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Barbara Biber Bodansky 1903-1993: A Life Observed and Recorded

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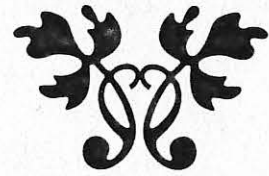


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Barbara
Biber
Bodansky
1903–1993

*A Life Observed
and Recorded*



List of Contributors

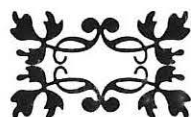
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The quotations accompanying the photographs throughout the text are taken from Barbara Bibers's *Early Education and Psychological Development*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.



Preface

In the spring of 1987, my mother wrote to Mary Ellen Gilder, Eleanor Bowman Hogan's daughter, and asked her to write some notes on her memories of times shared. Mary Ellen responded at some length, and my mother was deeply appreciative. At this moment, I cannot find Mary Ellen's notes, which I am sure my mother saved. When I asked Mary Ellen if she had a copy, she told me that she does not but sent the letter that my mother wrote in response. In this, Mary Ellen's recalls are summarized, the moments recaptured, and we see that in her 85th year, my mother spoke eloquently in the voice we know so well—the voice that educated, enlightened, comforted, and inspired us over the years. Mary Ellen and I are glad to share this letter. I believe my mother would have liked our doing so.



Dear Mary Ellen,

I am indulging myself today. Here I am sitting and listening to the rain falling on the beautiful woods that surround the country house that Margery and Ray have developed during the ten years since Oscar died. They cling to old things so I see the old chairs we sat on in our Woods Hole summer days and the desk that was the first recognition of my "growing up."

I have one deep regret in my old age—why didn't I keep a diary of my family life and, beyond that, my experience in bursting into the real world—from Barnard to the Amalgamated Clothing Workers to Chicago and then Lucy Mitchell and Bank Street? When I read real life stories, as I have been doing, and note authors' minute recalls of life events, I stop feeling my regret. Maybe those detailed diaries represent removal from the depth and intimacy of living and working together—fully with friends and relatives.

But, in more recent times, I begin to read about the extreme individual differences in the way individual brains record and thereby recall experience. Not at any great length, since I am trying to discipline the use of these later years and finding it hard to do. If I had sense I would get into autobiography—but there are other pulls—practical accounting of business affairs, old time friends in trouble, a promise to put my professional papers in order for placement in T.C. archives, and a request to give a session on old time Bank Street to contemporary students. I said

Margery B. Franklin
April 11, 1994

Barbara Biber Bodansky
*Letter to Mary Ellen Gilder,
July 11, 1987*



yes, did the best I could, wishing I could have had Eleanor with me. Only one instance of longing for that rare friendship and sense of communion.

How can I tell you with what deep feeling and appreciation I have read your written notes of recall? Each is precious to my poor memory—

- the Waverly Inn fireplace and the outdoors in summer
- your recall of library meetings with Lucy talking while we sat in Lucy-designed chairs
- Eleanor walking back to Bank Street after supper
- Manuel living in the building—being part of us and your speaking Spanish to him
- the painted pipes related to the systems (that was Lucy in Essence and noticed by Eleanor Roosevelt)
- Lucy's dangling earrings (she always meant to be distinctly herself) and smoking two cigarettes together (make the most of a mistake, don't be embarrassed by it)
- the discussions of how to make work with students from rural South (what would Eleanor think about the present way of incorporating black, Chinese, et al. students into Bank Street philosophy and practice?) I keep wishing we could sit down together and rehearse our problems as we used to do.
- I love your recall of the beach trip with you and Margery (2 years old)
- and the lessons you gave to Margery and Ellen with my sister Lil's advice about movements. (My sister Lil is ninety years old; she plays and is making records for her children while giving courses for the elders at the New School)
- and your mother's retirement after our plunge into the Harlem public schools. (All that seems infantile when put beside the present enterprises at Bank Street—but it had an irreplaceable quality of its own)
- I am glad you remember the family people—they remember you and then the difficult years during the war — — —

Many thanks for carrying me back to life experiences that meant so much to me and to my wonderful recalls of Eleanor and you. With love and best wishes that all is well with you.

Bolke

Joan W. Blos
*Remarks at A Tribute to
Barbara Biber Bodansky,
April 21, 1994*

Once upon a long time ago there were three Biber sisters. The oldest—and sole surviving—sister recently passed her 97th birthday. The other sisters were, of course, my mother and my aunt: Charlotte B. Winsor (the “B” standing firmly for Biber) and Barbara Biber Bodansky.

Each of her sisters, recalling their Brooklyn childhood, claimed distinction as the more devoted sibling; both remembered their sister’s golden curls and enduringly shared the conviction that she was her father’s favorite. This view is psychodynamically interesting for family legend has it that when his youngest daughter was born the father, disappointed at not having been granted a son, took off on a three-day binge.

I would be sorry to give the wrong impression. By all accounts William Biber was loyal, if temperamental, as a husband and a father; proud of his daughters’ achievements, bemused by the radical politics of their youth, and astonished (and delighted) when they, in turn, had children and he eventually found himself the grandfather of four. Trained as a hatter by a Vienna apprenticeship, he had come to America as a young man. Once arrived in this country, and making characteristic non-use of job training programs, he was briefly a busboy at the old Astoria Hotel. He soon became a house-to-house seller of watches, rings, and similar merchandise, and then a businessman of sufficient affluence to dabble in real estate and lose money in the depressions of 1907 and 1928.

Also an immigrant, Fanny Stark was a seamstress when marriage rescued her from the monotony of making ladies’ gloves. She was a gifted homemaker, skilled at knitting and sewing, apparently something of a neighborhood counselor in matters of family planning and child rearing, and a protective, devoted mother. Never having had the opportunity to become literate in English herself, she was a firm believer in education and her two daughters’ professionalization of that value must have pleased her immensely.

But it was the oldest and musically gifted third sister whose employment as a secretary made it possible for the younger two to attend college immediately after graduation from Girls’ High in Brooklyn.

And it was while at Barnard College that the young woman with hair cut daringly short in the bobbed style of the 20s met the young scientist whose claim to fame, at that time, was a stunt. Standing at the top of the great, wide stairs in front of Columbia University’s library, casually engaged in ordinary conversation, he would suddenly let himself go limp and roll to the very bottom of those steps, and then get up unharmed. The effect of this stunt on observers was, as may be imagined, quite considerable.

He must also have made a profound impression on “Bobsie,” as she was called at the time, and of course he had other talents that were more substantial.



If nothing else were to be said about my Aunt Bobbie and my Uncle Oscar, it would have to be stated that theirs was a well-made marriage. Anyone who knew them together had to be aware of their love for one another—compelled as it was to accommodate sickness as well as health and wartime separation. Their shared belief that it was a privilege to work at something you loved was something they spoke of freely. More private, perhaps, but equally strong was pride in each other's achievements and respectful appreciation of each other's interests. (My uncle admired Damon Runyon's stories and was a baseball fan. Even if he dozed while the radio blared, he was still a baseball fan; a sepia tinted photograph, hung on the wall of their 86th Street home, recalled the Barnard undergraduate who danced in the "Greek games" of the day with the same grace and fervor that she gave to her studies.)

Her first published paper studied the drawings of children from a developmental perspective. (Some of you, knowing her daughter Margery's subsequent research and writing on symbolic thinking and pre-verbal representation may think you detect an early influence here. I think, rather, that what we see is a similar attitude of mind, the capacity for inquiry, and the gift of logical thinking. Intensity of interest in others' lives and activities is also a trait that mother and daughter shared—Bobbie perhaps more temperate, Margery more impulsive.)

Those of you who were at the funeral service held on this past September 17th will remember the tributes of her grandsons—Kenny offering words of his own; David choosing readings; both revealing the depth and breadth of their lifelong affection. When I was asked to speak on this occasion, it was to "represent the family," to tell about the distinctive individual who was significantly, but not exclusively (there were three cousins on the Biber side and Bodansky cousins as well), my Aunt Bobbie. Because my Aunt Bobbie was not the Barbara Biber of the classroom whom many of you knew as an inspired, and inspiring teacher. She wasn't the Dr. Biber of socially motivated service on national committees or the Barbara Biber, Ph.D., of influential publications. She wasn't the colleague, friend, and ally—the Barbara of whom you will hear in a moment from those who knew her thus. She was my Aunt Bobbie.

Although she was related to these others and formed, with my mother, what has been called The Greatest Sister Act in the field of education—my Aunt Bobbie was the keeper of sequentially owned cats named Stripes and Lucy, just as later she was the bemused, affectionate, but not too effective co-owner of a cocker spaniel named Ginger. She was the wife of my fun-loving Uncle Oscar (who became a distinguished biochemist), my cousin's mother, a focal member of our extended family. One of the cousins recalls Thanksgiving at Bobbie's thus:

The extended family is assembled: three sisters, three husbands, four cousins. Bobbie is elegantly dressed but aproned. She is concerned about the quality of the food, but more about the quality of interaction: are people getting

along, having fun, engaged with each other in interesting ways. This is not so easy . . . but she tries. She tries to smooth things out. "You sit here." "How about sitting there?" She oversees in a subtle way trying to keep the family in harmony. And when it looks a little shaky, she tosses the ball to Oscar . . .

Photographs, many of which my uncle framed and labeled with care, recall a delighted mother with her infant daughter, the family on holiday, Bobbie giving a lecture. Not similarly documented, but surely well remembered, are my Aunt Bobbie's enjoyment of gardening, cooking, refinishing furniture, recorder playing, and—when at the Woods Hole house—the regular purchase of small, miscellaneous objects at the Falmouth Historical Society's weekly yard sale. Summer after summer, in Woods Hole on Cape Cod, Barbara Bodansky was better known than Barbara Biber and that was as she wished it. There also were several years of meticulous needlework.

The fact of my Michigan residence made it impossible for me to be a regular visitor during the last years of her life. I took to writing letters, attempting to model them, I should add, on those that she had written when my mother was ill.

As I had come to realize when doing the requisite research for my historical fiction, in the olden days it was the recipients—not the senders—who got to keep family letters. Now, with the computer making it altogether too easy to SAVE what one has written, the sender's access is equally complete. And so, in preparing my remarks for this afternoon, I read through the letters. One of them recalls the needlework:

Today I find myself thinking about knitting needles and continuity! As you may know, I have not only my own collection but also those my mother accumulated. I believe that some of yours have also found their way into this stash of knitting needles and yesterday, when I was looking for some double-pointed #2s, I came on a particularly fine crochet hook, steel, that I'm sure your mother used in making her lace doilies!

I believe that Margery has used many of the knitting needles that were yours at one time or another and I know that Sarah [our daughter] learned to knit with mine and my mother's. If you add us all up it comes to six knitters over four generations!

A little more than two years ago, on January 21, 1992, I was telling about my reading of a recent biography of Margaret Wise Brown.

About seven or eight years ago [I wrote] the author of the book seems to have interviewed those people still at Bank Street who might have known [her]. As Barbara Biber you are reported to have observed that she "operated in a highly individual mode!" Now, doesn't that sound like you?!

And on February 4th, after telling about a visit with a friend whose conventional upbringing and school experience were at opposite poles from mine, I wrote:



. . . the school is considered a life sphere of search and discovery, trial and solution, self-awareness and social interchange, conflict and resolution, resistance and adaptation—in all, an experience in depth and achievement.

All of which brought me to realize very clearly that I and Margery, and Dick and Ellen too [here naming the other cousins], had had a most unusual growing up! In many ways our childhood experience was so much ahead of itself and of its times that the world hasn't caught up yet! It must have been enormously exciting to have been a part of all of that and to know yourself as contributing so many new ideas. Thank you for playing a part in my young life! And much love always . . .

The reference to "my young life" was not just rhetorical. I had been only one week old when my 25-year-old Aunt Bobbie, evidently reveling in her new role and title, gave me Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, my first book of poems. Smile though we may at such a premature gift, the book was a favorite by the time I was four and is on my shelf today.

And now, as I reflect on it, I think the volume was not a chance selection, and its title not irrelevant. In the character and personality of my beloved Aunt Bobbie there lay these same dual qualities: openness and caution; the capacity for naive enjoyment and acquired wisdom; a "new slate" attitude toward the world ("I'm an optimist," she used to say), and the sort of courage that neither denied nor forgot the hard and difficult messages sometimes inscribed by life.

