By Sharon Carlson, archivist, colleague, and mentee

This issue of Gatherings is a tribute to Dr. Laurel Grotzinger upon her retirement from Western Michigan University after more than a half century of dedicated service and leadership.

I first became acquainted with Dr. Grotzinger in 1984 through the Woman Researcher Conference at Western Michigan University. Dr. Grotzinger, as Dean of the Graduate College and Chief Research Officer, was instrumental in organizing this event, which involved the collaboration of several units on campus. The Woman Researcher Conference was an annual event through the 1980s and brought female researchers from across the country to Western Michigan University. The structure of the conference provided a forum for beginning and unpublished scholars to present their findings, as well as experienced women researchers. This was an innovative and much needed forum in the 1980s, as it provided opportunities for conference participants to learn about areas of particular concern to women involved in research. As an undergraduate, this opened my eyes in ways that radically differed from my classroom experiences. Little did I know that this was the beginning of a relationship that would profoundly shape my professional and intellectual life.

The Woman Researcher Conference was a microcosm of Dr. Grotzinger’s commitment to research and scholarship. On a state level, Dr. Grotzinger has promoted research through her leadership in the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts & Letters. She also served four one-year terms as President of the Michigan Academy—the only person in the 110-year history of the organization to do so. Nationally, Dr. Grotzinger has been actively involved with the Library History Round Table of the American Library Association and was involved with their first program on women’s issues held in 1974. Dr. Grotzinger’s involvement in the Library History Round Table stems from her dissertation research about the early library educator Katharine Sharp. Published as a monograph in 1966, *The Power and the Dignity: Librarianship and Katharine Sharp* is an outstanding study that remains a classic in the field.

Her record of scholarship and commitment to research made her an obvious choice as a committee member when I began my own dissertation about the history of ladies’ library associations in Michigan. She served officially as an out-of-department adviser and reader. In reality, she was the committee member who made it possible for me to complete the dissertation. She was able to help me through some of the extremely difficult first drafts, as well as the political process of completing a dissertation. When Dr. Grotzinger returned to faculty in the University Libraries she continued to mentor me as a colleague. Over the years, she has provided sound professional advice and she has become a dear friend. Dr. Grotzinger’s influence will continue even as she takes on new challenges in retirement. Every time I work with a student and develop a mentoring relationship, I think about Dr. Grotzinger.

It is fitting that this issue of Gatherings be a tribute to Dr. Grotzinger. It was a publication she oversaw and edited for many years for the Friends of the University Libraries.
**Worked magic**

*By Henry M. Yaple, former student at the School of Librarianship, College Librarian Emeritus, Whitman College*

If memory serves correctly, and it may not after all these years, Dr. Grotzinger was not one of my first semester professors at the WMU School of Librarianship. However, she was always in her office, door open, attired professionally and busily reading, writing, or speaking with a student. Although not enrolled in any of her courses, she always greeted me cordially when we met in the hall and made me feel welcome. She projected through her manner that she was an entirely competent professional. Becoming that seemed a distant probability, but she clearly suggested it should be a goal.

Second semester Dr. Grotzinger was my Science Reference professor. As a veteran student of literature, the subject matter did not seem appealing. She changed my mind very quickly, made each class stimulating, answered all our questions fully, taught us to use the various keys to respective fields of science, and patiently explained the intricacies of such reference tools as The Science Citation Index.

In the first 14 years after library school, I worked in acquisitions. Science reference questions never penetrated those precincts, and there were few opportunities to meet patrons. However, when I became Library Director of Whitman College’s Penrose Library her example guided me perfectly. I opened the office door, always dressed correctly, welcomed anyone who wished to see me, made a point of speaking to everyone on campus whether I knew them or not, and tried to be as responsive as possible in any discussion. It worked magic, Laurel—thank you so very much! Much later, I learned that my predecessor had always kept his door closed.

Science reference became an imperative because our staff of librarians was limited. I elected to work at night, and that created two benefits: my acquaintances among students increased exponentially, and it required I clean the rust off my knowledge of various reference tools. I owe Laurel a vast deal of credit for the basic foundations of my success at Penrose Library.

Librarianship was a wonderful, fulfilling career, and Dr. Grotzinger was the sine qua non for so much of my success. All best wishes for many wonderful years of retirement.

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**Supportive of critical thinking**

*By Diane Worden, former student at the School of Librarianship*

In the academic year 1970-71, while in Western Michigan University’s School of Librarianship with Dr. Grotzinger, not only was I among those learning library administration and management from her, I also accepted her extended opportunity to support a research project of hers and William Smith’s. Both of these occasions remain with me for different reasons.

