

# Interview with Jenny Benevento

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**Elizabeth:** Hello, and welcome to Beyond the Stacks: Innovative Careers in Library and Information Science. I'm your host, Elizabeth Reilly, and I'm here today with Jenny Benevento.

Jenny Benevento started volunteering and working in libraries at the age of 13. After experiences in public and academic libraries in circulation, reference, systems and as a page, she decided to get a library degree at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Despite an allergy to both cats and wool, she graduated with a specialty in classification systems. Jenny has created taxonomies for the Associated Press, Sears and Kmart, Etsy, and other smaller businesses and organizations. She lives in Chicago, but travels frequently.

Hi Jenny! Thanks so much for joining me.

**Jenny:** Hello!

**Elizabeth:** So to get started off, um, can you tell me about your educational background, including advanced degrees?

**Jenny:** Sure! I have a very useful Soviet History degree, Bachelor's degree from Reed College in Portland, Oregon and just that library science degree. So that's my only master's... "That's my only master's." That sounds very uppity.

**Elizabeth:** I did say degrees, so it's fine.

**Jenny:** Yes.

*Both laugh.*

**Elizabeth:** So how did you decide to go from that to get your master's in library science?

**Jenny:** So I had um volunteered in libraries, like I said since, I was 13 or worked in a library. During college I worked at the Circ desk, after college I worked at the Reed College library on an IMLS grant to create webpages and to, for students, for seniors and then after that it was like a year long position and then after that I worked at the Multnomah County Library, or the public library in Portland, Oregon. So I had pretty much...I think like a lot of history majors, I told my parents I was probably going to go to law school. And that's why that history degree was totally reasonable.

**Elizabeth:** Yup. Same.

**Jenny:** I realized very quickly, like, I had zero interest in that. And towards the end of my college career...so, Reed is particular that in order to graduate, you have to do a full year length original research thesis to graduate. So, um, I had done a lot of research and written a very lengthy paper. So the idea of any sort of doctorate or masters degree quickly became not interesting to me. And I realized...I had to do a lot of literature reviews as well as part of my Political Science classes. And I realized like, the part I really liked was doing the research, not writing the paper. So that made it to me ...like my idea...I have also have ADHD, and so to me the idea is...once I've learned the thing, like, I don't want to write it down, like I've learned it, what's the point? So that quickly made me realize like academic situations were not for me. And I had worked in libraries for so long. And as someone who was working in a public library, I kind of was like how do I get to sit behind that reference desk and just have people ask me questions all day long, that I research 5 to 10 minutes and then move on. And they were like, "Well to do that you need a master's degree in library science." So that is how I realized that I needed one of those.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, that's funny. Did you...um, had you heard of a master's degree in library science before someone told you that's what you needed to do?

**Jenny:** Uhh, I think a little bit. Um, so I uh had because I worked at the Reed library, after undergraduate, I knew that it was a professional degree and I knew like the librarians I worked for, particularly Dena Hutto who is now the head of that library but she was on the ALA Government Docs Committee so I knew a little bit about that. So yeah I had kinda realized that was it. In a public library setting though, actually it's very funny, by the time I did get that library degree, working reference at the Multnomah County

Library was no longer a job you could get with a library degree because it was a civil servant job. So it's very funny that like actually now that I do have that degree I can't get that job. So yeah it is interesting that it worked...it depends where you actually work. So I knew a little bit of the ins and outs of that. And actually as a pre-professional I joined ALA, so I was super interested in it as an organization. I grew up in Chicago so ALA was actually an association I knew of in high school um because I had to do a speech class presentation on a non-profit I would give all my money to if I had a lot of money and I did the [Freedom to Read Foundation](#). So um, I think it had been my radar weirdly because I had worked in libraries for so long.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah no, that's cool. So working the reference desk sort of inspired you to want to go to library school so I guess when you entered school what did you think you were going to do?

*Both laugh.*

**Jenny:** So in order to apply to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign you have to fill out an essay that is like "what is the one class here you would like to take?" You know, when I was applying, my librarian friends at the Reed College library were like, "What? You're applying to library school right out of undergrad? Usually people do this as a second career." So they were kind of surprised I think.

**Elizabeth:** That's interesting.

**Jenny:** So I assumed everyone else would be like...you know, already have a master's in something else, probably have worked in a library. So in my essay, I wrote about thesaurus construction. And the only way I found that was, you know, I went to their catalog, course catalog and looked at that and was like, "Whoa I didn't even know this was a thing you could take a class on!" Like back of the book indexing was really interesting to me. But I didn't realize that was like even...how do you even get that career? So I wrote about that and it was funny because in my first meeting with my advisor, he was like we never teach that class, no one ever teaches that class.

