

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript
Episode #5, "Climbing the Family Tree"
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Ken Harvey: 00:02 Welcome to all our listeners, to episode number five of Check it Out, the podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds. This podcast is brought to you by Sno-Isle Libraries, and the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation.

Cindy Tingley: 00:15 The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.

Ken Harvey: 00:23 Cindy Tingley my illustrious and world-famous colleague is back in the studio with me for this interview, and Cindy, glad to have you. How you doing?

Cindy Tingley: 00:32 I'm happy to be here. And I don't know if my head's going to fit back out the door after that intro.

Ken Harvey: 00:37 Well, you know that you're famous in a lot of places, so we might as well extend it around the world.

Cindy Tingley: 00:44 As are you, Ken. As are you.

Ken Harvey: 00:46 Especially with the podcast now, so. Hey, we're pleased to spend some time with a very special guest, Rob Branigin, who I am also going to describe as illustrious-

Rob Branigin: 00:56 Oh, dear.

Ken Harvey: 00:56 And world-famous.

Rob Branigin: 00:57 Oh my.

Ken Harvey: 00:58 A librarian from Stanwood Library. And Rob, I hope you don't mind me describing you that way, because I know that you are well-known in the genealogy community, especially with individuals in this region. And we just want to thank you for being on the show today.

Rob Branigin: 01:15 Oh, well thank you for having me.

(Continued)

Ken Harvey: 01:17 Hey, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself. I understand that you went to Franklin College in Indiana for your undergraduate degree, and then got your masters in Library and Information Science from the Indiana University School of Library and Information Science.

Rob Branigin: 01:34 Yeah, that's correct. I graduated from college in 1994, and my original career track was I had planned to be a professor of English and had wanted to teach, specifically 19th century literature, English and American. And after I got out of college and I kind of dithered around with the idea of going to graduate school and was sort of scared off by the prospect of immense debt, and-

Ken Harvey: 02:04 That'll do it.

Rob Branigin: 02:05 Yeah. And the jobs weren't really out there. So I wound up working for bookstores for a number of years. And I really enjoyed doing that work, but it wasn't really a living wage type of situation. So I'd always been a library person. I always hung out at the library. If I moved to a new town, one of the first things I always did was go over to the library and get a library card, and-

Ken Harvey: 02:30 Yeah, me too.

Cindy Tingley: 02:30 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 02:30 Me too.

Rob Branigin: 02:31 I always an active library user. And my mom had always said, "Well you know, you use the library so much. You really should just work there." And that was always in the back of my mind. So after several years working in bookstores, I thought, "Well, geez. I'd look into this library thing," and got accepted to the MLS program at Indiana University in 2003 and finished in 2005. And got my first professional gig at La Porte County Public Library, which is just about an hour East of Chicago, way upstate Indiana just along the Michigan border. And worked there for about a year, and interviewed here at Sno-Isle, and I have been here ever since.

Ken Harvey: 03:15 Well, so thank God for someone who will speak some words of wisdom into our lives and maybe give us a pointer which direction we ought to go.

Rob Branigin: 03:25 Yeah, yeah. That was always in the back of my head, the whole, "Maybe I should work at the library." Took me couple of years, it took me about the course of 10 years to sort of come around to it. But it was the smartest thing that I ever did, and it has been a very rewarding, just a wonderful work environment, wonderful career, and I think it's a great way to feel like you're doing something of real value for the community.

Ken Harvey: 03:53 Well, sounds like a lot of that schooling was taking place in Indiana. So was Indiana where you were born?

Rob Branigin: 04:00 Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, totally.

Ken Harvey: 04:01 Tell us about the town you were born in.

Rob Branigin: 04:03 Oh, wow. I grew up in Franklin. My family has roots in Johnson County, Indiana, back which I discovered largely through my genealogical research. My family came over, my Dad's family anyway, came over from Ireland in the 1780s, settled in Southern Virginia, moved up to Kentucky in the 1820s and settled in Johnson County, Indiana in the 1830s. And my family had been there ever since. And when I was growing up in the '70s and '80s, Franklin was still a very agriculturally-based community. A lot of guys walking around in kind of bib overalls and those Dekalb hybrid corn hats.

Ken Harvey: 04:52 Yeah.

Rob Branigin: 04:52 Yeah. My memories of growing up there are unilaterally pleasant. It was a really wonderful little town.

Ken Harvey: 04:59 Small town, Americana?

Rob Branigin: 05:00 Yeah. Absolutely, yeah. And it's changed very much since then. It's kind of been absorbed by greater Indianapolis. When you go to Indianapolis and watch the TV news, they'll refer to Franklin now as the South side, which kind of blows my mind, because-

Ken Harvey: 05:15 Wow.

Rob Branigin: 05:16 Yeah, back when I was there, it was very much an isolated little town. And I think that's largely, that's a huge part of why I think Stanwood was always such a good fit for me, because it's kind of the same size as Franklin and the same sort of, is traditionally based in agriculture, and it's kind of transitioning into something different, and that's just, it's an environment that I feel very comfortable in.

Ken Harvey: 05:44 So the high school you graduated from, do you ... Franklin High?

Rob Branigin: 05:49 Yeah, Franklin Community High School. That's correct, yeah. Class of 1988.

Ken Harvey: 05:53 So do you remember the mascot?

Rob Branigin: 05:58 Yeah. It was the ... I was never a big sports person. It was a bear or a dog or something. Grizzlies, yeah, OK. Sorry. Yeah. Sorry Franklin alumni.

Cindy Tingley: 06:07 How about school colors? Can you give us the school colors?

Rob Branigin: 06:07 Blue and a white, that I can tell you for sure.

Cindy Tingley: 06:07 There you go, see?