Once, mid-lecture Dr. Grotzinger paused and addressed me directly with her gaze amid the 15 or so students in class. “I can see the wheels turning in your head,” she stated with a chuckle. “What have I said that you’re shortly going to question?” Even today, listening evokes a comparison of what I hear with what I remember of perhaps seemingly unrelated bits and pieces, a decided annoyance to some fellow listeners. They anticipate some nugget will be brought into a question being silently formulated. I have always considered Dr. Grotzinger’s class challenge that day as being supportive of critical thinking. She encouraged questioning and made class lectures fun. Similarly, she modeled that characteristic for me as I too have come to lead, and intentionally provoke in that particular way, classes or workshops or committee meetings since then.

Allowing me to help collect and organize basic data was also something Dr. Grotzinger did, even paying me handsomely for it as I remember. It introduced me to what I’ve had occasion to use many times since. Community study groups, whether for PTA, church, League of Women Voters or municipal recreation purposes that I’ve worked with during intervening years, all had data to collect, summarize, and include in various reports for action or advocacy—just my cup of tea. I’m grateful for her awakening what has become an enjoyable, fiendishly distracting, and long-time interest of mine.

Shortsightedly, retirement usually refers to a stop in being paid for time, effort, and results. The longer view refers to absolute freedom to pursue one’s interests. Using personal time and effort to produce results that promote selectively meaningful causes still gets you out of bed in the morning, this time without an alarm. Retiring completely is unfathomable; let the fun continue as long as requisite ability concurs.
Indefatigable

By Maria Perez-Stable, librarian and colleague

I first became acquainted with Laurel Grotzinger when she joined the Central Reference Department in 1993. My former colleague Hardy Carroll, who had taught with Laurel in the School of Librarianship, always spoke very highly of her and I was glad to be getting such an intelligent colleague. In fact, before long, we joked that the Laurel and Hardy team were back together again, albeit briefly. I always appreciated how Laurel just jumped into the new job with both feet, given that she came from the academic side of library science. But in no time at all, Laurel was au courant with reference work, and became an active liaison to psychology, religion, philosophy, science studies and finance and commercial law. I soon learned that Laurel was not shy about expressing her opinions, but that they were always reasoned and logical.

I do not know if Laurel will remember, but she and I tussled a bit when I became head of the Reference Department in 1997. Several times she informed me, in no uncertain terms, that I was overstepping my bounds. She gave me heart palpitations several times, but before too long we managed to work out our issues and it has been pretty smooth sailing since. Laurel is whip-smart, with a mind like a steel trap.

Over the past 20 years, Laurel has become a valued and integral colleague in the Central Reference Department and in the University Libraries. I appreciated her sense of follow-through; one did not need to nag Laurel to get the job done. She is indefatigable and I admire that; I often say to people that Laurel has more energy than many of our younger colleagues.

I think what I esteem the most is the passion that she has for librarianship. Laurel cares very deeply about the work we do and the service we provide to our patrons, which often has led her to fight very hard for things she believed were right. No one quite tackled the issues in VuFind the way Laurel did! I believe our technical services colleagues will attest to that. Now that I am in the autumn of my career, I take her as my role model.

Laurel's retirement will leave a void, a substantial loss of history and expertise. I wish her the very best, but she will be missed.

A force to be reckoned with

By Linda Rolls, librarian and colleague

In August of 1964, many things were happening in the country. On August 1st the Beatles’ single “A Hard Day’s Night” went to #1 & stayed #1 for 2 weeks. On August 5th the United States began bombing North Vietnam. On August 26th Lyndon B. Johnson received the nomination of the Democratic Party for president. And on August 29th the movie Mary Poppins was released.

At Western Michigan University, Sangren Hall was dedicated, but the seismic event of that August was that Laurel Grotzinger was appointed as an assistant professor. Two years after that she became Assistant Director of the WMU School of Librarianship, and later, Acting Director and Director. When I came to Western Michigan University in 1968, Laurel had already achieved the rank of full professor in the span of four years. Since the library school was located on the second floor of Waldo, we library faculty interacted with most of the faculty in the library school.

Laurel was such a force to be reckoned with on so many levels that when she approached me about giving presentations to classes she was teaching in the School of Librarianship, naturally I was somewhat intimidated, and knew that I had better be at the “top of my game.” I don’t quite remember now what I taught, or how I did, but Laurel did invite me back several times. After Laurel made groundbreaking progress by becoming the first female dean at WMU as Dean of the Graduate College, and Chief Research Officer, our paths did not cross as often.

However, after she was appointed as a professor in the University Libraries in 1993, I began to come to know and appreciate the many strengths and talents possessed by this amazing woman. I got to know her as a woman of scholarship with vast depths of knowledge that have been graciously shared with colleagues and students across campus and throughout the country.