Thank you, Aunt Bobbie, for the book of poems and the gifts of many kinds that followed over the years. And thank you, all, for coming here today—to love, to honor, and to celebrate my Aunt Bobbie, Mrs. Oscar Bodansky, and your Barbara Biber.



If we were to free the child's intellectual capacity, we had to make learning an active, self-generating, searching experience . . .

Barbara had a major influence on my professional development as a researcher in many ways, but especially in helping me to see the importance of emphasizing the positives, to view obstacles and write about them not as problems but as challenges.

Jacqueline L. Rosen



I first met Barbara late in her career in 1973 when I became president of Bank Street, although I had become familiar with some of her writing much earlier. My immediate admiration of her as a person quickly combined with my earlier appreciation of her writing to make her in many ways the most significant colleague at the College during my tenure.

Francis Roberts

Barbara wrote somewhere that education is a blend of an older self with new experience, and although I was an experienced educator by my arrival, Bank Street was most certainly a new and indeed wonder-filled experience. The enthusiasm, energy, commitment, imagination, and ideas that were in the air still stimulate me. And the presence everywhere of marvelous children's programs made the ideas real. What I needed, however, was better understanding of the intellectual or theoretical basis for Bank Street, something more than the slogan "the Bank Street approach."

The approach itself was evident, but I knew that beneath it was a construct, a web of meaning. During my years at Bank Street, it was Barbara who again and again supplied that clarity and depth, sometimes in public presentations, more often in small discussions about a current project, and frequently just over lunch. Despite her total loyalty to Bank Street, Barbara was never one to rely on vague laudatory evocations of some "mystique." Barbara was always a great listener and a great clarifier. She could take the experience or observation at hand, examine it with care from every angle, and point out how the event or setting or classroom or behavior was to be understood in relation to a child's or a teacher's development. And, more to be admired, Barbara let anyone in hearing share in her thinking process because she generously thought out loud. So often I watched her listen carefully to others and then begin with some such words as, "Well, now, let's think about this . . ." and then she would think out loud, drawing others into the process.

Barbara Biber contributed in so many ways to Bank Street. One of her most important contributions was her role as Bank Street's theorist and clarifier, an inspiring thinker surrounded by and enriching the work of all of us fortunate enough to have been her colleagues.

David Bodansky

My early recollections of my aunt Bobbie (never Barbara to my memory) are inseparably linked with my father's liking and admiration of her. Bobbie was to him the perfect combination (at least by the standards of those times) of the successful professional woman and the devoted wife and mother. I then instinctively accepted his evaluation, and in retrospect it seems to me to have been absolutely right. But, of course, what made Bobbie special was not that she filled those roles, but *how* she filled them.

In my contacts with Bobbie, from the first to the last, what stands out in my mind was her warmth and her enthusiastic interest in people. She had a wonderful welcoming smile. She always conveyed the feeling that the person she was greeting or speaking to was important to her, and I think that very many people were.

As I grew older, the pleasure in seeing Bobbie did not derive solely from a sense of family warmth. It was also a pleasure to hear always the voice of calm and reason. World affairs were often prominent in the group discussions, and Bobbie was admirably temperate, open-minded, and rational. She was deeply concerned about many issues, but she did not let her concern turn into intolerance. She seemed genuinely to believe that the other person might have a point, or at least an interesting point of view.

Of course, Bobbie had a very active and important professional life, but this I only heard about. It did emerge once for me in a very small way many years ago. She and Oscar were visiting us in Seattle, and our two small children were making some standard difficulties about going to bed. I mildly deplored their behavior, and Bobbie even more mildly told me that I should welcome it as an evidence of their commitment to life. It probably did not take a distinguished scholar to provide that perspective, but it was a new insight for me.

Bobbie also seems to have had an unquenchable idealism. I tend to save letters, and I have one from her written in the early 1980s when many members of the younger generation were going into law. She wondered why, and remarked: "For some there seems to be a quiet, underlying image of the profession as a route by which to keep our society in touch with its better self, in the face of the plagues that beset it." I do not know how true this sense of purpose was for most of the prospective young lawyers, but it was true of Bobbie. A life and a career to her were meant to be devoted to improving society and the lot of others. Her own life clearly was very much in this pattern, and she was too generous not to impute similar high purposes to others.

All in all, Bobbie was a wonderful person, with her combination of dedication and calm, rationality and warmth, interest in the world and in the family.

Angela M. Covert

Barbara Biber is one of my heroes, a rare human being whose passion for the intellect was matched by her compassion for people.

My images and recollections of Bank Street are many. But among the ones that stand out as most important are the conversations that I had with Barbara—out of the office, one on one—the times we would spend together, just talking. Whatever the topic, the conversations were always about ideas; she was always pushing the frontiers of thinking, her own as well as others'. I remember one occasion in particular when we were talking about progress in social change, and how the pendulum swings. She took out her pencil and drew a diagram on the table:



explaining that when we make advances in social change, we might move from A to B; and then, when we have a backlash, we might return to C, but rarely would we go back to A; and then, in the next wave of change, we would begin at C.

This bit of conversation has stuck with me, and I have used it many times in my work and my thinking.

Those moments with Barbara were indeed special—always positive, always upbeat, always seeing the best. Those moments were all too rare, but I always felt as though I had been given a precious gift, and actually I had—time with Barbara Biber, my hero.



. . . if we were to be responsive to the goal of educating the whole child, we had not only to stimulate independent thinking and reasoning processes but to open avenues toward creative reorganization of experience as intrinsic to the learning process . . .

Ellen Uviller Keniston

When I was in the nines at the City and Country School, my whole class was abducted—one by one—to the Bank Street School a few blocks away. There we made drawings, looked at inkblots and pictures, told stories, and played games. My classmates agreed, when comparing notes afterwards, that we must all be privileged participants in an exotic experiment. I personally, however, suspected that the whole thing had been planned, engineered, and carried out by a single powerful individual; my aunt Bobbie. The fact was confirmed by irrefutable evidence. The cunningly made fire truck and perfect ambulance that were sitting squarely amidst the toys we were encouraged to play with belonged to my cousin (her daughter) Margery. These were the very toys we played with endlessly, crawling around the bedroom and living room floors, constructing elaborate and enthralling adventures. Sometimes Aunt Bobbie wasn't there, sometimes she was present in the background. She never interfered. I sensed that she appreciated and enjoyed our games from afar. So now, at Bank Street, confronted by these toys, I was a somewhat puzzled nine-year-old—at once the subject of a child development study and a special niece; and she, at once a researcher and a devoted aunt.



Happie Byers

My first class at Bank Street College was Child Development. It was in 1958 at 69 Bank Street. Tuition was \$25 per credit. The teacher was Barbara Biber. I never expected that my first graduate school course ever would

be so confirming and supportive. I was an assistant teacher in a small private nursery school in Westchester. Each week the trip to New York to be in Barbara's class became more exciting. It was here that I first became acquainted with the "aha" experience and concept. At every session I was treated to another way to understand a child's behavior, keys to why my approach to working with a child worked, and the basis for its becoming broader, to include more children and become more successful. Here the value of theory and its relationship to practice became my reality base for good teaching. I learned from Barbara that young children are problem solvers, and that my job was to discover the problem the child was trying to solve and support the child's own problem-solving process.

In the many years after I joined the faculty of Bank Street College in 1972, I enjoyed many conversations with Barbara in her sixth floor office at Bank Street on 112th Street. She always asked the searching question, respectful of our shared interest in probing for some constructive thinking together. She modeled the respectful probing question and how to use it well. I remember well the exhilaration I felt after a class session with Barbara or a collegial conversation with her. She set my mind working for weeks. I loved her dearly for her extraordinary inclusiveness as she shared ideas.



I first met Bobbie, and Oscar, when I was four and a half. Young as I was, I remember clearly the immediate attention bestowed upon me. My arrival in their house on East 74th Street was awaited with wicker boxes full of toys, and glass animals, which seemed to materialize from the top shelves of closets. They used to belong to Margery. I played, a sort of interview was conducted. Bobbie wanted to get to know me.

This is what we'll always remember about Bobbie. She always wanted to know what you thought, how you felt, how you thought things should be, what you thought should be done. She always wanted to hear. She was opinionated, she believed in opinions. One of her strongest opinions was that she always wanted to hear other people's opinions. Of course she had very strong beliefs of her own. We all know about her belief in education, particularly for young children. She realized that to help young children, you had to help mothers, which in turn, no doubt, helped fathers, and between mothers and fathers, and children—children being taught by good teachers—you got knowledge, wisdom, and foresight, in short: the foundations, the bedrock of humanity. Because really what Bobbie wanted was a better world. She never took her eye off the big picture. She knew of cruelty and injustice, poverty, she recognized it around her. Yet her foundations, her parents, her older sisters, Lil and Charlotte, provided Bobbie with the relative security in which they lived in New York City when many people around them had it much harder. Thus, Bobbie had an eye, a nose, for the concerns and needs of others.

She went to Barnard in 1920. She met Oscar, a young student at Columbia. She studied under the anthropologist Franz Boas. She was influenced—the age of science and reason had dawned, it was happening, the future looked bright. A sort of nonreligious salvation based on modern science, humanitarian ideas, and human ideals seemed possible, perhaps even just around the corner. This inspired Bobbie, motivated her for what would become her life's work.

She never stopped believing in her ideals. It would be putting it mildly to say that she was an idealist, and proud to be so. Nor did she ever stop wanting to know what others thought, particularly what people younger than herself thought. During family dinners, Thanksgivings, when the conversation tended toward current events of the day, of the year, it was always Bobbie who at some point would pause the conversation and say, "Now, let's hear what the younger generation has to say," and it was always as if what the middle and older generations had to say was interesting to a degree, for a while, but what Bobbie had been waiting for all along, what interested her most, was what we the children, the teenagers or young adults, had to say for ourselves.

When I was a teenager, in college, and during the years after college, years in which I was often cynical about this or about that, and I'd visit Bobbie, and after whatever we had been discussing, she would say, "Kenny, tell me something good, something you're looking forward to, because you know," she would

Kenneth Franklin
*Remarks at Riverside
Memorial Chapel,
September, 17, 1993*

say, always smiling her unforgettable smile, "I am an optimist," saying "optimist" as if it were a political party, or a club to which she belonged.

Bobbie was born in 1903, one year before the IRT subway line opened. Interboro Rapid Transit—it symbolized the times, uptown-downtown, one borough to another, Brooklyn-Manhattan-the Bronx, moving people for the new century. And along with the IRT, Bobbie moved as a young girl from Brooklyn to Manhattan, went to Barnard College uptown, lived in Greenwich Village downtown. She started Bank Street with her friend Lucy Sprague Mitchell. Then Bank Street, like the IRT, headed uptown, up Broadway, to the Upper West Side. Bobbie spent, aside from a few years in Chicago, her entire life here. Margery was born here. Bobbie loved New York City through all its changes. And all the changes she must have seen! We've all seen change. The Upper West Side of my childhood was largely knocked down in the 1980s. Walking around the Upper West Side in recent years, thinking how different it all looks to me, I always think of Bobbie, and my goodness, it's incomprehensible how different it must have been when Bobbie walked the same streets,

a young woman at Barnard in the 1920s. Yet, while a lot of us despair at many of the changes, Bobbie the optimist, stuck by New York City, even long after she could keep up with New York's various changes and reincarnations, which to Bobbie must have seemed a whirl, unrecognizable, often incomprehensible. And Bobbie, with her graceful intelligence, was the first to understand that there was so much she could no longer understand. Yet she was never pessimistic, she was never a member of that club.



. . . if education was ultimately to effect social change, we had to bring the reality of how the world functions into the classroom curriculum . . .

Joan Cenedella

When I was asked to compose a notice from the College on Barbara's death, I found myself inundated with memories of her bright, upturned face visiting my classroom so many years ago, asking me questions that set me to serious thinking, and exhorting me to write, write, write. And also I remember meeting weekly for over a year in a recorder group that included Barbara and Charlotte, who approached this recreation so differently. Barbara always thought we sounded terrific; Charlotte heard our flaws.

