

# Gatherings

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## A Dane for All Seasons

A Friends' Personality

by

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Some of his colleagues affectionately call him the "Great Dane." The title describes Gordon Eriksen admirably. He towers over the crowd, is most solidly built, has a resounding voice, an infectious personality, and a definite presence wherever he goes. Born among the hearty Scandinavian souls of St. Paul, Minnesota, he and his family moved within a few years to Graham, Texas where he graduated from high school in 1939. Two years later, he began what would be a life-long association with institutions of higher education when he enrolled at the University of Oklahoma. The times, however, caught him up and after completing two years of college, he joined the U.S. Army Air Corps and served through World War II until 1946. With the useful assistance of post-war funding for veterans, he then returned to academic study and earned the first two of several degrees, a B.A. in English and, in 1950, the B.F.A. in drama.

A few years of career exploration took him to the firm decision to become an educator. The first step included a teaching certificate in 1957, and into the classrooms of high schools across the country. As he notes, "I never had a class I did not like." Even the challenge of 26 high school senior boys who had been labeled "Do Not Admits" proved his love for teaching—and his ability to instruct and influence those who sat in his classes. During the 1950s, he began a correspondence with students, now friends, that continues to this day.

Turning from high school to higher academe, Gordon took the time to complete a M.A. in English literature in 1967, and six years later, earned the Ph.D., also in English literature, from the University

of Colorado in Boulder where his dissertation dissected the life of George Fitzmaurice, an Irish playwright from the turn of the century. No one is surprised to learn that Dr. Eriksen was an avid reader as a child, and that this avocation still dominates his life.

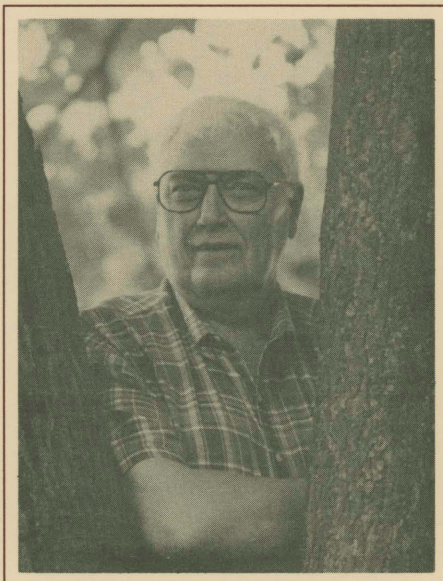
After teaching at the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, for a number of years, Dr. Eriksen concluded that a slight refocusing of his career was desirable. He headed a hundred or so miles east to the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign where, in his 50s, he earned the Master of Science in library science. He then sought out a graduate school of library science where teaching and his enchantment with books blended into a perfect vocation. WMU's School of Library and Information Science employed him as the reference and bibliography specialist in 1976. When the School was closed, Gordon made a logical transfer into the Central Reference Department of the University Libraries where he was able to put library theory into practice, teach, and have access to an infinite array

of literary works.

Separate from his decades of teaching and literary exploration, Dr. Eriksen has a breadth of other interests. One of his greatest passions is music. Everyone in the family learned to read music, and Gordon inherited a fine voice from his father. He first participated in the church choir, then his undergraduate university chorus, and eventually the Houston Chorale. In fact, he claims that the most important moments in his life have centered on music. Needless to say, his musical knowledge is impressive. Not only has he attended hundreds of concerts, but he has served on several boards including the Kalamazoo Junior Symphony and Bach Festival Society of Kalamazoo, and has provided special support to the Fontana Concert Society.

Gordon loves almost all classical or serious musical offerings, but if pressed, will admit that his particular favorite is opera. He can call forth dozens of recollections of famous singers including the thrill of hearing Maria Callas sing in her first two American seasons. His enthusiasm for the operatic format is documented by trips to Chicago to enjoy the Lyric Opera, or visits with friends in Santa Cruz, California, so that he could attend the San Francisco Opera. On most Saturday afternoons, he will not answer his phone as he listens to the Metropolitan on WMUK.

A second major love that has taken him outside the halls of academe is that of travel. That love is simply explained: "I come by it honestly—I'm a Viking!" The Eriksen wanderlust has led him to accomplish a rare feat—he has visited each and every COUNTY in the continental United States, and only four counties in Hawaii are left before his map of the U.S.A. is totally blocked out. Friends know that it is only a matter of time before the 6'2" figure, in an aloha shirt and matching lei,



Gordon Eriksen—for all seasons

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## A Dane for All Seasons

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steps onto the soil of the 50th state.

