

Paul and Maggie Parisi Interview Log

Time Code Content

- 00:00:00 **Introduction.** Paul Parisi, HG Group Acme Binding, Charlestown MA, and his wife Maggie. Interviewed June 4, 2017, at the Roslyn Hotel, Roslyn, New York. Interviewed by Jeanne Drewes, librarian.
- 00:00:41 **Career:** Paul was born into the business. His father started Acme Bookbinding in 1958 when Paul was five years old. Maggie does legal work for the company and also some sales work.
- 00:01:36 **Interest in Industry:** Paul didn't want to work in the family business when he was younger, but he wrote a paper for an economics class at Harvard in his sophomore year about a hypothetical investment in his father's business to double its size. His father asked him why not do it, and Paul started running the company as a junior in college.
- 00:2:35 **Mentors:** Paul learned from his father, from people like Jack Bendror, and Dudley Weiss, Executive Director of the Library Binding Institute (LBI) encouraged him to become interested in the broader binding industry, beyond the scope of his company. Paul also learned from his customers, particularly Jan Merrill-Oldham at the University of Connecticut and Doris Freitag at Harvard. Jan was a particular hero, and an inspirational person in every way. Jack Bendror's engineering skill has always impressed Paul. Jack Fairfield was a mentor as a businessman.
- 00:04:39 **Building and Plant:** Originally, the business operated out of a small storefront in Waltham, MA, about 1500 square feet. When Paul started in the business, it had moved to a 4000 square foot space in Boston and there were seven employees, including his parents. The company grew through acquiring other companies and moved to a 25,000 square foot plant in Charlestown, MA. They doubled that space to 50,000 square feet and then doubled it again to 100,000 square feet with a staff of approximately 125. The company merged with HF Group in 2012 and now there are multiple plants in multiple states with 300 employees. Access to public transportation has been important for the employees. Transportation of materials has changed over time from pickup and delivery with their own trucks to an increasing reliance on UPS to ship materials.
- 00:08:50 **Employees:** Paul describes the unique challenges of library binding, the variability of shipment size with the same time commitment for completing the work, and the variation from book to book within each shipment. Doing this well is only possible with skilled staff who are dedicated to their craft. Paul tries to keep his staff motivated by sharing his love of the product, the process, and the clientele with the staff. When hiring people, he compares the work to parachute packing (no mistakes), wedding cake delivery (have to keep to the promised schedule), and loving what you do like you love your mother. Highly demanding industry that isn't particularly financially rewarding. The job requires persistence, attention to detail, and reliability.

- 00:13:45 **Changes in Business over Time:** In the early days, completing 50 books in one day was an accomplishment because everything was done by hand. Automation increased that productivity; they can now produce thousands of books per day. The company has diversified into a trade binder, digital printer, conservation work and digitizing, as well as book storage and retrieval services. Maggie mentioned that there are more and more environmentally friendly changes to the business as well, overhead suction to recover paper fragments for recycling, for example. Acme Bookbinding always recycled the board used to make book covers and everything that can be recycled. It generates income for the company.
- 00:16:42 **Information Technology:** Paul is proud of their development of the ABLE (Advanced Binding Library Exchange) system, particularly in light of his history helping his father with hand stamping. Information is pulled from the library's online catalog and shared with the bindery's systems to produce stamped covers without manual data entry. Quite an advance from the days of producing slugs from linotype machines. The amazing technological advances in binding automation have been possible because of partnerships between vendors and binders.
- 00:20:52 **First ALA Conference:** The 1983 pre-conference (to the American Library Association annual meeting) on library binding was life-changing for those in the library binding industry. Paul spoke on leaf attachment, putting oversewing at the bottom of the list of options.
- 00:23:02 Parisi describes the Flat back binding versus rounded and backed books controversy. Paul is on the side of durability, functionality and affordability.
- 00:24:40 **Interesting Projects:** Paul worked with Jan Merrill-Oldham to write the 1986 standard, and then the guide to the standard for librarians, binders, and suppliers. In 2000, they worked on an ANSI/NISO/LBI standard (American National Standards Institute/National Information Standards Institute) which presented various acceptable binding options, placing the decision in the hands of the customer.
- 00:27:32 Parisi describes Adhesive Binding. Bob Strauss, Barclay Ogden, Fritz James and others worked together to create a protocol for testing various binding methods and materials. Test books were designed to be particularly challenging: large, heavy, bulky items. Double-fan adhesive bindings far exceeded anyone's expectations and the requirements.
- 00:31:24 **Regrets:** Paul regrets that as an industry, they have been great binders but not necessarily great business people. Binderies tend to be marginal operations. Maggie thinks library binding missed an opportunity to thrive in the 21st century through compatibility with the Internet and self-publishing.
- 00:33:31 **Opportunities:** They morphed the business to compensate for the inevitable decline of library binding. They developed trade binding business, digital printing, and reformatting books.

00:37:13 **Impact of Technology:** Equipment and technology did not take jobs away from people; they saved people's jobs because they kept the company competitive. The hand binding process was labor-intensive and physically demanding. Automation has made it possible to produce an affordable product. The staff is very loyal, working in the company from 15-40 years usually.

00:39:40 **Employees:** Maggie observes that the ethnic makeup of the employees reflects the region where the plants are located, various Spanish-speaking communities in Boston, as well as Vietnamese immigrants, Amish in Indiana. Many families work for the company.

00:40:52 **Interesting Projects:** *Bhutan, a Himalayan Adventure*, the largest book ever published, at five feet tall. Machinery had to be built to produce the book. The 100 copies of the book sold for \$15,000, proceeds supporting literacy in Bhutan.

The book celebrating the 100th anniversary of Major League Baseball was another interesting project. The book had a very tight delivery window and secrecy, because it included an all-time dream team which had to be kept unknown until the books were delivered.

Maggie also mentioned Barack Obama's inauguration book and the bid for the World Cup boxed presentation.

00:45:35 **Business:** Boxes have always been an option offered for books that are in poor condition but had intrinsic value worth preserving. Box making has also changed from hand work to automation. They continue to hand make custom clamshell boxes for special items and custom slip cases.

00:47:38 **Changes to Industry:** There has been a change from a growing market to a shrinking market. Commodity books like telephone directories, dictionaries, and encyclopedias have all but disappeared because that information is best delivered electronically, but information presented for beauty, for cherishing and for celebration remains the market for bookbinders.

00:49:12 **Business:** Photo Books. They tried to work on establishing a standard for photo books like the standard established for library bindings, but it failed for three reasons: equipment producers are not interested in the interference to their commerce presented by standards; the companies producing the books are happy to let the market set the standard; and the diverse interests of the group working on the standard prevented them from coming together in agreement. Maggie adds that the top priority for the customer is the cost, not the quality.

00:53:42 **Advice to Next Generation:** Do what you love. It takes work to discover what your passion is.

00:57:43 **End of interview.**