My own experience with Barbara, both personal and through her writings, led me to think and act as a teacher within a theoretical/philosophical framework. That framework is still very much a part of my thinking and acting. She did the same for Bank Street, only writ large. She looked at what Bank Street was doing and told them (us) what it was. There is no "Bank Street approach" without Barbara Biber's work.

One's first thoughts about Barbara Biber are of her remarkable intellect and her deep understanding of the intricacies of children's development and how it is touched and molded by experiences in school. She was the peerless master of this domain, and when Fran Roberts used to speak of Bank Street serving as a beacon, he was doubtlessly thinking of Barbara.

In bringing the psychological world of the young child to center stage, Barbara introduced us to a realm that had previously been barely examined, let alone understood—the universality of the themes of children's strivings, explorations and interactions, their modes of symbolic representation and idiosyncratic expression, and the threads of continuity that are to be found between early development and later features of psychological functioning.

In describing education in terms of its ramifications for psychological development, she broke new ground. No one but Barbara Biber would have been asked to contribute a chapter on preschool education in the 1960s to a volume with the cosmological title, *Education and the Idea of Mankind*, and no one could have made so compellingly powerful a case for the importance of preschool education. It was no surprise, then, that when the mental health movement was at its zenith both in terms of the new insights that it contributed to understanding the human condition and the new promise that it held for healing society, and came to address the fundamentally important issue of prevention, it turned to Barbara Biber to receive a dazzling and definitive elucidation of the role of education in the field of preventive mental health.

Barbara's unique powers as a thinker about children's development were marked by outstanding intellectual taste and an absence of pedantry. She viewed ideas as tools rather than as ornaments and she was a master craftsman at using them. It was not just that her vocabulary of theoretical constructs for describing children's behavior was imposingly rich, it was the ease and the deftness with which she could call upon her idea system to accomplish her work. She was attracted to ideas because of their strength and useability; she was too down to earth to be taken with abstract formulations for their own sake. She borrowed from the best—from psychodynamic theory, from Piaget, from Heinz Werner, from the orthopsychiatric literature—often contributing, in passing, elaborations and clarifications that enhanced the original work, as she invariably did in responding to the ideas of her colleagues and students.

Barbara was capable of rising to even greater heights when addressing an audience. On such occasions she could be observed, gracefully and almost magically, to reach more deeply into her own well. In witnessing these miraculous moments, it reminded those of us who had learned at her knee about the universalities and continuities of human behavior, that we, too, must have a well, because we are all more alike than different. In countless ways, then, she called forth identification with her. In her character, her work ethic, her seriousness of purpose, her respectfulness and sense of dignity, her generosity of spirit, and the profundity and clarity of her thinking, she strengthened and inspired those around her.

John H. Niemeyer

*Excerpt from remarks at
Riverside Memorial Chapel,
September 17, 1993*

. . . I spend so much time on this memory because, while I am, as I was then, under the spell of Barbara Biber the deep and precise thinker, the clear and powerful communicator both in speaking and writing, I am, as I was then, even more under the spell of Barbara Biber, the warm, understanding, always fair and considerate human being. You know . . . I cannot remember Barbara's ever saying an unkind thing about anybody. Not that she didn't have strong

convictions about what she considered right and wrong. If she thought a person's ideas wrong—and above all, if she thought the ideas harmful to other persons—she would be devastating in her rebuttal. But in rejecting the ideas, she never seemed to reject the person. It was as if she never lost faith that truth would always, finally, prevail.

To know Barbara was to be glad to be alive.



Edward Zigler

*Excerpt from a letter to
Margery Franklin,
September 20, 1993*

I was in awe of Barbara long before I met her, and one of the great satisfactions of my life was that she and I could become close colleagues and friends. There was no one in my field that I held in greater respect. . . . She is no longer here but her efforts will affect lives forever.

Allow me to recount one brief tale of Barbara's influence. I had a moderately good idea in the early seventies to develop a performance-based competency certificate for those who care for and/or teach young children. We called these workers Child Development Associates. Barbara's brilliance and hard work spearheaded the effort to describe specifically the competencies underlying the CDA certificate. Today, there are tens of thousands of CDAs. Each of them will touch the lives of many children and all of this can be directly traced to Barbara. This was only one of countless accomplishments.

Barbara was much more than an imposing intellect. She constantly exuded warmth and compassion. She had a strong social conscience and would never look the other way when evil or wrong-headedness threatened children.

If memory serves me right, I spoke at two retirement dinners honoring Barbara. We all know that Barbara never retired, but instead worked brilliantly and effectively until she could not longer do so. She is gone and we shall all miss her. Her family and friends must take solace in the knowledge that Barbara enjoyed a rich and meaningful life.

I remember staying overnight at my grandparents' apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and helping my grandmother, Barbara Biber Bodansky, serve breakfast through the kitchen window onto the balcony. I think she made french toast. The balcony looked east on the East and Harlem Rivers and the Bronx. It was a bright sunny morning, and a little chilly—maybe early autumn?

I went out on to the balcony with my grandfather. I think there was an astroturf carpet. There were some plants, and the dining table was glass and metal. The chairs were metal, too. I think my grandfather said that we couldn't really start having a conversation until Bobbie came out because she would want to participate, so I asked him a question about the little plastic things that dripped water into the big potted plants on the balcony to keep them moist.

Then my grandmother came out and we sat down and the conversation began. It went like this: I asked my grandfather a lot of questions about science and facts related to science, because that's what I wanted to know about, and besides being my grandfather, he was a scientist. My grandmother asked me a lot of questions about many different things because she wanted to know what I thought about them, because I was a child, and besides being her grandson, she wanted to know what children thought about things.

I was happy because my questions got answered, and my grandmother was happy because *her* questions got answered, and both my grandparents were happy because I was curious about the world, and even if my name wasn't George, they would tolerate my taking a chimpanzee as a role model sometimes, as long as it was Curious.



I would put her on top of a list of people I thought important in any era. We respected her for her approach to materials; I had the utmost respect for her approach to action.

She was not frivolous or superficial, but had a light touch in spite of being very deep in thinking. She was nice, and not overly proud. We think of her as being strong. There were times when she wouldn't tolerate certain things but she always had the right word naturally. She never used words like struggle or fight—"tolerate" has "fight" in it. I think of her as arriving, thinking through: "You don't have to fight; this is the way it will be."

She seemed to know why people behaved as they did. She was a most accepting person, with a way of understanding what people were trying to say to her, and making things that mattered appear important. A lot of people have some of her characteristics but can't begin to approach who she was. You had to be sensitive to see how much she was sensitive to others. I learned what sensitivity I had through her, without preaching.

David Franklin

Florence Kandell

Claudia Lewis

I knew Barbara Biber for 60 years. When I went to study at 69 Bank Street back in 1933, the school's second year of training teachers, there was the young Barbara Biber, just developing the course she called Learning and Growth—a course that countless Bank Street students ever since have said laid a solid yet flexible foundation for their work with children.

After that rich year, I still lived in the neighborhood and taught in the city, so never wanted to leave Bank Street (and never have!). Who was the person I saw when I came back? Usually Barbara Biber. She was there and often made herself available, and was always interested to hear about the children I was teaching.

Then I went down to the Tennessee mountains for several years to run a little nursery school for the mountain children, a project of the Highlander Folk School.

I came up to New York a couple of times for brief visits, and of course sought out Barbara to talk with her about the mountain children, so different from those I had taught in New York. I shared some of my notes with her—and immediately she saw that they could be expanded into a book, and should become a book. A new idea for me! But she pushed me into it and encouraged me, and *Children of the Cumberland*, my first book, was the result.

I think there may have been other young students or teachers whom Barbara was helping and pushing along, toward realization of their potentials. Of course, I don't know about that, but I think it very likely.

I joined the Bank Street faculty, part time, in 1943, after receiving a master's degree in Minnesota. I worked with Barbara on a little research, and also became one of the advisors. Bank Street didn't have advisors for its students in its beginning days, but as the School for Teachers grew and students were placed in many kinds of schools for student teaching, the need became clear. I remember Barbara as Chairman of the Advisor group in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and it was certainly she who visualized the training we should have, and made it possible. Over a period of a few years our small advisor group met biweekly in Barbara Biber's apartment on 74th Street, for long mornings of discussion with Dr. Viola Barnard, the psychiatrist who worked with Barbara on many projects. Dr. Barnard did not train us to become therapists, but to become more skillful in the personal and professional guidance that is Bank Street's specialty with students. These were very memorable mornings. We talked, and thought, and drank the coffee always prepared for us by Barbara.

Later, as Barbara became more deeply involved in research, our Elizabeth Gilkeson, highly trained and experienced, became the guidance leader of the advisors.



. . . if we expected children to become awakened to the advantages of a democratic society, we had to provide the experience of living democratically in the social setting of the schoolroom, of being part of a cooperative structure characterized by egalitarian interpersonal relations.

I think it was not so easy to find Barbara around the building to talk with during those early 1960s. Not only was she heavily involved in research, but she was often conferring with our president, Jack Niemeyer, along with one or two other faculty members, on Bank Street's administrative problems. After all, we were no longer just a small school on Bank Street. We were a college, and we ran a child care center on West 42nd Street, and one in the Bronx. Furthermore, our Bank Street Children's School was expanding, to become an elementary school in the 69 Bank Street building. There were serious space problems to solve. No wonder Barbara Biber's thinking was valued in these times of change and uncertainty. She was a person of great wisdom and good judgment. Though her imagination flew high with ideas, she always had her feet firmly on the ground.

I always thought that Lucy Sprague Mitchell, founder of Bank Street, was an amazing person. But so was Barbara Biber in her quiet yet vital way. And one could get *close* to Barbara. She had a profound influence on my personal and professional life. I think of her with love and deep appreciation.



Some years ago I showed Barbara a children's book I was writing. My goal was to present life cycle to elementary school children, concisely and straightforwardly—linking together all living things on earth:

Everything
that is alive,
grows
and dies.

In the full cycle of life,
adults reproduce themselves
and get old
before they die.

The text, repeated four times, was to be illustrated by drawings of life-cycle stages of a plant, an insect, a nonhuman animal, and a woman and a man.

Barbara commented that children need to know that people are remembered after they die by those who knew them and loved them. As always, she probed the interface between thinking and feeling, igniting deeper understanding for both children and adults as she enriched the book.

Barbara was teacher, advisor, colleague, mentor, and friend without peer. She, who integrated developmental and dynamic psychology with educational theory and practice, set her work in the context of a just and functioning democratic society. She, who was the brilliant investigator and exponent of cognitive-affective processes, exemplified in her own person the most intricate and sensitive interwovenness of thinking and feeling.

Marjorie Graham Janis

Barbara Mildram

Words are inadequate to express my admiration for Barbara as a teacher, as a colleague, and as a friend. She was always the model to which I would aspire throughout my professional life.

Who can forget

- the breadth and depth of her knowledge and understanding, not just of children, but of people;
- the enjoyment she derived from sharing this knowledge in serious fashion, combined with delightful touches of humor;
- Barbara's wonderful sense of self and the way she helped others confidently discover for themselves a rewarding sense of self.

I rejoice in her life.



Ellen Galinsky

Barbara Biber was always—and will remain—my image of what a professional should be. She was deeply connected to her work. Her work was personal, in that she was investigating questions of interest to her; but profoundly public, in that the results of her work made such a difference to policy makers and practitioners.

Barbara was always learning, engaged and curious. Despite her massive knowledge, she was humble, treating everyone—her peers, students, and young children—with a profound respect.

She was a teacher as well as a learner, and an articulate and precise communicator. From the first day that I met her until the last time I saw her, I felt I was in the presence of a true leader.



Jessika Chuck

I remember Barbara in *so* many ways and so often. The feelings I had on those occasions when I worked with her in her home still remain vivid. Her need was always for order. Somehow she wanted to leave her writings in a form that would be simple and accessible. Her cross-referencing in her files was done out of consideration for those who might benefit from her Early Childhood Studies.

The Lunch Pause was refreshing because of the alacrity and perfection with which she turned out an omelet. Another talent I admired was her ability to make handmade suits, classic in style, and usually blue to match her eyes.

If she was late in answering a letter, she might say, "Your patience is only matched by my guilt." And so, Barbara, to quote you as you ended a letter, I say, "Thank you endlessly."

