



Majorie Jean (Smith) Blewett

March 5, 1927 - February 15, 2019

Marjorie Jean (Smith) Blewett died Friday, February 15, 2019 at Bell Trace Health & Living Center. She was born March 5, 1927 at her family's home on Cherokee Drive in Bloomington, to Mary Gladys (Riensch) Smith and Elmer Guy Smith. At age eight, she went with her father to the Bloomington World Telephone newspaper office, where Elmer handed in typed pages of a column he was contributing. Little Marge was given a tour of the great pressroom and Linotype machines. A linotype operator typed her name on his machine, and presto, a reverse-type lead slug dropped out and he handed it to her. Instantly, Marge was "bitten by type lice," and fell in love with newspapers.

Hard times in the Great Depression meant several never-explained moves around town during her childhood, but when the family landed in Elm Heights their world improved. Elmer Smith could easily walk to a WPA job at the IU Library, and Marge could attend Elm Heights School (now Harmony School). She attended Bloomington High School for her freshman year, where she worked on the Optimist student newspaper. The family moved to Washington, DC in June, 1941, when her father took a job in the War Department's payroll office as part of the nation's preparations for entry into WW II. Her mother worked in the brand-new Pentagon as a file clerk. Marge graduated from Central High School in Washington, where she was Editor in Chief of the school paper, served in the Girl Cadets, was an active Senior Girl Scout and worked for two summers for the Army Air Force Map Services in the Pentagon during World War II.

In 1944, Marge returned to Bloomington to attend IU and get a BA in Journalism. She got to live in Memorial Hall, the “Castle on Third Street,” which she had always admired as a child. To no one’s surprise, she became Editor of the Indiana Daily Student in her senior year, 1948, where she terrorized the incoming veterans. They were returning from war to get an education on the GI Bill and hadn’t expected a co-ed in bobby socks to be giving them such clear and firm orders. This was the year when Dr. Alfred Kinsey’s book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, was published. Marge was the subject of a now-famous photograph, where she sits with her saddle-shoed feet up on the IDS Editor’s desk, agog at reading Kinsey’s book. Besides earning her degree in Journalism, Marge was a member of Theta Sigma Phi, the women’s professional journalism organization, and Mortar Board, a senior women’s honorary society.

After graduation, Marge became Assistant News Editor of a new newspaper in Bloomington, the Daily Herald. She was on staff in 1950 when that paper merged with an older paper, the World Telephone, and became the Daily Herald-Telephone.

In 1951 she grabbed an opportunity to move north and be an Assistant Local and State Editor for the Lafayette Journal and Courier, covering 13 counties in northwestern Indiana. By 1955 she was ready to return to Bloomington, where the Daily Herald-Telephone needed a News Editor. Although she was always a writer, Marge’s main love was editing, layout, and the decisions that put together a newspaper’s daily edition. For a woman to run a daily paper’s news operation was quite unusual in the 1950s.

Almost immediately upon returning to Bloomington, Marge met Harry Blewett, a lifelong Bloomington resident and supervisor at the local post office. They married in 1956 and had two children. Marge quit the newspapering she loved for the sake of motherhood, because “that’s what we did in the 1950s.”

Such conventional behavior never had much chance in the long run. In 1960, Marge Blewett took a part-time job as Assistant Editor of the IU Alumni Magazine. In 1965 she landed at Ernie Pyle Hall, back in the IU Journalism

program – first as a lecturer, then doing a wide range of administrative work, which quickly turned into a full-time staff position that Marge basically invented as she went along. Marge drew on her already extensive familiarity with the IU Journalism alumni working at newspapers and magazines around the country, to help current students seeking internships and jobs. She planned hundreds of events, including awards dinners, alumni reunions, faculty parties, and summer workshops. She started an alumni newsletter, which became a slick magazine called Newswire in the 2000s. She organized the Journalism Alumni Board, which became a thriving constituent society of the IU Alumni Association.

Perhaps the most complex, far-reaching and interminable project Marge oversaw was the 1973-1976 remodeling of Ernie Pyle Hall. Wielding the title of Supervisor, Marge planned and watched over the complete evacuation of the building to various temporary locations around campus. She had to explain to a workman what a “computer terminal” was, and why it was indicated on the blueprints. And of course she planned the party that celebrated the program’s return to its home.