Rob Branigin: 06:13 Yeah. I mean I was actually, I was the kid, me and a couple friends of mine were direct reason why ... we used to have pep rallies.

Ken Harvey: 06:23 Yeah.

Rob Branigin: 06:23 The kind of rah rah stuff. We used to get in trouble for not fully participating and showing school spirit. Since then there has been an option to take a study hall when there is a pep rally. And that was a direct result of us sort of passive resistance, doing our passive resistance thing to the pep rallies, with all affection to Franklin. I was never a big sports person as well.

Ken Harvey: 06:53 You know, kind of the alternative of study hall or heading into the library for-

Rob Branigin: 06:58 Yeah, absolutely.

Ken Harvey: 06:58 For an alternative. That's not bad.

Rob Branigin: 06:59 Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. I'd actually forgotten that. That's exactly correct. They would let us go to the library. Yeah. And one of my favorite teachers was the head librarian there. Really wonderful woman. Her name was Mary Alice Comstock, and she had it really dry wit. Just a super hilarious woman, very, super sharp, just a great librarian, and I hung out with her alone. She was really, really a wonderful lady.

Cindy Tingley: 07:28 Do you find yourself modeling some of your librarianship after her?

Rob Branigin: 07:32 Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah, I couldn't remember her ... she just had a very finally developed sense of irony that was completely lost on about 95% of the kids in the school which appeal to me, even more, yeah.

Rob Branigin: 07:48 I can remember we had to do a research project when I was a senior in high school and we all went into the library and of course, all the kids are in there just messing around and not taking the project very seriously. And I can remember her walking around through the stacks offering help to all these kids who were not taking their project seriously. She said something to the effect of, "look at all of this great information flowing so freely."

Rob Branigin: 08:20 I still say that every now and again when I walk in through the library. Look at all this great information flowing like a mighty river. Yeah. She was a funny lady.

Cindy Tingley: 08:30 That's fantastic. Now, you mentioned Stanwood of course, which is where you are located for Sno-Isle Libraries. Tell us a little bit more about the work you do there.

Rob Branigin: 08:39 Well, I work at the reference desk. The nature of the work has changed considerably since I started. What I do a lot of nowadays is assisting folks with downloadables, a lot of tech assistance, that kind of stuff. However-

Ken Harvey: 09:00 So when you say tech assistance-

Rob Branigin: 09:01 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 09:02 Explain that a little bit more.

Rob Branigin: 09:03 I would just ... people that come in ... a lot of people that come in aren't 100% tech literate and just need some basic help using the computers, creating email accounts, that kind of thing. Just basic tech literacy kind of stuff.

Rob Branigin: 09:24 But occasionally I'll have somebody come in that needs some genealogical assistance. And the sort of introduction that folks will often make is, "Geez, I'm really sorry to bother you with this or blah blah blah." Something of that nature. And I always tell them it is no bother. This is my absolute favorite part of the job. So throw me the thorniest, genealogical problem that you've got and I am more than happy to tackle. That's that is absolutely my favorite part of the job. I just I love doing that kind of

research. It's a little bit like detective work, trolling through the old records and things of that nature.

Cindy Tingley: 10:05 So for our listeners, Stanwood, if you have an interest in genealogy, Rob is-

Rob Branigin: 10:10 Oh yeah.

Cindy Tingley: 10:11 Wanting you to show up.

Rob Branigin: 10:13 Not just Stanwood, anybody north in the Snohomish County. I've had folks come up from Brier, Mountlake Terrace. Anybody who is-

Ken Harvey: 10:24 So all over the service area [crosstalk 00:10:26].

Rob Branigin: 10:25 Absolutely. If you're in a service area and you can, you really don't even need to travel. Shoot me an email. I'm more than happy to help anybody. I mean you don't physically have to be in the branch. Just tell me what you're working on what you need help with and I'm happy to help.

Ken Harvey: 10:42 Well, if it's OK with you we'll list your email in our show notes.

Rob Branigin: 10:45 Oh, please do. Yeah. [crosstalk 00:10:46]

Cindy Tingley: 10:46 Fantastic. And phone number too.

Rob Branigin: 10:49 Yeah.

Cindy Tingley: 10:49 So as far as since you became a librarian, how many communities have you actually served?

Rob Branigin: 10:55 I worked ... when I was first hired here, I did 20 hours a week in Arlington and 20 hours a week in Stanwood. Over the years I have worked Sundays at the Lynnwood Library. I worked Sundays in Marysville. So I've worked in probably, I don't know, five or six libraries in the system as far as this being an actual reference service person as opposed to presenting a program or a genealogical demonstration.

Cindy Tingley: 11:31 And was it the work that brought you to Washington from Indiana?

Rob Branigin: 11:34 Partly, yeah. I mean, sometimes ... I'm often asked this. Why did you move so far away? I always wanted to move here from the

time that I was a little kid. I mean, I can remember we used to go on these-

Ken Harvey: 11:50 Is that your mom who's asking you that question?

Rob Branigin: 11:52 Yeah, yeah. Among others. Yeah. Yeah. I can just remember, I just always had this, I just always knew when I was little kid that this is where I wanted to live. It's partially the climate. It's the culture it's just the-

Ken Harvey: 12:06 Because it's a different climate.

Rob Branigin: 12:07 Absolutely.

Cindy Tingley: 12:08 Very.

Rob Branigin: 12:08 Yeah, absolutely. I can remember very, very clearly going on these torturous family vacations to Florida. And I am not-

Cindy Tingley: 12:17 I can relate to that.

Rob Branigin: 12:17 I am not a hot weather person. I am not a beach person. And I can remember whining to my parents about why don't we ever go to Washington or Oregon or someplace cool. Why do we always-

Ken Harvey: 12:27 So are those vacations in a station wagon with air conditioning?