Elaine Sofer

Morning—Research meeting with my Associate: We are discussing the implications of our finding (as others have before us) that for young adults, personal autonomy is correlated with capacity for intimacy; providing the autonomy is genuine and not defensive, the correlation is very high and positive.

Barbara was a presence at our meeting (she continues to be—as she once was—my Research Director), but only later in the day did I think how well she herself embodied that very same connection.

Lunch time—Report to a clinical colleague: I am speaking about a man nearing the end of his long analysis, of how exciting I find our work together as he thinks and feels what had remained for years as disparate into *gestalts*, relating memory to desire, past to present, childhood to adulthood.

Affective. Cognitive. Barbara.

Late Afternoon—Telephone call from my sister Marjorie Janis, who both studied and later worked with Barbara at Bank Street. She tells me that Joan Cenedella has asked for recollections of Barbara, to be printed and distributed at her Memorial. We talked of how thinking, remembering, feeling about the dead keeps them in some ways alive. And how that provides comfort. For children too.

Barbara.

Early Evening—The McNeill-Lehrer News Hour: A segment on American Values: Charlene Hunter-Gault is interviewing a professor at NYU. He is saying that Americans must grow up, that only in the Garden of Eden could life be lived as a whole. The American (human) fate was and is to live and die forever divided, in values and in experience, within ourselves and between ourselves. He struck me as depressed, though determined to be stoic (longings for merger denied?). I thought: there are other and more joyful ways to be grown up, as a country and as a person.

Barbara.



I vividly recall Barbara [in her Child Development course] attempting to describe the two-year-old, and his or her need to assert a spirit of independence. She was very graphic and dramatic and finally, in exasperation, she said, sliding along the blackboard, “Am I a mouse and do what mommy wants me to do, or am I a man and say no?”

I taught Child Development for many years and always used this illustration. I remembered it when I had my own three children. I remind my children of this when our grandchildren, now seven of them, reach the age of two and their parents are trying to cope with the irrational, to them, demands of the child.

Phyllis Couse

Amy Lawrence

Barbara Biber, whom I loved almost from the first day I met her, reminded me of a wonderful bundle of many colored yarns I'd known in childhood: on the one hand tightly wrapped; on the other endlessly expansive.

She was a private sort of person, but she invited me into her heart, as she did so many others, with little hesitation. Her interest in the world about her and in the lives of her friends was extraordinary; she simply drank in information which could then be distilled in the warmth of her affections and commitments. She was simple, modest, unassuming; and she was proud, strong-minded, and determined in all her projects. She had a clear sense of her own values, yet

she treasured the views and perspectives of others, eager to understand them.

She was in her seventies when I met her and became her colleague, then her friend. One evening she and Oscar Bodansky dined at our home where they happened to meet a professor of medicine who turned out to have been a student of Oscar's at Columbia, many years earlier. The affection and esteem which he expressed to his former teacher delighted Bobbie and deepened the colors of a marvelous evening: warm and fun and interesting.



"A child," my mother said in criticism [of a young mother who kept her infant screened in and isolated, safe from the dangers of human contact], "has a mind" and needed playing with and talking to even before it could respond. The importance of stimulation in infancy that rings through the child-development literature so many years later rings old bells for me.

It seemed to me the bonds of feeling which had made that evening extraordinary were transmuted through some alchemy into my future relation with Bobbie. She told me once that was the last evening in which she had dined out with Oscar Bodansky before his death a week later and, with her unique generosity, I believe she credited me with one of the last perfectly happy evenings of her life. So she embraced me, deserving or not; she took me in; and she offered me, in all the greatness of her spirit, the fruits of her long life: her love of learning, her respect for people, her caring, her passionate interests, her memories.

For she was devoted to life, to young people, to the Other in the world; and she knew the meaning of I-Thou profoundly, probably without ever suspecting herself of such depth.

Long before I came to teach at Bank Street I felt part of the college because of my occasional contacts with Barbara Biber and her sister, Charlotte Winsor. They were heroic figures and yet accessible.

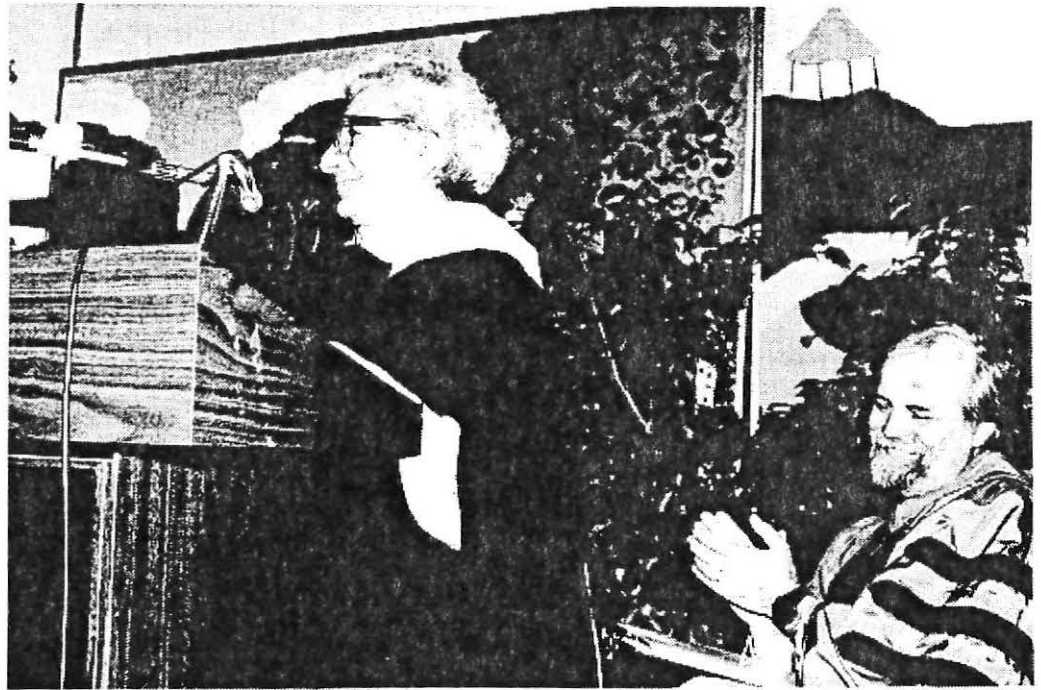
In 1946 or 1947, Barbara asked me to give a demonstration-lecture to her class in "Assessing and Interpreting Child Behavior" (later renamed "Observing and Recording") on the use of standard psychometric testing. It was in the old building on Bank Street. A ten-year-old from the School for Children came in for me to test. Barbara's genuine respect for children emerged as she greeted and introduced the boy and after the test thanked him, in the same tone she used to me as a peer. In fact her treatment of me as a peer, when I was going through a long period of unemployment, was so sustaining and far more valued than the stipend, much as I needed the latter. I had seen much good and even great teaching at Sarah Lawrence College, but nothing that surpassed hers; she spoke so little, but every question or comment evoked so much from the students. There was, in that class, and in all my contacts with her, a unique quality of her listening, that made a resonance, so one stretched and was far more intelligent and wise than usual.

In 1958 Barbara and Jules Henry gave papers on "The Teacher's Role in Creativity" at the American Orthopsychiatric Annual Convention and I had the role of discussant. The whole week before I fretted and fumed, for how was I to do a professional job as discussant when only Barbara had sent me her paper. Like all her work, it was honed and thoroughly developed. Finally, the night before the meeting, I received Henry's paper. Then I really got frantic.

The subtitles only partially indicate how many light years apart the two were: Henry dealt with "The problem of spontaneity, initiative, and creativity in suburban classrooms," and Barbara dealt with "Premature structuring as a deterrent to creativity." Henry's paper was a savage attack on sloppiness, sentimentality, coddling children, lack of intellectual rigor, all justified by an ideology of permissiveness and supposed creativity. Using his ethnographic approach, he related observations in classrooms that seemed preselected for the most abysmal examples of well-meaning, vapid ineptness in teaching. This was compounded by his cutting wit and the mocking voice with which he read his paper. Then, during the discussion, he distributed examples of drawing done by children under this system, smirkingly commenting, "Pure id."

In contrast, Barbara in her paper made it clear that she did not see a dichotomy between intellectual rigor and creativity. After describing aspects of a creative kind of person who does good teaching she adds, on the first page, "we may be guaranteed sensitivity to upsurges of spontaneous thinking and feeling in the children, but this is not yet the model of the creative teacher. In addition, she is contributing, not in a passive and diffuse manner, but directly, first to the freedom of thought and feeling of the children, and second, to the disciplined mastery of form and technique." This brief quote sums up so much of contributions. Never in all she has written or in all of our talks together have

To mark my graduation from elementary school, my father took me to the top of the Woolworth Building (the highest New York City skyscraper at the time) and pointed out the wondrous crisscross of streets below, of bridges carrying cars and streetcars and ferries riding back and forth from the marvelous isle. Could I have guessed that here were the seeds for falling in love with Lucy Mitchell's brand of human geography and the community patterns the students created under her guidance?



I heard her dichotomize feeling and thought. I once said to her, "For you, simplistic dichotomization is as grievous a sin as reification." And she agreed. Though I think she was even more pleased when once I introduced her to someone as "here's an adult who still has the sense of wonder of a two-year-old."

Barbara was herself somewhat aggravated by Henry's paper, but in a quiet way; she wasn't surprised, by his attack in particular or the many attacks progressive education was and still is getting. She modeled for me a calm, steadfast, judicious approach. There was a quality of irony in her view and hence of trivializing the critic.

It was ten years later that I finally came to Bank Street as an Adjunct. Among the many rewards was the chance to drop by Barbara's office for a talk. We covered so much in so little time: exchange of bibliographies, thinking of new development in schools, stories about children, concerns about graduate students, and often political matters for beyond the college. I so wanted her to come to one of my classes and give me her response.

The year in which she visited was sometime in the 80s. It was the session of Child Development in the Middle Years, where we discuss riddles. Barbara said little, much like her teaching when I first visited a class of hers, but made a few quiet, penetrating comments, and showed eager appreciation of the students' contributions. Then afterwards she said, "You did a fine job, Leah, in stimulating them and opening up new concepts. But at the end of a class wouldn't it be better to help them get a sense of closure, and pull it together by a few minutes' summary, so as not to leave them hanging?"

For many years during the eighties, the highlight of our yearly trips to New York was a visit with Barbara. My husband and I used to return from Sweden to spend a warm summer period in our old country, to keep in touch and exchange views—the meaningful views that only personal experience can spawn—to find a balance between work abroad and readiness to return home. Barbara was a focus for continuity. A few hours with her would create an open structure of long vistas and immediate pleasures. We soon felt whole again

On one of the last visits, the three of us went for lunch in a small place on Third Avenue. As usual, Barbara elicited lively and sparkling conversation. And this time she took notes. She had brought pad and pen. As we spoke she would slow us down, clarify our talk, and reduce it to its essence, then she would write, mainly names and time sequences “So that I can read it later and remember.” She made separate pages for each topic, for each person, especially for “the young people” whom she wanted to understand in their separate lives. Taking notes to be reviewed and brought up to date later had been one of the tools she had used and taught. She was still using it, teaching us one of those implicit lessons she had been so keen to bring out in the open. In her fight to keep connected, she did not lower her standards. Loose, unclear talk would never be accepted, no matter what difficulties intervened between a dialogue enjoyed and the memory that would value and savor it. She was actively struggling, as she always had been, to experience, examine, and connect to a world that fascinated her and that was by now eluding her.

The search for engagement was at the core of her practice as well as of her theory. “I need to be primed,” she used to say, by way of introduction, when she was leading informal group discussions with those of us in Graduate Programs. “Primed,” not “stimulated.” Deep in her well ran a continuous stream that would surface with full force when in touch with what interested her colleagues.

In 1939 she had written of “the especially human needs for questioning and understanding the world.” She never failed in this belief. I remember one meeting, in the early seventies, when we were discussing Skinner’s latest book which gave freedom and dignity a completely behavioristic look. Some of us from the Special Education Program entertained the possibility that extrinsic rewards might be of some utility with severely disturbed or brain-damaged children when all else failed. Barbara listened, tried to clarify our terms, to show the full measure of our assumptions, and then said very quietly: “No, I have very strong doubts. This cannot be a good way to work with any children.” Her conviction that the essence of human learning and development consists in active engagement with the social and physical environment, in active search for answers to inner questions was unshaken.