In so many essential ways, she has been a role model not only for myself, but for many other women on campus, in the library community, and locally in the Kalamazoo community through her leadership, her work on prestigious councils and library committees state-wide and nationally, and her leadership in the local community.

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When it was announced that Laurel was joining the library faculty, there was some question as to whether she would “work out.” She had been out of library work for a while; she had been in big administrative positions. Would she fit in? Would she carry her weight? We soon found out there was no need for worry.

I did not know Laurel very well then, but I soon learned a few things that have made her a favorite colleague:

• You know where she stands. Whether or not you agree with her, you have to respect her reasoned arguments and her fluency in expressing them.
• She has an incredible memory, and after a half-century of service, preserves an amazing institutional history. She knows everyone and every-
thing (really, she does).
• She has maintained a work ethic and level of activity that would qualify anyone as an “over-achiever.” She serves her constituents above and beyond. She has made tremendous contributions to the library faculty through her hard work on our departmental policies alone (a thankless job if there ever was one).
• She can be direct with her criticism. She is often the one who says what needs to be said when others will not or cannot say it.
• She is just as generous with praise and encouragement when due. Knowing her reputation as a tough editor, it was with some trepidation that I agreed to write my first article for Gatherings. But along with her corrections and suggestions came congratulations and thanks for a job well done, and full credit for the finished product.

A champion of intellectual freedom, free inquiry, and the free exchange of ideas, Laurel has fought without equivocation to preserve the library’s critical role in the exercise of these core academic values. She has stood steadfast for the principle of shared governance in our university, challenging those who would have the academy reduced to a “business,” education a “product,” students “customers,” faculty “employees,” and administrators “managers.” Hers has been a forceful voice for the faculty’s role in decisions and policy-making, for, after all, who knows our “business” and “customers” better than us? Most importantly, as librarian and educator, she has inspired countless protégés to do the same. She will be missed, but in no small measure thanks to her, the principles and high standards she so strongly upheld will continue to guide those who do this important work.
Laurel Grotzinger is a complex person

By Monica Ann Evans, friend

Did Laurel’s collegiate work in library sciences sidetrack her interest in medical matters? I wonder. She is knowledgeable about and converses well when matters of health are brought up.

Although Laurel has been in this community for more than 50 years, I have not known her long. Before I met Laurel, she was a volunteer with the Kalamazoo Bach Festival Society. I met her through a mutual friend (Valerie Ann Noble) who had convinced me to sign up for the annual Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra (KSO) series. We three and Gordon Eriksen (WMU Librarian) dined together and attended those performances. Laurel continues to attend the KSO series with other friends while I retire early every evening.

Laurel loves the sun and enjoys it at her Kalamazoo home, at her Lake Michigan cottage, and wherever travels take her, especially to Florida.

Trill, a gray rescue cat, enjoys Laurel’s home and informs Laurel when outdoor cat neighbors approach…for food or just spying. All animals, especially wolves and big cats, are on Laurel’s help radar. The home of her deceased pets (cats and standard poodle) is her backyard.

She collects sculptures of horses, waterbirds, and shorebirds. These, plus masks, art (of beaches and lighthouses), books, books, and more books fill her home, her lake cottage, and, until retirement, her WMU office.

Laurel is concerned about the evolution of all libraries and the accuracy of history. She wonders how the massive embracing of high technology will affect knowledge, history, and record keeping. Books as we know them, sometimes referred to as “those in the hand,” are being removed from shelves and may be destined for oblivion. Internet hacking gives unscrupulous individuals opportunities to modify and to change history, knowledge, and even record keeping.

A writer, editor, gardener, volunteer, supporter—of her colleges, her extended family, and of selected non-profit organizations—prowler of antique shops, and lover of fine music: This is Dr. Laurel Grotzinger.

She has made a difference

By Marty Deming Maytnier, librarian and colleague

My first memory of Laurel is at an Alberta L. Brown Lecture where she acted as moderator for the event. I remember thinking that she had such an easy way of connecting with the crowd. Laurel spoke briefly on the history of the lecture series and of her personal interest and passion for library history. I also remember thinking that, as a fellow librarian, I would like to hear more about her favorite subject.

Barbara Cockrell approached me after the lecture and asked me if I would be at all interested in joining the Reference Department at Waldo as the Saturday librarian. I had gotten to know Barbara while working for Kalsec Inc. on a consulting project. Barbara introduced me to Maria Perez-Stable, who was walking past us on her way out of the Fetzer Center, and the rest, as they say, is history.