**Elizabeth:** *Laughs.* Oh no!

**Jenny:** Yeah and I guess I had been in public libraries for so long and had worked at an academic library that I really thought public was probably the easiest place for me to work. So I really thought reference. I was good at reference. I had done a page job. I had done instruction in a public library all as a pre-professional. So to me I just thought this was gonna certify my ability to get those jobs that I'd already sort of had. And like I said, I think once I actually got to library school there was this idea that like oh actually that's not what professional librarians do.

**Elizabeth:** Mhm. Yeah so then as you're going like through your studies what were some of the coolest things you were able to do while you were at school?

**Jenny:** Well, so my advisors at the University of Illinois were kind of like, "Hey, you have library experience which not a ton of people seem to have a ton of and you have computer skills so why don't you focus more on these jobs where there are tons of them?" So uhh...I think the great thing at that time about the University of Illinois was that it had a huge library system and so they needed a ton of graduate assistants. In addition to your general work as you know a student, I had a graduate assistantship in the archives, in the math library and in the Slavic library. So those all really gave me a lot of practical experience about what those jobs were like. Having a history degree, I thought archives would be amazing and it turns out I really like telling people where to put things, but not actually putting them back myself. I got to work on the ALA archives. I got to work on the [North American Serials Groups archives](#) and which I then saw all the entries to their scholarship program. And just applied. I would not have known about that scholarship program beforehand. But like, hey! I have literally seen all the answers, which anyone could have seen you know going to but I processed that collection. As a professional, that gave me a real leg up like I knew all the parts of the ALA backwards and forwards because like, I processed their archives. Which like as a professional was so awesome. I processed Sandy Bergman's archive, part of it. So like that's cool! I got to read Sandy Bergman's mail. Like that is awesome and like you can too, you can go to the Illinois archives and read them. But I did that for a living.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, that's really great!

**Jenny:** In the Slavic...I mean, it just exposed me to a lot of things. I did serials cataloging in the Slavic library. In the math library, I did collection

development. I uh, you know, did journal management budgets. Um, I did reference. It allowed me to see like every part of the library and so, yeah and it actually, the only relevant thing to, you know, what I do for a living now, kind of. I mean I think reference is inherently very helpful to what I do now. But I did a crosswalk between the math subject classification which is what all of our math graduate students and professors used which is a very specific numeric classification for high level math texts and Dewey Decimal which is what the University of Illinois uses for all of its jillion items. So uh they were like, they did not understand the Dewey Decimal System at all so they were like where's this kind of math? So that was actually really fun and I just created that project as part of my graduate assistantship.

**Elizabeth:** Wow, that's, that's really cool.

**Jenny:** Yeah!

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, so you're saying that reference is inherently related to what you're doing now. So what are you doing now?

**Jenny:** So currently my full time job is as a taxonomist at [Etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com). And Etsy is a website...the fact that I have to explain this to librarians is funny to me but, in case you do not know, I feel like stereotypically you're probably in our wheelhouse. It's a website that has somewhere over 20 million items. And they are vintage, handmade items or craft supplies. So you either had to have make them or they have to be 30 plus years old or craft supplies to be sold on our website. So it's extremely unique items...“extremely unique” is not a thing...

**Elizabeth:** They are very, very unique.

**Jenny:** But yeah if there's any website where “extremely unique” would apply, it is like very one of a kind items that people make, hand make for you. You can ask them to make things for you. We have literally everything you can ever imagine.

I do categories and hopefully filters in the future. When I started they had no structured or controlled data and so we're just sort of getting this now 11-year old company onto having any sort of data records that are controlled. It's really interesting.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah that is really interesting. Let me back up a bit. So after you graduated, like what happened between graduating and working at Etsy?

**Jenny:** So after I graduated I was applying to jobs and there weren't really taxonomy jobs at the time, there were some that were like Metadata Manager but there weren't a lot of full time jobs for what I did. And at the time I went to a party, and I met this person, it was a party for South by Southwest which is a very tech oriented, you know, culture and she was like, "You know what? In 5 or 10 years people are really going to need what you do but right now no one knows they need that thing." Which at the time was the most infuriating thing I've ever heard but now is very, is very appropriate.