Viola W. Bernard

My long relationship with Barbara Biber combined a uniquely fruitful professional collaboration and a close, cherished friendship. From our respective fields of child psychiatry and educational research, we brought different skills and understandings from a base of shared values to our efforts on behalf of young children.

My personal relationship extended to Barbara's husband, Oscar Bodansky, her daughter and son-in-law, Margery and Ray, and her grandchildren, David and Kenny, as well as to her sister, Charlotte, her husband, Max Winsor, and daughter Joan.

My connection first came about in 1940 through Dr. Winsor, director of the Harlem Unit of the public school system's Bureau of Child Guidance. At the time, this was the *only* outpatient psychiatric clinic for black children in Manhattan due, of course, to the prevailing racism. As a third-year psychiatric resident, I sought out Dr. Winsor for child psychiatry training because he provided clinical experience with interracial and socioeconomically deprived groups.

Later, after I became a psychiatric consultant to Bank Street, I recall those stimulating meetings of Bank Street advisors—I think in the 1950s—that Barbara had at her apartment for long mornings of discussions with me. (By that time we were neighbors, so all I had to do was cross the street to her house.) My role was to help the advisors learn more about understanding and helping student teachers with various difficulties with their roles; often these were traceable to unrecognized revival of their early childhood schooling. Those meetings were full of serious thinking but in an atmosphere of informality and Barbara's characteristic hospitality with coffee and cake.

I particularly admired Barbara's interweaving of psychodynamic insights with child development and the learning process. As an example of our conceptual compatibility, we spoke on the same program at an annual meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric Association. The two papers were published in a single reprint; Barbara's was "Teacher Education in Mental Health, From the Point of View of the Educator," and mine was "...From the Point of View of the Psychiatrist." These were subsequently published in 1958 in a book edited by the late Morris Krugman, Ph.D., entitled *Orthopsychiatry and the School*, U.S. Public Health Services. The two papers, in a single reprint, were also published by Bank Street.

A big joint venture came about through funding by NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health) for a series of books under the rubric "Schools and Mental Health." I remember a summer at the Bodanskys' beautiful place at the Cape where a group of us, headed by Barbara, struggled to plan and write the grant proposal for this series. I had the opportunity of working closely with Barbara and her colleagues as this work evolved. Two of the published research volumes were Barbara's large book, *The Psychological Impact of School Experience*, with Minuchin, Shapiro, and Zimiles, and Eleanor Burke Leacock's *Teaching*

and Learning in City Schools.

We not only shared successful endeavors; painful experiences also strengthened our professional and personal bonds. Thus in the McCarthy era, a valuable research study encountered irrational political opposition that ultimately killed the project. With foundation support gained through the Citizen's Committee on Children of New York City—I was the Chairperson of its Mental Health Section—a study had been planned with the Board of Examiners of the public school system to develop and test effective methods of teacher selection. The special staff that Barbara recruited and directed at Bank Street was stopped in their tracks. I was very active in this effort, but in the climate that prevailed at the time, we were unable to save the project.

Thinking back, my knowing and working with Barbara, and having her as a friend, remain as a precious part of my life. Her human qualities, so firmly integrated with her outstanding intellect and talents, have had a beneficial ripple effect, directly and indirectly, on many lives. I miss her very much.



I greatly loved and admired Barbara. Our work together for twenty-five years enabled me to get to know her well as a colleague, friend, and mentor. Formally, Barbara was also my boss (when I first came to Bank Street, I was her assistant), but this word, of course, is preposterous when applied to Barbara. She was completely uninterested in wielding personal power. Her passions were rooted in beliefs and ideas, and they guided her actions as an administrator, just as they did her work as a developmental psychologist.

These beliefs included the idea that creative work was not simply a solitary affair but was sparked by collaborative processes. She never gave a talk or wrote a paper without talking to teachers and observing children to try out ideas and get fresh perceptions and information. She never made an important decision without thorough consultation of colleagues in various sections of the College. She always created for herself a broad base from which to develop her own ideas.

There are many personal memories that will always keep Barbara alive in my mind. One of the sweetest is her making a gingerbread house and Christmas cookies with my young children. This is an unforgettable memory for them; and now, grown up, they still get together to make Christmas cookies. How easily Barbara moved between her diverse professional roles! How generously she spread her spirit across the generations!



Doris B. Wallace

Pearl Zeitz

Although I never had the opportunity to work directly with Barbara, her occasional presence in my classroom with the ubiquitous notebook was welcome.

Her incisive observations and questions helped me to understand more profoundly how seven-year-olds developed a sense of self through interactions with each other and the materials in the classroom that reflected their culture and community.

Equally rich were our encounters on the #104 bus where Barbara's wry comments on the urban scene could make a routine experience as memorable as she is.



Vivian Yale

Barbara had been my seminar advisor when I was a student at Bank Street (1942-43), as well as the fabulous teacher who inducted us into an appreciation of the developmental complexity and richness of the lives of young children. After Bank Street I went on to teach at the Harriet Johnson Nursery School. I was reveling in my daily delight as an early childhood educator and I shared this with Barbara. She smiled, lifted an eyebrow and said, "You ought to consider teaching older children." I was shocked. I considered this an aberration on the part of my beloved teacher. But she was on the mark for, in fact, that is what happened. The developmental grounding and the profound respect for children that I received from studies with Barbara served me well at whatever age level I subsequently taught.



Shirley Wirt

When I matriculated at Bank Street in the early 1960s, my first course was Learning and Growth, taught by Barbara Biber. I will never forget those wonderful sessions where she led us into an understanding of the developing child, all with a sense of humor and the kind of simple clarity which allows the true scholar to make any subject accessible to the most unsophisticated audience.

My other special memory of Barbara was many years later after I had become an early childhood consultant. She and I met with a group of parents resistant to licensing requirements for their preschool program. Those standards were based on the knowledge of child development which Barbara so skillfully communicated in her writings and teaching. I was impressed at the meeting not only by her expertise, but by her modesty. I doubt those parents knew what a distinguished person had been in their midst.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to be her students and/or colleagues over the years *did* know and are grateful.



When John Niemeyer first formally interviewed me for a position at Bank Street, the initial question he asked was what I knew of Barbara Biber's thinking and writing?

From those very first days, I saw her as a Bank Street icon, a potent resource and inspiration for the College community—always generous of spirit and intellectual sharing, always willing to speak to one of our many conferences and institutes. We savored her discourse, a kind of collaborative circulating authority.

Barbara Biber respected the reality of others, children and adults. She responded to it; she observed, analyzed, learned, and wrote and spoke from these observations. Hers was a generosity of vision. She was a vigorous part of the developing consciousness about children and their learning in our society in the late mid-century.

Barbara was not sentimental about children and their life situations, but she had what might be called a moral intelligence. She cared with insight and understanding and wanted a better learning world for all children.

She was teaching all the time, always from a basic set of concepts and beliefs about children and their learning. She linked their events and experiences, always sequencing and relating them with insight and wisdom as she articulated her thoughts against her intellectual grip so wonderfully. She processed children's activities bringing language and reality together with new meanings.

To paraphrase the poet Michael Blumenthal, "she enticed us with the lights that shine from children and their world."

Gordon J. Klopff

Patricia Minuchin

I think of Barbara in many ways, but for me she was, above all, a mentor. Not exactly the dictionary definition, though that is not so far off (“a wise and trusted teacher or counselor”). Something more personal and more complex. It was the combination of her intellectual style, her role as a professional and a woman, and the quality of her relationships that brought something new and special to me, and to others, and that influenced the way I came to think, work, and develop.

Barbara was a scholar and an investigator. She had a strong respect for the people who had thought and written in the past about the matters she was involved in. She believed you had to master their work before you proceeded into new territory. And she made a clear distinction between ideas, even good ones, and evidence. If you worked on research with her, it was an elaborate and exciting process. You read, talked, and thought about child development, dynamic psychology, the school and classroom as context, social value systems, humanism, child behavior, and individual fulfillment. Then you worked on testing the ideas, trying to formulate ways of accumulating evidence without losing depth or complexity. Of course, some of the things she and we came up with don't hold up as eternal truths. How could they? Social realities, substantive knowledge, theoretical formulations, and the mechanisms for testing ideas have changed over time, sometimes radically. But the hallmarks of the process haven't changed much: the responsibility for knowing the field you're working in; the broad examination of issues; a style of inquiry that sees around corners and that searches for the highest rather than the lowest common denominator. That process and that intellectual energy is what a mentor gives you, by example and by stimulation, and that was a precious part of Barbara's legacy to the people who worked with her.

But, of course, she was a three-dimensional mentor, and her intellectual style was an important but not exclusive part of her impact. There were not so many professional female “role models” in the 1950s and thereabouts as there are today. Those of us who wanted our careers and our families struggled uphill a little, trailing behind us social criticism and our own guilts. We were a small group, and it was crucial that we lived alongside Barbara, ahead of us by about a generation and with a life style that had already jelled. It was a compelling pattern. It combined warmth and close relationships with intellectual challenge and productivity, and it did not seem to require a choice between one path and another, as the zeitgeist of our times demanded. Undoubtedly, it wasn't a perfect amalgamation and it certainly wasn't a formula. But it was in Barbara's presence that I came to understand, for myself, that what is important for women is to be able to forge the combinations and life style that satisfy



Play serves two different growth needs in the early years, learning about the world by playing about it . . . and finding an outlet for complex and often conflicting emotions.

us as individuals, and that fit our circumstances and the people who are important to us.

Finally, there was the relationship with Barbara—her warm, loyal, sensitive way of connecting that shared your personal concerns and that treated your ideas as if they were really important, worthy of respect, and grist for discussion. She was a facilitator, creating an atmosphere in which you could be comfortable, work productively, and take all that you had learned with you, when it was time to move ahead on your own. Those of us who knew Barbara as a friend, as well as a mentor, were profoundly fortunate.

In the last year, I watched with enormous pain as Barbara became a person who did not recognize herself. It is restorative for all of us, and fitting for her, that we can now say who and what she was for many of us through decades of a long and productive life.



I first met Barbara Biber as a student at 69 Bank Street in the 1944-45 class and she became my advisor. Coming from traditional public schools and a city college, I was unaccustomed to a teacher who cared about both my learning process and me. Barbara gently and gradually changed me from a submissive and hesitant person to one who developed a joyous self-awareness and an exhilaration in learning about the dynamic development of children. She transmitted the art of observing children so that teachers could become researchers in the classroom, applying their findings to the practical task of individualizing the teaching/learning process.

Her assignments were special: find things in a hardware store that can be used for an educational activity; select a relatively unnoticed child in our student teaching group for an intensive individual study. What mind-openers they were as we learned to analyze and understand children.

After a few months of the Barbara and Bank Street experience, I remember dashing to her office. I couldn't wait to tell her that I found that I was no longer struggling with what to say and how to talk to children. She understood and appreciated my new freedom to be spontaneous and comfortable with children.

Her eloquent talks and writings demonstrated her uncanny ability to communicate the most profound and thought-provoking ideas simply and beautifully. What made her truly distinctive was how she intertwined her magnificent professional ability with her human caring qualities and brought beauty to our learning and living experiences.

Lillian Shapiro

Nancy Balaban

Barbara was always interested in what other people were thinking about. She asked great questions. She helped me with an important part of my dissertation in a casual conversation we were having at a Graduate School party. She enthusiastically came to several of my conference groups over a period of years where she loved to engage with the students' ideas—and they loved to engage with her. I remember that one student, after the group, met her at the bus stop and they rode together. "She was so much fun to talk to!" the student told me. Indeed she was.



Ann W. Silverstein

In 1947, I had the privilege of being in Dr. Biber's classes on The Role of the Teacher and Child Development.

I found my notes from her first class on the role of the teacher. These questions were compiled from responses to a cartoon showing a teacher enclosed inside a block building and became the basis for class discussion:

1. What are some of the mistakes a teacher can make in stimulating cooperation?
2. Is cooperation a sound goal?
3. What will make children cooperate?
4. What do children dislike or resent in a teacher?
5. Is there something wrong with the teacher if the children dislike her?
6. Do children enjoy the expression of resentment against their teacher? Should the teacher allow it?
7. How passive shall a teacher be? What are the reasons why she would be passive?

