creative and innovative solution that relied on a numerical and topical approach developed by LeRoy Walters, and expanded by Doris. Soon “loose documents” as well as books and journals had their own 22-category organizational system. In the early years Doris led the Library staff, which consisted of a share of LeRoy’s secretary’s time and two Work-Study assistants. Then in 1974, the Bioethics Information Retrieval Project (BIRP) was funded at the KIE by the National Library of Medicine. Two bibliographers and a research assistant were hired, and they began developing an indexing vocabulary and terminology to organize the multi-disciplinary literature of bioethics. A database, Bioethicsline, and an accompanying Bioethics Thesaurus, were created to offer a scholarly finding aid —linking together terms and issues so that clinicians, scholars, students, and researchers with on-target materials. In 1985, the library was selected to serve as the National Reference Center for Bioethics Literature (National Library of Medicine) and in 1994, the National Information Resource on Ethics and Human Genetics (National Human Genome Research Institute).

The Bioethicsline database and the BIRP ran from 1976 to late 2000. In later years, indexers Joy Kahn and Hannelore Ninomiya worked with NLM to incorporate terms from the Bioethics Thesaurus into the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) indexing language. This meant that materials about bioethics issues and topics could be identified within a new publicly available web-based database called PubMed and in NLM’s online book catalog, freely available to researchers around the world. Eventually these bioethics-related indexing terms, journal titles, topics, and issues were turned into the “bioethics subset”—a sophisticated search tool available with one click of a mouse.

In April 2005, Doris received the President’s Medal from Georgetown University President John J. DeGoia in recognition of her innovative scholarship and librarianship. Explaining the honor, he said, “We are proud to recognize Doris for her longstanding service to the university. Doris has helped strengthen the Kennedy Institute’s bioethics collections, which are known as among the world’s most comprehensive collections of bioethics books, articles, and public documents.”

Doris continues her university service as the Senior Library Advisor on International Initiatives for the Bioethics Research Library until she retires in August 2012. This will include her work on the Advisory Board on the German Reference Center for Ethics in the Life Sciences University of Bonn, and she will continue as co-Principal Investigator (with Frieda Wiebe, Director of Georgetown’s SFS-Qatar Library), of the Islamic Medical and Scientific Ethics Project (IMSE). Funded by the Qatar Foundation, the IMSE Project continues to expand the boundaries of bioethics and of librarianship. She will travel to India to explore possibilities for virtual and physical libraries and undergraduate and faculty study abroad exchanges as co-PI on a “Bioethics as a Means of Engagement: Focus on India,” research grant awarded University Provost.

In retirement Doris may add to her publication list as she tells the story of charting the way in a new discipline. She will enjoy more time with her husband Steve, a recent retiree from a government career, trips to North Carolina beaches, and more trips to New York to see the bright lights along Broadway with her daughter, Susan.