In retrospect, Marge thought of the Journalism students of the 1970s and 80s as her “kids.” Today those alumni are leaders in the communications industry. She fully supported the IU program’s move to become an independent School of Journalism in the late 1980s.

Marge’s beloved Harry died in 1988, and Marge retired from the IU School of Journalism in 1990 after 25 years as Placement Director. A later Dean, Brad Hamm, recognized Marge’s continuing value to the School as its institutional memory. Marge wrote a column for Newswire, sharing stories about the School’s history and accomplishments as she had lived them. This kept alumni delighted, and Marge’s relationships with current students continued to flourish as she advised student groups. She was involved in the planning for the Journalism School’s 2011 Centennial Year, and contributed ideas and content for the “Centennial Wall” timeline displayed in Ernie Pyle Hall until the

program moved to Franklin Hall as part of the new Media School.

Recognition of Marge Blewett's unique place in IU Journalism began flowing in the 1980s and only increased as she reached retirement.

1982 – All-Campus Staff Award

1990 – Sagamore of the Wabash (State of Indiana)

1999 – Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame (Society of Professional Journalists)

2007 – “Marjorie Blewett Day” declared by Bloomington Mayor Mark Kruzan (IU Journalism BA'82) on Marge's 80th birthday

2011 – Distinguished Alumni Award (IU School of Journalism), inaugural class

2013 – President's Award (IU Alumni Association), for alumni involvement.

Beyond the IU School of Journalism, Marge made local history in the 1960s by being named the first woman Elder in the First Christian Church, while also serving on committees. In retirement she was an enthusiastic member of aquatics classes at the Monroe County YMCA. True to form, she also was among the founders of the Ernie Pyle Society in 1990, giving older journalists a monthly social gathering for casual dining and conversation. Marge also established a trust with the IU Foundation to support Journalism students who are working unpaid summer internships.

Marjorie Blewett is survived by her son, Daniel Blewett (Laurel) and granddaughter Catherine of Naperville, IL; her daughter, Joy Shayne Laughter (formerly Barbara Blewett) of Bloomington; step-granddaughter Holly Blewett Gould (Trent) and great-granddaughters Stella Rae and Sawyer Gould of Westfield, IN; and step-grandsons Don Blewett and Duane Blewett. Marge was preceded in death by her husband Harry, brother Robert D. Donaldson of Toms River, NJ, stepson Donald Alan Blewett and her second beloved partner-in-life, Lyndon Millican.

Allen Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements. A private family interment will be followed by a celebration of life at a later date. A memorial page is online at www.allenfuneralhome.com.

The family is very grateful to the Bell Trace community for the high level of companionship, society and care Marge received in her last lively years.

Donations are suggested for the Bell Trace Residents' Council's Employee Appreciation Fund, 800 N. Bell Trace, Bloomington, IN 47408.

Donations also may be made to the Marjorie Blewett Journalism Internship/Scholarship at the IU Foundation, PO Box 509, Bloomington, IN 47405.

Marjorie Smith Blewett wanted to end her obituary with the traditional journalist's mark saying the story is complete, so here we are.

Tribute Wall



“ A fellow IU alumna just sent me this obit so I have only just learned of Mrs. Blewett's passing. She was my boss at the Journalism School library for 2.5 years of work-study. She was wonderful, a great mentor and a great boss; my first female boss. She told me funny stories about a young B.F. Skinner. During Nixon's wage and price freeze, Mrs. Blewett, knowing that I was a married student with a small child, changed my job title, giving me a promotion so that I would still get a raise. She was so kind and supportive.
Juli Evans McGruder

Juli McGruder - July 07, 2020 at 03:13 PM

LG

“ I will forever remember Marge's smile, support and encouragement. I got to know her during my work-study job at Ernie Pyle working for Associate Dean Jon Dilts and through the assistance she gave me with classes and preparing for my job search. What a breath of fresh air every day at the school, and what a big heart she had for journalism and journalists.
Linda Gebhart-Jackson
Class of '88
Evening Anchor/Reporter, Fort Wayne's NBC

Linda Gebhart-Jackson - March 08, 2019 at 12:58 AM

PV

“ As someone else said here, we were all her kids, and she so wanted us to succeed. I was at IU from 1977-1981 and after I graduated, I'd get calls or letters, checking up on me or telling me about other opportunities. What a gift she was to all of us at Ernie Pyle Hall. My condolences to her family and many friends.
Pam Vaught BA 1981