**Elizabeth:** Right.

**Jenny:** Like, most people did not, most people outside of libraries, did not have a lot of digital records that they needed to organize, strictly. Um so it really was hard to find jobs like when I was looking for jobs, library databases were open to hiring what I did but again, it would be part of the job and the rest of the job would be like, sales. So, um, I had a job at the University of Illinois. You know...my first job tip is...nepotism! Get a job at your alma mater - worked for me twice! Um so uh they...I worked on an IMLS – another IMLS funded project, thank you IMLS! All of the money that IMLS had given to small digital projects, those small digital projects didn't really have a wide audience so the idea was like, let's make an aggregated catalogue for all of their records. So museums might have used, god I'm so far away from this, like MODS and a library might have used DC and so you had to aggregate all of those records into one unified project so that you could search through a catalog and see all those records. So I did project management on that so it was like maybe 10% taxonomy and then like 50% metadata stuff, aggregation, and then like 40% project management.

And then after that I applied, you know, I was applying to taxonomy jobs whenever they came up and a lot of them wouldn't hire me because technically my job title at that job because I was a librarian at the University of Illinois was, "Assistant Professor of Library and Information Sciences."

**Elizabeth:** Interesting.

**Jenny:** Yeah, because it was a tenure, you know, even though it wasn't a tenure track job you still had to go up for tenure, I had to have a docier... I mean, Illinois is so, so into that, that level of um tenure so um, I again I was like, "Oh no this is what I was trying to escape with this academic business, I'm terrible at this!" so I was like, "I gotta get out of here!" I applied for some taxonomy jobs and you know again even people in the interview would be very upfront and say, "You know we just don't know if you have the business ability to do this." So I took Assistant Professor out of my resume and immediately got a ton more calls.

**Elizabeth:** Wow.

**Jenny:** And I had to downplay my academic interests you know or abilities, actually and what I was doing with an academic institution and prove that I had like either some business, you know, acumen. So, the Associated Press called me and I interviewed there and they are a non-profit organization so I think that really helped – the fact that they weren't a business. And have a lot of the same goals as libraries, journalism does. So they needed, I think I was a Vocabulary... Vocabulary Editor there but it was making taxonomies for news articles and photos and videos and audio - anything they had, even historical AP stuff, so that was cool.

And then after that I got hired as a contractor at Sears/Kmart to do their ecommerce site. So kind of if you shop on Amazon, the same - those categories and filters. That was here in Chicago. And then after I got that job, Etsy, Etsy called. So that's my progression from academic to nonprofit to actual ecommerce businesses.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah! Can you just explain what "taxonomy" means to those who may not know?

**Jenny:** Sure! Yeah I mean I feel like it's a fancy new word and I think a lot of people in the library like the inherent concept of your show and a lot of people in the library field think it's really not a library field, it's like a new fangled tech thing. But I do classification systems. I make... just like the Dewey Decimal System or the Library of Congress system, I make a hierarchical set of, you know, controlled terms that we assign to products instead of books. And you know, filters on that and different fields and I make those data structures that you know, "This field will always be this." So I just happen to do that on weird products as opposed to books.

**Elizabeth:** Oh, that makes a lot of sense.

**Jenny:** I do what Ranganathan did. It is the most library thing... This is the most library thing you CAN do!

**Elizabeth:** I mean...I'm in my first semester so I'm learning about FRBR.

**Jenny:** There ya go!

**Elizabeth:** It's all about hierarchies and relationships and that makes sense.

**Jenny:** Totally! Like, faceted classification...I mean like I was very lucky at Illinois that not only do they have a pretty traditional cataloguing department and like a lot of local...I mean Urbana Free Library is a very well known public library and you know they have a really strong background in cataloguing and I had a lot of good cataloguing classes from practical teachers who were out in the field cataloguing. But in addition to that, you know, the faculty had a ton of people who were in more traditional classification systems, including Pauline Cochrane who worked for UNASCO doing their system and like, was a student of Ranganathan. So like, I do feel very tied to that like, "Wow! I was taught by someone who was taught by Ranganathan!" Like that is a really handed down legacy I feel like I'm doing the same exact thing we were always meant to do as librarians. Just in a very different...you know, not for a library. Libraries don't really have anything for me to catalogue. I would if you guys did but...

