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Rita "Claire" Callan

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**Sponsor Profile:
Rita “Claire” Callan**



The sponsor profile for the Fall 2017 edition of *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy* (OJOT) is dedicated to the memory of Claire Callan, occupational therapist, scholar, and chair emeritus of the Occupational Therapy Department at Western Michigan University (WMU). Claire died on Monday, September 18, 2017, in Kalamazoo, MI. She was 87.

Rita “Claire” Wegner was born on August 6, 1930, in Chicago, IL, to Albert and Irma (Giometti) Wegner. Claire attended grade school at the Academy of Our Lady, an all-girls school. She graduated in 1948. She went on to study at the University of Illinois, where she earned a bachelor of science degree in 1953. She then immediately began pursuing her master’s degree at Loyola University. From 1953 to 1957, Claire worked as an occupational therapist at the Chicago Department of Welfare Convalescent Home and at the Veteran’s Administration Research Hospital in Chicago, IL.

While attending Loyola, Claire met Edward T. Callan, her future husband. The couple married on August 6, 1955. Two years later, Edward accepted a full-time faculty position in the English department at WMU in Kalamazoo, MI, where he remained for 26 years. During his career at WMU, Edward was recognized as an internationally known scholar, critic, and playwright. He was instrumental in the development of WMU’s African Studies Program. In 1980, he was named a Distinguished Faculty Scholar, WMU’s highest scholarly award. In 1983, Edward was appointed a Distinguished Faculty Professor, WMU’s highest faculty honor.

In 1960, Claire earned a master of arts degree in English from Loyola University. Her thesis, titled *The Critical Theory of John Keats*, was concerned with theories Keats had developed about the art of poetry. Claire did not aim to interpret Keats’s poetry, but rather to provide a clear and organized framework to analyze critical statements made by Keats about his art. Claire wrote, “There is one characteristic which Keats considered essential to the great poet and which, so far as can be determined from the evidence in his poetry and letters, he did not modify: the ability of the poet to lose his own identity and to assume the identity of the poetic object” (Callan, 1960, p. 81). Claire also recognized how combining knowledge, experience, and native imagination

would lead to a greater understanding of nature. “Claire had an inclusive ‘world view,’ said Sandra Edwards, close friend of Claire’s and a former WMU faculty member. “She had a sophisticated understanding and perspective in contrast to others who felt threatened by anyone who was different. She was also comfortable with conservative boundaries.”

During this period in history, it was uncommon for women to pursue higher education or a professional career. That did not stop Claire from following her dreams. “It would have been easy for Ed to overshadow Claire, but she held her own. Ed supported Claire in having her own career,” said Sandra. “Ed and Claire were a power couple at Western.” Aside from their professional lives, Claire and Edward were focused on starting a family. After relocating to Kalamazoo, they welcomed a son, Joseph, and a daughter, Ruth.

Claire met Sandra in 1974, when the two competed for a faculty position in the Department of Occupational Therapy at WMU. Although Sandra was ultimately awarded the full-time position, Claire joined the department on a part-time basis. Three years later, she transitioned to full-time faculty. Claire had a reputation of being responsible, organized, and good at editing. Work life was predictable, and there was very little chaos. Barbara Rider, former WMU faculty member and chair emeritus of the Occupational Therapy Department at WMU, remembers Claire’s keen sense of wit. “She had a wonderful, droll sense of humor,” she said. Claire was not afraid to voice her opinion about her dislikes. For example, when Barbara asked for her opinion on sensory integration, Claire replied, “I don’t want some OT student swinging me around in a hammock!” Claire did not enjoy the limelight. Instead, she preferred to mentor others to help advance their careers. “She would rather listen to you, and she always gave you the impression you were more interesting,” said Sandra. Claire was also known to follow what interested her and peaked her curiosity.

As a member of the faculty at WMU, Claire was interested in learning about administration, coordination, and supervision in higher education. In 1983, she earned a specialist degree in Education in the Educational Leadership Department at WMU. As a requirement, Claire completed a 6-week internship in the Division of Education at the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) headquarters in Rockville, MD. Prior to the internship, Claire served as a delegate to the Commission on Education for 4 years. In a written report summarizing her experience, Claire emphasized the need to develop a training module to help clinical educators improve their skills as supervisors of occupational therapy students. In it, she states, “The development of the training unit for clinical educators was a project that allowed me to meet my own interests and, at the same time, be of service to the organization” (Callan, 1983, p. 53). Furthermore, the internship allowed Claire to put several years of academic work to practical use.

Claire served as chair of the WMU Department of Occupational Therapy from 1985 to 1989. She continued the work of her predecessor, Barbara Rider, whose objective was to build a solid foundation for research in the Department of Occupational Therapy. “Claire brought occupational therapy to the larger university community with distinction,” said Sandra. In 1989, Claire transitioned to the role of fieldwork coordinator. “This was Claire’s favorite role at WMU. She always felt like a travel agent when placing

students!” Sandra said. Claire developed an index card system to keep track of student fieldwork placements. “She was amazingly organized,” said former student and faculty member Debra Lindstrom. “The memory of Claire sorting through the cards is a strong one for me from over 35 years ago!”

In 1992, Claire retired from WMU after 18 years of service. During retirement, Claire enjoyed spending time with family and friends, traveling, and enjoying wine and a good dessert. She looked forward to visiting with Joseph and Ruth and her grandchildren Cody and Dylan. Claire and Edward spent their days enjoying each other’s company. They had a regularly scheduled date every day at 5:00 p.m. on the veranda where they would share everything that happened that day over two glasses of wine. “Claire was very sophisticated in wine,” said Sandra. When Barbara came to Kalamazoo in 1976, Claire was serving as chair of the local Les Amis du Vin (friends of wine) organization. “I knew nothing about wine at the time,” said Barbara. “Claire taught me about local wines that were as good as the French varieties. Ed was my consultant for whiskey, Glenlivet.” Claire and Edward continued to enjoy their lives together until Edward passed away on November 17, 2011. He was 93.

Claire Callan lived a good, long life. As an occupational therapist and scholar, she left a positive impression on the lives of her students and colleagues at WMU, she improved standards for clinical education at the American Occupational Therapy Association, and she advanced the mission of the occupational therapy profession. Claire was a leader, mentor, and appreciator of others. Her perseverance, keen wit, social elegance, and sophisticated world view will be fondly remembered for many generations to come.

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