

Mary Virginia Gaver 1906-1991

On December 10, 1906, in Washington D.C., one of this nation's foremost pioneers in library service was born to Clayton Daniel and Ruth Lydia (Clendening) Gaver. Mary Virginia Gaver moved to Danville, Virginia at an early age and attended Randolph-Macon Institute, graduating in 1923. From there she went on to take a Bachelor's degree at Randolph-Macon Woman's College and a BLS and Master's degree in library science at Columbia University.

Mary Gaver's first position, which she held for ten years (1927-1937), was as a librarian at George Washington High School in Danville. Like so many Americans who were products of the Great Depression of the 1930's, Mary Gaver became involved with the W.P.A., serving as Technical Director for the Statewide Library Project in Virginia for the term 1938-39. During the next three years, she served as librarian of Scarsdale, New York High School, and from 1942-1954 she was librarian at Trenton, New Jersey State College. After that, until 1971, Mary Gaver held the position of Associate Professor and Professor of the Graduate School of Library Service at Rutgers University. From there she moved on to Professor Emeritus of Rutgers; an Adjunct Professor at the School of Library Service, Columbia University; and Vice President of Bro-Dart Industries, Inc., a company with headquarters in Williamsport, Pennsylvania serving the school and library market.

In addition to this, she held numerous offices in various educational and library related organizations throughout the United States, including that of President of the American Library Association. She authored two volumes involved with library services, was a Carnegie Fellow, was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, and held two honorary doctorate degrees from Mt. Holyoke College and from C.W. Post College of Long Island University.

Such credentials would tend to assure anyone of certain stature in most any circle, but Mary Gaver "has risen above the norm and involved herself with constant dedication to the highest professional standards, especially in generating a community of concerns among librarians, publishers, and the public, particularly in the interests of children and youth. She has influenced the ideas and work of countless people in this country and abroad and affected legislation and other major library developments for more than thirty years." These words were used to describe Mary Gaver when she was named recipient of the Constance Lindsey Skinner award, an award presented annually by the Women's National Book Association, by a vote of all the members, to a living American woman who has made an exceptional contribution to the world of books and to society through books, who has shown a consistent, long term concern and commitment, beyond the call of duty, to the role of books, reading, and literacy in society. The award is named for Constance Lindsey Skinner, novelist, poet, historian, and editor, who died in 1939. Previous winners include Pearl S. Buck and Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as many women in publishing and library services.

In accepting the award, Miss Gaver laid to rest the time-honored traditions about librarians – that they are stodgy matrons, who dwell in a world of silence and hushed contemplation. She revealed the determination that marked her fight for effective library

services and for dignity and equality, especially for women. "I can think of no way of life, no life style, in today's terms," she said, "more satisfying or nourishing than to have shared, no matter how modestly, in the production and publishing of the creative work of artists and authors, and also to have been able to develop services and programs by which to bring these works to readers and viewers, especially to young readers and viewers." Miss Gaver went on, beyond the platitudes that so often accompany such an occasion, to address the problems facing librarians and publishers in light of the Supreme Court decision on the interpretation of obscenity, and of the Nixon Administration's efforts to apply a zero-budgeting policy to Federal Grant-in-aid Library Programs. She said it "threatens society as well as libraries, schools, and publishers," and called the move a "firm step backward."

Unflinching in her ideals, Mary Gaver went on to advocate the total involvement of women and the end of discrimination against women "in both librarianship and in publishing." She noted, "recent studies show that, especially in publishing, discrimination works more often against women than against men."

In a role she attained by her deeds and services, Mary Gaver asked to be indulged in pretending to be an elder statesman. She advised the younger members of her profession on four fronts: "don't be afraid of dreaming, and be sure to dream big dreams; do your homework; don't be afraid to ask for help; and don't let yourself be walled in by the restrictions of your publishing house or your own library."

To Mary Gaver, the success of education, libraries, and publishing lay in a total commitment to service, work, and efforts directed at overcoming the inequities affected by diverse elements of society, inequities that manifested themselves in sundry acts of discrimination.

When summing up her hopes for the future, Miss Gaver alluded to a female psychologist who noted 'There must be one standard for all.' Miss Gaver said, "In publishing as in librarianship, that standard should be the intellectual stimulation that comes from the challenge and confrontation of good minds, without regard to sex. The implementation of such a standard is likely, it seems to me, to be more productive not just for publishers and librarians, but for our entire society."