As you might expect, a quote from a Bank Street publication (1954) is as pertinent today as when Dr. Biber wrote it:

Ahead of us still lies the development of that kind of skillful teaching, on a broad scale, that sees and responds to each child in terms of the basic strivings that are intrinsic to the growth process and that he shares with all other children, teaching that takes into account the multiple influences that condition his particular pattern of development and personality and deals with his behavior as the end result of this complex process from which it cannot be separated.

I consider myself fortunate to have been one of her pupils.

From afar, Barbara had become my authority, even my idol, as I studied and taught in Bethesda and later in New Haven and Poughkeepsie. She served as a dynamic source of direction and growth while I attended her series of presentations at professional gatherings and as I studied her writings. (I turn always to that writing of hers with its rich, complex, uncompromising prose.)

Barbara and I became colleagues through NANE-NAEYC, through Head Start, and later through my relationships with Joe Stone and with Margery and Ray Franklin. I was rather an outsider to New York and Bank Street, having been educated at Oberlin and then with Jimmy Hymes at the University of Maryland. But to Barbara, “turf” made no difference. When we met, she engaged me in discussion openly, intently; our mutual concerns and philosophical convictions led to friendship.

Barbara’s modesty always amused and touched me. It was not false modesty, in my view; she truly felt a need to know more and delve further, and she said so. Her tireless questioning of herself and others set a standard for the rest of us. When she used to ask me about my experiences with children or about my visits to Bank Street or to Head Start classrooms, I *had* to be fully accountable!

When she welcomed me back from Mainland China in 1973—questioning me, listening, questioning further—she called forth my most careful, honest responses. Barbara was after anecdote, analysis, fact, hypothesis. She stood for professional conscience.

With all of her formidable intellect and scholarly rigor, Barbara was warm and nurturing. I loved talking with her. An engaging listener and conversationalist, she seemed to enjoy lively exchange of opinion and experience.

On a personal note: Barbara took great pleasure in the late marriage of Joe Stone and myself; and for that we felt blessed. She and Oscar Bodansky opened their arms to Joe and me and welcomed us into their bountiful, warm household. As a festive conclusion to a dinner in our honor, at their apartment, Barbara had even baked us a chocolate cake! Then, just a few years later, during the sad and difficult days following the deaths in New York City of Joe, and soon after of Oscar, the friendship and collaboration between Barbara and me remained steady. One late afternoon, in an empty children’s classroom at the Early Childhood Center at Sarah Lawrence College following a conference, Barbara and I faced each other over a long moment, then with arms encircled, we spoke together about the sorrow and poignancy of widowhood, agreeing that “nothing can ever make it better.”

Though saddened and diminished by her illness and death, I feel fortunate to have known Barbara, to have learned so much from her, to have loved her, and to have shared a little of her life.

Elizabeth L. Robson

I knew Barbara Biber when I was a 22-year-old student teacher at the Little Red School House on Bleecker Street under Elisabeth Irwin, attending Bank Street, on Bank Street, on weekends. I was in awe of Barbara: she was brilliant, a creative thinker, her life dedicated to the study of what was best for children in education.



Anna Switzer

I attended Bank Street for my first master's degree in the late sixties. During that time, I never had an opportunity to take a course with Dr. Biber, or even to meet her. But because everyone knew of her and had enormous respect for her, she became, for me, a little larger than life.

Ten years later, I had temporarily stopped teaching to raise my own children, and my thoughts about Bank Street and Dr. Biber had receded behind diapers and babysitters.

One afternoon at about 5:00 pm, I found myself in the horrible position of waiting for an uptown bus on Madison Avenue at rush hour. I held both Jessie, my 3-year-old, and my umbrella stroller in my hand. Daniel, my soon-to-be son was also weighing me down. The bus arrived and, along with many others, I struggled on. There was no seat, hardly even a place to hold on. I guess everyone on the bus was tired, certainly no one offered to help. Suddenly, an older woman stood up to give me her seat. It was Dr. Biber. She had no idea who I was, she only saw a pregnant mother, uncomfortable and overburdened. I thanked her, but I was too embarrassed to tell her that I knew who she was.

This speaks to the private Dr. Biber. Not only an intellectual star in the field of teaching and raising children, she was a kind, decent human being with a special feeling for children and mothers, one who demonstrated this feeling by actions that brought her neither fame nor praise.



Lelita Jaspal

I had the privilege of serving Dr. Barbara Biber as a reference librarian for ten years, from 1974 until the completion of her last book, *Early Education and Psychological Development*, around 1984. It was a pleasure to work with her and from her I learned a great deal about the Bank Street approach to education.

As a library patron, Dr. Biber . . . would use the card catalogue, at times for more than an hour, patiently going through card after card—not only to find the particular book she was looking for, but also allowing herself the possibility of a new discovery. I told her that one day computers would do the job for her, and more quickly. Her response was that she would not want a computer finding books for her, and that by searching for herself she was able to turn up more books on the topic that interested her.

I have numerous recollections of Barbara's warm concern for individual students and their problems as beginning teachers, but one stands out in my memory. During my first student placement, I had been feeling frustrated and inadequate in working with five-year-olds in that I never seemed to be able to distribute myself (my attention) or play materials so as to meet children's demands in an equal and fair way. Barbara quickly entered into a dialogue with me that was so relieving and enlightening to me that I have never forgotten it. The simple idea that not all needs need equal attention at all times had never occurred to me, and my preoccupation with being "fair" had backed me into a corner. Realizing this, and discussing with Barbara what "need" means in different contexts has made me better able to deal with these issues in teaching, friendship, and family life ever since.

Joy Rutland Watson



Barbara Biber is a legendary figure to many Sarah Lawrence undergraduate and graduate students of psychology, child development, and education who read and learn from her writings on theoretical issues and their practical application for the education of young children. I remember being scolded by a young woman who had completed a year's field work commitment at the Early Childhood Center in connection with her studies in developmental psychology: "We should be required to read *A Value Base for Selection of Theory* before classes start! It presents developmental-interaction so logically that everything about my work in the classroom makes sense."

Sara Wilford

My most vivid personal memory of Barbara is during a visit to Sarah Lawrence when she came to talk to teachers and students at the Early Childhood Center. Quite simply, she wove a spell. The pioneers of progressive education came alive through her words...and when it was time for questions, her depth and generosity would have held her listeners forever.

There can be no greater inspiration than Barbara Biber's writings for those of us seeking to entice intelligent and committed young people into the fields of early childhood development and education. She reminds us that good observers of children can connect theory with practice in powerful ways, and that we are mandated to redefine and act on the challenges posed by an ever-changing society. The principles she articulates are timeless.

Ronnie Gordon

My memories of Barbara Biber are as vivid as they are varied. Bobbie influenced my life on three levels: first, when I was a student at Bank Street (in the fifties, over a period of 7-8 years at night); later, when she was finally convinced to serve as the Research Consultant in the department I headed at NYUMC, Rusk Institute, where we first serviced, then studied, the preschool multihandicapped children and their parents; and finally, as a dear and cherished friend to me and my family. Our relationship spanned 30 years and was more like a tapestry than a series of many contacts.

I was a mathematician. How did I get to Bobbie's at Bank Street? I was a volunteer in NASW when my first daughter attended Fresh Meadows Nursery School. As president, I inherited the job of designing and operating an outdoor preschool program on the roof of the school. I wanted to meet licensing requirements. I asked my daughter's teacher (Marguerita Rudolph) where to go to get the information I needed. "Go to Bank Street College." I did.

My first choice was a course that was Dr. Biber's most advanced. I convinced Polly McMillan that I was not matriculating. I took that course and I took every course that Bobbie gave. She was like a magnet. Her brilliance, enthusiasm, clarity of presentation of complex material—always with an example of a child's related behavior of a concept being studied—was exhilarating.

Simultaneously, my department's growth was in "exponential fashion" (a description used by one of my mathematician friends as he described his baby's crying). When I asked Bobbie to join us as our research consultant, she modestly replied that I had available in-house psychologists who, closer to the program, could do a better job. I refused to accept "no." I had another problem with her. I insisted that she would be paid well for her time. I convinced her only when I said that NYU valued a person's worth in direct proportion to their pay. And, in our HEW award grants, I had to put her on the budget page.

Bobbie never appeared to value her worth. An amusing sequence of self-devaluation took place at an advisory board meeting when Ed Zigler and Bobbie argued about which of the two had had more influence on the study of child development. Ed said Bobbie; Bobbie said Ed. It was a futile game. Each was so different—Bobbie the superb teacher and researcher, Ed the active pragmatist and conscience of the government. Bobbie was a fighter when principles were being violated or research was being done "sloppily." I'll always remember being invited to the Bodansky house on the Island. In bucolic surroundings, Bobbie was wearing blue jeans overalls raking up the leaves. After I showed her our preliminary report to HEW, I was feeling "raked." We needed her help. One of our hypotheses (based on clinical judgments) was way off. She gathered scissors and paste and for several hours we worked. I pasted; she explained and wrote. I'll always remember her response when I claimed that the results raised another question. She said: "Good research, sound research is the best

when it points to a narrower or another area to study.”

Returning to the theme of self-devaluation, a characteristic of Bobbie, I received in 1976 a letter: “This is in lieu of our Wednesday call. [A friend] has been here since early morning, showing me the manuscript of her book. I think she has done a fine job . . . she has doubts, doesn’t think the book is good enough. . . . Why, I ask myself, as she goes out the door, do I happen to have such a collection of friends who don’t have the right image of their true worth? Who knows? Maybe that makes them more lovable as people.”

Another example of her positive philosophical approach to life: In a letter in 1978, Bobbie shared with me her feeling “while writing from the heavenly outdoor spot where Margery and Ray have their ‘little house in the woods.’ A kind of peace comes over me when I am here while I look out on trees and sky. . . .I begin to believe in recovery from pain and sadness, the sense of loss of self that I have had for most of this year. Will you let me remind you, when I speak of myself, that there are depths of strength in all of us though there are times when they seem hard to get at? Deep and complex problems of sadness, loss, and uncertainty *do* get unraveled and maybe the costly learning about one’s self has an important yield in the long run.”

What are my most valued memories of Bobbie? I can’t separate them. As a teacher, colleague, and dear friend, her humanity, integrity, brilliance, and caring all fuse into a fine, principled, endearing, unique human being.



Barbara Biber was the best teacher I ever had—a psychologist who talked about children, not statistics.

Trudy Weiss

I have often told a personal experience in her class which, 35 years later, continues to make me want to reach out in small but deeply personal ways to others:

I was called to the telephone during the class; I must have looked scared! Fortunately, it was my father who wanted to take a ride home with me. The city transportation was paralyzed in a heavy snowstorm. When I returned to class, Barbara silently mouthed, “Everything okay?”



In order to make us understand developmental stages the following unforgettable example was used by Barbara Biber: “A kindergarten child can’t paint at the easel if his pants are falling. He needs two hands to hold the paint brush. But the first grader can paint with one hand and hold up his pants with the other.”

Shirley W. Seligman

We loved it, we understood, we remember.

Deborah Stone

Excerpt from a letter to
Margery Franklin,
April 4, 1994

. . . my sisters, Sukey and Midge, and I grew up thinking of Barbara Biber with great affection and respect because of our parents' great fondness and appreciation for her. Was it at the Vassar Summer Institute that we spent time together? I can still hear my father's [Joe Stone] voice and your mother's in affectionate discourse, amiable argumentation.



Anne Mitchell

My enduring memory of Barbara Biber is looking at her against the backdrop of the south-facing window of her office while talking about children and learning.

I met Barbara Biber during my first week in the Research Division in the spring of 1981. Edna Shapiro and Doris Wallace had hired me as a research assistant. Barbara was working on the manuscript that was to become *Early*

Education and Psychological Development. One day that spring she invited me into her office and sat me down in the chair beside her desk. She asked me what I was working on, how it was going, what I thought about it. This amazed me completely. Here was a great thinker, founding mother and influential leader in the early childhood field sincerely asking *me* what I thought! And she did this not once, but many times over the next few years.