Rob Branigin: 12:31 Yes they were. You bet, yeah.

Ken Harvey: 12:32 With air conditioning?

Rob Branigin: 12:34 Yeah. The family Squire.

Cindy Tingley: 12:36 I have Holiday Road playing in my head now.

Rob Branigin: 12:38 Yeah, yeah, they were in a station wagon with air conditioning. And actually one of my most clear memories of those vacations is the air conditioning would be on. And this is in the 70s. Mom and dad were smoking cigarettes back in those days. And I used to have to sit in the back because I was the youngest and all of the ... when they crack the windows-

Ken Harvey: 12:59 Right.

Rob Branigin: 13:00 All of the cigarette smoke would be blowing in the back.

Ken Harvey: 13:05 That's torturous.

Rob Branigin: 13:06 It was bad and I remember saying, "can you roll the windows down. Can't breath back here." My dad would be like, "I've got the air conditioning on. We're not rolling any windows down."

Ken Harvey: 13:17 You're killing me dad.

Rob Branigin: 13:18 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 13:18 You're killing me.

Rob Branigin: 13:19 It was different times, different times.

Ken Harvey: 13:20 It was very different times.

Cindy Tingley: 13:22 Absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

Ken Harvey: 13:24 So, while I was just going to just jump in. So this time of year, and because we're talking about summer in Indiana-

Rob Branigin: 13:33 Don't get me going.

Ken Harvey: 13:34 Temperature's balmy and-

Rob Branigin: 13:36 To say the least. I just got back. It was horrible. Indiana, I love you but the summer weather, can't deal with it. Sorry. Cannot deal with it. It was 95 degrees. The overnight low I was checking the weather quite religiously when I was there. The overnight low in Indiana while I was there was 10 to 12 degrees higher than the daytime high out here.

Ken Harvey: 14:04 Oh my gosh.

Rob Branigin: 14:05 Yes. Yeah.

Cindy Tingley: 14:06 But they have AC?

Rob Branigin: 14:07 Yeah. Every place is air-conditioned. That's absolutely true. That's absolutely true.

Cindy Tingley: 14:15 No. I'm just thinking I've been back and forth-

Ken Harvey: 14:18 I've been there.

Cindy Tingley: 14:18 Since I grew up there. I'm the same way. I was never a beach girl so I totally get it. So now you talked a little bit about trying to come to terms with what you wanted to do with your life-

Rob Branigin: 14:28 Oh, yeah.

Cindy Tingley: 14:28 And how your mom told you about being a librarian. What age would you say you were when that finally snapped, and you said, "I've got it. This is what I want to do."

Rob Branigin: 14:36 It was probably, believe it or not, it was in my early 30s. I worked for Borders. I just kind of floated around and did a lot of temp work. I worked in bookstores. I worked as a book editor. I did all kinds of stuff. I just didn't really find anything that kind of resonated or paid a living wage. And I worked at Borders. The late lamented Borders Incorporated. It's a wonderful job, great company to work for. But unfortunately, the pay wasn't great. And I just, I was not making a living wage. I had great healthcare had a great optical planet at Borders. Believe it or not, I worked in the warehouse. I kind of was a person that was in charge of receiving. It was a great job. But the pay wasn't great.

Rob Branigin: 15:31 And I was living in Bloomington, Indiana at the time and that was ... Bloomington is the home of Indiana University. So, it seemed kind of a natural transition to well let me try out this library science thing and see where that goes.

Rob Branigin: 15:45 So one semester I went as a, what do they call it? Audited classes. I wasn't an actual sort of, wasn't accepted into the program, but I took some classes and I was like, "Oh, this is interesting. It certainly isn't anything that I can't handle." So I kind of pursued it from there. And like I was saying earlier, it really is the smartest thing I ever did. It was a really wonderful experience.

Cindy Tingley: 16:11 Yeah, I asked because it seems like people come into this field from all different ages. Some people know as a child, they want to be a librarian and others-

Rob Branigin: 16:19 Yeah.

Cindy Tingley: 16:19 It's a little later.

Rob Branigin: 16:20 Yeah.

Cindy Tingley: 16:21 And I think that's fascinating.

Rob Branigin: 16:22 Yeah, yeah. That's one thing I recall being in library school was that the composition of the classes that I was in, I mean, they would be people in their 50s in their 60s, and kids fresh out of undergraduate. So, I was kind of-

Ken Harvey: 16:40 That's a wide age range.

Rob Branigin: 16:41 It was, absolutely. I remember doing some group projects with, I'd have, some of the people in the group would be 22, 23 years old and some folks would be 55, 56.

Ken Harvey: 16:55 Wow.

Cindy Tingley: 16:55 Amazing.

Rob Branigin: 16:56 So, I was right in that kind of golden mean. Being the mean of the 30s.

Ken Harvey: 16:59 You were mentioning that you had worked in the kind of in the retail book-

Rob Branigin: 17:06 Oh, yeah.

Ken Harvey: 17:06 Market selling directly to customers and also in the kind of the distribution side of it with Borders. So that just makes me think that you may be a great person to ask the question about that we hear sometimes about our library's obsolete. That you can find so much of what you need on the internet, and you can find it through bookstores and all and. So, why do we need libraries these days? Well, I mean, what would you say to people like that?

Rob Branigin: 17:33 I think, and this is ... I'm glad you asked that question because this is actually kind of one of my favorite things to harp on. When I'm back at the branch, you should ask any of my co-workers. I think there's a perception nowadays that the technology and the Internet has been around long enough and now with the last 10 years the explosion of the mobile technology. You're carrying around this incredibly powerful device in your pocket.

Rob Branigin: 18:04 All of this stuff has become commonplace and it's become a part of people's lives looking things up online. There's a perception not entirely off base among I think the general population in terms of finding information. There's a perception that well all you need to do is Google something.

