



Norma S. Brink

Birth: September 26, 1928

Death: June 12, 2004

Father:

Mother:

In 1929, Norma Brink was born in the Westside Lithuanian community of Grand Rapids, MI. She had two younger sisters whom she babysat quite often as her mother worked outside of the home.

For her elementary years, Norma attended St. Peter's and Paul's Catholic School. From 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, she went to Catholic Central High School. After graduating, Norma continued her education first at Grand Rapids Junior College (now Grand Rapids Community College) and then Western Michigan University (WMU). Although she started as a music major, she ended with a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education.

After graduating from WMU in 1949, Norma taught fourth grade at Lafayette Elementary School (later renamed Vandenberg Elementary School) at the corner of Lafayette and Wealthy. For her second and third years, Norma was reassigned to the special education classroom. She described this one room in which there were 20 children from first to sixth grades with many kinds of impairments. During her fourth year she taught a fifth and sixth grade combination.

In 1950 Norma married Ted Brink, whom she had met at the local Civic Theater. From 1954 or 1955 through 1957, the Brinks adopted three children from Ireland—John, 8; Terry, 2; and Teddy, 22 months. From about 1953 to about 1960, Norma worked only part time. She was a substitute teacher and the director of women's affairs for radio station WGRD. Every day she had a 15 – 20 minute show about local women's issues. Her involvement in local theater also led to freelance work on radio and TV. At the time TV was just getting starting locally.

In 1960, Norma went back to teaching full time. She was at Parkside Elementary School in Rockford for 2 years and Alexander School in Grand Rapids for 8 years. By the late 1960s Norma found herself at South Middle School for 2 years. She described those years as

“traumatic.” She said, “[They] were a big period of adjustment in the school system of Grand Rapids [as a result of desegregation and bussing].” She taught math, English, and drama. She also taught at Riverside Junior High School.

In 1965, the Brinks were divorced. From 1970 – 1985 Norma was appointed by Grand Rapids Public Schools Superintendent Phil Runkel as the principal of Iroquois Middle School. From 1982 to 1985 Runkel assigned her as supervisor of art and music for the entire school district. She was told that the position would eventually expand, but it never did because of lack of funds. In 1985, Norma retired from Grand Rapids Public Schools.

From 1985 to 1995 Norma was adjunct faculty at Davenport University. She taught communication skills, English, and math. She also taught classes and workshops at the Civic Theater and Davenport Entrepreneurial Center. In addition, she continued her freelance talent work, including voice over work in videos for the Amway Corp. and ad work on TV and in print.

From the time Norma came back to Grand Rapids in 1949, she was consistently in local theater. In 1951, she and her husband started Community Circle Theater. She also performed in summer stock in Manistee, Augusta, and Saugatuck.

Her other volunteer work included the Butterworth Hospital Guild coffee shop, the Arts Festival, the local Cancer Society Discovery Shop, the Civic Theater, the board of the Kent County Humane Society, the board of Actors’ Theater, and the board of Community Circle Theater.

Norma had three grandsons, all from her son John.

Other Resources

<http://www.ggrwhc.org/twelve-outstanding-women-brink>

<http://obits.mlive.com/obituaries/grandrapids/obituary-search.aspx?daterange=99999&firstname=norma&lastname=brink&countryid=1&stateid=26&affiliateid=1328>