**Elizabeth:** Have you had people actually say to you like, "Oh, I don't think you're doing, like, library work?"

**Jenny:** 100%. I mean like I think it's just assumed. Like I've had, first of all library science professors, I'm sorry, Information Science professors, assume that I'm really excited about you know, taking library out of information science and uhhh I'm not. I think I'm like one of the more conservative people in that...if that's conservative however you call that. I've taught thesaurus construction and taxonomy classes. I've had students contact me and say like, "I don't know if I can take your class, I'm not very technically minded." And I was like, "Well, the highest tech thing I've used in doing taxonomies at large companies is Excel so umm I mean some people aren't good at Excel and that might be you." But yeah, I mean I think

it's like the least...I mean yes, I work with engineers all the time and so there is a technical aspect. And yes, knowing SQL is helpful. Or you know, if I knew more programming that would be more helpful. But like uhh...I make hierarchical lists. It's not very technical. There are like...knowing how databases are and knowing how data is normalized is technical and that is helpful. But on the face of it, yeah I mean I think like I have to remind people like this is what the father of library of science did is what I do for a living and I think we think of librarians as you know the person behind the desk even internally to the profession which is so funny because we all know that's not what you do!

**Elizabeth:** Right, right. Yeah, it's a persistent stereotype.

**Jenny:** Right, right.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah. But that's what we're definitely trying to do with this show, you know? Like, "Look what you can do with a library degree!"

**Jenny:** Yeah and I have struggled. I mean there are some cases I think it behooves me to call myself a librarian and in some cases it doesn't, honestly. I do struggle with that idea of like...I mean I think this is sort of similar to how people feel about the word "feminist." Like if I say this it conjures all these images to other people of what this is but it may not be what I am actually...I feel that way about "librarian" like if I say that to an engineer they think like I'm who person that loves books and hates computers. So it is a hard thing and I mean it is not a thing I've resolved for myself. People internal to the profession don't call me it, so that's interesting, too.

**Elizabeth:** That is interesting. I feel like that's...I would be hurt. Like, that's sad.

**Jenny:** Like I got the degree, so technically I am, you know? I can't take it back, I got this thing!

**Elizabeth:** Yeah I mean I feel like it's so much, I again, I haven't been here very long but it's all about like organizing information and thinking and ways of, yeah making things more accessible so...

**Jenny:** Yeah, and I mean not to get on a speaking box...what do you call that, high horse? I don't know. Uhhh...

**Elizabeth:** A soapbox?

**Jenny:** Yeah! Soapbox! There ya go...um, I feel like...I should know words right, that's my job?

*Both laugh.*

**Jenny:** But yeah, I mean, I think that it *sucks* that like...I think in the profession we complain about like, "Libraries aren't just a place downtown that has a lot of books that homeless people can go to!" It's like well yeah, I agree with you but then like show it by your own skill sets, too. Part of that alienation from internal to the librarian community is like well not only...you should be the first people in the door who are like that's a librarian, like, what did we do in the 50s and 60s? We made...we used computers to make punch cards to organize information. Like, that's what I do there's just not punch cards anymore. It's the exact same thing. And I think like it goes both ways. Like, people will only take us seriously in tech when we have those skills, too, and we portray librarians that way. And I think a lot of times we just sort of complain about it and don't portray ourselves that way.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, That's a lot to think about. Um, so, is there anything you know now that you wish you could've known as an undergrad or graduate student, like, do you have any advice for your past self?

**Jenny:** Umm, I mean on one hand, I am the kind of person who's like, "Uh no, because it all led me here". But um I mean honestly, like don't be afraid of technical things and even knowing a minor bit about technical things you know like you don't have to be an expert at Python and database management to talk to the people who are those experts but like if you know a very minor bit about how those things are constructed, it like makes that a lot easier and it makes you sound a lot less dumb. And it makes people who are going to do that job for you far more willing to help you out. I mean I think like, I mean that's true of any job, like if you interface with professors and you have to do collection development for like, history, but you don't know like basic facts about periods in American History that are important, you sound dumb and that person is not going to trust you. I think it's exactly the same with technical people. I think a lot of times people make real big technical decisions as a librarian without having *any* knowledge or including

anyone who has technical ability and so I guess my feeling is like, as soon as you can and as early as you can like start, start learning any vague thing about how programming languages work or how databases are normalized. That sort of stuff.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, that's a really good piece of advice. I'm trying to do that myself.

**Jenny:** Yay! Yeah, I mean I think, I think like honestly, when I say that, people who are library students and honestly like people who are under 35 are likely to take that information but I think that information is more important for people who are not in those groups because I think there's this sense and I feel this way because like I have a job and I want to have a side life that isn't involving my job. Like that's even more important if you're not in school right now like that is...like, you have to still keep up with stuff.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, definitely. Um, so yeah, going back to talking about your career, um, what are some of the best or unique opportunities that you think your graduate studies enabled?

