I expected to just walk back in and have that familiar atmosphere there. But I was surprised; everything was covered in plastic. There were some lights on, but not many, because many of the power breakers, distributors and such, for safety reasons, many of them were turned off and I take it one or two were even destroyed in the fire. And also, immediately after the fire, the recovery and cleaning crews came in and had taken down all the ceiling tiles. So it extended the space of the ceiling three or four more feet. There were various wires and ventilation ducts exposed and other infrastructure in addition to everything being exposed. That, in conjunction with the limited light really produced a different effect. It was almost like going to visit a friend who had just had surgery and their physical condition is much different. There wasn’t this immediate correlate of this environment that I was used to. It was almost like being in a different building. In addition to the heavy smell of smoke, they’d laid down plastic pathways for moving equipment in and to take rubble out. There were various things strewn about. It wasn’t the vibrant social space and living research space it once was. It was sort of like a tomb.

Nancy Dennis
Assistant Dean

Nancy: The morning of May 1, when I walked by Zimmerman, it was all cordoned off and fire trucks and fire Marshall vehicles were still here. The parking lot

A collection that was built over a century with the work of many librarians cannot be completely restored.

Linda Lewis, UNM Today, May 1, 2006

In 13 days approximately 130 microfiche/microfilm cabinets were packed and shipped and I’m guessing approximately 13,000 boxes. In 13 days. To me it’s simply incredible how quickly and professionally BMS CAT went about their business and got our material out for remediation.

Dan Barkley, e-mail, May 27, 2006
...it really wasn't about the library as a library.

Deborah Cole: How did you feel when you first went into the basement?

N: I think that was the first time I had a strong sense that we no longer had any control over the building and it really wasn't about the library as a library. Zimmerman is a UNM building, a facility. It being a library is an important part of the story but the Physical Plant has a different sense of what this facility is, the Provost has a different sense, Risk Management, the police, the Fire Marshal—everybody has a different perspective of what this facility is. Of course, to us it's a library housing our collections and it's where we work and have committed our careers, but that's only one perspective on this particular building. At that moment, the fact that it was a library was not the priority. Your building can be closed, for a crime investigation, for health reasons or whatever. In fact, when we came in we had to wear a respirator face mask. You couldn't see the mud and the grit and the grime. On the 1st floor some things were out of place, but it didn't have that overwhelming sense of disaster ... it was kind of quiet. But as we went down the stairs, the smell was pretty dramatic.

There aren't too many times, at least in my experience in this building, where it is totally quiet. Most regular full time employees leave around 5:00 p.m., but there's a whole other life to this building. It's full of life and noise and activities that we don't typically observe or participate in. But when we in the library administration moved back in and all the remediation was still swirling around us, most other library employees were completely closed and, of course, you could smell it. You couldn't really see a lot of smoke, but you could smell it, just walking by.

I don't think Camilla was here that first morning so Fran assembled us all at Centennial and gave us the most current information she had. She and Ed got into the building, finally, I think as a Social Space and Living Environment, Zimmerman was not the priority. Your building can be closed, for a crime investigation, for health reasons or whatever. In fact, when we came in we had to wear a respirator face mask.

It wasn't the vibrant social space and living research space it once was.

AARON BLECHA
Student Employee

J.R. and I were going down the stairs,... it smelled bad.

Lee Byrne
Technical Services and Online Training, CAPS

Coming in here that day there was tons of plastic because they were cleaning here and there. The smell was so ... oh my gosh ... it was so ... smoky ... [Laughs] There wasn't smoke in the air but that burning smell, it smelled bad. We did not have to wear masks, but we couldn't stay in here for long and ... this was a week after the fire. I don't know if those ozone machines came in right away or not. But I do know one time I came up here—I wasn't here for very long at all. I was feeling really. "Ooooo, ooooo!" [Laughs] When I left I saw one of the machines, and I thought, "Oh. Big huge ozone machines. That's what's wrong with me: too much ozone!" [Laughs]

Deborah Cole: How was it, being inside Zimmerman for the first time after the fire?

Barbara Aragon
Custodian, Zimmerman Library

Barbara: Back here in CSWR and on the 3rd floor it was eerie at first because there was nobody there. I'd have to come by and check things, try all the doors. None of them were locked. It's full of life and noise and activities that we don't typically observe or participate in. But when we in the library administration moved back in and all the remediation was still swirling around us, most other library employees were out of the building. There were really quiet moments in the building and it was dark! The building had assumed a personality, a character in this story. At the end of the day I would walk out saying good night to the building. "Okay, well, today you had your venting cleaned," or "We ran into this problem today.

