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## Gary Herald-President, Ambassador Book Service

Katina Strauch  
*Against the Grain*

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# ATG Interview with Gary Herald

President, Ambassador Book Service, Inc. <abs@class.org>

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*)

NB: I have known Gary Herald a long time. How many of you know that he wrote ONE OF THE VERY FIRST ARTICLES that appeared in *Against the Grain* (v. 1#2, June 1989, p. 19, "Out of Print? Not So Fast!")? He is one great dude, as my daughter would say. — KS

ATG: Gary, you are celebrating Ambassador's 25th anniversary at the beginning of 1998. Congratulations! Tell us more.

GH: Ambassador was incorporated in January 1973. We began our business from my parents' home on Long Island, actually their basement. The initial employees consisted of myself, my father, and my mother. I transferred from George Washington University to Hofstra University to help start, learn, and work the business. As our business expanded, we moved in July from our basement to a converted garden apartment in Bellmore. Before we moved from Bellmore in 1977, we had increased our space to the equivalent of three apartments. We rented our first actual warehouse space that year until we moved to our current location in Hempstead in 1979. We have since expanded our current facility twice in the last ten years. My mother and father officially retired in 1986.

ATG: You were in college and working? You took on a lot at a very young age ...

GH: Yes, I was just eighteen when we began. I guess I worked for over four years with no income! working full time, weekends, holidays, vacations, summers ... In those early years we worked primarily with special libraries based in New York City. Special libraries were very viable and many are headquartered in New York. Our location only thirty miles from downtown was a major asset for us. Based on our proximity to many of the major technical publishers, our emphasis then and now was on supplying STM materials

**"My answer to the approval plan conundrum is the timely and orderly delivery of those items our clients specifically request."**

to those libraries. We began marketing our services to academic libraries in 1974. In 1974 I transferred to SUNY Albany where I attended classes in the morning and visited college and university librar-



ies in upstate New York, wrote letters, and developed marketing strategies in the afternoon. In 1976, we were fortunate enough to have been awarded a New York State book contract. It was a very important stepping stone and very prestigious at the time.

ATG: Where do you call home?

GH: Dix Hills, Long Island. I was born in the Bronx. My parents had moved to Westbury, Long Island three months before I was born and I lived there until I got married in 1976.

ATG: What did you study in college? You have a library degree, I believe.

GH: I majored in political science and economics. My initial plan when I attended GWU was to become an attorney. Considering the change in my career path, a degree in library science was a prerequisite.

ATG: How many people work at Ambassador? And where is your main business? Libraries? And do you sell more than books?

GH: We currently employ 75 including marketing staff. We provide a comprehensive range of services to academic, special, public, and government libraries, including many value-added services. Sales of books and publications represented virtually all of our sales until 1993

when we created **Ambassador Media** and hired **Philip Hallman**, a media librarian formerly with the University of Michigan and Gettysburg College to head it. Philip

is the Creative Director and Collection Development Manager of AM. **Mary Mercado** is the Fulfillment Manager. They head a team that is quickly building a worldwide reputation for delivering all media in all formats.

Twenty-five years ago nearly 80% of library materials budgets was spent on books. Today in most research libraries the reverse is more often true. Because of this trend and in an effort to diversify and expand our services internationally, we began marketing our services to libraries in Europe in 1987. Since then we have opened marketing offices in Tel Aviv, Moscow and Bangkok. Presently we supply books and non-print media to libraries in at least thirty countries. Our international sales represents over 30% of our business. Books are still our most prevalent core product representing slightly under 80% of our total sales.

ATG: What are some of the differences that stand out in ordering media versus books?

GH: Producer discounts, pricing, credit terms, availability and sourcing are the biggest differences. To assist libraries in these areas we produce and select core bibliographies and have recently begun publication of *Pause*, a magazine devoted to introducing media products of interest

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to academic libraries. We are also in the process of preparing our first non-print catalog.

ATG: Are you defining non-print as media? What is your experience as to how libraries buy media products?

GH: Yes. Many libraries buy media as part of the collection building process, while others purchase media in response to faculty, much the way they do for publications, to supplement course work. Libraries have grown to depend on us for collection development assistance as well as our expertise in shelf-ready technical processing, public performance rights, and previewing. Our recent merger with **Library Associates** has greatly enhanced our ability to provide a full range of cataloging for both books and media. Essentially, we now have a technical services division capable of providing generic and original cataloging for any item we sup-

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ply including foreign language, serial publications, video, compact disc, etc.

*ATG: You don't have an approval plan and that's probably one area of expansion. Do you want to comment on that? I notice that in this issue of ATG (p.22)*

**Alison Grant**

*(U. of Auckland, New Zealand) talks about how outsourcing of approval plans may save money*

*but we may be compromising quality.*

GH: While our specialty is firm orders, we also offer an LC Class based notification forms service, publisher based blanket order plans, and continuations. For Ambassador to maintain a superior level of service and for our clients to control and manage their collections, my answer to the approval plan conundrum is the timely and orderly delivery of those items our clients specifically request.

*ATG: The book business has certainly changed in the 18 years I've been an acquisitions librarian. The concept of service has greatly expanded and computers are everywhere.*

GH: I couldn't agree more. It has been

a long time since all we did was supply books. 1982-83 was when we all started talking about "value-added" services and the demands of technology really started to take hold. Our profession is very much technologically driven, perhaps more so

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**"1982-83 was when we all started talking about 'value-added' services and the demands of technology really started to take hold."**

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than many other industries. In many respects, technology has shifted resources away from interaction with people to interaction with software. Our Web site (which we expect to introduce later this year) is a perfect example of this.

*ATG: We've danced all around it, so let's talk about outsourcing.*

GH: No doubt this is one of the most important issues facing libraries and vendors, and certainly the most significant value-added service. As we have with Ambassador Media, our approach is to provide a professional, custom tailored service. **Deb Goldstein** is our leader in this area. She and her staff of 12 catalogers offer the expertise our library clients require. As you know, we

have been a **PromptCat** vendor for the past year, as well.

*ATG: Tell us about your Web page.*

GH: Our Web page was developed entirely in-house over a year ago. **Stuart Grinell** and I designed it and continue to maintain it. The intent was to give libraries a general overview of our company and its services in addition to serving as an entrée to our Web site, which is currently in de-

velopment. Like all technology, we consider the Internet based products works in progress.

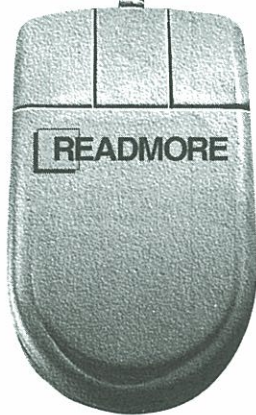
*ATG: You are a private, family person. Tell us more about yourself.*

GH: There are a few things I really love — my wife, my kids, playing golf, and the Yankees. My sixteen-year-old son **Justin** is a star tennis player while my daughter **Amanda** is twelve and very active in gymnastics. My wife is a pension actuary. 🐶

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*NB: Gary was telling me that the only journal he reads cover-to-cover is Against the Grain. We have to get him to write another article. Tell him that when you see him in Charleston in November. — KS*

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