Rob Branigin: 18:28 Well yeah, that's true. However, what I come across as a librarian is, and this is concerning to me because I don't see a lot of concern for the quality of information. What seems to be the most common yardstick nowadays, I call it kind of a fast food sort of mentality. It's just what people go through the drive up. They're not really concerned about the nutrition, the health effects of what you're consuming. It's just all about speed and convenience.

Rob Branigin: 19:03 And I'm seeing that same sort of yardstick being applied to information. And I think the library and in addition to providing a lot of resources that library naysayers have no idea of. Part of what we can do is I think it's extremely crucial to instill in people across the board a conception of quality and information. And that is a huge part of what I see us doing nowadays. I think that applying the sort of fast food mentality to information is, that's a that's a dangerous road to go down. And that's ... I think-

Ken Harvey: 19:53 What, meaning that as long as you can find it, get it fast-

Rob Branigin: 19:57 Right.

Ken Harvey: 19:57 And eat, consume it, then it must be good for you right?

Rob Branigin: 20:00 Applying a model of speed and convenience to information as opposed to quality and-

Ken Harvey: 20:08 Accuracy of it.

Rob Branigin: 20:09 Correct. Absolutely. Yeah, that's a huge part of what I think ... that's a huge part of what plays into what I see as the continued relevance of public libraries. But also, I think ... I'm a big advocate for electronic resources.

Rob Branigin: 20:27 When I began library school, and as I mentioned earlier, I've always used the library. I was a pretty dedicated library user. But I was amazed to find out at IU when I was in grad school, that there were these research databases where you could do things like look through newspaper archives. You could look through census records, you could access academic journal content, 19th-century periodicals. It was amazing. There is this entire world of content beyond the free internet, beyond Google.

Ken Harvey: 21:05 Yeah.

- Rob Branigin: 21:05 And that is also a huge part of where the Public Library comes in, is ... I think there is a, the vast majority of the public, particularly people who argue against the continued relevance of public libraries are completely ignorant of the existence of these types of resources. There is an entire world of content out there that is way beyond Wikipedia, way beyond the top of your Google search results, quality content, and that's what we deliver here. And that's what public libraries deliver across the nation. And I think public libraries are more relevant now than they have ever been.
- Ken Harvey: 21:52 I guess that flies in the face of those who say that we're outmoded.
- Cindy Tingley: 21:57 Yeah. Sure does.
- Rob Branigin: 21:57 Absolutely. Absolutely. And to anybody that would suggest that the library is obsolete, I would say, I would invite them to come in and check the library out and see what we have to offer because there is an entire world of content out there that is not accessible on the free internet. It just isn't.
- Cindy Tingley: 22:23 So what do you think are some of the examples of how we continue to evolve in the library to anticipate or respond to these changes in the marketplace?
- Rob Branigin: 22:33 Well I think that ... my take on that is that there are niche markets for information. Genealogy is a good one. Consumer information is another one. Business information is another one. That is something that I'm very happy to see that we have embraced as an organized. I'd like to see us move forward with that. I think that is, as I was saying, this sort of general informational culture of looking stuff up on Google, that has become, part of daily life. And to take that a couple of steps further and to start providing information in these kinds of niche areas at quality information, information with depth and quality and provenance and all of that good stuff.
- Rob Branigin: 23:35 That is the direction I'd like to see us go in. And I just to ... I always think if my first reference librarian position was at the main desk at the undergraduate library at Indiana University, the reference staff there, the librarian and staff all had subject specialties. So you could come in, as opposed to let's say Googling some kind of market research or something of that nature. You could talk to somebody that was a stunningly adept subject specialist and just played these electronic resources like, Stradivarius on a violin or whatever.

Rob Branigin: 24:21 I mean, it was really amazing. I mean, I'll give you an example when I, and this is 15 years ago, right? I mean, this is the model that I would like to see us follow. But my first reference question was, this is literally my first day on the desk. The building that I worked in was right across the street from the School of International Business. And I had a Ph.D. candidate come in, and I'm just, fresh out of a shift at Borders. Sorting Harry Potter books and Hoobastank CDs or whatever it was back in those days, and somebody came up and said they needed demographic and sales information on three, comparative demographics and sales information on three different kinds of Turkish soft drinks between 1976 and 1983 or something like that.

Ken Harvey: 25:14 Wow.

Rob Branigin: 25:14 Right. And I just looked at her just like a complete deer in headlights. And I yeah, I asked the person who was the business specialist, and the guy just came out there and just played, he knew the resources to use. He knew where to go for the information. He knew how to use the resources and had this I mean, this incredibly arcane question, and was printing out color charts. All of this stuff and had a packet assembled for this person within 15 or 20 minutes.

Ken Harvey: 25:43 Impressive.

Cindy Tingley: 25:44 Yes, very.

Rob Branigin: 25:45 That is what I would like to see in terms of Information Services. That's where I would like to see us, the direction I would like to see us moving and because everybody knows how to Google something on their own, we need to be able to help people take research to a different place. To instill a sense of quality and information and also to be able to show people that there is an entire world of information beyond just Googling something.

Ken Harvey: 26:15 So when you say that's where you'd like to see us go-

Rob Branigin: 26:17 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 26:17 Are you and your fellow kind of research librarians providing that type of assistance now with individuals in your service area?

Rob Branigin: 26:26 Yeah, I think so. I think so. Here at Sno- Isle, we have, over the past couple years, we've created the lead librarian position,

which I think plays into directly what I'm talking about having somebody who is a subject specialist, who knows how to use, knows the suite of resources that are available in a given subject area. Knows how to use those resources goes out and presents to the public and kind of sells these resources to the public. But yeah, I think that we have embraced that model, certainly in business, I think it would be really cool to see us branch out, say, have a subject specialist in other areas and hopefully, that's, that's common in the next few years, but we'll see. Yeah.

