

Werner Rebsamen Interview Log

Time Code Content

00:00:05 **Introduction.** Werner Rebsamen, a master bookbinder / consultant. Interviewed June 3, 2017, at the Roslyn Hotel, Roslyn, New York. Interviewed by Whitney Pape, librarian.

00:00:35 **Career:** His father, a master bookbinder in charge of Switzerland's largest edition bindery, tried to discourage Werner's interest in pursuing a similar, professional career. May 1, 1950, under the direction of his father, Werner started a four-year apprenticeship in edition and hand bookbinding in Zurich, Switzerland. Later, after graduation, he worked and studied a year in the Netherlands. Working in the bookbinding trade, he then later conducted classes for the Zurich school district, teaching students how to do bind books and make simple boxes. 1959, Werner applied for a job as a hand bookbinder to produce fancy pulpit bibles for the Lutheran Churches in St. Louis, Missouri. Picked from over 50 candidates, he agreed to a three-year contract, which then led to a lifetime career working in USA. Werner worked there five years and mechanized several processes, including gilding the edges of books.

Next, he worked for four years as the sample maker and quality control manager at the nation's largest Bible printing and binding company, World Publishing, located in Cleveland, Ohio. Thereafter he was invited to manage the Thomas Nelson Bible bindery as plant superintendent in Camden, NJ. Here again, he mechanized many hand binding processes. 1973, he took-on the challenge to set-up and manage the world's first fully automated book production line, printing and binding up to 70 hardcover bound books every minute! This pioneering endeavor opened-up an academic career, starting in January 1975 at RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology). This being an appointment to teach print-production planning, print-finishing and bookbinding, a career that lasted 26 years. As a technical writer, he published over 500 trade articles, which opened-up travels for presentations and consulting all over the World. Werner retired from RIT later in the year 2000 but continued working for trade organizations like LBI and BMI and others. He fully retired December 31, 2015. The main reason being, to take care of his ailing wife of 56 years.

Werner's consulting career started with requests for technical input and the need for on-site training, some coming from his former students. These endeavors, all thanks to his extensive writings, articles, which spread via the internet all over the world. Those assignments covered the USA, Canada, South America, Europe Indonesia, China, Australia, India, Bali, etc. His writings, lectures, research and testing helped to him to advance to a full, tenured professorship at RIT in 1986. In 1994, Werner was honored with the Graphic Arts Technical Leadership Award, the Oscar of the industry. This was the very first time for a RIT faculty member to win this award.

00:18:35 **Career:** Within six months after starting his teaching career at RIT, the Library Binding Institute (LBI) contacted Werner and invited him to work part time as a Technical Director. This assignment required technical writing for their publications and doing on-

site inspections for their quality examination service all over the U.S. and Canada. The experiences of seeing so many different binding facilities and observing how they coped with their difficult tasks and various other challenges, put him into a unique position to help other binderies around the World solving problems in their plants.

- 00:22:47 **Mentors:** Dudley Weiss, Executive Director of LBI, introduced Werner to some highly automated library binding operations. Through his activities with LBI, he became familiar with Jack Bendror's work, he being a pioneer building sophisticated Library Binding equipment, The two became good friends. Werner found the LBI gatherings most valuable for professional information sharing, but also for the warm relationships they fostered.
- 00:24:08 **Coworkers:** Together with Carolyn Morrow and Frazer Poole of the Library of Congress and with Jan Merrill-Oldham of Harvard, they conducted preservation seminars for librarians around the U.S. and Canada. These included grant-funded preservation seminars for librarians at RIT's bookbinding laboratory.
- 00:26:11 **Career:** Next to an intensive teaching schedule, with sometimes seven different classes, Rebsamen also chaired and taught print finishing and book-manufacturing seminars to industry people. He conducted over 100 such three-day seminars, 50 of them on book production to members of the Book Manufacturing Institute (BMI) who were new to the field. BMI sponsored those popular events.
- 00:27:48 **Career:** After his retirement from RIT, he moved to New Hampshire but continued working for LBI and BMI. These activities required writing for the Endpaper and ShelfLife publications. In addition, at their conventions, they always expected technical PowerPoint presentations. At age 81, Werner was offered yet another contract but declined. Main reason was his ailing wife, who shortly thereafter went onto her eternal journey. As for professional activities, he still does answer and aid people via e-mail, but is no longer interested in writing, traveling and presenting technical subjects. He now enjoys his lonely days as a widower with his dog, travels, hiking, swimming and skiing at a near by resort.
- 00:33:01 **Mentors:** Through LBI, Dudley Weiss, and Jack Bendror.
- 00:36:24 **Regrets:** None. Has been very lucky to have such an interesting career with travels all over the World, meeting interesting people and cultures.
- 00:37:44 **Greatest Accomplishment:** His three successful children, being married for 56 years. The diversity of people he's consulted with, worked for, and taught.
- 00:41:15 **Interesting Projects:** Advanced fine leather Bible bindings and his innovations in the mechanization of hand bookbinding processes. His technical work with the Otobind lay-flat binding organization, the latter being a free-floating, flexible softcover binding. 1986, he received a patent for his RepKover, another lay-flat binding process.

- 00:43:28 **Differences within Industry:** Rebsamen describes Bookbinding in Europe vs. U.S. When bookbinding for libraries was thriving in the U.S., Oversewing was the predominant binding method. This now changed to the double fan and PUR adhesive binding processes. Some library binders, having the skills and knowledge to bind one book at a time, acquired digital printing and are now most successfully offering Print-on-demand and self-publishing endeavors, which dominate today's publishing endeavors.
- 00:48:29 **Advice to Next Generation:** As long as we print books, we will need to bind books. All thanks to computers, clever software and digital printing, we now produce more books than ever, millions of titles every year. New markets are emerging, all thanks to new and advanced technologies in printing and binding.
- 00:52:43 **End of interview.**