

Marge Leffin

Love of books and love of learning are a natural fit, so it is not surprising that the planning committee for Learning in Retirement included several librarians. Marge Leffin was one of those librarians who put in long hours to create the structure and set up the by-laws. Then, when the organization was up and running, she served on the membership committee for a number of years.

Marge has always been an active gal. Growing up in the western part of the state, she had many opportunities for skiing, hiking, and tobogganing in the scenic bluffs area. Summers were spent on her grandparent's fruit farm where she and her brother picked strawberries and raspberries to earn spending money. "We were probably paid no more than five cents a box," she recalls, but that was the going rate. She also notes that her grandmother trusted them to do the job thoroughly so no berries were left unpicked even though she and her brother were very young.

The family's move to Madison when Marge was a high school sophomore required a bit of an adjustment. Madison East high school was almost as large as the entire village of La Crescent, Minnesota where her family had been living. After high school, Marge enrolled at Whitewater State College where she graduated with a degree in elementary education in 1956. Her first teaching job was in Racine, but she also taught in Brown Deer, Janesville, and Madison.

Marge met her husband Bill while at Whitewater, and they married in 1957. Eventually they had two children, but early married life was spent as graduate students when Bill changed his major to art and they decided to stay in Wisconsin while he finished his Ph.D. Marge did substitute teaching in Madison during that time. In 1966 they made Oshkosh their home when Bill joined the Art Department faculty at UW-O.

Early on, Marge and Bill decided not to put off travel until retirement. Bill often led student trips to Europe, and Marge and the children were able to go along for a reasonable fee. When son John was in high school and Lisa in grade school, the family packed up and made their first jaunt to Europe to join Bill on the student tour. Sixteen days in Scandinavia was an adventurous undertaking for the family whose biggest trip prior to that time had been to Wisconsin Dells.

Shepherding college students through Europe presented real challenges such as making sure they were all on the right train at the right time, dealing with the occasional lost passport, and making sure luggage travelled along (this was the era before wheeled suitcases). But the travel had its own rewards in adventures, such as celebrating New Year's Eve in Trafalgar Square.

Not all travel involved shepherding students. There were car trips to Yellowstone and negotiating the back roads of Montana to visit friends who had moved there. Bill and Marge celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary with a trip to Hawaii. Marge has continued to travel since Bill's death, traveling to Northern Italy, Austria, and Switzerland. She has also tried ocean cruises, but has a preference for river boats. A proud grandmother, Marge is kept busy keeping track of her four grandchildren who range in age from college graduate to elementary school.

Not one to sit still for long, volunteer work keeps Marge busy when she is not traveling. Among other work, she has spent time as a hospice volunteer because she felt the need to give back the comforting care extended to her and the family during Bill's last illness.

Marge worked as a school media specialist in the Oshkosh Public schools for 20 years, and she keeps up her interest in the field by running her church library and volunteering at the hospital library. Marge felt her retirement in 1995 came at a good time as the world of libraries was becoming more and more technical. While seeing e-books as filling a niche, Marge admits she does not want to see traditional books disappear.

Stretching through all her experiences is Marge Leffin's love of learning and people. Like so many in LIR, Marge has bent her energy and time toward creating a culture in which sharing experiences and discovering new things keep her youthful and involved.