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Memorial: Viola A. Bird (1905-2007)

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Memorial: Viola A. Bird (1905–2007)*

¶1 Mrs. Bird, as she was affectionately known by her law librarian colleagues and friends, died peacefully in her sleep on her 102nd birthday, June 7, 2007. You may remember reading about Mrs. Bird not so long ago when she was featured in the AALL Centennial Feature Series upon the occasion of her 100th birthday.¹ What better way to be remembered than when you are alive and can savor the stories your friends and family recall about you!

¶2 I was privileged to attend Mrs. Bird's 100th birthday party and what a celebration it was! Friends and family from around the world paid tribute to this wonderful and generous soul. Standing behind or sitting on her bright red walker, Mrs. Bird talked with each guest, sharing stories and adventures from her long life. Laughter was a common occurrence in these conversations.

¶3 Given the impact Mrs. Bird made on the many people she encountered during her professional career, a relatively small portion of her life was spent working in law librarianship. She actually spent less than one-third of her life as a law librarian—first as assistant law librarian at the University of Washington Law School Library for twenty years. In addition to running an outstanding law library on a day-to-day basis with her friend and mentor, Marian Gould Gallagher, Mrs. Bird served as president of the American Association of Law Libraries and “mentored a generation of law students, law librarians, and lawyers.”² She retired from this work at the age of seventy and then spent ten years as the first librarian at a major law firm in Seattle.

¶4 So what else did Mrs. Bird do during her very long life? She raised her family, worked tirelessly as a volunteer during World War II, and, during her second retirement at the young age of eighty-one, Mrs. Bird began to tutor adults

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1. AALL Centennial Feature, *A Tribute to Viola A. Bird on the Occasion of Her 100th Birthday*, 97 LAW LIBR. J. 205 (2005) (containing several moving tributes and personal reminiscences of Viola A. Bird).

2. Peggy Roebuck Jarrett, *Our Oldest Alumna—Viola Bird*, UW LAW., Fall 2006, at 52, 52. Jarrett also notes:

To say she was important to the UW Law School community is an understatement. When Mrs. Bird was honored with the UW School of Librarianship's Distinguished Alumna award in 1981, Mrs. Gallagher wrote, “The first time she and Win [Bird's husband, Dr. Win Bird, a UW Speech Department faculty member] took a European vacation, the law school faculty took it very hard. I never have forgotten the sight of the professor who came charging out of the elevator headed for Viola's office with his problem in memorandum form in his hand. When he said ‘Where is Mrs. Bird?’ and I said ‘She has gone to Europe,’ he uttered a strangled cry and clutched his head.”

Id.

in English.³ Mrs. Bird traveled extensively during her lifetime, visiting every continent except Antarctica. Her trips to Russia, China, and Tibet were filled with interesting stories of the people she met.⁴ Mrs. Bird was a proficient computer user and loved to keep in touch with friends and family through e-mail.

¶5 She had such a zest for life. And what a life! Bye Bye, Mrs. Bird.⁵—Penny A. Hazelton⁶

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3. Jarrett reports the following about Bird's experience as an unpaid tutor.
Looking around for a community service project, she happened to see a need for teachers of English as a Second Language. She took a short course at Seattle University, and then tutored through North Seattle and Highline Community Colleges. Although tutoring was usually done on campus, Mrs. Bird spent several years visiting the homes of two families from Mexico. She tutored the mothers, children, and even friends who would drop by. She stayed close with the families and they became part of her mosaic, calling them "her daughters."
Id.
 4. Jarrett describes Bird's approach to travel. "Although she enjoys visiting a place more than once to make it 'hers,' she claims no one place is her favorite. She traveled with her late husband before his death in 1976, and later with her daughters or by herself. Alone or with family, she prefers a group tour because of the efficient use of time and, no surprise, the opportunity to meet people." *Id.*
 5. In recalling the involvement of Viola Bird in *all* aspects of the operation of the University of Washington Law Library, long-time collection development librarian Reba Turnquist quotes affectionate verses from Mrs. Bird's retirement song:

No more desk, doors to lock
Mail to sort, heads to knock
Bye, bye, Ms. Bird

She won't be here to answer
All those questions, moot
To scrub the sink, and t.p. distribute

Without her word of what to do
We'll just have to muddle through
Ms. Bird, bye, bye
Vidy, bye, bye

Reminiscences of Viola Bird, 97 LAW LIBR. J. 209, 229, 230–31 (2005) (reminiscence of Reba Turnquist).

6. Professor and Associate Dean for Library and Computing Services, Marian Gould Gallagher Law Library, University of Washington School of Law, Seattle, Washington.