**Jenny:** Um, I think like a thing that is great about a school that is so focused on academic prowess and like librarians as an academic force with that tenure thing, the other side of that was it was very expected that we would go to all the conferences and speak at them. And like, I talked to people who went to other library schools and that wasn't like, assumed whereas like I was going to ALA as a student and there was like money to do that and you were really encouraged to be on a committee, in school, you know? And I think like that is a thing I will credit Illinois with over a lot of other schools is like, it was just expected that everyone would be in a professional capacity publically.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense because I mean I feel like everyone talk to, similar to the nepotism thing, like, it's all about networking and building these connections.

**Jenny:** Yeah and I think like as a student it seems really like, "Well what do I have to talk about?" Like also, "Oh it must be really hard to get speaking gigs." We self select out, like we don't even apply. If you have any vague idea, like, just apply and like it's just not that big, as big of a deal. It seems

like, as a student it seems like a such a big deal to speak at a conference. It's in fact like, you know, you might be at 8am and no one will show up. Like I mean that in a good way, like you know, I mean like a lot of organizations, especially smaller organizations, like ALA is such a big fish but like I said earlier like I applied to that North American Serials Interest group. Not a lot of students care about serials so like it was very easy to get into that organization and like join a committee and then people know who you are and are actually doing work and people who are like 10 years into their job don't want to be on that committee anymore. Like they have tenure now, so they're very excited to give that to someone else.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

**Jenny:** They probably have a kid now. And they don't care anymore.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, yeah they're done.

*Laughs.*

**Jenny:** Take advantage of the fact that you have time to do work is a real key thing.

**Elizabeth:** Right, right. As you're saying there's this sort of tension within the library community, between like tech and non-tech or maybe not so...those simple terms...I guess how do you think we can sort of bridge the divide and the gap about like what a librarian is and isn't and those stereotypes?

**Jenny:** I mean I think like you can call things library or information science and that doesn't really matter to me. I think it's more proving that you have something that is useful to organizations or you know, non-library organization or companies. To me, like, I feel like the big data type of stuff that companies are doing is exactly what we have. But we're too scared to do anything about it because of our user privacy stuff. And I believe more than anyone in user privacy so like, "Hey you know what we've been good at for 100 years? Like, talking about user privacy!" So like, maybe let's go out there and start talking about it. Or, you know what we're really good at? Aggregating data! Like why are we leaving that to companies? I guess I don't...I think when things are thought of as "too tech" like we don't think of them as a library thing and that's really weird to me, because we've been

doing that forever, it's just bewildering to me. Like, user experience is like the biggest thing we're good at. We're good at transferring information to people in a way that they can understand it. So like why did we wait 30 years for people in this other field to get good at it and start their own departments? I don't know!

*Laughs.*

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, no it's so true! And I think...I don't know just like the feeling here at Simmons as a brand new student I feel like there is more talk about...like there's a whole User Experience Professionals club and um...but yeah it is interesting that it like took so long, you know?

**Jenny:** Yeah. I think the other thing to me is like, I guess I hear a lot of complaining about it, like, "Why don't people take librarians seriously?" It's just like, well, do good work and then they will. That's the thing for me, like...Also, if you're a librarian or if you're in any position you're probably using the language of the field you're in currently, look at how people are talking about it and package it differently. That's literally my job and that's all cataloguers job, like how do people talk about this thing? Let's use those words. To me it's just like, if people are doing another thing and they're calling it something else, just call it whatever they're calling it, I don't care. Do good work and then people will notice and want to hire you. Maybe just take the library word out of it, like, that's funny, that's ironic about what I said earlier, take the library language out of it. Call them ontologies, don't call it FRBR. Call it...you know no one knows what that...we love our acronyms!