We talked about family, about living in Brooklyn (which I did) and how it had changed since she lived there as a child. Sometimes she would talk about her role in the history of Head Start, or her thinking about teachers and children as she worked on her book. Barbara was interested in the new developments in child care in the early education field and how these related to Head Start. We talked about many subjects over the years. Through our talks, I believe I served as a link to current issues. Barbara's interest in me was influential—my understanding of children is deeper because of her.

Barbara was truly interested in people as people, especially the newer members of the Research Division. She lamented that she could not keep track of all of us—as time went on the number of new younger people did become confusing to sort out. We tried to make it easier by telling her our names each time we talked with her.

Many “famous” people will talk only about themselves and their ideas to younger colleagues, if they deign to speak to them at all. Barbara treated all of us as valued colleagues, and I will never forget that.



Shortly after I arrived at Bank Street in 1980, I was asked to do a revision of the brochure “A Brief History of Bank Street.” I interviewed Charlotte Winsor, who pointed out a number of inaccuracies in the earlier version of this publication and suggested that I also speak to her sister, Barbara Biber, who could set me straight on the Bank Street research. I dreaded calling Barbara because in my mind she was stellar, mythic, an icon; I expected to be eaten alive. But I could not have been more wrong. Barbara was warm, kind, generous, and very humble. She and I talked endlessly and easily—as if we had been friends forever. I will always cherish the hours we spent together. When I came home from my going-away party at Bank Street in the spring of 1988, the first words I said to my family were: “Barbara Biber was there!”

Anne D. Perryman



Dr. Barbara Biber and I met in 1967 when Bank Street College was still located at 69 Bank Street in the West Village. I knew that she was a Distinguished Scholar, deeply engaged in research related to early childhood education, but I was delighted to discover later that she was also a kind, warm, and accessible person.

Dorothy Carter

In no time at all, we became engaged in a series of running conversations as we walked through corridors or while waiting for an elevator, or eating lunch, or in her office. Our talks were more often spontaneous, always reciprocal, but never trivial. This kind seer really listened, showing interest in my views without withholding her say, which was always dynamic, cogent, affecting, and memorable.

Over time we envisioned and characterized “a Utopian schooling environment” for all children. Our model would have certain constant features as well as other essential variations designed to ensure connectedness among the children’s past experiences, their home, neighborhood, and school communities.

As a reformer and progressive educator, Dr. Biber was unequivocal about the universal or constant features of “our model.” It would be:

- Ego-strengthening —the teachers and adults would set the stage and create interactive personal and physical experiences for the “community.”
- Cognitive challenge and active participation would characterize the experiences and activities.
- The moral and social atmosphere would be generated by the exercise and practice of fairness and responsibility.

I think Dr. Biber advanced my own thinking about remaking curriculum for a pluralistic democracy.

Edith L. Gordon

From the first developmental psychology course I took with her, I realized Dr. Biber was an inspirational teacher. Sitting in a stark classroom crowded with desk chairs at 69 Bank Street, I learned from her a wonder of and respect for children. Who can forget the apt and often humorous anecdotes with which she illustrated a child's intellectual, social, and motor stage of development. The stories were her technique for bringing children to life, even as she taught a holistic approach to children.

Barbara Biber personified the philosophy and history of Bank Street. She had been there since 1928, and she knew Lucy Sprague Mitchell intimately, and constructed for her students the pedestal on which we saw Lucy, perhaps larger than life. She was Lucy's first lieutenant and field commander in the struggle to change education into a humane and nurturing practice.

Her sister, Charlotte Biber Winsor, was my acerbic advisor and reality check as I did a difficult teaching apprenticeship in the mid-1950s. But Bobbie kept my eye on the elusive goal, always reaching beyond the present to greater attainment and understanding. She herself was warm and humane, but also disciplined, and she demanded intellectual excellence. It might not come easily,

but she was patient and *expected* one to excel, so that one came to believe it possible.

Without seeming to be a feminist, Bobbie dismantled by her example and her teaching the culturally accepted gender image that held women to a lesser role than men. The Bank Street of Bobbie's experience was a feminine creation, where women governed and set the course. Men like John Dewey were admired and Rank Smith was tolerated, but those men who measured up as colleagues did so on the women's terms.

After graduation from Bank Street, I gradually came to know Bobbie in the role of friend. When I married, our husbands were compatible. Both Oscar and Bobbie drew no generational limits on friendship. They bought a "get-away" house in Stony Brook near us, so it was our great pleasure to share life in the leisure months of summer.

I returned to teaching in 1968, after my children were in school, and in 1974 I spent a day visiting Bank Street that changed the course of my life. I attended one of Bobbie's occasional luncheon seminars, and she lifted me again to think about the core concepts that guided me as a teacher. Also, I met then-president, Dr. Fran Roberts, and learned that a few charters and occasional paragraphs were all the history of Bank Street then existing. I decided to remedy that.



When I told Bobbie and Charlotte I wanted to do a history of Bank Street, they were delighted. Charlotte introduced me to a closet full of scrapbooks and photographs and long forgotten or unpublished writings by Bank Streeters. Then she sat down with me in her office and talked to me and the tape recorder for four solid hours on the history of progressive education.

Bobbie went even further. We spent many hours together as she recalled, not so much events, but the threads of thinking from many directions that influenced those who created the Bureau of Educational Experiments, which became 69 Bank Street, then Bank Street College of Education. She listed former associates and students who could contribute to the recreation of Bank Street's history. I traveled the land on the carpet of Bobbie's letter of introduction and found myself welcomed by creative and innovative people in Maine, up and down the coast of California, Washington, DC, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, even abroad.

The oral interviews I was taping, and the words that became the hard copy were of intense interest to Bobbie. She had a vision of this institution, Bank Street, that she wanted the world to understand. She particularly wanted a history of ideas, and her specifications were, again, beyond my immediate reach. It was because Bobbie asked so much, that I started studying to be able to meet her criteria. She may have given up on me by the time I got close to the analytical history she demanded. But it was she who set my sights and helped me understand the magnitude of the vision Lucy and she and those "progressive" education pioneers, including Claudia Lewis, shared. She inspired all of us who followed, and she will always be a beloved presence in my life.



What made Barbara Biber stand out in even as outstanding a faculty as that of the Bank Street School for Teachers was the spectrum of her gifts: though at the time (1948-49) up to her eyeballs in projects, research writing, teaching, presenting at educational events, and more, she was never hurried or impatient with us students; she was truly a "mensch." Later I read a number of her research papers and experienced some of her presentations; I admired the clarity of her insights and the eloquence of her expression.

All this she brought to our Child Development class, and more—a wonderful sense of humor, the ability to empathize and identify with a child's experience and growth stages, and a delightful penchant for dramatizing them. She vividly conveyed to us what it meant to an infant to be able to close his fingers around an object and guide it to her/his mouth for inspection. Even more dramatic was the day she helped us to share the momentous experience of a child standing upright and taking his/her first steps: how it expanded his/her world, which forever after lay at her/his feet!

Half a century has gone by, yet the memory, insight, and inspiration of that class is as vivid as ever. I call that immortality!

Ursula Krainock

Suzanne West

What an opportunity this is to celebrate the life of such a wonderful human being! For me, she stands in a small group of “greats” who came into my life in the early 50s and have continued to influence the ways I have lived and worked. Others in that group are Carl Rogers and Pete Seeger, who, like Barbara, seemed to express so beautifully a synthesis of heart and mind. Remembering what I had read of her work in an education class at Antioch was what drew me to Bank Street for my master’s in 1974. After that, I directed two lab schools, Vassar and Cornell, and taught many students in participation classes. Her writings figured prominently in the material I shared with staff and students, and her ideas always helped shape my professional values. In the last year, I was rereading some of her older pieces and appreciating so much her wisdom and spirituality.

I had the good fortune to meet her two or three times. In 1977, she was a Keynote speaker at a conference we put together at Vassar to honor Joe Stone and the 50th anniversary of the Wimpfheimer Nursery School. Of course, she gave a masterful speech and seemed to have a good time visiting with friends and colleagues. I helped her get her things together for her drive back to New York. When it was time for her to get into the car, she started arguing with her sister about whose turn it was to sit by the window. They had quite a little squabble, resolved it somehow, and then took off. Those of us waving goodbye collapsed into laughter, in delight at sharing this very evolved woman’s forthright humanness and the persistence of sibling rivalry!

In 1979, she came again to Vassar to evaluate the Nursery School with Lillian Weber. Her approach to the assessment was to give us her observations and a long list of questions for us to work on. Once again, her own way of being was a great gift.

I’ve moved on to another kind of work, just in the last year, actually. Early childhood education, however, has been my “work in the world” for the major part of my life and Barbara Biber has been a major guiding light for me in that work. I didn’t realize until I was writing this letter, how much each contact with her and her writing had touched me. Perhaps it is her “realness” that communicates so directly and meaningfully. Thank you, Barbara.



Fay Gang

I was doing my student teaching and I had a pupil whom I felt very discouraged about—I felt that I wasn’t reaching the student, and I wanted to give up. I can still remember Dr. Biber shaking her finger at me and saying, “Never give up, you never know what your concern and tender-and-loving care might mean to that child. It may change his life. At least he might realize that somebody out in that cold world is interested in him.” I often thought of that remark during a teaching career that spanned four decades. I tried to never give up on any child.

Barbara was my teacher, my colleague, my mentor, and my friend. She taught me many things—one was to be patient and to sort out what were the most important ideas in early childhood education, to be steadfast about them, and yet to be flexible in their implementation. Once, about 20 years ago, we were having lunch together when two students walked in and very enthusiastically expressed excitement over an experience they had had that morning in being able to put into practice an early childhood theory. Barbara joined them in their excitement. When later I suggested that we had done this at least 20 years ago, Barbara pointed out that for these young people it was a “new idea” and how wonderful it was that they used it—better late than never!

I think that Barbara would be pleased to know that today in this transitional way of learning by computers and other mechanical ways, that the basic human interactions of family relationships and age-appropriate development, both physical and social, are still the basis for whatever is superimposed on education.

Barbara will be remembered for her work in child development. And always for the kind, lovable person she was, and as an inspiration for those who had the good fortune to have known her.



How I remember Barbara: Blithe, felicitous, ever professional, boundless in her empathy, steadfast in her belief.

From a deep wellspring of vision and disciplined intellect, Dr. Barbara Biber followed her dream of teaching teachers, first, to know themselves and, second, to learn the business of learning.

She taught us who the learners were (ourselves), and from whom we would learn (the children). The curricula evolved as we understood their needs.

Barbara loved her work and in her devotion to it gave generously of herself. She had a graceful way of really listening. Her optimism and enthusiasm made her students feel cherished. “Spoiled” was a rejected word in Barbara’s vocabulary. “Understood,” “respected,” “loved”—those were Barbara’s words.

We learned the real necessity of love as we heard about those sad war babies lying untouched in their cribs in England during World War II. Then Barbara taught us that love alone is not enough. After warmth and acceptance has to come the real work: opportunity for learning and a climate in which, excel or fail, we still thrive. We can keep on growing.

I can still hear Barbara cheering me up once when my husband’s work took us away from New York and my work at the Harriet Johnson (now Bank Street) Nursery School. She said, “Vecelia, we will always be here for you.”

I believe Barbara well knew the universality and world need for the concepts the Bank Street group labored to forge and teach. . . . I believe her work will endure. I know her beautiful spirit lives on in many, many of our hearts.

Fannie Rudykoff

Vecelia McGhie

Mary Ellen Gilder
*Excerpt from a letter to
 Margery Franklin,
 September 27, 1993*

Seeing Bobbie's picture brought back so many wonderful memories—starting back when you were two and I was nine and we and our mothers went to the Half Moon Hotel for the weekend. And then lunches and dinners through the years when, in my memory at least, we were always laughing.

I think I grew up partly in your house, with you and Bobbie and Oscar. You were very nearly family to me and Bobbie, of course, was my idol as I studied psychology. It was thanks to her that I was able to work in two schools to get material for my master's thesis. She helped me in a hundred ways. Mostly by being the marvelous person she was—warm, accepting, and always comfortable to be with. She had such a lively original mind that it was exciting, too, to be with her. Her understanding of child development and her descriptions of children's behavior were so sharp and true that they have stayed with me always. They were at the very center of my work as a child psychologist. I was very lucky to have known her.