A.J. LaBelle
Student Employee, Print Resources

I thought it was cool, like being in a cavern. It was all dark and kind of nasty smelling. I thought, "That's cool." It was like a new environment. Then everything got back to normal again, a boring old library [Laughs].

Barbara Aragon
Custodian, Zimmerman Library

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open. Nobody was here, just the construction workers, me and the guards. And the guards just stood at the door saying, “No, you can’t come through here.” When I’d go up to the 3rd floor and check up there! Nobody. Nobody, nobody, nobody. And everything was encased in plastic. All the books up there were encased in plastic. The ceiling tiles were all off. Everything was weird. It was a strange thing with everything in plastic, no ceiling tiles, just the concrete up there. Really pretty!

Ellee: When they asked you to clean the restrooms in the basement, was that your first time down there?

D: Actually, I got to know one of the BMS CAT [BMS Catastrophe Company] people who had been cleaning and I wanted to see the basement. So she said, “Bring your hardhat and I’ll take you downstairs.” When I walked downstairs, I couldn’t believe it. It didn’t look like the basement anymore. They had started tearing down the walls. They had some of them down already. There was a rectangular outline of dust there. You can still smell the smoke in the restrooms. Even now, I go down there to check on the restrooms when there are people working down there.

Ellee Cushing-Cruver
Student Employee, CAPS

Ellee: I think we got back in a few days before our fall training session in August, so it was really hectic. We had a lot of cleaning to do. We found things exactly where they had been left, papers on the desks. You’d pick up the paper and there was a rectangular outline of dust around where the paper had been. I know the building had been cleaned, but then they turned on the lights and more stuff came out. We kept finding bits of dust and stuff.

B: Actually, I got to know one of the BMS CAT people who had worked everything down really well, but still we did a daily dusting. The copier would have this very thin—not real noticeable until you went to touch it—film of dust. ‘You feel that there was dust on it again and you’d think, ‘I just dusted that yesterday!’ And you’d do it again and the next day you’d come in and do the same thing.

Then there was watching the items being removed from the 1st floor from where the smoke came up, and watching the walls come down and reconfigured—all that change—you really got to know the building from the whole building to a bare skeleton and back to a building, a usable building again. It was very interesting to watch that metamorphosis. And then the ceiling tiles, talk about dust! [laughs], we had a new kind of dust. We were dusting pieces of ceiling tile and insulation off the photocopier.

When they were working on the air ducts, they took all the ceiling tiles down and there was no sound barrier. When the fans would come on it was like being under an airplane. In the office where we were it would be a big “ROAR!” You couldn’t hear your telephone conversations. It was just a roar until they got the new ceiling tiles back up there. You don’t think of your air conditioning and heating as being loud, but it’s because the sound dissipates in that dead space behind the tiles. For that period of time, it was not that quiet up there.

Ellee: It didn’t look like the basement anymore.
Several months after the fire, during one of the update meetings Nancy Dennis held of the Content Acquisitions and Access Services group [CAAS], of which the eResources Team is a part, the topic of which Zimmerman keys people should turn in or keep came up. It was a long conversation. Some of us had keys for the outside door. Since that had been re-keyed, we knew we had to turn those in. But various people had keys to doors that led into the staff offices on the 1st floor of Zimmerman. There was quite a bit of discussion about whether to keep those keys or not. Then Nancy suddenly looked up with a funny expression on her face and said, “But that door isn’t there anymore.” We all laughed. It was pretty clear what we had to do with those keys. The door no longer existed.

Ed Castillo-Padilla
Manager, Facilities Services

In those early days right after we weren’t allowed into the building and the smells and sights were still so vivid in everyone’s mind? That was difficult for everybody, including the Physical Plant. They were really taken aback by it because it’s a building they work on and really liked. Some of them even called to give me their condolences; they were really upset.

“Zimmerman is far more than a building.”
FRAN WILKINSON
Interim Dean

“They’ve pulled all of the Zimmerman holdings out of the system. That library doesn’t exist any more.”
KATHRYN WOOD
Interlibrary Loan

“… because Zimmerman was “dead,” you know.”
SUSAN MAGEE
Web Services