Gordon thinks he retired from WMU in 1990, but that really isn't true. Back in the busy months when Waldo Library was being rebuilt and expanded, Assistant Dean Bettina Meyer and Gordon, along with some colleagues, began the planning for the first Friends of the University Libraries organization at WMU. Staff member Bill Smith and Gordon drafted a constitution, called together interested individuals, and, ergo, the Friends became a reality. No officer has probably contributed as much time and effort to the Friends as has Gordon—especially when the semi-annual book sales are at hand. Not only does he assist in collecting, marking, moving, and displaying the items, but he's invariably at the scene—a salesman par excellence.

One might expect that Gordon would have little time for anything else given the interests just noted, but currently he is involved in organizing the library at the Hospice of Greater Kalamazoo. Over the years, boxes of materials had been collected and ignored at the Hospice headquarters. Every item is being reviewed and cataloged so that the staff and patrons can find and use the information. Most recently, he began mentoring third grade children at the North Glade Elementary School. These mentees are at-risk students who need academic and social guidance. This means that he also attends school events so that he can support and encourage his young charges.

What next? The wandering, musical, literary Dane really doesn't know. We can hardly wait for the next season to arrive!



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## Rare, Special, Why?

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established. The newly acquired Ben Tibbs Collection (325 volumes) includes signed works by women poets who read their poetry and writings in Kalamazoo. As a result, a synergism exists among several different "sets" of special materials.

The Haenicke Poetry Collection is a scholarly resource for the academic community and a cultural resource for the wider community. Now that the foundation is firmly established, one goal is to give the holdings a stronger shape as a research tool. To this end, an Advisory Committee composed of English department faculty and librarians is preparing a list of 100 poets whose works will be collected comprehensively. A second objective is to acquire the working papers of selected women poets so that the creative process is seen in more detail. Still another aim is to attract younger poets to use the collection—first to support and enhance their own work, but also to associate them with WMU and acquire their contributions. Achieving these objectives will ensure the intellectual direction of the Collection, and affirm its research and teaching ends here and in the larger academic community. A major recognition of the value of this resource and the goals established by the Advisory Committee came in January 1997 when an anonymous gift of \$450,000 brought about an acquisition endowment. That gift assures that growth, access to the community, and usefulness as a research resource can and will occur.

So, "why is that book up here?" All is understood when the patron/user knows that this non-circulating research collection is kept under controlled temperature and humidity conditions. That book is here so that it can survive the acid burn of our contemporary environment, so that it can remain in the physical state in which it left the publisher's warehouse for as long as possible. That book is here so that not only the text remains readable, but that its bibliographical integrity is intact. That book is the actual volume that the author created and approved through the publication process. The patron who visits Waldo Library in the next week, the next century, or the next millennium will be able to handle and read that book. Rare in its selectivity and uniqueness, special in its form and availability—and that, in short, is why!

—Archibald Macleish

—Archibald Macleish

## Unexpected Treasures

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searchable text and some 1,000 illustrations. Found within this substantial set of data are the original *Encyclopedia on American Indians*, published in the 1850s; the full text of over 350 treaties, color illustrations; myths; statistics; and biographical information on the lives of famous Indian chiefs.

### TEXTBOOK COLLECTION

Although the name may not immediately catch one's attention, this unique compilation of resources is heavily in demand, a focal point in the circulating collection. The titles found in the Education Library include elementary, middle school, and secondary textbooks currently in use in the U.S. They provide prospective teachers with examples of the books and resources they will encounter in the classroom. Among the topical areas are reading, spelling, language arts, mathematics, history, social studies, science, and several foreign languages.

The status of the item as a "textbook" is noted in the classification number that always begin with the letters "LT." The remaining components of that number indicate subject, publisher, series title, grade level, material type, and publication year. Along with the student and teacher editions are activity booklets and workbooks, copy masters, lab manuals, and other teaching tools. Part of the development of this collection is built on the premise that every major publishing firm should be represented. As a result, the user can find examples from Glencoe, McGraw-Hill; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; Holt, Rinehart & Winston; Scott Foresman; Addison-Wesley; and Silver, Burdett & Ginn. As with other materials, the FINDER online catalog can be searched to locate specific titles. Although intended primarily for the teacher-to-be, many users peruse the collection simply because a textbook is a good introduction to the topic.

In general, the University Libraries does not select postsecondary textbooks for the overall collection. This special grouping in the Education Library is intended and developed for the future teacher whose career is centered on the K-12 schools of this country. As such, it is a valuable "special" collection at Western Michigan University as is each of the others described in earlier paragraphs: Curriculum Enrichment, ERIC Document Collection, and Multimedia. Visit the Education Library and discover, anew or for the first time, the variety of resources that can be found in the University Libraries.