**Elizabeth:** There are so many, oh my goodness! Yeah, um. I'm just gonna, to change things, to switch things up.

**Jenny:** Cool.

**Elizabeth:** I'm just gonna ask you some...5 random things.

**Jenny:** Ok. I hate random, I'm a taxonomist. No! No miscellaneous!

**Elizabeth:** Ok, they're fun little things.

**Jenny:** Ok, there you go, category "fun."

**Elizabeth:** Fun, yes exactly! So, um, if you had a spirit animal, what would it be?

**Jenny:** Um, in addition to being allergic to wool, I'm allergic to most animals so I would say robot.

**Elizabeth:** Ok, no I like that, I like that!

**Jenny:** Logic robot.

**Elizabeth:** And you said like to travel a lot, so where's been the most interesting place you've been?

**Jenny:** Um, so I really like, uhh, abandoned things and places. So, especially abandoned factories and stuff like that. So I really enjoyed the Salton Sea, which is this area out in the Imperial Valley of Southern California. It's near the Mexican border where it was a resort and then um due to environmental circumstances, the sea kind of dried up and so then it became like just totally abandoned. And recently I just went to the Great Smokey Mountains, which were amazing. And the Museum of Appalachia there is just like a folk art style museum of... Since, Appalachia kind of got parts of Appalachia got wiped out by creating the Great Smokey Mountains, this man just like took all of these cabins from the areas that were going to be destroyed by the park and moved them to this one place so you can go and see how people actually lived. Um, it's really neat.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah that's really cool! What are some of your favorite blogs to follow, like library related or otherwise?

**Jenny:** So as a person who is no longer in the library world I have to see I have to say I know this is so anti-library like I get you guys are real into blogs about library stuff. I am not, I totally don't, I follow a jillion blogs, I'm super into RSS but I would say I follow [Library with a Lead Pipe](#) because you know I know people who work there but like other than that I follow mostly taxonomy related things, so things from [KM World](#) and um actually I follow a lot of craft blogs for work.

**Elizabeth:** That makes sense.

**Jenny:** Yeah, yeah and sometimes they talk mean about me, that's fun. Um I also really love [Ask A Manager](#) um that's like probably the work related blog, though not library centric, that I love the most because it's just like the crazy things people will pull at a job that you're like is this for real?

**Elizabeth:** Yeah.

*Laughs.*

**Jenny:** So yeah that's probably my best. Umm...

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, no those are, those sound cool. I think it's good to get non library blogs, too I mean that's...

**Jenny:** [Mr. Cross Stitch](#) is a craft blog I love and they often feature hat makers who talk, talk smack about the taxonomy at Etsy, which is fun.

**Elizabeth:** That...that...that sucks!

*Laughs*

**Jenny:** Well it's funny, I do cross-stitch so like it's very weird to be talked about on a blog you read normally you're like, oh that, that's about me.

**Elizabeth:** Right, right, so is it, is there like is there like a taxonomy team at Etsy? Or is it like...

**Jenny:** There is now a team of me and one other person. His name is Mark Shimpeno, he is in Fort Lauderdale. He is also, he is a graduate of University of Washington, as a librarian. So yeah uhh until recently it was only one of me and now's there's two of us.

**Elizabeth:** Were you the first? Is that what you said?

**Jenny:** Well so there was a taxonomist back in ye olde times at Etsy um but they, again it wasn't, there was no interest in controlling things, and I think only after like, many, many years did Etsy realize like "oh, we kind of have to know if something is a shoe before we can ask what shoe size it is." They had done they so much with search which they have an awesome search team and they have done so much with that inferred data that it

wasn't until they were like, "oh wait we can't actually get to filters if we don't know what a thing is for sure."

**Elizabeth:** Do you think it will grow?

**Jenny:** Yeah I mean I think for the projects we want to do like we did just um get an AI Department so we bought out an AI company called Blackbird so in order to like, just work with them and get to a basic level of like how other ecommerce sites work, like, I...there's way too much work for me to do. Yeah, so hopefully, yes in the future we will be hiring people.

**Elizabeth:** That's cool. If you didn't go to library school what do you think you'd be doing now?

**Jenny:** Uhh...sleepin' on the streets! *Both laugh.* Uh so I did a lot of like phone sales when I wasn't working in libraries which is soul sucking but I, I do think like talking is a thing I'm good at so I feel like some sort of sales-y thing uh and I'd be really sad umm because that hurts my soul.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, yeah. I've also worked in libraries since I was a little kid, and, not a little kid, like 13 (*laughs*) but yeah it just feels like natural that I'm still in this world.

**Jenny:** Yeah it's so weird! I mean like, I feel, I guess like I think a lot...I know a lot of people who I mean like there's like 5 years post library school I think there's a big drop-off of people who are like, "yup tried this out, not for me" so I do know a lot of people who went to library school who are now getting out. And it's so weird to me because I was like no this was obviously the thing. Yeah you know yeah. I don't know another job where I can just like research things for 5 minutes and then move on. Like that's what's good about it.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah um so do you have any questions for me? I don't know!

**Jenny:** So I guess my question is like when you were looking for a library school, did you care about like how "techy" it seemed?

