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 one down. A reviewer once called his books, “fairy tales for adults—one 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.