

The *Danville Community Encyclopedia* began with my interest in the library as a public space. Libraries are one of the few places left where people can go without needing a membership or money to buy something. People are left alone to do what they want, yet can also get help in finding information when needed. Libraries welcome people from all classes, races, ages, and stages of life.

I began planning the project by considering what I perceive as the purpose of the library: A place where members of the community can come to acquire knowledge. I wanted to create an encyclopedia from the knowledge of people in the Danville community; an encyclopedia that contained all types of knowledge, from the history of the conflict in the Middle East to how to make a laser blaster. The idea was: One comes to the library to get some knowledge and ends up giving knowledge as well.

The process of making this encyclopedia involved many interviews over many days. For four months, I went to the library at scheduled times advertised in the local paper and at the library, as well as at random times, to interview people. These interviews were like conversations. They were conducted in a study room with a minidisc recorder, clip-on mic, digital camera with remote, and paper and pens for illustrating ideas. The clip-on mic and the remote for the camera were used to minimize the “stiffness” people feel when they are interviewed and photographed. I wanted people to relax, have fun, and forget they were being interviewed.

One interesting thing I discovered was that a lot of people thought they did not have anything to offer the encyclopedia, that they did not know anything worthwhile. Often, I had to convince them that they had knowledge to share before they would do the interview.



Interview with Jacquelyn Craft (on left) in Library study room

Once we started talking we always discovered they had some significant knowledge or special skill.

This encyclopedia is a culmination of these interviews. The interviews were transcribed word-for-word from the tapes and the resulting text was used for the entries, listed alphabetically by subject. Because people are thinking as they are talking, the entries have pauses, stops and starts, and often do not seem grammatically correct. The Illustrations were done by the contributors in order to further explain what they were talking about.

As has been the case with all my projects, people surprised me. As much as I try not to, I still make assumptions about what I think people will tell me and most of the time I’m wrong.

How to use this encyclopedia:

This encyclopedia is designed so that information can be accessed in many different ways. There is a topical index for looking up information by topic. There is also a contributors index to look up everything that a particular person talked about. A CD of excerpts from the interviews is included in the back of the book. This is meant to be another way to connect with the contributors, aside from just reading their words. There is a small sample of each person talking about a singular topic.

This encyclopedia is a record of the people living in Danville, Illinois at this time.