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# Elizabeth (Betty) Loosley: Adult Education and Research Excellence

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## E. (Betty) Loosley: A Woman of Creativity and Educational Excellence

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E. (Betty) Wyeth Magee Loosley (1911-1994) was an artist and researcher, sociologist and critic, librarian and friend, and one of the finest minds among the women who worked with the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) programs in the 1950s and 1960s. She is known to us through family memories, as well as through her writings, both personal and published. A person of many interests and talents, her legacy included her paintings as well as a history of costume (Loosley, 1942), and a major work of sociology written with Jack Seeley and Alex Sim (Seeley et al., 1956), on the life of parents in suburban Canada in the 1950s. This chapter examines these achievements in light of her social and cultural background and scholarly contributions to the CAAE.

### **Documentation and Sources**

Betty, as she was known to her family and friends, had a varied professional life and multiple interests and hobbies. In her later years, she took time to record memories of her life as it related to the CAAE, her writing and most of all her family. She left behind a corpus of work, including a history of her family, and what appears to be an autobiographical account of various segments of her life including her student days at "Victoria College 1930-1934"; and a family "History of the Magees and Loosleys." From her days in adult education, she left several personal accounts: "Pontiac County"; "My Years in French Canada," and "Laquemac and Renée Morin," covering her time at MacDonald College outside Montreal. Her files also contain a partial resume, a teenage diary, and reports and theses from her graduate work at both University of Chicago and Institute of Education, University of London (Loosley, n.d.).

### **Young Years and Education**

Writing later in life, Betty credited her high school years at Hamilton Central Collegiate for her strong education, saying the school gave her "a firm base for my love of history and a broad view of English literature." (Loosley, n.d.). Yet, she did not take on all their ideas about suitable professions for women. When her career options were laid out as teacher, nurse, or social

worker, she knew she had to be a librarian. As well, “it was tacitly accepted that the girls who went on to university and a profession would in all probability never marry.” A strong student, Betty won a number of scholarships which covered her university tuition for four years, though there is no question her family could readily have supported her studies. In looking back at her undergraduate days during the Depression, Betty said that she and her classmates were aware they were the chosen few, a contradiction that would be traced through her life journey (Loosley, n.d.).

In 1934, at the age of twenty-three, Betty graduated from University of Toronto in Modern Languages. The following year she pursued library studies at University of Toronto, and was awarded both a diploma from the University and a certificate from the province, in librarianship. In 1938, she and CAAE colleague Ruth McKenzie graduated with a Bachelor of Library Science from University of Toronto, cementing a lifelong friendship. They worked together at the Toronto Public Library, along with Isabel Wilson who was also a librarian and later research director of the CAAE’s radio program, *Citizens Forum*. Betty was employed at Toronto Library from 1935-1943, developing skills in research and the building of comprehensive history bibliographies and catalogues, work that would serve her well in later positions (see Loosley and Wickson, 1941; Loosley and Bennett, 1943). From 1945-1947 she was the librarian in charge of a public library in Leaside, Toronto, tasked to have the library meet community needs (Loosley, n.d.).

### **Betty and Adult Education**

Throughout her work life, she weaved between studying and working in a variety of capacities. It seems a degree in librarianship had equipped her, as well as Isabel and Ruth, for research positions in the CAAE and beyond. Returning from studies at the Institute of Education in London in 1948, Betty went to the extension service of Macdonald College of McGill University as Librarian of Adult Education service and Secretary of the Information Centre (Loosley n.d). The college was located offsite in St. Anne de Bellevue and was led by inspirational Alex Sim who was a great believer in cooperatives and the power of adult education. Betty and Sim were to work closely for the next ten years.

One of the main initiatives of Macdonald College was a ten-day summer training school for “both professional and voluntary leaders” (Loosley, 1960c) in adult education at Laquemac (in English, Lake MacDonald). The Camp grew from Alex Sim’s deep links to French Canada and to the work Betty did at MacDonald College with him. In remembering back to the camp, Betty writes of how she came to know about the adult education camp through her friend Ruth who was research director of Farm Forum in the 1940s, and she went there to have a camp

experience while on her holidays (Loosley, n.d.). She attended two years as a student, first in 1944 while she was in the RCAF and before she became a College staff member, and two as a staff member. Here at the Camp she became acquainted with Eleanor (Alex Sim's first wife) and her sister Jean (Neil Morrison's wife) saying, "The Hunter Sisters had enjoyed a brilliant reputation as intellectuals and Alex had made himself very much at home in their circle." (Loosley, n.d.). And she was dazzled by the intellectual speakers that Alex invited including Zilphia Horton (wife of Miles Horton) and Dr. Hallenback from Teachers College, Columbia University.