- Cindy Tingley: 27:16 Yeah. And you were talking about specialties and of course genealogy is it for you.
- Rob Branigin: 27:20 Yeah.
- Cindy Tingley: 27:21 Is that something you decided early on or did it just evolve?
- Rob Branigin: 27:24 It evolved. My grandmother was always very interested in genealogy. And I kind of remember her telling me all of these things about my family history and I was probably 12 or 13 and I'm just blowing it off. And when you're that age, you don't really-
- Ken Harvey: 27:41 Yeah, yeah, yeah, grandma, OK.
- Rob Branigin: 27:42 Right. Exactly.
- Ken Harvey: 27:43 That's nice.
- Cindy Tingley: 27:43 Yeah, yeah. I haven't got [crosstalk 00:27:45]
- Rob Branigin: 27:44 Years later, I would just I do anything to be able to talk to her about this stuff now. But yeah, when I started my first gig as a librarian in La Porte, Indiana. I was basically told we subscribe to X amount of electronic resources here and teach yourself how to use them. Yeah, thanks a lot, have a great day. I was basically kind of left up to my own devices, which is totally fine. I think that's really the best way to learn how to use these things. And in a certain respect is, I basically just played around with these electronic resources. And, I would think, well, what happens if somebody comes in and asked me how to use this, and I'm clueless. So I would teach myself how to use them. And so I started to use Ancestry. And I, because I didn't know anything about genealogy or genealogical research.
- Rob Branigin: 28:41 And the more I played around with this thing, and I'm using myself as a guinea pig and just kind of tracing my own family

history. I just really got captivated by it. It was really just kind of a revelatory moment for me that wow, this is really cool. And you have these incredibly powerful tools. Again, something that is not available on the free internet. You can't Google this stuff. This is directly out of the realm of library-specific resources.

Ken Harvey: 29:14 And when you say library specific, that's because the library-

Rob Branigin: 29:20 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 29:20 Pays for a subscription to it.

Rob Branigin: 29:22 Correct.

Ken Harvey: 29:22 And then offers that access to others?

Rob Branigin: 29:24 Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I mean, we see Ancestry-

Ken Harvey: 29:26 That's pretty cool.

Cindy Tingley: 29:26 Yes.

Rob Branigin: 29:27 Advertise on television for a personal subscription. And I have one myself. It's not cheap.

Cindy Tingley: 29:34 Right.

Rob Branigin: 29:34 The product that we subscribe to here at Sno-Isle Ancestry library edition is virtually identical to the home subscription. And you don't have to pay the couple hundred bucks every six months or whatever it is.

Cindy Tingley: 29:49 And this is something that our customers can access from home. They don't have to come in.

Rob Branigin: 29:52 Ancestry is actually one of the two databases that we subscribe to that you cannot access from home.

Cindy Tingley: 29:58 Oh, you can't. OK.

Rob Branigin: 29:59 Yeah. To use Ancestry library edition, you do physically have to be in the branch or connected to the internet via Sno-Isle Wi-Fi network. So if the library is closed, let's say and you drive down to the parking lot and get online, which I've actually, I'm somewhat embarrassed to say, I've actually done this before. Drive down to the parking lot at five or six in the morning.

Ken Harvey: 30:22 Of the library?

Rob Branigin: 30:22 Yeah. And connect via the library's Wi-Fi network. Yeah, you can get on that way. But you do have to be either in a branch or on a Sno-Isle network to use the Ancestry.

Cindy Tingley: 30:32 See, this is good. I'm just learning this too. Because recently I got my DNA done through ancestry and I'm starting to get the bug, right? So when people come to you with these questions, what do you find was kind of the impetus in them saying, "Wow, I really I want to look into my family's history."

Rob Branigin: 30:48 Well, I think everybody ... when you reach a certain point in your life, you begin to realize that I am, I don't want to get too heavy talking about the thoughts of mortality. But I think that-

Ken Harvey: 31:04 That's all right.

Rob Branigin: 31:06 I think that plays into it. And everybody, when you reach that certain point in your life, you just start to wonder. It's really a self discovery thing. And I think everybody when you're searching, when you're doing genealogical research, yes you are reading about Uncle Joe or Aunt Minerva, whatever. But it's a journey of self discovery. And I think that's where it comes from. I think people are just interested in knowing who they are. And this is something that the library can be a director, help in that kind of work.

Ken Harvey: 31:49 Do you find that people want, some people are looking for, to get a sense of connectedness? They want to know what they're connected to and who they're connected to?

Rob Branigin: 31:59 Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Sure. Sure. Sure. I think, yeah. There is definitely, I think a need to, to ... I don't want to necessarily say what your sort of tribal roots are. But everybody wants to know sort of where your roots are. What sort of part of the world you're from. Who are your people.

Cindy Tingley: 32:25 Right. Right.

Rob Branigin: 32:26 I guess and that's-

Ken Harvey: 32:27 That's different than your peeps, right?

Rob Branigin: 32:30 Yeah, yes. Definitely.

Ken Harvey: 32:33 Yeah, all right.

Rob Branigin: 32:33 Definitely. Yeah but no, I think everybody ... you want to know. It's like I said. It's just, it's sort of self-discovery via group membership, if that makes any sense. I know I am Irish or I am half French and half whatever, that kind of thing. But I think it all boils down to self-discovery. I mean people want to know who they are and that's-

Cindy Tingley: 33:03 And it's gone a little mainstream too.

Rob Branigin: 33:05 Absolutely. Yeah.

Cindy Tingley: 33:05 I mean Lisa Kudrow-

Rob Branigin: 33:07 Yeah, totally.

