By Courtney Holsworth, student

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 the 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!