At MacDonald College, Betty was asked to write one of the booklets for the CAAE, called *Residential Adult Education* which focused in large part on the Camp Laquemac, and included some information on the Banff Centre in this book as well as Rural Folk schools, which she noted were strong in Atlantic Canada. This booklet was funded in part by the Canadian Citizenship Branch, coincidentally where Ruth worked, in 1960. The most important thing about this publication, however, is that it is fairly critical of residential adult education, which she identified as the only successful experience in adult education. She notes that too often these social experiences don't have good results "while leaving it to chance –and discussion—to reveal the *facts* of the learning. (Loosley, 1960c, p. 39). Her conclusion emphasises the need for more content and focus on learning, and less conversation. It is not hard to believe that a woman raised in an industrialist home would be frustrated by talk. In a defensive tone, she takes on the notion of residential education, saying that

And, although business favours the social climate of residential education, it also has a healthy respect for facts: and the certainty that they are not acquired without effort! There are signs in Canada as well as in the United States, encouraging signs, that business education will incorporate the humanities alongside vocational subjects. (p. 42)

When she returned from graduate studies in Chicago, she held a position in the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital as a Research Associate on the Forest Hill Village project, begun in 1948, which formed the basis of the book she co-wrote with John Seely and Alex Sim (Seeley et al., 1956). Two years later, she was back in adult education taking on the editorship of the CAAE's *Food for Thought*. As most of the Forum publications bore the name of the corporate author (the CAAE), it is sometimes difficult to know who actually wrote each issue, but we do know that Betty also contributed items to the journal and kept it running for six to seven years (1954-1960).

### **Betty's views on adult education**

Betty had very clear views on adult education and what it should consist of. From her years at MacDonald College and Camp Laquemac, to her time editing the *Food for Thought*, she had full exposure to how adult education was carried out and conceptualized. And, she did not always agree with the status quo. Experiences such as graduate school in London and Chicago, life in the RCAF, and her family background of prosperous business people influenced her views and convinced her of the things that could be improved.

One of the most striking items is her impatience with the adult education's emphasis on talk and group process. Writing for *Adult Education Quarterly* about adult education in Canada in 1956. (Loosley, 1956b). Betty observed that until we find what exactly adult education is supposed to do, the constant use of group process "could weaken rather than strengthen the cultural context which it is the function of adult education to interpret and transmit" (p. 173). Given the implicit belief among adult educators that adults know what they need to learn and want the support of others to discuss their experiences, it seems she was out of step with many of the CAAE programs and practices. Yet, she was the child of a very traditional and elite education, so anything as daring as group process was likely alien to her, no matter how creative and artistic she might be.

Betty's background as the child of a merchant family descended on two sides from prosperous merchants likely influenced her unwavering belief in the need for adult education organizations to be self-supporting and entrepreneurial, if need be. Not only did she think they should make money, but adult education organizations and individuals needed to work alongside and with business. In a paper she wrote on a successful film company, Betty observed that while some intellectuals are opposed to mixing education and money, she saw that "An educational film can be sound, entertaining, and artistic—and can also make money!" (Loosley, 1955, p.117)

Not only did Betty think that adult education needed to make money and to be less *laissez faire*, she thought that they ought to be more provocative in their publications. As editor of the *Food for Thought*, she was frustrated with the CAAE, and in 1959 she wrote a letter to Alan Thomas, expressing her views about the need to be more challenging.

My concern is that the material be original and good. Would it be possible to build up gradually a "MSS bank" and publish the cream as funds become available? Alex Sim, in his answer to the questionnaire, pointed out that there isn't enough controversial material appearing and I agree with him one hundred per cent. But we're not too receptive to it, I feel. I'd love to get my paper on adult education published. Admittedly, it may be one-sided and perhaps prejudiced;

but it's something I do feel deeply about. Then I've just finished a paper on residential adult education in Canada, which I'm sure will please no one in the movement. Deliberately I've kept away from description and innocuous repetition that everything is just dandy, dandy. ...Jack Seely found it provocative. (Loosley, 1959)

No shrinking violet, Betty uses her last editorial to state her policies and her difficulties with editing the journal (Loosley, 1960a). Betty points out that she has had a lot of responsibility and initiative in running the journal but it is rather lonely for her. She defends her choices of articles saying that she had to maintain a balance "between the demand of readers and the editor's own attitude to the demands" (p. 351). She acknowledges the complaints about the journal and ultimately the "hurdle of integrity versus popularity" (p. 351). She has been asked to "pep it up a little" (p. 351) and has tried to do this but it has not worked well. By 1960 she had moved on to the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* and Eleanor Graham became acting editor of *Food for Thought*. The journal ceased publication in 1962, and then *Continuous Learning* replaced it in February 1962, with Eleanor Graham as editor.

