Rebecca Altermatt ‘88

Q: In what profession might you:
• Handle paper money printed during the Civil War?
• Hold the habit of a seminarian known to be a healer – and possibly a nominee for sainthood?
• Curate relics in a religious collection?
• Handle fossils millions of years old?
• Work with papers chewed on by rodents?
• Interview Ross Perot?
A: In Rebecca Altermatt’s profession: archivist. She has done all of those things and more.

Rebecca graduated in 1988 with degrees in the Humanities and French and a great sense of curiosity. She went on to earn a Masters in Library and Information Science degree at the University of Texas in Austin and then held a variety of jobs – all in the interest of satisfying her curiosity while helping her clients manage their historical assets.

Currently a project manager in the library at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, she has also worked as an archivist for organizations as dissimilar as Boston’s Children’s Hospital, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Citigroup, and the Redemptorists of Denver.

Rebecca has also archived and organized, literally, miles of linear records for important political clients and organizations such as:

• Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland and Congressman Thomas Carper of Delaware;
• The Rudolph Giuliani Center for Urban Affairs;
• Congressman Peter Rodino, chair of the Nixon impeachment hearings;
• Presidential candidate Ross Perot;
• And Lincoln Laboratory, the classified national defense research facility at MIT.

As a student at CSB, Rebecca loved history and visited the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library for a class. She has been intrigued ever since by the prospect of finding and organizing information for the long term. The information can take the form of documents, rare books, ledgers, photographs and daguerreotypes, audiovisual materials, artifacts, the mysterious category known as ephemera and, more recently, electronic records.

Rebecca says it is helpful to be naturally inquisitive and feels fortunate that she quite likes problem-solving and working with technology. “For what I do, curiosity and an open mind are essential. You never know what you will find in an archive and how it will connect to something else. I like things to go smoothly but, even when they don’t, it is interesting because I learn what not to do the next time.” Her advice to students is that if they do what they love and enjoy, many avenues will open up for them.