Hedi Levenback

Barbara Biber left me an enduring legacy which kindles many fond memories: her spoken words and her writings. Her voice rings clear on my flawed 1978 tape, as she compares her views with those held by "neutralistic" scientists:

I, as a person, had values. I believed in them. I think you should work for them, You should think about them, You should change them, if you have to. I have not changed my basic values.

One of those basic values concerned the learning process. In a 1959 paper (*Premature Structuring as a Deterrent to Creativity*—one of my favorites), she questioned "how relaxed, imaginative, and generous" can teachers be in "the exposure phase"? She held that not only young children but learners at all stages experience this exposure phase. One of several challenges for the teacher was

how to enrich the experience that intervenes between question and answer or, in other words, how to give the question a life of its own.

Not by theory alone: her writings were grounded in her practice whether in class, at a conference, workshop, meeting, or informally in conversation. It was her *modus operandi*. She was a relaxed, imaginative, and generous teacher who created a climate for questioning. Never demeaning the person who asked, she gave the question—trivial or topical—a life of its own, an extraordinary one, never imagined.

Was this approach rooted in her own sense of wonder which unifies learners at all stages? How I wish I could ask Barbara Biber this question. What I remember best of my encounters with her is that I came away with a warmly felt "open ending"—a feeling of attachment—no finality—even now.

I became acquainted with the Bank Street School through Lucy Mitchell while she was gathering members for the Writers Lab, and I too was in her fold. This happened in the 1930s, and committed me to writing for children from then on. The Writers Lab also brought me to friendships with Louise Woodcock and Irma Black, influential friendships lasting the rest of their lives.

Continued influence of Bank Street persons in the 1940s and 1950s came from personal and professional contacts with Agnes Snyder and Jessie Stanton, which led me to the new Bank Street College Master's Program in the 1950s. And then and there was Barbara Biber. She was not only one of the Program's teachers, but the advisor for my thesis!

I soon—no, immediately—fell under the spell of Barbara's spirit in searching for knowledge, her uncanny ability to distinguish *what* really matters, her taking pains to articulate her own thinking, and her easy responsiveness to ALL students, who asked her many questions.

"How long should the Master's Thesis be?"

And in her inimitable, casual, personal, yet provocative fashion, Barbara answered:

"Oh, about the length of a book chapter. Approximately."

Book chapter! Aha! This gave me such impetus to produce a book chapter for my thesis that it inevitably led to creation of the whole book, my first book for teachers (*Living and Learning in Nursery School*, 1954). This brought me to the second, third, and fourth, and to what occupies me now.

So I greet Barbara Biber now—with a special deep bow, and with love!

Marguerita Rudolph

Remarks at a celebration of Barbara Biber's 50 years at Bank Street, October 1978

(Marguerita Rudolph, who died in December 1992, was co-author with Dorothy Cohen of Kindergarten and Early Schooling, as well as author of From Hand to Head, Should the Children Know? and others.)



In contrast to the earlier era, the 1960s and 1970s represented an era of imagination and scholarly attention to the questions of dialect and bilingualism. A new perspective has evolved. We look to the school as a social instrument to help children gain the advantage not only of two-language competence but also of broadened understanding of social diversity and an enlarged sphere of interpersonal communication. . . . The subtle differences of method fall within the larger context of complex political issues as well as divided educational thinking, which pertains to this question as it does to so many others.

Elsbeth Pfeiffer

As a member of the first graduating class to receive State Certification, I had the privilege of being a student in Barbara's Child Development class. As a final assignment, she chaired a panel on block building with us students as presenters. Content was based on individual research projects—a thrilling experience for all of us. It was empowering and stretched our minds. We were treated as “professionals”!

It seemed that whenever I reached a crossroad in my working life, it was Barbara I turned to for guidance (starting a therapeutic nursery in a municipal hospital, presenting at a national conference, publishing my first paper). She remained my mentor and spiritual leader who encouraged new projects (developing the Special Education Department, Child Life Programs in hospitals).

. . . Barbara and her family have been part of my inner landscape of important life experiences, which remain present forever and become more treasured as one grows older.



Nancy Bogin

Barbara Biber was a “guru” to many of us. I can say with *absolute certainty* that she was the most powerful influence in my professional life. Her wisdom, empathy, unfailing ability to see into the heart and mind of a child and then to articulate what she learned with precise clarity will forever remain imprinted in my mind and heart and soul.

I remember the first day when we went into her class and she wrote the word “ambivalence” across the board. We had not heard that word in those days—and what an important concept and revelation that was to us!

Her clarity of thought and ability to get to the heart of the matter enabled her students to learn constantly, to be open, to question, and to understand. Her humanity and empathy were ever-present. After I graduated, when I was having a great deal of difficulty at a job (I was a director of a day care center at the time), I called Barbara. I needed help. And as busy as Barbara was, she had time to see me and to help me with my problem. She simply asked questions; she did not tell me what to do. But those direct, honest questions enabled me to understand my situation and what I should do. She found the time—and she had the wisdom.

Once, when she was being introduced at a conference of New York State Prekindergarten Directors, all kinds of laudatory and true things were said. When Barbara stood at the podium, she looked around her and said: “Who me? Am I the person you were talking about?”

Her honesty, modesty, humanity shone through at all times!

How lucky we were to have known her as our teacher, friend, and leader.

It is good to have the opportunity to reflect on and to celebrate the life, the contributions, the exemplary blending of passion and intellect that Barbara Biber Bodansky represents to us all.

Barbara had a notably fulfilling life, marred in the last several years by a debilitating disease that robbed her of her distinctive powers, and brought grief to her as well as to those who loved her. She was remarkable in illness as in all aspects of her life—fighting against it with all her strength, which was prodigious.

Barbara was richly productive as psychologist, educator, writer, teacher; she was a passionate advocate for children and for humane and vital schools. From her earliest work in the labor movement, for which she retained a strong affinity, to finding her role as a research psychologist at the Bureau of Educational Experiments, she maintained her vision, the sense of possibility that human effort could create a more truly democratic society. She considered it her good fortune to have found a place and a band of like-minded colleagues; she always honored her intellectual and personal connection with Lucy Sprague Mitchell and with Harriet Johnson.

For Barbara the work was always nested in a framework of values—values that focus on the well-being of children and of adults, that highlight the transformative power of the school in a democratic society. In her research and her many theoretical writings about psychological development in early and middle childhood, the essential interrelatedness of thinking and feeling, the nurturing of creative work, about the role of the teacher, she consistently emphasized the power and potential of the school for promoting healthy development and as a force for social change. She had the vision that if children went to a school that was intellectually challenging, peopled with understanding adults sensitive to children's needs, they would become people who cared about others, who lived with principle, felt a moral commitment to do right, who would take up the fight for a more just and humane social order.

One of her most salient (to use one of her favorite words) contributions was the concept that when one evaluates any program, intervention, or action, one should look not only at its intended goals, but also at its unintended consequences, what it is *not* doing; what are the concomitants, or more colloquially, the side effects. If this clear-minded and stringent criterion were, had been, taken more seriously in education as well as in other fields, we would all have been spared a lot of grief.

Barbara was an indefatigable worker who found genuine pleasure in the work she was doing. She loved to read, think, talk about ideas—about the fine points of psychological concepts and educational practice, about political and social events and issues, about “the state of the world.” She had a finely tuned sense of moral purpose, a kind of old-fashioned belief in the Good. She didn't go in for small talk or gossip, but she cared deeply about her friends and colleagues, her concern for their lives and their work made her a confidante and

Edna K. Shapiro
*Remarks at Riverside
Memorial Chapel,
September 17, 1993*

a resource for many.

She was always learning, refining her perceptions, checking her observations. Often she came to work with a story about a conversation she had had on the bus with a Columbia student, or with a young mother in the park. As she grew older, she remained eager to learn about and was genuinely interested in the research and programs that others were engaged in, especially the younger generation, wanting to understand current issues, what was changing,

what remained constant. It was with considerable reluctance that she decided that she was not going to master the computer. She never coasted on past achievements. Every time she needed to write a paper, give a talk, or teach a class, she would read and re-read, make a visit to a group in the School for Children to revivify her images.

As a teacher she was inspiring—able to bring concepts of broad scope to earthy meaning, always ready with an apt illustration. In her teaching as in her writing, she cherished words and sinuous phrases that could evoke the living, sensing, questioning, ardor of childhood, as well as the intricacies of theoretical formulations. She also had a particular talent for taking what a student said and raising the level of inquiry. Students became aware and appreciative of this; she could, as one put it, “take a simple minded and naive question and offer a dignified, serious interpretation.” Or, as another said in tribute to her, “All of your students felt worthy in your class.”

It was, perhaps, something akin to this talent that enabled her to work collaboratively not only with colleagues

whose goals and principles she shared, but also with those who held quite different approaches to educational programs. In the late sixties and early seventies, Barbara often commuted to Washington where, at the then Office of Child Development, she worked with others to develop basic principles for federally funded day care and Head Start programs. She was instrumental in developing the role of the Child Development Associate; Barbara defined the competencies required for this role, first implemented in the early seventies.

She was the central figure in articulating and clarifying the theoretical bases as well as the programs in the institution which she helped to create and to which she devoted her remarkable talents—the Bank Street College of Education. She had an unwavering commitment to imbuing education with humanist values. It was Barbara’s sister Charlotte Winsor, who first described Bank Street as a “committed society,” and it was a recurrent challenge to Barbara to remind, prod, rededicate to the ideals of the early co-workers, while accepting new realities.

In many ways, Barbara Biber Bodansky was an exceptionally fortunate woman, and she knew it. She had joy in love and joy in work. She was respected,



admired, beloved by many colleagues, students, and co-workers both inside and outside of Bank Street, and honored by the profession. Yet she carried her accomplishments with humility, aware of the enormity of the challenges.

For all her openness and accessibility to others, she was essentially a very private person. She did not talk about her personal life, although in her most recent book—*Early Education and Psychological Development*—she used vignettes from her early life and her school experience to illustrate threads of continuity, recurrent themes. I think that she would not mind but would appreciate my saying that she found much happiness as well as personal, intellectual and moral sustenance from her husband of many years, Oscar Bodansky, and from her daughter, Margery B. Franklin, her son-in-law Raymond Franklin, and her grandsons, Kenneth and David.

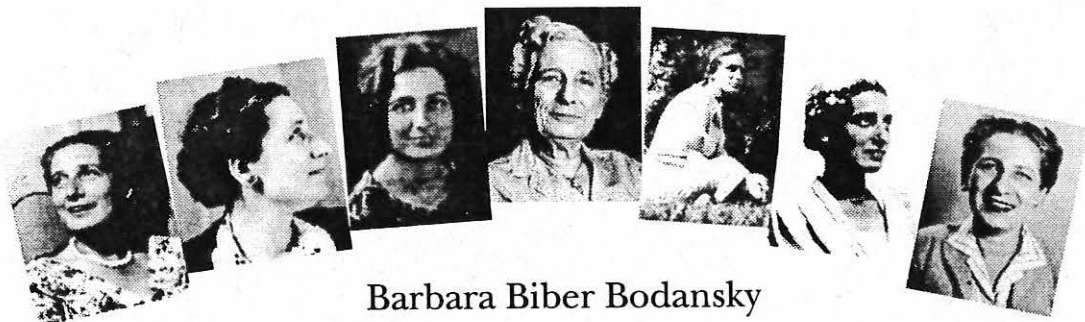
Barbara's aesthetic was evident not only in her writing but in her homes where, despite the fact that she was a reluctant consumer, she created an ambience of comfort, beauty, and ease—good food, good talk, good feeling.

Although not observant in the usual sense, Barbara was keenly identified with being Jewish; perhaps it is fitting that she should leave this world on the cusp of the old year and the new in the Jewish calendar. She often remarked that it was unfortunate that overthrowing the orthodoxies meant abandoning rituals that give meaning and coherence.

It was a privilege to know her. Everyone who had the opportunity to work with her learned from her. And we will continue to hear her voice in her work, which, even in this era of attenuated memory span, will survive. We can hope that her blend of scholarship, ardent commitment, and idealism will inspire future psychologist/educators. She was a determined optimist, but optimistic also about human capacity. As she said, "I hold to my lifelong confidence in the positive motivation and creative spirit of those who are young now, and in their ability to forge solutions to the problems of this era."

"Earth, receive an honored guest."





Barbara Biber Bodansky
A Life Observed and Recorded

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