



Elizabeth “Betty” Garver

Born: 1918

Death: February 5, 2014

Elizabeth “Betty” Garver was born in Indianapolis, IN. She recalled that her “father and . . . sister were all great readers.” Her mother, on the other hand, “really thought you should be vacuuming every chance you [got]” Nevertheless, Betty said the family “used the [public] library a lot.”

In the 1930s, near the end of the Great Depression, Betty graduated from DePaul University, in Greencastle, IN, with an AB degree. She was certified to teach at the high school level, but she had no desire to pursue that profession. Instead, she spent a year looking for a job and still did not have one when a family friend told her about a training class at the Indianapolis Public Library. She said, “It was one of the best things . . . I ever did in my life.” She trained under Carrie Scott, whom Betty described as “one of the leading forces in children’s literature in the century.”

Exactly 25 years later, Betty earned a degree in Librarianship from the University of Michigan. During the years between earning her two degrees, Betty first married and started a family in Indianapolis. When the two boys were school age, the family moved to Grand Rapids, MI. “I was beginning to get a little antsy, so I applied for a job at the Kent County Library as a reference librarian,” explained Betty. Beginning in 1954, for a few years, she was a substitute librarian. Then, for a couple of years, she worked as the first librarian of the new East Grand Rapids branch library. At that point, she went back to school to get her librarian degree.

After completing her degree, Betty worked as the branch supervisor at the Wyoming library. “Then, I went into being in charge of the bookmobile, which was not one of my favorite things,” she confessed. It was during the 60s and bookmobiles were on their way out. According to Betty, something was always going wrong mechanically with them. “I was in no way qualified to handle it,” she said. Finally, she “just sort of fell into this business of coordinator of children’s services. . . . You hear of these people who plan their careers very carefully, and I just kind of fell into mine. . . . I just went with the flow.”

Next, because of her husband’s job transfer at that time, the family left Grand Rapids and moved to Marion, VA. “I had a wonderful job down there . . . state library consultant,” Betty said. “I

didn't make very much money, but I had a good title . . . and it turned out to be a very good experience. They were ready for libraries . . . and I managed to get some libraries organized."

Nevertheless, after a couple of years, the family moved back to Grand Rapids, and Betty went back to her old job with the Kent County Library. "My husband didn't want me to work," explained Betty. "But I talked him into it. He finally decided everybody was better off if I did [work] because . . . it's awfully hard when the kids leave and you've given your life to being a parent . . ."

Betty also explained how children's programming began at the library. A couple of her staff members put together a puppet show and presented it at the Alto branch. It was supposed to be a one-time presentation at only that location. However, a *Grand Rapids Press* reporter, Berniece Manciewicz, covered the event, and in her article she "got things a little mixed up and said that this [program] was the sort of thing that [the library was] taking everywhere around the county. So we thought, heck, that's a good idea. So that's how we started doing programming in all the branches," Betty concluded.

They were not "trying to be entertainers. [Their] purpose was to "make reading an enjoyable experience for kids." The programs were held mostly in the summer in all 16 branches and were targeted at elementary-school-aged children. "The individual children's librarians were the persons responsible for the children's work at the library and would come up with things," she said. Betty was also in charge of the annual budget to purchase new children's books for all 16 branches. It was \$10,000.

While still working, Betty's volunteer activity included forming the Story League or Story Spinners with her friend, Eleanor Burgess, children's coordinator of the Grand Rapids Public Library. Betty dropped out, however, when the group started charging money for its story telling. "I didn't feel that my type of storytelling was worth \$50 or \$100," explained Betty.

After retiring in 1982, Betty volunteered for many organizations: Rockford's historical museum (her husband and she lived there at the time); fund raising for Rockford's Krause Library's addition; Butterworth Hospital information desk. When the couple moved to Porter Hills Retirement Village, in Lowell, MI, Betty was a volunteer in a couple of programs there: the YMCA's Generations program in which she read to children once a week; Porter Hills' Magic Carpet program in which she drove those who could not drive to their doctor appointments or other places. At the time of this interview, as a result of her husband being very sick for a couple of years, Betty had cut back on many of her activities. Nevertheless, she had recently led a book discussion in East Grand Rapids. Also, at the time of this interview, Betty had two granddaughters who lived in the area.

Other Resources:

<http://obits.mlive.com/obituaries/grandrapids/obituary.aspx?pid=169722595>

<http://www.kdl.org/kdl/pdf/EGRLibraryHistory.pdf>

<http://grplpedia.grpl.org/wiki/images/9/93/167.pdf>