Cindy Tingley: 33:07 Executive Produces, that show Who Do You Think You Are, and that's become something people are like wow.

Rob Branigin: 33:13 I think that's fantastic. Because that is something that ... I really believe that genealogy is something that everybody is interested in. And I think the TV show has sort of brought that sensibility to the public. I mean, if you talk to, I mean, older folks are interested. If you talk to young kids, they're interested. If it's, everybody is interested. Everybody wants to know what their roots are, who their ancestors are. It's a universal thing.

Ken Harvey: 33:43 And even our family dog and cat want to know [crosstalk 00:33:46]

Cindy Tingley: 33:46 Yeah.

Rob Branigin: 33:46 Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 33:49 Well, talking about this mainstream, it's just been amazing to me over the last few years to see the kind of proliferation of the DNA testing commercials and then people sharing with one another, "Hey, I just got my DNA results back." And I mean, my wife and I just received DNA testing kits from our son and daughter in law for Christmas and did the test and sent them in and all. I mean, it's just very interesting.

Rob Branigin: 34:20 Yeah. I have not done DNA yet myself. That is something that ... I have traced, my dad's family is Irish and I have traced my Irish roots back to as far back as I believe I can get in with any degree of verifiable accuracy in the paper trail as far back as I can go. I found that my Irish ancestors got into the United States. Guy named Nicholas Brannigan came from Ireland and he arrived

here in 1784, just after the American Revolution. And I found that in Ancestry, oddly enough on a list of enemy aliens that was written up during the war of 1812, which we fought against England. And my Irish ancestor was born a subject of King George the Third. And he was born in the 1750s I think, something like that.

- Rob Branigin: 35:21 Anyways, the guy came over and he never apparently became a naturalized American citizen. So years later in the early 19th century, when he was an older man, he was still technically a subject of George the Third and hence was compelled to register himself as such with the United States government. So anyways, that's as far back as I've been able to get. And I think if I did the DNA, I would likely be able to make that missing connection and find out where this guy came from in Ireland and why he came over. That's something that's always kind of bothered, not bothered me, but it's just kind of one of the big unanswered questions in my own family history, is why did this guy-
- Ken Harvey: 36:10 Why did he make that trip?
- Rob Branigin: 36:11 Right. Right.
- Cindy Tingley: 36:12 It's like detective work you're talking about.
- Rob Branigin: 36:13 Right on. Exactly.
- Cindy Tingley: 36:13 You get the bug, you want to know.
- Rob Branigin: 36:15 Totally, exactly. Yeah. So yeah, yeah I've thought about doing the DNA and I think that's probably something I'm going to have to do because I think ... you get to a point where you use the sort of historical record. And the further back you go the spottier it gets. So, you go back 1850, 1840, 1830. When you start getting into the early years of the 19th century, it really starts getting pretty, pretty spotty. So I was very lucky to find what I did. But yeah, I don't think that there's much left of a paper trail from the late 1700s, at least in terms of my own family.
- Ken Harvey: 36:58 Well, that makes me think of one of the definitions that I came across for genealogy. They said it's a book of generations. When you're looking at genealogy. And another one said that it's a book of or it's a term for determining pedigree and in terms of pedigree, sometimes it may help to have some spotty gaps in the record, because then you could just make it up.

Rob Branigin: 37:27 Yeah, yeah.

Ken Harvey: 37:28 It's a pedigree you want.

Rob Branigin: 37:31 That's a good point. And there's a lot of times ... something that's been interesting to me as a library helping people out over the last 10 odd years is sometimes maybe a gap in your genealogy is a good thing because occasionally people find out things about their family history that they don't want to know. Or maybe it's something that's an unpleasant surprise. I worked with somebody a couple of years ago who had a mystery Uncle Joe. I can't remember what the guy's name was.

Rob Branigin: 38:03 But I researched this for the person. And it turned out that the reason Uncle Joe was never mentioned, Uncle Joe was a bit of a narrow do well in the family tree. It turned out that he, I found out he was involved with a notorious child kidnapping in the 1930s and did hard time in a state penitentiary for many, many years and that was why Uncle Joe never mentioned, was Persona non grata in family history. He was in the state pen.

Rob Branigin: 38:42 But yeah. So yeah, that happens occasionally. You find out these things that are not, I mean, it's family history, it's the truth. But, sometimes the truth is not people find things that they didn't think, they find stuff they weren't looking for.

Ken Harvey: 38:58 Not everyone's linked to a world-famous scientist or elected official or the King of England. It might be the person who was given the ax that was chopping off the heads of-

Cindy Tingley: 39:10 Exactly.

Rob Branigin: 39:10 Not everybody is descended from William the Conqueror. Alfred the greater. Yeah, yeah, that's a major, major thing. Yeah, and that's ... I'll tell you the truth. That's something as a researcher that I find a little mystifying. Sometimes people will want to find out how they're related to some famous person and whether there's some tenuous connection or not. I don't know but everybody's got family history and it just seems strange to me that people are not as interested in their own say great, great grandparents which is a verifiable fact. They're not as interested in that as they are in, "Tell me how I'm related to Abraham Lincoln." That kind of stuff. So I don't know.

Ken Harvey: 39:58 So I heard a rumor that you are a Trekkie.

Cindy Tingley: 40:04 Oh.

Rob Branigin: 40:04 Oh, yeah.

Cindy Tingley: 40:06 OK, wait, let's clarify. Trekkie or Trekker?

Rob Branigin: 40:08 I don't object to either term.

Cindy Tingley: 40:11 OK. Neither do I.

Rob Branigin: 40:13 I know a lot of people do. But yeah, I'm OK with either.

Ken Harvey: 40:18 All right. So which series or movie or character set-

Rob Branigin: 40:24 That's hard to say. That's hard to say. I mean, I grew up in the 70s-

Ken Harvey: 40:29 And just so that everyone knows for the none Trekkies out there we're talking about the Star Trek Universe.