Pam Vaught - March 04, 2019 at 11:06 PM

CW

“ I attended IU-Bloomington from 1973 through 1976, and worked at the *Daily Student* all three years. In the spring of my senior year, after sending about 100 letters seeking work and not getting any offers, I decided to stay on campus and become editor of the summer edition of the *Daily Student*. Sometime early that summer, the editor of an English-language newspaper in Rome, Italy, wrote to IU (as well as to several other Big 10 journalism schools) asking for the nomination of one person to get a job working at the newspaper in Italy for a year. The IU School of Journalism execs thought about it, and made a natural choice--a talented grad student whose mother was Italian. Marge wrote the letter to the newspaper recommending that fellow. But then, on her own, she said that if he didn't seem like the right choice, there's this young man named Craig Webb who might fill the newspaper's needs just as well. A few weeks later, I got a letter from that newspaper inviting me to go work in Italy starting that fall. So I did, and it changed my life. Marge made that possible.

Marge also provided me with valuable parenting advice my senior year when I became guardian of my little brother, Chris, while my parents were down working in what was then the remote Mexican state of Chiapas. Chris went to Bloomington South High School, where he took part in several theater productions. Among the people he got to know well was Marge's daughter Barb. It's not all that easy to parent a teenage when you've never gone through the preliminaries, but Marge was quite helpful. So I owe her doubly.

News of Marge's death has hit me hard. She was one of my all-time favorites.

--Craig Webb

Craig Webb - March 02, 2019 at 05:46 PM

LS

“ Mrs. Blewett was my instructor in 1967, and although I did not become a journalist, she was one of the inspirations for my love and appreciation of the field. I am now tutoring young writer's who publish in the Simpson Street Press in Madison, WI.

LeeAnn Sharp Sinclair - March 02, 2019 at 02:55 PM

KD

“ Dear Joy,
Heartfelt condolences on losing your mother. I know she meant the world. Please let Deborah (deboah1701@fishernyberg.com) or me (diamanti7867@gmail.com) know what we can do. Please touch base. All my love, Kellen

Kellen Diamanti - February 26, 2019 at 01:27 PM

BB

“ Somehow Marge remembered and kept track of EVERYBODY. We I.U. journalism grads owe her big-time.

Brian Buchanan - February 19, 2019 at 07:39 PM

VP

“ When I was a new J-School student in the spring of 1967, I was given the opportunity to fly to Chicago on the IU Foundation's aircraft to pick up Bob Hope for the Little 500 show he was to give that night. (My mother was administrative assistant to that department.) I told the ids editors I had gotten an "interview" with Bob Hope. They wouldn't even hear me out, telling me I couldn't go because I hadn't been assigned. I defied them and went anyway. I showed up on Monday with my copy. Sensing I would be in trouble, I went to Marge. She never missed a beat. "If they won't publish it, I'll go with you down to the H-T and they WILL publish it." I was shaking when I turned in the copy, with Marge keeping watch, and the editors shook their heads in disbelief. I wish I could say this got me into their good graces, but it didn't. Defiance is my middle name, I'm afraid. But I kept at it after graduation, as Marge told us to do, and landed on The Columbus Dispatch copy desk in 1973 (despite low expectations of the ids editors). When visiting the ids in the '80s, Marge knew where I had been working and continued to give me applause. Say hello to Ernie Pyle, Marge! --Vicki Massy Palmer

Vicki Massy Palmer - February 19, 2019 at 11:06 AM

CP

“ Oh, Dan & Joy (Barb)! My condolences. I have SO many memories of our younger years into high school. Your homes on Rogers St & then Viva Dr. bikes & toy ponies, lots of laughing! I hope your memories fill you with peace, love & great stories to share with family & friends. Please feel free to keep me posted on a memorial if you wish. Love, Curt Pruitt

Curt Pruitt - February 18, 2019 at 09:40 PM

LJ

“ I met Marge in 1982, when I began working at the IU School of Journalism. She showed me how to use rub off letters on the soj newsletter called the Deadline. I enjoyed working with her. Most Friday afternoons she would buy popcorn for the staff and we would sit in the main office and chat, what she called Agenda Setting. Rest in peace, Marge you will be missed.

Linda Johnson - February 18, 2019 at 05:10 PM