**Elizabeth:** Um, yes and no. I think...So I worked at my undergrad, I went to Bryn Mawr College and I worked there um 2 years post-grad and I learned a lot of stuff on the job like tech and otherwise and um I always thought of

myself as more academic so I'm in the history/archives degree, dual degree but I'm finding that I'm really fascinated by user experience research and data and systems and organization so I'm having like a mini crisis but I'm not like dealing with it head on yet.

**Jenny:** Yeah, yeah!

**Elizabeth:** But so since I think I went into the search with the archives/history um idea like I sort of honed in on Simmons um especially because of its location in Boston and but I feel...like I'm in the Intro to Tech for Info Professionals now and I think it's really great because you can do as much or as little as you want like if you want...so I've sort of been challenging myself to do CSS, HTML, JavaScript, all that stuff. So yeah it's interesting I wasn't, that wasn't on the forefront of my mind.

**Jenny:** Well, it's super weird that we have a specialty that is people who are good at technology it's like but isn't all of librarianship supposed to be good...like isn't that the whole thing?

**Elizabeth:** Yeah.

**Jenny:** Do most people you go to school with, do they have library backgrounds? Like have they worked in a library before?

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, so yeah that's what's interesting, I thought more people would. But...

**Jenny:** Me too!

**Jenny:** Like how did you get a degree in a thing that you never worked in?

**Elizabeth:** I'm like how did you know you wanted to do this if you've never done it?

**Jenny:** It was so strange to me. Volunteer for 10 hours, see what it's like! That's longer than applying that is like the strangest thing to me in libraries, it's like do other masters degrees have that? Like where you're like I've never taken an art class but I want to get a master degree of art. That's super weird!

**Elizabeth:** I know! It is interesting...I know some people who are more in the tech track and they've had more experience with coding, systems, that kind of stuff. But yeah it was interesting to me that, um...because a lot of the concepts weren't super new to me so I feel like I was able to dive in right away and go deeper whereas other people, you know, it was like all these brand new things being throwing at them so like understand that it's hard but I was like I'm glad that I have this...

**Jenny:** I mean I do wonder what like, I mean I know library schools can't do this because like monetarily they just need as many people to apply as possible. Um but I wonder if they were like, "You have to volunteer for 10 hours." And get a certificate that says you volunteered. Like how would that work? Like because, or more than that, that's such a bare minimum. Like just volunteer for 10 hours, it's fine. Like, just be in a library for 10 hours.

**Elizabeth:** Right just see like if you like the environment.

**Jenny:** Like it seems like such a weird investment, like I'm gonna go move to another place and pay someone thousands of dollars...

**Elizabeth:** Yeah! To do this thing that I may or may not like.

**Jenny:** It's so strange. Yeah I met someone in library school whose focus was children's libraries and she didn't work in a children's department until her last semester and she realized like I'm not that into this....so it's like oh my god, that's horrible!

**Elizabeth:** That is awful...I feel like Children's Lit is a very specific, you've gotta like kids!

**Jenny:** So specific! What are you gonna do now? I would have nightmares.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, yeah...I mean...

**Jenny:** Just volunteer man, its fine.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah! Volunteer!

**Jenny:** Even if you are in library school, like volunteer for 10 hours, volunteer in a local library and then you actually know how it works. Like I

volunteered in our local...I took Collection Development in library school, and which is basically the Amazon Recommender. I think that's so interesting because like that's also not seen as a tech profession but like collection development and like running, you know if someone's like, "I really like *Harry Potter*, what else might I like?" That's exactly the Amazon Recommender and in Reader's Advisory classes um so I took Reader's Advisory and the person who taught it was like, "We need reader's advisory people to like come to the library and volunteer four hours a week and just like give books to shut-ins. Recommend books to shut-ins." I was like that sounds awesome, I want to use this skill I just got. So like I mean yeah I think like the local libraries...most library schools are in large cities or college towns so they probably have a public library that you can like, volunteer in.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah.

**Jenny:** Yeah.

**Elizabeth:** Well that's awesome.

**Jenny:** Yeah.

**Elizabeth:** So, before we wrap up, um is there anything we didn't cover, something you'd like to talk about, go over, mention?

**Jenny:** I think like in terms of like because I get a lot of questions about like how do I get into taxonomy for my library job? And I guess my feeling is like first of all, because there's not a ton of classes about it, umm I would say like I will give you a few books to read and like communities to join to get into that but I think also just starting your own project.

I feel like uh you know I know someone who was a metadata manager who was in a camping club, which had like all these things you could rent out from the camping club. So she just like made a taxonomy of those things so that people could browse then and then that's an example of your work. When I look to hire people like having examples of your work even if it's for like a nonprofessional thing just tells me you can do this thing, so that's really helpful. Learning about user testing and card sorting, is really helpful that's the kind of thing I do a lot.