Cindy Tingley: 40:37 World, universe. Yeah.

Rob Branigin: 40:37 Yeah. I grew up in the rerun days. So, the 1970s. So, I will always have a special affection for the original series. However, I will say over the last 10 years or so since they've done these reboot movies which are terrible by the way.

Cindy Tingley: 40:58 Really.

Rob Branigin: 41:00 Not a fan, sorry. The whole thing has become a, for my money, a little bit too original series centric. I mean the next generation was fantastic. Patrick Stewart is, Jean-Luc Picard is one of my all-time favorite. Not just Star Trek characters, but all time favorite fictional characters. I would also say that Deep Space Nine is ... my favorite series are in varying depending on, asked me why, I'd say the original series next generation or Deep Space Nine. That to me is the trinity of Star Trek. I have recently been re-investigating Voyager which I was not a fan of on a first run in the '90s. But I'm very pleased to find out is a lot better than what I remembered. And Enterprise as well with Scott Bakula, I like all of them.

Ken Harvey: 41:54 I've been watching some of those too. I've not been surprised.

Rob Branigin: 41:57 That show I'll tell you, was a lot better than people give it credit for. It suffered from having a really bad musical theme, which I think-

Cindy Tingley: 42:06 Oh, it's horrible.

Rob Branigin: 42:07 Yeah, yeah. It was a real bad idea. But the characters were great and the prequel idea I thought was fantastic. That was the show that ... I kind of, I went through a phase in the late 90s early 2000s so I didn't watch a lot of TV because as a child I was just, my dad used to tell me I would be you know irradiated by the time I was 25 years old because I watch so much TV. So, yeah I gave up. And after Deep Space Nine went off, I didn't really follow Voyager through the end of the series. But enterprise I liked so much. It got me watching regularly every week again.

Rob Branigin: 42:50 So, I've really been pleased to see that show getting over the last couple of years, a little bit of the respect that it didn't get on first round.

Ken Harvey: 42:57 So did you ever happen to visit the Star Trek museum, down in Las Vegas?

Rob Branigin: 43:03 No, I didn't.

Cindy Tingley: 43:03 Missed it too.

Rob Branigin: 43:03 And I would love to. I would love to. Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 43:06 I had a chance to go twice.

Rob Branigin: 43:07 Oh, man. Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 43:08 And walk through it. And I'll tell you, it was at the MGM Grand, I believe for a time. And what was so fascinating to me was you would walk through this exhibit and it was kind of a directed path, you had to walk this direction and they took you through essentially the chronology of history-

Rob Branigin: 43:33 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 43:34 That led from the first NASA enterprise mission all the way into the Star Trek series history and they gave you, they showed you the progression of uniforms and-

Rob Branigin: 43:50 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 43:50 US, the Federation logo insignia and how all of those things progressed from century to century.

Rob Branigin: 43:58 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 43:58 And then they filled in some gaps with information kind of I think made up pedigree historical information, future history that filled in gaps to help you understand how things were evolving and developing.

Rob Branigin: 44:13 Yeah, that's ... I'll tell you one of the things over time, I think that has, I mean, for me as a long-time fan with the Star Trek universe is there is no fictional universe, not token not Star Wars, nothing that is as detailed and has as much internal sort of consistency and reality as the Star Trek universe. I mean, it's really quite astonishing what they've done over the years and considering the fact that all of this stuff was done over several decades and several series. The internal consistency of fact in the Star Trek universe is pretty amazing. I mean, there are occasionally the little sort of blips where they'll say one thing on one show that contradicts something on another show.

Rob Branigin: 45:01 But it's pretty smooth. And that's I think that's pretty cool to be able to sort of trace the sort of fictional spaceflight and space exploration in this fictional universe.

Ken Harvey: 45:15 Yeah.

Rob Branigin: 45:15 It has a internal consistency that kind of appeals to me as OCD. OCD Star Trek nerd.

Ken Harvey: 45:23 Well, and I think it's pretty remarkable to that we're talking about Star Trek as a modern day phenomena that's lasted 50 to 60 years now.

Rob Branigin: 45:33 That is quite amazing. It really is.

Ken Harvey: 45:34 And many of the things that we saw, especially from the original series, and then next generation that were kind of fanciful,

Rob Branigin: 45:45 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 45:45 Science fiction, some of that technology now has occurred-

Cindy Tingley: 45:49 Absolutely.

Ken Harvey: 45:49 And we're using it.

Rob Branigin: 45:51 I think something that really resonates with me watching the original series now is not, I'm also kind of a vintage TV nerd. So I watch a lot of old Dragnet, The Man from U.N.C.L.E., that kind of stuff which I'm a huge fan of.

Ken Harvey: 46:04 Great stuff.

Cindy Tingley: 46:05 Yes.

Rob Branigin: 46:05 Right. But if you watch Star Trek the portrayal of the multi racial crew people as equals and the they live in-

Ken Harvey: 46:15 That was a cutting edge.

Rob Branigin: 46:16 It was.

Ken Harvey: 46:16 I mean that was-

Rob Branigin: 46:18 It's still resonates 50 years later and there was nothing like it on television at the time. Nothing.

Cindy Tingley: 46:23 And so many social issues had been tackled on that program.

Rob Branigin: 46:27 Yeah. So it a was great show I said, is the best TV show ever.

Cindy Tingley: 46:32 Yeah. I don't know if either of you had a chance but recently I believe it closed not that long ago but MO POP had also had a fantastic-

Ken Harvey: 46:39 Really?

Cindy Tingley: 46:39 Star Trek exhibit.

Rob Branigin: 46:40 I did see some of that.