### **Betty, the sociologist**

Perhaps Betty's greatest academic achievement was the sociological study, *Crestwood Heights*, completed in 1956, when she was in the middle of editing the *Food for Thought*. This book, co-authored with Alex Sim and Jack Seeley (Seeley et al., 1956), examined in part parenting practices in the suburb of Forest Hills (disguised as Crestwood Heights) in which the authors observed that mothers were looking to experts more and more to show them how to parent. The authors 'were commissioned by the government and the U[niversity] of Toronto to record, in part, their impression of the impact of modern child-rearing practices. More broadly, Crestwood Heights was part of a modern movement to examine parenting in Canada and to shed light on cultural and social practices. So, it was no coincidence that her colleague Jean Hunter Morrison was also writing about parenting at this time. In many ways, *Crestwood Heights* cemented Loosley's role as a sociologist, which she had honed in both her graduate research projects: the University of London study on community centres (Loosley, 1948a) as a bonding force for neighbourhoods and the University of Chicago study on the Home and School Association (1952).

There is an overlap of concerns in *Crestwood Heights* and Betty's thesis at the University of Chicago. Indeed, her MA thesis project was a piece of the larger Forest Hills project and it focused on the role of the Home and School Association in "an upper middle class community," which also deal with the upper crust and their parenting and children's schooling. In her

University of Chicago thesis, she acknowledged that John Seeley was director and Alex Sim the sociologist, of the larger project from which her thesis draws. Betty describes the larger project as a “mental health research investigation sponsored by University of Toronto and the Provincial and Canadian Department of Health” (Loosley, 1952, p. 6). Chapter 9 of the *Crestwood Heights* book appears to be a synopsis of her thesis on Associations. Both Sim and Seely were heavily involved in this major project and appear to have had much conflict over authorship and deciding who was responsible for writing the book and when it would be done and whose names would appear first. Knowing Betty’s abilities, Sim brought her in to make things happen when neither he nor Seeley agreed. Sim wrote chapters two to six, she wrote chapters seven to ten, and Seeley the opening and final chapters, eleven to thirteen.

Betty’s intellectual interests were broad. Related to her focus on parents and homes in suburban life was her overall focus on quality of urban life. Her Institute of Education thesis (Loosley, 1948a; also 1948b, 1949) had looked at the role of community centers, her Chicago thesis at home and school associations, and her articles on Canada brings in her focus on community (Loosley, 1956a, 1956b, 1960b). Never one to rely on an anecdote or casual reference, Betty believed in being fully informed on the issues. She studied low cost housing and town planning through attending a series of ten lectures in 1941 at the extension department of University of Toronto. This series was likely the impetus for her study of community neighbourhoods and centres in England.

### **Betty’s Later Years**

Following her years at MacDonald College, as well as working on the Crestwood Heights project, and editing the *Food for Thought*, Betty went on to work at the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* 1960 -1966, as assistant to the general editor Dr. Frances G. Halpenny, former editor at the University of Toronto Press, which published the *Crestwood Heights* book. When CAAE colleague Harriett Rouillard, along with Katherine McCool and Viola Pratt, was writing about distinguished members of the University Women’s Club of Toronto they highlighted the careers of Betty Loosley and Clare Clark. Of Betty, they noted first and foremost that she was a distinguished sociologist, author and editor (McCool et al., 1978).

She retired early, in her mid-fifties, to pursue her painting, travel and writing (e.g. Loosley, n.d, 1966, 1976). Betty is pictured in many places with Ruth McKenzie and also with other friends in Europe. Her autobiographical manuscripts show her close family ties, especially to her sister Jill who was an accomplished photographer (Loosley, n.d.).

Betty appears all through the CAAE records and no doubt was a social fit with the upper class sentiment of the association---one could see her being friends with many of them. She shared with the other women an interest in research, a distaste for the politics of association, and a keen intellect. Yet, she was known to challenge the CAAE and leaders such as Roby Kidd. Collectively, she and her female colleagues advanced the work of the CAAE in citizenship and adult education in Canada.

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