I had been a corporate librarian for more than 15 years, and while there are many similarities between the role of an academic reference librarian and the role of a corporate librarian, I knew that in order to be able to do my new job effectively I would need to understand the unique culture of Waldo Library and the issues faced by the Central Reference Department. I decided to ask Laurel if she would be willing to act as my mentor. Laurel was most kind and generous and agreed to adopt me.

Since those early days, Laurel and I have discovered we both share a passion for classical music, fine dining and…Dick Frances. I greatly value our evenings going to hear the KSO, which are usually preceded by dinner at the Park Club. Dinner at the Park Club is going back in time to the days when dining out meant a quiet, intimate, elegant dinner with friends.

About Dick Frances, for those of you who do not know: from 1957 to 2010, Dick Frances was the author of more than 40 books whose central theme was horse racing. You may ask, Laurel, Marty and horse racing? His books are pure entertainment with such memorable protagonists and thrilling plots, it is hard to put down one. A reviewer once called his books, “fairy tales for adults—ones in which the actors are better than we are but believable enough to make us wonder if, indeed, we could not one day manage to emulate them.” I could say more, but pick one up and read it yourself. Recently, both Laurel and I have read through the entire collection—again.

Over the past six years working as a part of the Central Reference team, I have been called upon to fill-in for librarians on leave due to illness, sabatical, and the many other issues that impact daily life. I have shared my shifts on the Central Reference help desk with Laurel, and have seen her ability to address ANY question that came to the help desk. I have also listened and learned valuable techniques for getting to “why,” as in “why do you need this information?” which as any reference librarian knows is usually a far cry from the information a patron thinks they need. On Saturdays, I have heard from the reference students who work with me, that Laurel is one of their favorite librarians to work with because they are confident that she can help find the answer, but most of all because she is considerate and respectful of them as individuals.

Last fall, the Western News ran an article that highlighted the accomplishments of Laurel’s 50 years at Western Michigan. It was quite amazing to read the list of her professional accomplishments. Laurel mentions in the article that it has been important for her to remember that each new term provides an opportunity to “make a difference.” I need to make sure that I tell Laurel she has made a difference in my life through her kindness and generosity, the example she has set for women in academics to follow, and most of all through the gift of her friendship.
I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Dr. Laurel Grotzinger six years ago when I was hired by the University Libraries to work in the Central Reference Department. It was the fall of my freshman year at Western Michigan University. I had just moved to Kalamazoo from Mount Pleasant and, like most first-year students, I was incredibly nervous. But at the same time I was starting college I started working at Waldo Library, and I found myself working with the most incredible people, one of whom was a Dr. Grotzinger.

Before having any lengthy conversations with Laurel, the first thing I admired about the woman was her collection of snazzy suits, which were always paired with an equally stunning and unique brooch. But that one-dimensional assessment was quickly replaced with adoration for her incredible breadth of knowledge of...almost everything.

Laurel is the liaison librarian for legal reference sources, and I, once a prospective law school student, loved to pick her brain about career opportunities in the fields of public policy and law. This was merely a starting point for our conversations, which eventually spanned across more topics than that. Laurel never ceased to amaze me how much she knew about so many different things. What I found truly remarkable about her character is that she has a profound appreciation for sharing information with anyone smart enough to listen.

Despite the many conversations I had with Laurel, I realize that most of what I learned about her life and career has been from others. It’s not that she didn’t care to share; it’s just that despite having an incredible career, Laurel is humble beyond belief.

In the staff lounge at Waldo there is a table for freebies, the most common giveaways were calendars and nice cardstock. It took me about a year or two to finally ask someone why a pile of calendars and a box full of cardstock were basically permanent fixtures on the freebies table. I was told that because of Laurel’s generosity, the organizations she donated to would send her these things (and because of her generosity she gave them away). Other than being told she was “generous” I didn’t know just how generous she was until this past year. I was actually asked by Laurel to help calculate her charitable contributions for the previous year. I realized that Laurel is the personification of generosity.

Of course, it’s not like I had to see this information to verify that Laurel is in fact generous, because I was a recipient of hers once upon a time, too. It was my senior year at WMU, and I had just been awarded a scholarship (which didn’t cover the entire cost of the trip) to attend the Women, Law and Legal Advocacy seminar in Washington, D.C. Before I departed, a beautiful card signed by Dr. Laurel Grotzinger had been left in my work mailbox with some money to help cover the cost.

This all pales in comparison to what I have really received from Dr. Grotzinger. Laurel signed off on my graduation card, “The world is yours.” She instilled lasting confidence in me with a mere four words. She taught me to always ask questions, think critically, to never settle. Most importantly, after years of seeing her in colorful suits I feel compelled to jazz up my collection!