Cindy Tingley: 46:41 Yeah. And I got to climb through the Jeffrey's tube. It's was a whole lot of fun.

Rob Branigin: 46:48 We got a picture somewhere, of my wife got a picture of me standing next to the Locutus mask-

Cindy Tingley: 46:51 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes.

Rob Branigin: 46:52 From when Picard got assimilated by the Borg.

Cindy Tingley: 46:54 Right, right. And they actually had the, you can say and in the Borg.

Rob Branigin: 46:58 Yeah, Yeah. Right. It was seven's regeneration cubicle from Voyager.

Ken Harvey: 47:02 Well, one of my keepsakes is a photograph that was taken of me at the Star Trek museum and I've got a Ferengi and a Klingon and a cling-on standing next to me.

Rob Branigin: 47:13 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 47:14 And a Borg. A Borg guy.

Cindy Tingley: 47:15 That's great.

Rob Branigin: 47:15 I always wanted to go and have a beer at Quarks.

Ken Harvey: 47:18 Yeah.

Cindy Tingley: 47:19 Oh yeah.

Rob Branigin: 47:20 It was pretty cool.

Ken Harvey: 47:21 So, hey, growing up any favorite books or authors or titles?

Rob Branigin: 47:27 Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Ken Harvey: 47:29 Or other TV shows that you really loved.

Rob Branigin: 47:31 I grew up in a house full of books. My parents were readers and we had a lot of literature on the shelves, and I can remember actually kind of segueing from the Star Trek thing. My dad kind of grabbing me by the shoulders and shaking me and telling me that I would be irradiated by the time I was in my mid 20s and I needed to read a book. Read a book. Read a book. Read a book.

Rob Branigin: 47:57 And when I was about 14 teen I think, I was a freshman in high school, I read David Copperfield, by Charles Dickens. And, the literature ... this is another thing I kind of harp about when I'm at the branch is that, literature, literary fiction has this kind of, I don't like the term classics, because it just, I think it just kind of ghettoizes literature. And it just kind of coincides it into this sort of thing. Hey this is what people read for school for assignments. And, when I read that book when I was 14 or 15, or however old I was, I know it resonated with me. And I was like, here's this thing that is, kind of has this patina of being a school assignment, but I'm really enjoying this. I was like, I'm really genuinely digging this.

Rob Branigin: 48:49 And, I think part of what clued me into that was, that the dickens was, in a very real sense kind of the popular entertainment of the day. I mean, they didn't have obviously

film or TV back in those days. But that was written for, his books are written for a general audience. It was a lot like in this, we're talking about how Star Trek, kind of tackled social issues. And Charles Dickens did the same thing.

Ken Harvey: 49:17

That's right.

Rob Branigin: 49:18

And that the characters were just so finally drawn. I'm a sucker for a good character writing and that really hooked in. So that was a special book for me. That really kind of got me reading literature at a young age and just not looking at literature as this sort of stiff kind of lifeless, kind of school assignment sort of thing. That was a big book.

Rob Branigin: 49:46

Another book that was big for me, my sister got me this for Christmas, and it was the year that John Lennon died, and it was called The Beatles forever and it was by a guy named Nicholas Schaffner and who was kind of a similar 60s music historian. And he died in the early 90s, great writer. He did some other books. But that was the first book I ever read about the Beatles. And that really, just, when I was, this was just right after John Lennon died, so I was about 11 years old and it really just fascinated me. So, I just-

Ken Harvey: 50:16

What was that book again?

Rob Branigin: 50:17

It's called The Beatles Forever.

Ken Harvey: 50:19

The Beatles Forever.

Rob Branigin: 50:20

Yeah. And it's by Nicholas Schaffner. And it's kind of I mean, I think it's since been superseded by the ending of the obtain Beatles biographies. But I think a lot of Beatles obsessives, certainly of my age will look back on that book with a great deal of affection. It was just a kind of a general history and it just had lots of neat pictures of memorabilia and just goofy, I love Paul buttons and stuff like that. It was really neat book and, I've always been interested in the past I guess. But yeah, that really, when I read that book that made me just so interested in the music of the 60s and, this guy would make passing references to groups like the Yardbirds or the Kinks or whatever.

Rob Branigin: 51:11

And again, I could go down to the public library and get books about these groups and check records out because we still had vinyl records back in those days at the library. Yeah, so that made a big impression on me as a young guy. And here I am almost 50 years old and house full of records and-

Ken Harvey: 51:32 Congratulations.

Rob Branigin: 51:33 Yeah. Framed photos of John Lennon on my wall and welcome to my home.

Ken Harvey: 51:41 Well, Rob and boy, it's been great having you on with us today.

Cindy Tingley: 51:45 Absolutely.

Rob Branigin: 51:45 No, it's a big pleasure. Thank you very much for having me.

Ken Harvey: 51:48 Maybe last, wondering if you might have some last thoughts you'd like to leave with the audience. Anything you'd like to encourage them to do or remind them about resources the library has available for them.

Rob Branigin: 52:00 The main thing I'd like to remind people of is there is a lot more to the information universe than just Google. Come into the library or check out our library's website here at Sno-Isle or your local Public Library's website. Check out the electronic resources. There is an entire universe of informational content out there that is not accessible via Google. That is the main thing that I kind of like to get across is. Just the depth of what's available is quite stunning, I think. And whether you're into business or genealogy or academics or the popular periodicals or whatever, there is an electronic resource I think that will resonate with you.

Ken Harvey: 52:54 That's great. Well, we've been talking with Rob Branigin. Rob Branigin is a well known genealogical expert who is tapped by a lot of individuals who are looking to be reconnected with their family roots. And he's a research librarian here at Sno-Isle Libraries. And Rob thanks again for being with us.

Rob Branigin: 53:16 Thanks for having me.

Cindy Tingley: 53:17 The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.

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