There's a couple of books. There's the [Taxo book by Marjorie Hava](#) which is like a 3 part, like history, theory, and like future tech part of taxonomy. And also in the same series, I can't think of the series, is [Faceted Search which his a book by Daniel Tunkelang](#) umm those are really amazing, very new books about taxonomy. I think the [Accidental Taxonomist is a really great book by Heather Hedding](#). Especially if you work at a job and you want to like, you have to do some sort of taxonomy and it's like 10% of your job, that's a really good entry into it. Um but yeah I mean I think really traditional...I when I am looking to hire people, um, hiring someone who has a library background is just a really good shorthand for me to be like, ah they care about users, they care about privacy, um they're gonna use data correctly and like not, you know, use one term that's plural and one term that isn't.

You know? So I mean I think for me that background if you're in another library field and this sounds interesting to you, having that background just means that you have a way head start over anyone. But it doesn't mean like, "Yeah! Tomorrow you can just be a taxonomist!" There are things you gotta learn. So yeah that's...I would read those things and then um then you know start doing some...it is kind of like a very...I mean all of librarianship is very professional but I feel like it's kind of like painting houses, like you kind of just have to start doing it. Like you can read the theory about it but you kind of just have to do it and do it and do it to know how to do it.

Um there's also a Taxonomy Bootcamp is at, in November, it's an annual event that we have, there's also European Taxonomy Boot Camp, so if you're not in America. And uh, [TaxoCoP, Taxo Community of Practice](#), is now, we have have a Yahoo group, which is "ye olde" and I think it might be phasing out and then there's also a LinkedIn group and it's really how our community kind of talks to one another so those are the big things to like overhear. Yeah.

**Elizabeth:** The other taxonomists, what is their...is it mostly library people, like backgrounds? Or...

**Jenny:** A good portion is librarians and then there's a lot of people who have just kind of fallen into it. Like they were uh like a CRM person or they did some SEO and then they had a job where this was given to them because they're the data person. When we interview people it's more and more mostly librarians but I've interviewed a lot of people who have database

backgrounds. Um and that's a little hard because I feel like half of the job is that like data integrity side and the other half is really more of a creative...like, "How do people actually think about this?" like whether or not this is a shirt...like, leggings aren't pants is my favorite thing to say, like leggings aren't pants, ok? You shouldn't be wearing those as pants! But people do wear them as pants. I have to put them under pants even though they're not, as much as it pains me as a human.

*Laughs.*

So like there's both sides of that and this is not to diss on people on who have just data integrity for such a long a time but a lot of them are like, "No it's this thing, that's how it is." So you have to combine that both of those sides of like human thought which is a little mushy and real strong categorization, which is not. Yeah.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah. Um, so do you, do you use Twitter or other social media? Are there places that you know our listeners can follow you at?

**Jenny:** Yeah I am [@jennybento](#) pretty much everywhere because I believe in consistent naming.

**Elizabeth:** That makes sense! I wonder why?

*Laughs.*

**Jenny:** Yes, no Instagram, anything! I'm not a big Tweeter but yeah Twitter is...I am on Twitter. That's also my Gmail so unfortunately, now you can all contact me! Or fortunately.

**Elizabeth:** And yeah the Beyond the Stacks is [@BeyondStacks](#). Unfortunately, [@BeyondtheStacks](#) was already taken! I was like what?!

**Jenny:** Who's that lameo?

**Elizabeth:** Yeah! I was like, ugh...

**Jenny:** So you should Tweet them and be like, "Hey give up this Twitter! Give it up!"

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, I should!

**Jenny:** No, not you! I think all the listeners should be like HEY...no don't bully people on twitter that's bad, sorry. That's a big thing to encourage.

**Elizabeth:** Bad Twitter etiquette!

**Jenny:** Don't bully, sorry!

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, well, it's been really awesome talking to you; it's been very interesting, thank you.

**Jenny:** Yeah, you too.

**Elizabeth:** Thank you so much

**Jenny:** Yeah no problem, I think it is, it is cool that this exists. And it's very cool...I like the idea that people might go to library school knowing they don't want to work in a library, like that is a really cool idea. And it...it was few and far between in my day.

**Elizabeth:** Right, yeah. No I think that's what we're trying to inspire.

**Jenny:** Yeah.

**Elizabeth:** That's great.

**Jenny:** Cool.

**Elizabeth:** Thank you.

**Jenny:** No problem!