

Vernis Schad

Birth: November 8, 1925

Death:

Father: Peter VandenBosch (died in 1985 at age 86)

Mother: Edith Baker (died in 1999 at age 100)

Vernis Schad was born in NW Iowa and was one of five sisters. In January 1942 the family moved to California, where Vernis graduated from high school in 1941. For one year after high school she was a civil servant at a naval dry dock off the coast of Los Angeles, CA. Since the country was consumed by WWII with such things as black outs and gas rationing, Vernis described this time as a “whole different way of life than anybody younger than I can think of.”

In the fall 1943, Vernis traveled to Grand Rapids, MI, to attend Calvin College. While attending college, Vernis worked for a family and was paid with room and board. She said that being a “hired girl” was common among the Dutch community even when the girl was not going to school.

After one year at Calvin, Vernis went back to CA, found a job as a secretary, and began to save her money. In 1945, she returned to Calvin, but this time she lived in an apartment with four other women. She worked part time at Nucraft Furniture Co. and met her future husband when he started working there. His name was George Schad, the son of the business owner.

In 1947, George and Vernis married. They had two boys: Timothy in 1948 and Scott in 1950. From 1951 through 1953, the family lived in Bogota, Columbia, where George trained the employees of a privately owned factory how to apply finishing material to furniture.

Upon their return to Grand Rapids, MI, in 1953, Timothy started school, and Vernis began her long tenure of volunteer activities. She began where Timothy attended school, North Park, helping out during hot lunch, with the PTA, and in the library. In 1960, she was part of a successful annexation campaign team that resulted in North Park becoming part of Grand Rapids Public Schools. From 1970 to 1982, Vernis served four terms on the Grand Rapids Board of Education. She was board president from 1974 to 1978. She was asked to run for Grand Rapids City Commission, but her husband discouraged her from getting involved in city politics. She was also active in the youth ministry of her church, Second Congregational.

Between 1964 and 1970, Vernis was appointed to the Grand Rapids Recreation Board by the Grand Rapids Board of Education and the Grand Rapids City Commission. In 1964, she was also part of a 51-member committee of the Grand Rapids Board of Education that studied the lack of integration in the public schools. Helen Claytor was also a committee member, and they became friends at that time.

In 1972, Vernis was invited to be on a steering committee that was organizing a new agency to help women who wanted or needed to transition from full-time housework to full or part-time work outside of the home. Founded in 1973, this new organization became known as the Women's Resource Center. After completing her bachelor's degree in 1974, Vernis joined the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and is still an active member today.

In 1992, the president of the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council asked Vernis to be chair of the membership committee. She accepted the invitation, and by the next year, 1993, she was president of the organization and served in that capacity until 2000.

As a member of the Grand Rapids Board of Education, Vernis was asked to be on other boards: for instance, the Junior Red Cross and the Kent County Mental Health Society. By the mid-1990s Vernis was also on the boards of the Center for Environmental Studies and the World Affairs Council of West Michigan. In 1997, she was appointed by the State Board of Education to the Board of Public Community Colleges.

After her husband retired in 1985, Vernis and George were recruited by the International Executive Service Corps. Their first assignment was at a privately owned furniture manufacturer in the Philippines. During two visits of about 3 months each, separated by a year, George taught the owner and employees how to make both office and household furniture. While he was busy at the factory, Vernis met the native women and did a variety of activities with them such as Bible study and work at the soup kitchen. She also connected with an elementary school that was in need of textbooks. With help from Grand Rapids AAUW members, Vernis collected textbooks and had them shipped to the school by the U.S. Navy and distributed through a local Filipino non-profit agency. Everywhere she went (they also had an extended stay in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Zimbabwe, and Tunisia), Vernis took pictures. When she returned home, she created slide shows and took them on what she called the "adult community education circuit" that included schools and nursing homes.

For Equality Day 1999, Vernis was presented the first Equality Award from the Women's Resource Center to honor her work helping women "find their voices." A few years before that award, she had received the YWCA Tribute Award for Community Involvement.

Today, besides AAUW, Vernis is involved in the Progressive Women's Alliance, the Porter Hills Advisory Committee, and a poetry group that meets at Fountain Street Church. She also continues to work on political campaigns and to maintain close relationships with the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council and the Women's Resource Center.

Other Resources:

<http://www.learningtogive.org/resources/schad-verniss>

http://www.progressivewomensalliance.org/images/pdf_pwahighlights_2007.pdf

<http://www.grwrc.org/OurEvents/EventPhotoGallery/tabid/126/AlbumID/484-5/Default.aspx>